

THE EASTERN SCHISM

From the time of the Council of Chalcedon (451) when Rome rejected its Canon 28, which granted great jurisdictional powers to Constantinople, relations between the two sees were marked by occasional episodes of high tension. Many diverse forces-political, social, cultural, and religious were pulling the two sees apart. A complete rupture even occurred when the Patriarch accepted Emperor Zeno's Henoticon (482), which seemed to disavow the Chalcedonian definition regarding Christ; relations were only restored when Constantinople abandoned its position. The subsequent Monothelete controversy-over the question of Christ's unity of will-ended with the Roman view triumphant over Constantinople, but the papacy did not emerge from the affair completely unscathed: Pope Honorius was anathematized at the Third Council of Constantinople (680) as a heretic along with four Byzantine patriarchs. Then the Moslem seizure of the three patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem and their isolation left the patriarch of Constantinople the unquestioned head of Eastern Christendom.

The Eastern Emperors' attempt to enforce a policy of iconoclasm (the abolition of all religious images) in the eighth century again brought conflict with the Popes. Moreover, the Emperor's refusal to send military assistance in 753 after an urgent appeal led Pope Stephen to turn instead to the Franks, inaugurating the policy that

was to lead to Charlemagne's imperial coronation. Another schism did not occur, however, until the advent of Patriarch Photius (d. 895). It proved to be only temporary. But trouble broke out again at the time of Patriarch Cerularius (d. 1058), and this time schism permanently separated East from West.

The Photian schism can be traced to the year 858, when the Patriarch of Constantinople, Ignatius, was deposed by Emperor Michael III and replaced by Photius, much to the dismay of Pope Nicholas I (d. 867), who in spite of difficulties with Ignatius was still horrified at the apparent irregularities of his deposition. Nicholas sent legates to Constantinople who decided in favor of Photius. But when Photius indicated that he did not accept the Pope's supremacy, the Pope in turn refused to recognize him as Patriarch. The trouble was aggravated by the situation in the Balkans, where the Roman missionary Bishop Formosus collided with Byzantine emissaries over his attacks on Byzantine traditions regarding marriage of the clergy, the Lenten fast, and the Western addition of Filioque to the Creed. Photius took up his pen to denounce the enormities of the Romans to the other Eastern Patriarchs.

At this juncture Basil the Macedonian usurped the throne in 867, removed Photius, and restored Ignatius. A new Pope, Hadrian, sought a reconciliation, sending delegates to attend a council at Constantinople in 869. But the climate at the council did not favor a restoration of good relations. The members refused to

endorse a statement brought by the legates declaring that the faith was kept inviolate by the Holy See, and they assigned the Church of Bulgaria to Constantinople in spite of Rome's claim over it.

Then Ignatius died and Basil reappointed Photius, who now proved eager to repair relations with Rome. Another council was held at Constantinople in 879 which annulled the acts of 869 and recognized the perfect orthodoxy of Rome. Even Bulgaria was handed back to Rome, although its King, Boris, refused to go along with this. So the episode ended with a complete reconciliation between the patriarchate and the papacy. Friends of Ignatius, however, hurried to Rome and spread false rumors, which developed into a legend of another excommunication of Photius.

The tenth century was one of relative peace between the two sees—a peace favored by the friendly political relations of the Popes who ruled Rome from 904 to 962 with the Byzantines, who once more had established their control over southern Italy. But the old issues had not been resolved; they merely were dormant. The revival of the Western Empire once more stirred them up. When Otto the Saxon in 962 revived the Empire, he assured the pre-eminence of German influence over Rome for the next century and therefore of the principles of reform that had originated in the North. This also meant the permanent addition of *Filioque* to the Creed. This Latin term, interpolated into the early Creed, expressed the idea that the Holy Spirit

proceeded from both the Father and the Son. This usage first occurred in Spain, probably at the Third Council of Toledo (589), and made its way to the Carolingian court, whence it was brought by German ecclesiastics to Rome. After some hesitation it was finally sung in Rome around 1000 and adopted as part of the official doctrine. Its adoption was extremely offensive to the East. For the Westerners it was merely a refinement of an idea already contained in the Creed; but for the Easterners, whose history made them more sensitive to Trinitarian terminology, its addition upset the delicate balance of properties within the Trinity. Their understanding of the Trinity emphasized the omnipresent and pervasive nature of the Holy Spirit and would only allow them to say that the Holy Spirit descended through the Son, not from the Son.

Involved in the dispute was an even more basic issue, however: the nature of ecclesiastical and papal authority. The attitude of the Easterners toward papal authority and primacy was undefined and ambiguous. For them ecumenical councils were the one' inspired doctrinal authority; to add to a creed issued by a council was to question the council's authority. Only another ecumenical council could amplify or explain the definition of a previous council. A term they might tolerate on purely speculative grounds meant a lapse into heresy if it were added unilaterally to the Creed by the Western churches. Nor could the pronouncement of a Pope change this.

But this did not yet mean an actual schism. In fact, the peoples of Christendom were in closer touch with each other at the beginning of the eleventh century than at any period since the coming of the barbarians. Pilgrims in large numbers headed East to Jerusalem, while the Moslems showed a friendly attitude. And as communications improved there was some attempt to define more clearly the relations between the two sees. Patriarch Eustathius in 1024 with the backing of Emperor Basil II proposed a formula that allowed for the primacy of Rome but left Constantinople self-sufficient and autonomous. At first, it seems, the Pope agreed, but the Cluniac monks objected to this parceling out of the one, indivisible domain of St. Peter, and so the Pope withdrew his agreement. So Pope and Patriarch remained estranged. Political events were soon to considerably exacerbate matters.

The return of the Byzantines to power in southern Italy met with considerable resistance and periodic revolts. One of these took place in 1020 when an Apulian leader by the name of Melo took up arms against the Greek oppressors and sought help from some Norman knights who happened to be passing through on pilgrimage. The revolt failed, but the Normans stayed on and under the family of the Hauteville began a systematic conquest of the South. At first the Popes looked on with little regret at the Norman victories over the Byzantines, for though these conquerors were freebooters, they were Latin Catholics. But when the

Normans began to threaten his own frontiers, Pope Leo (d. 1054) decided the time had come to form an alliance with the Byzantine Emperor to suppress them. However, a problem soon arose in regard to the territories that the Normans had already brought under Latin domination. The Pope had no intention of allowing them to revert to Byzantine rule nor to allow Greek ecclesiastical usages to be restored. The whole trend in Rome at this time of the reformed papacy was toward conformity and strict discipline.

The Patriarch at the time in Constantinople was Michael Cerularius, who had ascended the throne in 1043. He was a former civil servant with all the limitations that implied, possessing very little of the subtlety and wit or theological culture of a Photius, arrogant, ambitious, and immensely popular with the people. He also had a rather low opinion of the papacy, not being aware of the changes brought about in Rome by recent reforms. Taking his cue from the Pope's insistence on conformity to Latin usages in Norman-occupied territory in Italy he, in turn, ordered the Latin churches in Constantinople to adopt Greek usages. Upon their refusal, he closed them and ordered Leo, archbishop and head of the Bulgarian Church, to write to the bishop of Trani in Apulia in southern Italy and denounce such Latin customs as the use of unleavened bread in the Eucharist. This letter was to be passed on to the Pope.

This aggressive broadside reached Pope Leo at an unfortunate moment: He had just been defeated by the

Normans and was being held in honorable captivity at Benevento. His cardinal secretary, Humbert of Moyen.Moutier, translated it for him and probably-with his little knowledge of Greek-exaggerated its offensive tone. The Pope, who had expected friendly CO-Operation from the Byzantines, was outraged and was about to dispatch a reply when a courier arrived from Constantinople with two conciliatory letters from Emperor and Patriarch advocating closer unity. Most regrettably, however, Cerularius addressed the Pope as "Brother" instead of the customary "Father" and signed himself "Ecumenical Patriarch," which the Romans misconstrued as a claim to headship over the whole Church. (The Byzantine use of Oikoumene actually only meant "the Empire.")

The next lamentable episode must to some extent be blamed on the hot-tempered and truculent Humbert, who had no love for the Greeks. He decided that legates must be sent to the Byzantine capital, and he drafted two letters for them to carry-one for the patriarch and one for the Emperor. The one to the Patriarch condemned his assumption of the title "Ecumenical," took umbrage at his criticism of Latin usages, and prayed that the legates would find him repentant.

On their arrival the legates, one of them Humbert himself, were so offended-by the protocol of their reception that they merely thrust the letter into the hands of Cerularius without a greeting. Cerularius was dumbfounded. Having heard much about Pope Leo's

gentility and courtesy, he simply could not believe that such a man who he knew, moreover, was a prisoner and hence likely in no position to dispatch legates, would authorize such boorish legates or such a letter. He refused to accredit the legates' authority or have any dealings with them.

The Emperor, on the other hand, received them well which encouraged Humbert to publish certain documents in defense of Latin usages. In turn a Byzantine monk came out with a rebuttal that was very critical of Latin celibacy and other practices. Humbert then lost his temper and blasted the monk with a venomous screed and heatedly raised the provocative question of Filioque. Cerularius continued to ignore their presence. So finally with his patience exhausted, Humbert and his colleagues strode into the Church of Santa Sophia on Saturday, July 16, 1054, right before the chanting of the afternoon liturgy and laid on the altar a bull excommunicating Cerularius, Emperor Michael Constantine, and all their followers, and then departed, ceremonially shaking the dust off their feet.

Few ecclesiastical documents of such great moment contain as historian Stephen Runciman says, so much humbug. Besides refusing the title of Patriarch to Cerularius both personally and as bishop of Constantinople, the bull accused the Greeks of simony (the major vice of the Western Church at the time, as Humbert knew better than anyone), of rebaptizing Latins (untrue), of allowing priests to marry (incorrect), of baptizing women in labor, of

jettisoning the Mosaic Law, of refusing communion to men who had shaven their beards (untrue), and finally, of omitting a clause in the Creed(I).

The populace, which was already angry with the Emperor for the favor he had shown to the Latins, rioted. Only by ordering the bull to be publicly and solemnly burned did the Emperor succeed in calming the city. A synod condemned the actions of the legates and solemnly anathematized Humbert and his companions while carefully avoiding mention of the papacy.

This left the door open for the Pope to resume friendly negotiations-and, in fact, since Pope Leo died before the legates' arrival in Constantinople, the legates had been acting without actual authority, so it would have been easy for a subsequent Pope to repudiate their action without any loss of prestige. The whole episode could have been glossed over as a mere unfortunate lapse. And at first, it was viewed this way in the East. But in the West, it was different. With Humbert's star continuing to rise in the Curia, his version of the affair-which sounded like a hymn of triumph-was accepted as the right one. Subsequent Popes followed his line. Pope Gregory VII was Humbert's closest friend and would not have dreamed of repudiating his action. Humbert, they believed, did the right thing in excommunicating an unrepentant and contumacious bishop; since the Patriarch's successors also refused to seek absolution, they too were regarded as partaking in the schism. By continuing to elect and

support schismatic bishops, the whole patriarchate of Constantinople was eventually included in the excommunication.

Then, to complicate matters further, Gregory VII's policies led him into a close alliance with the Normans, while the Eastern Emperor found it useful to cultivate the friendship of Henry IV, Gregory's archenemy. Finally, Gregory excommunicated the Byzantine Emperor Alexius in 1081. By the year of Gregory's death in 1085 relations between Eastern and Western Christendom were extremely cold. Still there was as yet no actual schism.

A thaw seemed possible with the election of Urban II, who was a statesman to the marrow, a strong man of good will who shunned strife and controversy. He opened negotiations with the Byzantine court and lifted the ban of excommunication against Emperor Alexius. In response, Alexius held a synod at Constantinople, which found that the Pope's name had been "inadvertently" omitted from the diptychs, which in Byzantium as in Rome listed bishops and others who were worthy of the prayers of the faithful. (Throughout the controversy both Rome and Byzantium had been removing the names of their opponents from their respective diptychs.) Alexius proposed the restoration of the Pope's name if the Pope would make a conciliatory gesture, but the gesture never came, and the Pope's name was never put back in the diptychs. Nevertheless, good relations between the two sees were resumed.

And so when Urban called for a crusade at Clermont in 1095, one of his motives was to bring help to the beleaguered Eastern Christians. It would help to dissipate past ill feelings and lead them to recognize the Pope as the leader of all Christendom.

But instead, the effect of the crusades was just the opposite. They proved disastrous to the cause of Christian unity. The Emperor and the crusaders quarreled over the reconquered city of Antioch. The average Eastern Christian Byzantine soon learned to hate the rude, rapacious Western knights, who returned the compliment with interest. When the crusaders seized Antioch in 1098, their leader committed the unpardonable error of driving the Greek Patriarch into exile and installing a Latin Patriarch in his place. This schism at Antioch was really the beginning of the schism between the Eastern and Western Churches, for until then the other patriarchates were better disposed toward Rome than Constantinople, and if compelled to recognize any ecclesiastical superior would have preferred distant Rome to Constantinople.

Though it is impossible to give an exact date for the beginning of the schism, it was the Fourth Crusade (1202-04) that finally ended all hopes of reunification. The crusaders whom Innocent III directed toward the Holy Land were diverted instead by a young Byzantine prince pretender, who offered them great rewards if they would place him on the throne of Constantinople. Without consulting the Pope, the crusaders acquiesced. But the young prince proved inadequate as a ruler, and

in the midst of terrible turmoil and confusion the crusaders in 1203 sacked the splendid city of Constantinople, not even sparing the churches. The outrage was stamped indelibly in the Byzantine memory and caused the definitive schism between the Greek and Latin Churches.

There were two later attempts to heal the breach with the Church of Constantinople, at the Council of Lyons in 1274 and at Florence in 1439, but they were only nominal; in both cases the motives were political. Though in each case Emperor and Patriarch subscribed to the reunion, they never affected the general life of the Churches. It is only in our own day in connection with the Second Vatican Council that significant steps have been taken that offer the hope of eventual reunion.