

LutherFacts #37 – The Catholic Response

The Protestant Reformation led, in the years after Martin Luther's posting of the 95 Theses, to the Catholic Counter-Reformation. As Lutheranism swept across much of northern Europe, and both France and England experienced religious conflict, the Papacy—beginning in 1534 under the leadership of Pope Paul III—sought to stem the tide of reform. The Pope encouraged the rise of responses, such as new religious orders and societies like the Jesuits and Barnabites, to seek a reconversion of Protestants back to the old religious order. In addition, Pope Paul pressed for reforms in the training of parish priests and the church administrative structure. In 1545, the Pope convened the Council of Trent to lay the basis for a Catholic resurgence. In 1566, for example, the Council issued a Catholic Catechism, the first ever and one still in use today, to help train and educate priests in their struggle with the Protestants. In all these efforts, however, the Pope did not address some of the most basic issues raised by the Reformation. Instead, nearly four centuries would pass before Vatican Two would finally make reforms called for by Luther and other reformers.