

ALL-MERCIFUL SAVIOR ORTHODOX MISSION



A Pocket Church History for Orthodox Christians

by Fr. Aidan Keller

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PART ONE

+ IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, THE SON, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT, AMEN.

FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH

SOME 2,000 years ago, our Lord Jesus Christ directly intervened in human history. Although He is God (together with the Father and the Holy Spirit), He became a man--or, as we often put it, He became incarnate--enfleshed. Mankind, at its very beginning in Adam and Eve, had fallen away from Divine life by embracing sin, and had fallen under the power of death. But the Lord Jesus, by His incarnation, death upon the Cross, and subsequent resurrection from death on the third day, destroyed the power death had over men. By His teaching and His whole saving work, Christ reconciled to God a humanity that had grown distant from God¹ and had become ensnared in sins.² He abolished the authority the Devil had acquired over men³ and He renewed and re-created both mankind and His whole universe.⁴ Bridging the abyss separating man and God, by means of the union of man and God in His own Person, Christ our Saviour opened the way to eternal, joyful life after death for all who would accept it.⁵

Not all the people of Judea, the Hebrews, God's chosen people (Deut 7:6; Is 44:1), were ready to hear this news, and so our Lord spoke to them mostly in parables and figures. For the complete revelation of His teachings, He chose out twelve simple men whom He taught more perfectly.⁶ These twelve are called His Apostles.⁷ As part of His salvation of the human race, Christ established a Church (Mt 16:18; Mt 18:17).

- 1 Rom 5:1, 2, 10; 2 Cor 5:18-19; Eph. 2:14-17; Col 1:19-22
- 2 Gen 8:21; Eph 2:1-3
- 3 Ps 123:7; Act 26:18; Rom 6:17-18, 22; Col 1:13; Heb 2:14-15; 1 Jn 3:8
- 4 1 Cor 5:7, 17; Heb 9:15; Apoc 21:5
- 5 Jn 3:14-16; Rom 5:21; 1 Cor 15:22; Tit 3:7; Heb 5:9; 1 Pet 3:22
- 6 Mt 10:2; Lk 6:13; Mt 26:20; Jn 6:70; 1 Cor 15:5; Apoc 21:14
- 7 Mk 6:30; Lk 9:10; Lk 22:14; Lk 24:10; Lk 8:1; Rom 16:7

He appointed the Apostles to govern it, and He imbued them with priestly power (Mt 16:19; Jn 20:21), breathing on them and saying, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you shall forgive, they shall be forgiven them" (Jn 20:21-23). He commissioned them in particular to preach the Gospel (good news) of His saving death and resurrection, saying, "Go and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 28:19). Christian tradition is unanimous that during the forty days after rising from death, until the time that He ascended into heaven, the Lord Jesus instructed the Twelve in establishing His Church upon earth, a Church which He promised would never be overcome by the powers of darkness (Dan 2:44; Mt 16:18). The Lord promised that the Holy Spirit would be with and guide the Church, preserving it from untruth.¹

CHARACTERISTICS OF JESUS' CHURCH

It is important to understand that the Church was and is both earthly and heavenly. Existing on earth, it was and is affected by human weaknesses. For example, although the Head of the Church is Christ,² unworthy men are at times chosen to positions of leadership within it. As a heavenly assembly, however, it is grounded upon the guarantee of the Lord Himself that

"the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mt 16:18); that is, that the Grace and salvation God willed to impart to His people through it can never be invalidated by unworthy individuals. The Church which the Lord Jesus founded had specific characteristics, which are as applicable today as when the Apostles walked the earth. It was...

... **ONE**. Although composed of local congregations, it was a united body, visibly sharing the same Faith and Grace.³ It was not a set of different denominations having a common claim to follow or be founded by Jesus, united only in some invisible way by that claim. Christ's "high priestly" prayer which He prayed the night before His death on the Cross (Jn 17:11, 21-23) was that His Church would be one, even as He and the Father are one. The seamless garment of Christ, to which an unusual amount of attention is paid in St. John's Gospel (Jn 19:23-24), represents the unity of Christ's Church. It was...

... **HOLY**. The Church is holy because its Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, is holy (Eph 1:22-23; Eph 2:19-22). It numbered individuals who were sinners among its members, but it was the means chosen by God to give these sinners forgiveness (Mt 16:19), Grace, and sanctity. Its teachings were the very path to holiness, and still are. "Holy" means, originally, "set apart," and the Church was holy because it went not the way of the world, but along the paths willed by Jesus Christ our Lord. It was...

¹ Is 37:2-3; Mt 16:18; Mt 28:19-20; Jn 14:16-17

² Eph 4:15; Eph 5:23-24; Col 1:18

³ Jn 10:16; Jn 11:51-52; Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:12-13, 20, 27; Eph 4:4-5, 15-16; Col 2:18-19; Col 3:15

... **CATHOLIC**. Catholic¹ comes from two Greek words, kata holos, meaning "according to the whole." The Church was given to the whole of mankind; it was for all tribes, tongues, and peoples, and not only for the Hebrew people.² It embraced all the teachings the Apostles shared with the peoples of the world. Nothing the Lord wished us to know has been lost, because the Church has preserved it all from century to century. It was...

... **APOSTOLIC**. For it was established by the Twelve and remained faithful to their teachings, and not only the part of their teachings recorded in the Scriptures, but all of them.³ The Church was also apostolic in its form of government; it has always been governed by successors of the Apostles. These successors are called Bishops⁴ and are visibly united in a single body made of local Churches which share the same Faith and participate in Communion with each other.

"CHRISTIANS"

After about three years, the members of the Church became known as "Christians," a nickname first given to them at Antioch (Acts 11:26). This name has always been accepted by the faithful, for it is indeed Jesus Christ⁵ Whom we preach and worship, and it is He Who is our Way and Life. It is He Who founded our Church and promised to be in her midst, among His people, "even to the consummation of the world" (Mt 28:20).

¹ It should be remembered that "Catholic" in the 2nd century after Christ did not mean the same thing as "Catholic" means today, in the 20th century.

² Lk 13:29; Lk 24:47; Rom 1:5; Rom 10:12

³ 2 Thess 2:15; 2 Tim 1:13-14; 1 Jn 2:24

⁴ Act 20:28; 1 Tim 3:1-2; Tit 1:7

⁵ Jesus (or Joshua) means "Saviour" (Mt 1:21). Christ means "Anointed One."

WRITING THE BIBLE

The Twelve Apostles, who were hand-picked by Christ, walked next to Him, heard the most profound of His teachings, and left everything to follow Him, the Lord expressly designated as the first leaders of His Church. It was on their personal testimony of His Resurrection from the dead that the Church was established and flourished during what is called its Apostolic Age. At this time, God permitted numberless and spectacular miracles to blaze forth everywhere the Apostles preached (see the Book of Acts and contemporary historians), to confirm that it was His Truth they were teaching. At this time also, the Apostles and disciples were writing memoirs of their vivid experience of Christ, as well as important letters to each other and to the faithful. Three or four hundred years later, Church councils would gather the inspired writings together, sort them out, and call them the New Testament. During the Apostles' lifetimes, however, their personal witness and authority were much more decisive and immediate for the faithful than their writings. We must always

keep in mind that the Church existed before the Bible. Therefore, any church that claims to be based on the Bible is not the Church of Jesus Christ; only a church that claims to have produced the Bible can even be close to the Original Church.

CONTINUITY

Inevitably, the Apostles had to die. But the Lord did not mean for the Church to die with them; to perpetuate the Church, the Apostles ordained successors called Bishops (Philipp 1:1) for local congregations. To these men they imparted the apostolic Grace they had received from Christ Himself, a process which has been called "apostolic succession" and which is discussed prominently in the New Testament (in Titus and 1 & 2 Timothy).

Deacons, too, were ordained by the Apostles. Their order was established because after rapid growth it became impossible for the Apostles to tend to the Christians both materially and spiritually (Act 6:1-6). The duties of the Deacons were to distribute charities and maintain order, allowing the Apostles to concentrate exclusively on teaching, exhorting, and celebrating the awesome Mysteries of Christ (e.g., the mystery of the "breaking of bread," which we know today as the Eucharist, Liturgy, or Mass, and the mystery of Holy Baptism).

Not long after the order of Deacons sprang up, the order of Presbyters or Priests was created (Acts 14:22; some translations have "elders" since "Priest" means "elder.") The Priests were given nearly all the graces which marked the Bishops' office. They celebrated Baptism, the Eucharist, the anointing of the sick, etc., relieving the heavy burden of the Bishops, but the Priests did not have the ability to consecrate other Priests or Bishops. The primitive threefold hierarchy of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons remains the distinctive mark of all historic Christian churches. There were also lesser ministries such as those of the Readers, Subdeacons, Acolytes, and Deaconesses.

BOTH JEW AND GENTILE

In the Apostolic Age, the Church had to make one painful transition. It had begun, of course, in Palestine among the Hebrew people, for God had chosen this people to be a light to the world, to be the first to receive the Messiah and to tell the world about Him and eternal life in Him. However, many of the chosen nation of Israel did not choose to follow Christ, and so the torch of faithfulness to Christ largely passed to the Gentile peoples, to former pagans, as the Prophet Isaias had foretold some 700 years earlier (Is 2:2; 60:3, 5). The question immediately arose whether Gentile Christians had first to be circumcised and observe the law of Moses - whether, in essence, they had to become Jews first in order to become Christians. The Apostles were not found in full agreement. The Apostle Paul was very insistent that it was not necessary, and a Council was convened at Jerusalem attended by all the Twelve. St. James, leader of the church at Jerusalem, presided. By the light of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles ruled that new Christians did not need to be circumcised or observe all of the law of Moses. After this dilemma was resolved, the Church continued spreading and flourishing among the Gentile peoples. Jerusalem itself was utterly destroyed in 70 A.D. by Roman troops, and soon the major Christian centres were Antioch, Rome, and Alexandria.

RESOLUTION OF DISPUTES

When the Apostles met in a council which superseded their individual views, they established a principle that would guide the Church for centuries to come. No one Apostle was infallible, nor were any of the Bishops they ordained as successors. However, meeting in council under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Bishops of the entire Church have, on seven occasions, proclaimed dogmas and issued canons (regulations) which bear the stamp of the Holy Spirit and are of greater authority than the word of any one Bishop. The Jew/Gentile controversy was but the first of many divisive disputes, usually sparked by some untrue teaching, which at times have threatened the unity which is one of the four marks of the Church. Thanks to the Holy Councils, which spoke with the authority of the Spirit for all the Church, such disputes have never succeeded in tearing Church unity asunder.

FORMATION OF CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

The Primitive Church underwent a profound development in its worship during the first 100 years. Originally, the Mystical Supper, the breaking of bread, had been celebrated in the evening directly after a community meal. In these early years, all of the instructive and inspirational material which now surrounds the central act of Holy Communion in the Liturgy took place separately from the Eucharist in the synagogue. Over time, however, those Jews who did not accept Christ as the Messiah developed increasingly hard-line attitudes towards the Christ-following Jews and eventually refused to allow them to worship in the synagogue. This dramatic change of circumstances resulted in the basic

structure the Divine Liturgy has today: penitential prayers, praises of God, scripture readings, and a sermon (liturgical features lifted straight out of the synagogue) are now followed by the breaking of bread and Communion in the Body and Blood of Christ. When the Eucharist ceased being an evening affair, Christians started fasting before attending it.

WHAT HOLDS THE CHURCH TOGETHER?

Unlike other faiths, Orthodox Christianity looks not to a bureaucracy, hierarchy, or position paper to provide a focus for the Church. The centre of Orthodoxy is the very worship of God - the Eucharist, and the celebration of the Divine Office. Because this is so, any substantial history of the Church must include liturgical development, but we should avoid the trap of taking a casual, factual approach like so many scholars do. The history of our Liturgy is not just an arbitrary succession of additions and changes, but the unfolding work of the Holy Spirit, guiding the Holy Church century by century in a holy and right worship of God. We worship not as we think best but as God has willed to be worshipped.

THE AGE OF MARTYRS

The period just after the passing of the Twelve Apostles is often called the Age of Martyrs. As the news of the Faith spread like wildfire, Satan's immediate reaction was to inspire a bloody and total annihilation of Christianity. It is amazing how in spite of all obstacles the Christians persisted in meeting together on the Lord's Day. Often they would meet in a different house each week, since discovery meant certain death. Many Christians, since they refused to deny Christ and worship the pagan gods, even by some small word or sign, were killed summarily or by terrible tortures. But the Lord used their joyous deaths and their divinely-courageous sufferings, together with other stupendous miracles, to turn the hearts of many people to Himself. Far from destroying the Church, persecution only refined and strengthened it. Survivors wrote the Martyrs' names in calendars so as to keep a yearly memorial of their victories, forming the basis for our modern Church calendar with its Holy Days.

COUNTERFEIT CHRISTIANITY

The Church's trial by fire was spiritual as well as external. Heresies sprang up like weeds, and no uniform consensus of faith could be trotted out against them. The word heresy comes from Greek *hairoumai*, to choose. Heretics were those who chose their own beliefs instead of accepting the Church's Faith as it stood. The Gnostics tried to blend Christianity with a secret wisdom ideal, thinking that salvation came through arcane knowledge, not through the Grace of Christ. Judaizers did not accept the Apostles' decision that Christians do not observe the Mosaic Law, and sowed distrust and discord wherever pastors were too soft to stop them. The followers of Marcion believed that the God of the Old Testament was not the same as the Father of Jesus Christ. The Manichæans believed physical matter was evil and only pure spirit was good. The Montanists rejected the Church's hierarchy to emphasize spectacular spiritual phenomena and preached a new age of the Holy Spirit. The Sabellians held that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were just three "masks" God wore at different times when He did different things; they denied the reality of the Holy Trinity. Very few heresies since that time have been original; most have been mere rehashes of these timeworn follies.

In the midst of the confusion and bitterness stirred up by heretical movements, the Church of Christ was like a ship tossed on the sea; yet Christ was its Pilot, and the challenges of persecution and heresy were both overcome. The persecutions ended when the Emperor Constantine, a great friend of Christianity, overcame his pagan enemies, took control of the Roman Empire, and made Christianity legal (in A.D. 312; not till 392 did it become the state religion).

THE FIRST COUNCIL - NICAEA (325 A.D.)

This reversal of affairs was followed by a spiritual victory over heresy. A Council of all Christian Bishops was called by Emperor Constantine to decide officially what the Christian Faith consisted of, since a priest named Arius was teaching that Christ was not God but merely a unique man, and winning many adherents. The Council met at Nicæa and refuted his doctrine, writing a summary of the true Faith we now know as the first part of the Creed chanted in the Liturgy. At the same time, the Nicene Fathers agreed how Pascha (Easter Day) would be computed; required all Christians to stand, not kneel, at Sunday worship; and settled clergy affairs. These decisions are abided by even today by the Orthodox Christians of the East and of the West.

Just a few follow-up remarks. First, after Nicæa the Arian Christians grew to be more numerous than the faithful, showing that it is not sheer strength of numbers that determines

where the authentic Church lies. Second, although defining the Faith in terms of human language was necessary to safeguard the Truth, it was very painful for the Fathers of Nicæa to do. They felt keenly that Christ's Faith was something to be treasured and stored up within the human heart, not baked into a formula. We can only become their spiritual heirs if we embrace the Faith in the actions of our lives as well as by accepting their Creed.

THE CONSTANTINIAN ERA

After Emperor Constantine legalised the Christian Faith, and it was clearly defined at the General Council of Nicæa, momentous changes swept through the Church, and not all the winners were favourable. Christianity had not usually attracted ambitious men; now they sought to be made Priests and Bishops, with some success. There was a large influx of converts, not as fervent and sincere as converts had been. Public churches were built, and replaced the catacombs and private homes as the site where the Sacraments, or Mysteries, were celebrated. This new freedom allowed the cultivation and perfection of liturgical music and a flourishing of liturgical art, the groundwork for the church hymnody and iconography which so beautify and elevate our worship today.

The Constantinian Era is the name often given to that period following Constantine's reign when the aims of Christianity and those of the secular kingdom largely overlapped, when the expertise and resources of society were expended to the glory of God. This benefitted the Church in certain ways. For example, Bishops are not known for working well together, and it is possible that without imperial intervention no Ecumenical Council would ever have been assembled. All seven of the Holy Councils which upheld our Faith were convened by the summons of an Emperor or Empress. At its best, the policy of symphony between the Church and the State was advantageous for the Faith. The drawback was that worldly influence at times crept into the Holy of Holies, and this was a concern for many sincere Christians. In fact, whenever the secular authorities tried to interfere outright in the teachings of the Church, saintly Bishops were there to lay down their lives, if need be, to defend the Truth. Our calendar of martyrs is full of their names.

MONASTICISM

One reaction to worldliness was spearheaded in the deserts of Egypt, where once the Christ Child had fled to escape the hands of a worldly despot. A young man named Anthony retired into the deserts to serve God in solitude and prayer. St. Anthony was eventually encompassed by large numbers of enthusiastic disciples, and organised them as Christian monks. "Monk" comes from Greek monos, "alone," and at first meant a hermit or solitary.¹ The monks foreswore secular involvement, dainty food, the married life, and personal property. In short, their aim was to fulfill not only all the commandments of Christ, but also all His counsels given in the Holy Gospels, such as voluntary poverty, virginity, obedience, and ascetic life (asceticism is voluntary deprivation and struggle for God's sake). St. Pachomius started the first monastery, where these religious men could dwell in mutual support under a rule of life. These ideals, which fired the souls of many men and women whom we know today as Saints, spread from Egypt to Palestine to Syria and all the East. They were imported to the West by the great St. John Cassian, and there they shone forth as brightly as in the East.

"NEW ROME"; THE SECOND COUNCIL (381 A.D.)

Emperor Constantine set another mighty wheel in motion when he moved the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to Byzantium, an obscure village in Greece not far from Nicæa. It soon became known as Constantinople or New Rome, and there it was that the Second Holy Council of the Church was held in 381.² At the First Council, the main issue was the Divinity of Christ; this Second Council discussed the Divinity of the Holy Spirit. The genuine teaching that the Holy Spirit is God was enshrined by the council Fathers in statements which now form the second half of the Creed we sing every Sunday at Divine Liturgy.

¹ The word **monk** may also come from the Egyptian word for rug-weaver. The early monks in Egypt supported themselves by weaving baskets and rugs.

² This Council was only of Eastern Bishops, but the whole Church accepted it.

Another way in which this teaching was enshrined was pioneered by St. Cyril of Jerusalem. To the Eucharistic Liturgy he added an explicit invocation to the Holy Spirit to descend upon the Gifts and effect their transformation into the Body and Blood of Christ. This invocation is called the epiclesis, and all the various churches adopted it into their rites.¹

STANDARDISATIONS OF THE LITURGY

Some time before 450 A.D., a major transformation occurred in the way the Liturgy was celebrated at Rome. Originally, it had been done in Greek, until Pope St. Victor began using Latin. At some point, which no scholar has been able to discover precisely, the prayers were rearranged, and the terse, symmetrical Roman Canon was established. After this, the changes to the Roman Rite were minor indeed, at least after St. Gregory brought the Our Father and Kyrie into place (about 600 A.D.). The Roman Rite was present in Spain in the 5th century and developed independently as the Mozarabic Rite. In Gaul, the Gallican Rite, a Latin rite with Eastern features, was used. At Milan a rite similar to the Roman, called the Ambrosian, developed independently. In the East, St. Basil codified the Liturgy and from it St. John Chrysostom (5th century) produced a shortened version. These two Liturgies, together with the hours of prayer from St. Sabbas Monastery near Jerusalem, were the foundation for the Byzantine Rite. Other important Eastern Liturgies were that of St. Mark (Coptic Rite) and St. James (Syriac Liturgy). Nearly all the Eastern and Western rites named above have been used in the Orthodox Church in modern times, if only occasionally. But the Rite which is the spiritual heritage of the vast majority of Orthodox today is the Byzantine.

"ORTHODOXY"

Ever since the first four Councils, the term most commonly used to denote our beliefs has been "Orthodox." It comes from Greek *orthos*, "correct, straight," and *doxa*, "glory, worship." The Orthodox, then, are those who worship God truly and rightfully, with true belief. This word had the special meaning in those early days of "one who accepts all the Councils." (In the East and West, the word "Catholic" continued to be used to describe the Church, although, as we will see, "Catholic" and "Orthodox" nowadays connote two different faiths).

1 An epiclesis is found in some early Roman sacramentaries & in their progeny, in the Old Sarum Rite of England as well as other Roman-derived Rites.

FOUR FATHERS

Four great and holy men graced the Church as the 4th century gave way to the 5th. St. Athanasius was (almost) single-handedly responsible for the success of the Nicene Council when its popularity faded, and this earned him the title "Pillar of Orthodoxy." When still a Deacon, he denounced the priest Arius, and when he returned from Nicæa he was made Pope¹ of Alexandria. Soon, however, he was exiled from his see, and travelled across East and West barely escaping the clutches of angry heretics. Over the course of five separate exiles, he wrote letters, guided his flock from afar, and preserved an irrepressible sense of humour, one of the most effective weapons in his spiritual arsenal. St. Athanasius reposed in Christ in 373.

St. John Chrysostom ("Golden Mouth") made his start as a humble hermit in Syria, earned fame as a Priest and preacher at Antioch, and then was forced to be Archbishop of the New Rome, Constantinople. His zeal for virtue (an area in which the imperial couple were markedly deficient) attracted the imperial wrath. John was exiled from New Rome repeatedly. When he died in exile in 407, he left a massive legacy of letters, sermons, and commentaries. He is especially loved today for having given the Church her most commonly-used Liturgy for the Eucharist.

Another Saint of this era spanned the Eastern and Western worlds, but hailed from Yugoslavia (Sidonium). St. Jerome moved from Old Rome to Bethlehem and as a Priest and monk lived the rest of his life in the spot where Christ was born. He translated the books of the Bible into Latin from Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic, using ancient manuscripts which do not survive today. His great opus is called the Latin Vulgate, and it is the version of Scripture on which the Douay-Rheims Bible² is grounded. By the year 400, the Church had decided what writings were to be included in the Bible, and our list has not changed since.

The great giant of the West was St. Augustine of Africa, a man who came to Christ late in life. After many years as a wild-living Manichæan heretic, Augustine was converted through the New Testament and the preaching of his friend St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan. He became Bishop of Hippo in Africa, where he took aim at heresies of all sorts. He is a controversial figure because his pen often outraced his God-loving heart, and his logically-produced speculations were later utilised to develop certain Roman Catholic and Protestant teachings, which will have to be discussed eventually in this book. However, at the end of

his life of service to God, Augustine wrote an entire book of retractions, deferred to the judgment of the Church everything he had ever written, and died in the odour of sanctity, bequeathing to us a legacy as massive as St. John Chrysostom's.

- 1 A Patriarch is the chief Bishop of a major Christian centre. "Pope" is the age-old title of the Patriarchs of Rome and Alexandria.
- 2 An English translation closer to the received Orthodox texts than the King James Version.

THE THIRD COUNCIL - 431 A.D.

The year after St. Augustine fell asleep, the Church's Third Holy Council was convened at Ephesus, where the Apostle John and the Virgin Mary had lived. Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, was drawing such a line of distinction between Christ's human side and His Divine side that he said in a Christmas sermon it was demeaning for him to worship a God in a crib! The Holy Council defrocked him and stated that, because Christ is both God and man, the Virgin Mary is truly Theotokos, Mother of God. Nestorius headed east, "consecrated" many clergy, and set up many churches, all separated from the Orthodox and calling him St. Nestorius. But the next Council occasioned an apostasy still more terrible.

THE FOURTH COUNCIL - 451 A.D.

There were those who went so far in avoiding Nestorianism that they developed another error, Monophysitism (from the Greek for "one nature"). These taught that Christ's human and Divine sides were so closely united that they had fused into one human/Divine nature (which would, thus, be neither truly human nor truly Divine). The argument got fierce. The Empress St. Pulcheria convened a General Council at Chalcedon to solve the dilemma, and, assisted by an evident miracle worked at the tomb of the early Martyr Euphemia, the Fathers ruled against the Monophysites. Sadly, for reasons both religious and political, a large dissident denomination was formed, including Egyptian Copts, Syrian Jacobites, and their followers in India. This group rejected the Fourth Council (and succeeding ones). Orthodoxy proclaims two Natures in Christ-Divine and human, each distinct, neither fused together nor divisible. Recently this teaching has come under fire. A handful of Orthodox leaders now claim that today's Monophysites do not believe in classic Monophysitism, and that the Orthodox should unite with them. The Monophysites have responded by toning down their historic platform to a large degree. Nevertheless, traditional Orthodox were alarmed by a unity plan formulated at Chambesy, Switzerland, in 1990, a plan signed by representatives from most Orthodox Patriarchates. It failed to state that the Monophysite Christians ought to embrace the Fourth and all succeeding Councils. Condemnations of the Chambesy plan erupted from Mount Athos, the Georgian Patriarchate, and traditional clergy everywhere. Orthodox feel they have more common ground with the Monophysites than with any other separated Christians, but as long as fully half of the Ecumenical Councils are rejected, there can be no real unity.

ROME FALLS

Turned upside down by moral decay, weakened by internal conflicts, and reeling from the economic and ideological blow dealt by Constantine when he relocated the capital to Constantinople, Old Rome shuddered in the 5th century under repeated barbarian attacks. Finally, in 476, Rome fell permanently to heathen invaders. Many thought the world had ended as The City, the erstwhile hub of Western learning, civilisation, and order collapsed. The repercussions for the Church of Christ were great, especially in the long term, for as public order disintegrated in Italy, the Popes of Rome were forced by sheer compassion to assume a new quasi-governmental role. They began to oversee public charities and to mediate and even rule in public affairs. Before long, the see of Rome had become a government in its own right. As long as holy and capable men steered the Roman church, the arrangement worked, but in later years the saying "Power corrupts" came true. Slowly, over the course of the next 300 years, the attitude that the Popes ruled the whole Church manifested itself and alarmed the other local Churches.

A GODSEND

Just four years after Rome fell, St. Benedict the Great was born in Norcia, Italy. Schooled in Rome, he left it as a young man to seek Christ as a hermit living inside a cave in the wild. He gained many disciples, and wrote a Rule to guide them in monastic life. The Holy Rule revealed Benedict as a genius of discretion and moderation. The severity of the Eastern monks' asceticism he adapted to the Western character, insisting more on obedience and internal work than fasting or great labours. St. Benedict is known as the Father of Western Civilisation because the monasteries were for many years the only oases of stability and learning in a barbaric world. They fed the poor, saved the books, taught people how to read them, and fostered a new ethic, teaching the world that manual labour was honourable.

(Formerly, manual work was thought contemptible, only fit for paupers and slaves.)

Many people today object to Christianity on the grounds that no one is doing as the early Christians did: sharing all possessions in common, renouncing private property, living in community, praying daily, "working with [the] hands, the thing that is just," and the other things mentioned in the Book of Acts in the Bible. In monasteries of the Orthodox Church, at least, this way of life still exists - to the glory of Jesus Christ.

1 The Council Fathers wrote the Orthodox teaching on one scroll & that of the Monophysites on another, then placed both in St. Euphemia's tomb & began to fast & pray. After 3 days, they opened the tomb to find the Orthodox scroll in the Saint's hand & the Monophysite scroll trampled under her feet. Euphemia had spoken; the case was closed.

THE FIFTH COUNCIL - 553 A.D.

The 5th Ecumenical Council of Christendom was called because certain letters called the Three Chapters were being circulated, stretching and straining the definition of faith agreed on at Chalcedon. In the uproar, Pope Vigilius wearied of the argument and decreed that, taken in the best sense, these letters were acceptable, adding a little hazy theologising of his own. The Bishops of Africa cut the Pope off from communion, ordering him to repent. Emperor Theodosius called a Holy Council against the Pope's wishes, and the Fathers assembled at Constantinople ruled that the Three Chapters were not orthodox and implied that Pope Vigilius was heretical. This Council condemned Origen (d. 254), a brilliant teacher who had taught that souls lived spiritually before they are placed in bodies as a result of sin, and that all wicked angels and people would some day enter Heaven after purification.¹

THE FIVE PATRIARCHATES

In the 5th century, the overall structure of the Church became fixed as a Pentarchy. Five Patriarchs, Bishops shepherding major sections of the world from the important Christian centres and holding equal communion with one another, were invested with special archpastoral care. These Bishops were described as the "five senses" of the Church. We can see that the essence of the Church was still in the unanimity of faith, though, not in a command structure, for at times certain Patriarchs, such as Pope Vigilius of Rome, strayed from the faith and were cut off from the Church. The Patriarchates were, in descending order of honour, Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. Pentarchy is still the ideal of the Church, but various defections and contentions have made it practically impossible since at least 1054 A.D., and newer Patriarchates have developed over the centuries - those of Serbia, Moscow, Bulgaria, Romania, and the Georgian nation.

THE RISE OF THE PAPACY

From 600 A.D. on, the question of the Papacy's role in the Church proved thornier and thornier. At the turn of that century, however, an ideal man was drafted to fill the Roman see. St. Gregory the Great shepherded his patriarchate in a truly inspired way. First of all, he was mission-minded. He sent a troop of monks from the monastery he had founded in Rome into England to convert the Germanic people that had settled there and had re-paganised the land. St. Gregory is revered as the Father of the Roman Rite of the Church. He is known for having popularised the word *Mass* to describe the Liturgy of the Eucharist.²

1 The doctrine that denies eternal damnation is called **apokatastasis**, meaning "the restitution of all." This is not a Christian belief; both the words of Our Saviour (Mk 9:44-48; Mt 18:8, 25:41, 46; see also 2 Tim 1:9 and Jude v. 6) and the ancient liturgies of the Christians (e.g., "deliver us from eternal damnation" in the W. Rite Canon) teach the reality of eternal Hell for those who choose it.

2 St. Ambrose of Milan and St. Gregory of Tours also used the word **Mass**.

Taking his lead from the Greek liturgies, he placed the Our Father where it is sung today and added prayers to the Roman Mass. He polished and codified the chants then in the infancy of their use, resulting in an otherworldly musical form called, after himself, Gregorian Chant. The Saint felt it was his personal responsibility that no poor man or woman should ever die of neglect in the city of Rome. Times were often hard, but whenever Gregory heard that a homeless man had died, he counted himself unworthy to celebrate Mass on that day. A dispute broke out between Gregory and the Bishop of Constantinople, St. John the Faster. All the offices held in Constantinople, which was the capital city of the Roman Empire, were dubbed ecumenical (the librarian of New Rome, for example, was the ecumenical or

"universal" librarian), and this title was bestowed by the Emperor on the city's Patriarch as well. Convinced because of the language barrier that John thought himself to be a Bishop ruling over all other Bishops, St. Gregory reacted violently. In the most charitable language possible, he condemned St. John of insufferable pride and demanded he forfeit the title, himself adopting the title "slave of the slaves of God." St. Gregory's plea was, "May all Christians reject this blasphemous title [Universal Bishop] - this title which takes the priestly honour from every Priest the moment it is insanelly usurped by one!" The unity of the Church was not broken by this misunderstanding.

A SNAKE IN THE GARDEN

In St. Gregory's lifetime, however, a quiet event transpired in Spain that did lead, in time, to a permanent division. In 589, at the Council of Toledo, the word *filioque*¹ was inserted in the Nicene Creed, so that it read, "I believe... in the Holy Spirit... Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son." This was done to bolster the Divinity of God the Son, since Spain had been overrun by Arians who denied His equality with God the Father. But the phrase revised at Toledo is a passage of Scripture,² and Scripture cannot just be altered. This local council disobeyed the Ecumenical Council of Constantinople, which had ruled that no change could at any time be made to the Nicene Creed. Passing slowly into Central Europe and the rest of the West, the filioque was a theological time bomb with a fuse 4 1/2 centuries long.

THE SIXTH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL (680 A.D.)

The schism of the Monophysites, who did not accept the Fourth Council, greatly reduced the size and influence of the Church in Eastern lands, so to conciliate them the Emperor promulgated a doctrine called Monothelitism, which claimed that even though Christ's Divinity and humanity were two distinct natures, He possessed but a single Divine will. The Monophysites liked it, and no fewer than three Patriarchs of Constantinople and Pope Honorius of Rome favoured the notion. In the East St. Maximus, and in the West Honorius' successor as Pope, St. Martin I, vigorously assaulted this teaching and spoiled the Emperor's plans. If Christ has no distinct human will, they insisted, then He is not truly a man, for no man without a human will is a true man. Both Saints bore the full brunt of the imperial displeasure. Pope Martin was captured and condemned to labour as a common criminal near the Black Sea, where he died from exhaustion.

Amidst the uproar, Emperor Constantine Pogonatos called the Sixth Ecumenical Council of the Church to order in 680 at New Rome. Monothelitism was condemned and Pope Honorius was denounced as a heretic. It is interesting that the history of his condemnation continued to be read once a year in the Roman Catholic service of Matins until the uncomfortable passage was yanked in the 16th century. Pope St. Agatho and Patriarch St. George of Constantinople gave the Holy Council their full support. It must be remembered that at this time in history the Popes of Rome were widely revered throughout the Church, East and West, as holding the most steadily orthodox of any ancient, apostolic see. Rome was scarcely touched by Arianism, Monophysitism, Monothelitism, Pelagianism, Nestorianism, and other -isms. The Roman Popes steadfastly resisted the *filioque* change to the Creed as well.

THE "QUINISEXT" COUNCIL - 692 A.D.

The 5th and 6th Ecumenical Councils had concerned themselves entirely with matters of dogma and had issued no canons for running church affairs. Therefore, a sacred Council was called at Constantinople to issue canons. It is often called the "Quinisext" or "Fifth-Sixth" and is considered an extension of those Councils. Just a few of its rulings: Bishops could not be married; Deacons and Priests must be allowed to marry before ordination, but must never marry afterwards; the Roman custom of fasting on Saturdays, which differed with apostolic custom, was not permitted. Also, all clergy of the Church were strictly excluded from the political, military, and economic affairs of this world. Although Rome had local rules by this time forbidding Deacons or Priests to marry, and the Romans fasted on Saturdays, the canons which would not allow these practices were officially admitted at Rome, at least for a time, and the Roman and Eastern churches remained united.

- 1 "Filioque" is a Latin word meaning "and from the Son." Pronounced "Fee-lee-OH-kway."
- 2 At the Last Supper Christ said, "The Spirit of truth, Who proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me" (Jn 15:26).

MISSIONS

Throughout the 7th and 8th centuries, the Gospel was slowly accepted by more and more of Europe, but it must be remembered that much of Europe was still staunchly pagan. Many of

the European peoples were so fierce that their eventual acceptance of the gentle Jesus of Nazareth is considered by some historians to be the greatest miracle of Christian history. Evangelism at this time was conducted mainly by monks, and their principles were very sound and are relevant today. They would found a monastery in a lonely place, away from human habitation in a pagan area. Some among them might preach to the people, but only if they had a special gift for this. The other brethren would simply live their Gospel lifestyle to the fullest. With the passage of time, the local inhabitants would discover the true nature of the Christians' lives, and when they liked what they saw, they would be near to Baptism. The compunction and orderly beauty of the church services also warmed the hearts of these peoples, and served to convert them as much as any conversation or reasoning. In Western Europe, it was the Irish monks who were the most active missionaries; in Central Europe, Benedictine monks and nuns from England christianised the German lands.

ICON-SMASHERS

The 8th century was one of general doctrinal stability and harmony in the Western churches, but one of great turmoil for the Eastern churches. A succession of Byzantine Emperors called the iconoclasts or "icon-smashers" condemned the general Christian practice of venerating images ("icons") of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the Saints, and raised a bloody persecution against those who would not surrender their images for destruction. The iconoclasts quoted Scripture itself - had not God forbidden His people to adore graven images? The icon-venerators, mostly pious women and monks, persevered in the face of torture and death.

THE SEVENTH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL - 787 A.D.

Finally, in 787 A.D., a General Council was convened at Nicæa by Empress Irene. This was the Seventh and Last Ecumenical Council of the Church (Nicæa II). The Holy Fathers declared that the veneration of icons is not only possible but integral to the Christian faith. They saw the whole conflict as Christological - that is, they took the objection that God cannot be depicted as a denial that God truly took flesh. No man can see the invisible God. In Jesus Christ, however, the Invisible has willed to be made visible, as Christ told Philip at the Last Supper, "Philip, he that seeth Me, seeth My Father also." The Fathers carefully defined, however, that we dare not worship the icons themselves - they are but wood and paint - but rather, through them, we honour the prototype, what they were made to represent. We do not honour our country's flag, for example, because we wish to worship cotton, but because of what the flag stands for. The Council also proclaimed that icons are "the Gospel in paint," and are necessary for the biblical instruction of those who cannot read.

THE ICON-SMASHERS RETURN

Despite the stance taken at Nicæa, the battle over icons raged on. In 792, Charlemagne sent books to the Pope condemning the veneration of icons in the Nicene sense. They likewise excoriated the East for "dropping" (!) *filioque* from the Creed. Charlemagne's plan was to de-legitimise the Eastern Roman Empire in order to build his own new Roman Empire. His political plans were successful, but his assault on our Creed and the holy icons was not. Alarmed by his theological pretensions, Pope St. Leo III, the same man who had crowned him eight years previously, had the original Creed (without *filioque*), engraved on plates of gold and silver, in Greek and Latin, and affixed to the left and to the right of St. Peter's tomb.

In 802 Empress Irene died and a fierce iconoclast captured the Byzantine throne. It was not until 843 that the icons were permanently restored in the East, this time by another Empress - St. Theodora. As the wife of the iconoclastic Emperor, she had managed to keep her icons by calling them her "dolls." Upon his death, she ascended the throne and renewed Constantinople's allegiance to the Seventh Council. For all its wavering during the Patristic era, Constantinople proved to be as staunchly Orthodox after the Seventh Council as Rome had been before it.

EAST AND WEST DRIFT APART

Very early on, the Eastern and Western halves of the Church began to drift apart. The Greek language prevailed in the East; Latin prevailed in the West. The Byzantine liturgy predominated in the East; the Roman liturgy in the West. The Easterners tended to a mystical outlook; the Westerners to practicality. When considering God, the Latins started with the Unity and moved on to the Trinity; the Greeks began with the Trinity and then passed to the Unity. When considering the Crucifixion, the Latins stressed Christ as Sacrifice, the Greeks Christ as Victor. Westerners spoke more of redemption, Easterners more of deification, and so on. It was easy for misunderstandings to arise and difficult to dispel them. Still, the unity of the Church was preserved and indeed prevented the individual emphasis of any one area of the Church from upsetting the balance of Christian thought as a whole. Unity in diversity was the ideal, though in practice Eastern and Western believers were relating to each other, more and more often, as strangers.

POWER PLAYS

We know that in the West the Popes of Rome began as early as the 5th century to play a role more monarchical and unilateral than that of their Eastern colleagues. Ever since the faithful had been granted freedom by the government of the Roman Empire, the Bishop of Rome, the capital city, had been awarded a primacy of honour by the other Bishops of the world. Disputes between Bishops were referred to the area's Metropolitan (Bishop of a major city), and disputes between Metropolitans and other thorny cases were brought before the Pope of Rome, though even his decisions were not considered absolutely binding. In fact, because of Rome's consistent Orthodoxy, even religious disputes were referred there. Of course, the absence of political stability in Italy forced its Popes to be benevolent rulers of a para-secular sort. Many Popes handled this necessity admirably, but others, heedless of St. Jerome's dictum Let the lust for Roman power cease, escalated a relentless campaign to increase the scope of their authority. By the year 850, the Pope could act not only as an elder brother, but, in the West at least, as a master. This was, of course, precisely the complaint Pope St. Gregory, 250 years before, had hurled at Patriarch John.

CHURCH UNITY IS INTERRUPTED

In 858, 15 years after Theodora restored the icons, the seething question over Papal prerogative boiled over. In that year St. Ignatius, Patriarch of Constantinople, was replaced as patriarch by the brilliant St. Photius the Great. Pope Nicholas I saw an opportunity to increase his influence. He claimed that St. Ignatius, who was in fact Photius' friend, had been unjustly ousted, called Photius an impostor, and sent three representatives to New Rome to try Photius' "case." St. Photius received the delegates with honour and invited them to preside over a hearing, at which they tried his case. The result was that they endorsed his legitimacy without reservations. When they returned to Rome, Nicholas balked at their decision and held his own hearing, deposing Photius. No one in the East paid any attention to his sentence, and there was an open breach in Rome's communion with Constantinople as long as Nicholas was pope.

CROSSED CREEDS

East-West conflict acquired a theological dimension when German missionaries (who added filioque to the Creed) and Greek missionaries (who did not) were both evangelising newly-Christian Bulgaria, at Constantinople's back door. Rome itself did not use the filioque, but Pope Nicholas fully supported the Germans in promulgating it. Bulgaria see-sawed between the Old Rome and the New. St. Photius wrote a learned work on the filioque, showing that it is not a doctrine of the Holy Fathers of the Church. The dispute was not resolved, however, since no theological terms with which to discuss it had been settled upon. Bulgaria opted for the East, and Nicholas' successor, John VIII, restored communion with Constantinople. This was far from a happy ending, however; neither of the sticking points, Papal mastery and the filioque, were substantively addressed; they were merely patched over, while the shadow cast by West-East estrangement lengthened and deepened.

1 "Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am the Lord your God" (Lev 26:1). To this day, graven images (statues) are generally not used in the Orthodox Church, only painted icons.

WORSHIP

Because the very name Orthodoxy shows that the Church's beliefs are inseparably intertwined with her rites of worship (**doxa** implies both right belief and right worship), a word of explanation must be given about how we adore God.

The living Body of Christ, the Holy Church, grew and developed as a human body does. In the infancy of the Church, only the people of Judea made up this body. Growing, and guided at all times by the Holy Spirit, the Church gained an experience and wisdom which the Fathers enshrined in their writings and in the holy canons, to be passed to future generations. In her liturgical life, too, the Church matured, perfecting a liturgy which brought together the very best of Scripture, the Sacraments bequeathed by the Apostles, religious poetry, and sacred art and music - to offer the soul and body, the complete man, everything that can be offered at a service. Just as Christ was perfectly omniscient as a child, though possessing the tiny body of a child, so also the nascent Church was fully aware of the Faith and in full intimacy with the Holy Spirit, though its liturgy was somewhat unformed and the liturgical arts had not been fully developed. Also like Christ, the life of the Church, when finished on earth, will resume in eternity in Heaven. Imperfect here, she shall be "without spot or wrinkle or any such thing" in the coming Kingdom. (*Eph. 5:27*)

It is in the Church's **worship** that we both prepare ourselves for and joyfully anticipate that heavenly feast, and it is in the Church's worship that we find the true centre and heart of the Church - not any one leader or organisational structure.

LITURGICAL DIVERSITY -- PROS AND CONS

We saw already how great adaptations were made in Christian worship in the 200 years after the Apostles taught us the basics. By the 10th century, a very definite rite of worship had been established throughout Christendom; by no means, however, was it uniform from place to place - rather, distinct traditions were preserved in different regions, and in these wide areas there were local ritual variances. In the East, the predominant rite was the Byzantine, but other Eastern Rites were also widespread. There was the Liturgy of St. Mark in Egypt, the Liturgy of St. James in Syria, and others. By 1200 A.D., due to imperial pressure, the Byzantine Rite had largely replaced the other Eastern Rites within the Empire. This forcible standardisation of worship was hailed in the capital as a stroke of civilising genius, but it was catastrophic for the Church of Christ, for its end result was to disaffect the native Christians of Egypt, Ethiopia, and Syria from the "Foreign" Church and to rally them around "their" church, around the Monophysite leaders who preserved the ancient rites of their peoples. In the West, the Liturgy of St. Gregory, the Roman Rite, was also exported with a heavy hand. Charlemagne ordered it to displace the native Gallican Rite in his dominions, and about 1060 A.D. it was forced by the Pope upon the Christians of Spain, who had used their own Mozarabic or Visigothic Rite. In the West, as in the East, the new fashion of liturgical standardisation bore bitter fruit; eventually the identity of the various national Churches of the West was so seriously weakened that they lost their ability to act apart from Rome.

The weight given to liturgical matters in Christian history, and in Orthodoxy today, must appear extreme to anyone raised in today's secular culture. It does tell us one thing, however: the faith of the Christians in these early centuries found powerful expression both in their daily lives and in the keystone of daily life, the **liturgy**. Theirs was not a faith confined to the margins of life, but a faith prayed and sung and experienced every day. The symbols of the liturgy were closely identified with the doctrines they expressed, so closely that if a ceremony or prayer especially significant in one rite was noticed missing or sharply varying in another rite, the orthodoxy of those who held that rite might be called into question. This dynamic must be borne in mind as we examine the vicissitudes of Church history.

CHRISTIANITY'S GREATEST TRAGEDY

Century by century, we have been building toward a dramatic break, a catastrophic split, between the Christians in the East and the Christians in the West. I hope that prior pages have sufficiently prepared the ground so that these sorrowful and decisive moments may be understood.

In the 800's, despite cultural / linguistic differences, the art, worship, and discipline of the Eastern and Western Churches were remarkably similar, if we contrast this common ground to the gulf that divides the Roman Catholicism of today from Orthodoxy. Yet the two menacing currents of the *filioque* change to the Creed and the pursuit of Papal power threatened to tear asunder this unity, and indeed did so for a brief period in the 800's. Throughout the 900's, the Byzantines were preoccupied with the Muslim threat and tended to isolate themselves in a narrow, classical world of high cultural standards and court refinements. At the same time, the Popes of Rome presented such a morally decrepit and administratively weak picture that they were in no position to make any major moves which would impact the Eastern churches.

PRELUDE TO THE SCHISM

As the year 1000 A.D. grew nearer, Central Europe continued to be christianised, mostly through the efforts of monks. Parts of present-day Germany, Poland, and Denmark were accepting the Faith around this time, and in Eastern Europe the great Slavic missionary movement begun by the brothers Sts. **Cyril** and **Methodius** in the 9th century matured and bore rich fruit. These two apostles to the Slav peoples translated the liturgy, scriptures, and spiritual writings into the Slavonic tongue which is the ancestor of modern Russian, Serbian, Polish, and Bulgarian. Although they were careful to gain the support of the Popes as well as the Patriarchs of Constantinople, the brothers' mission was bitterly attacked by the German Bishops, who insisted that services could only be held in Greek, Latin, or Hebrew, since these were the three languages inscribed on the title above Christ's Cross. The Germans also insisted upon the addition of *filioque* to the creed, and when the disciples of Cyril and Methodius would not agree to these things, they closed their churches and sold the missionaries into slavery. None of this bode very well for future relations between East and West.

In 988, the ruler of Kievan **Rus**, St. **Vladimir**, led his nation into the Christianity of the Eastern form, a move which was later to provide Orthodoxy with a new, northern heartland. In both East and West, the liturgical life of the Church reached a new maturity and stability; in fact, the Roman and Byzantine rites scarcely changed at all after 1000. Seven Holy Councils were accepted by both the Eastern and the Western Christians, and there was still a measure of cultural borrowing and goodwill on both sides.

1 That is, the Old Roman Rite. Pius V severely curtailed this rite with his reformed Tridentine Rite, and after Vatican Council II the depleted remains of the Rite were utterly swept out of the Roman Catholic Church in 1969.

FILIOQUE PREVAILS OVER ROME

After the year 1000, however, a series of more intelligent and organised Popes began to stir up the old East-West tensions. In 1008, Pope **Sergius** issued a statement of faith which contained the *filioque*. This was the first time it was formally adopted by Rome, and at Constantinople the response was to remove the Pope's name from the diptychs (the prayer list of Patriarchs who are considered Orthodox). In 1014, **Henry II**, master of the Western Roman Empire, demanded that the Pope include the *filioque* in the Creed sung at Mass (previously, the Creed was not done at Mass in Rome). The Pope balked at first, then gave in. Steeped in the writings of St. **Photius**, the East naturally refused this intruder phrase whenever the issue arose.

THE GREAT SCHISM -- 1054 A.D.

What brought matters to a head was the Norman French invasion of Italy. In 1052, the Normans forced Byzantine-Rite churches, of which there were many in Italy, to adopt Western customs. The Emperor at Constantinople reacted by shutting down all the Western-Rite churches in Constantinople that would not adopt Eastern customs, and there were many of them.

In the heat of this charged atmosphere, the Roman church changed in 1053 to the use of unleavened bread at the altar, a Jewish practice which aroused suspicion among the Easterners. Tempers were hot; therefore, Pope Leo IX sent a delegation headed by the most hot-tempered and tactless churchman available - Cardinal **Humbert** - to negotiate with Patriarch **Michael** of Constantinople (no model of patience himself). When Humbert and his cohorts arrived at New Rome, they refused the usual courtesies to the Patriarch and thrust into his hands a paper listing their demands, including the submission of all the Patriarchs of the East to the Pope. After this initial contact, Michael simply refused to meet with the delegation. Before long, Humbert lost patience and drew up a Bull of Excommunication against Michael and "those in sympathy with him."

Early on the morning of June 16, 1054, Humbert and the others entered the Cathedral before the service and slapped the Bull of Excommunication down upon the altar. Ignoring the Deacons who ran after them pleading with them to reconsider, they left the city, shook the dust off their feet, and reported to Rome. Curiously, Pope Leo, on whose authority they supposed they were acting, had died three months before they cast their sentence at Michael. The Patriarch, for his part, summoned a council of Bishops who excommunicated Humbert and "all those responsible" for the incident. At this point, communion between Rome and the East was effectively and irreversibly shattered.

In the 1080's, the Eastern Patriarchs appealed to the Pope to initiate the standard procedure for re-establishing communion between two churches: they begged him to write a confession of faith, of the sort St. Gregory the Great had written to St. John the Faster, in accord with the Early Christian Fathers and Orthodox tradition. This was to be followed by their affirmation of the Pope as the most honoured of Patriarchs, but it was not to be. The Pope angrily retorted that neither he nor his faith could ever be brought into question by mortal men.

SCHISM OR FAMILY QUARREL?

Hindsight, as the saying goes, is 20/20, and as we look back on the events of 1054 we can detect a decisive rift between Christian West and Christian East. However, the original terms of the Schism were limited to a dispute between Rome itself and Constantinople itself, and there are signs of more closeness between other parts of Christian East and West during this time. For example, Western pilgrims to the Holy Land were still given Holy Communion by the Greek clergy at the holy places. In the minds of many Christians, the squabble between Old and New Rome might have been merely another family altercation of the sort which had happened before and could always happen again. Yet the Schism in 1054 was permanent, for several reasons:

Filioque: Before 1054, the *filioque* caused disturbances, but in the main the Popes stood firmly against it, which pacified the Eastern churches. After 1014, *filioque* invaded Rome itself and the Popes began ordering the Easterners to adopt it. In 1054, this was the only dogmatic issue on which Rome and the East could not at all see eye to eye. Soon after 1054, Western theologians hastened to justify the Creed change with a number of "dogmatic" opinions, cementing the mistake in place.

Papal Power: As we saw earlier, East-West unity was severely threatened in the 9th

century by Pope Nicholas I's power dramas. After a century of dormancy, a series of 11th-century Popes stirred up the unholy fires of ambition afresh, and Papal power reached its peak in the 13th century. At Rome, the papal pretensions finally grew so ingrained that no moderating voice could be found to reconcile Pope to Patriarchs.

Disparity of Customs: The Greeks were already wary of certain liturgical innovations adopted at Rome, such as unleavened bread (1053) and single-immersion baptisms (in some regions). This suspicion was often levelled against the West indiscriminately, and in some circles had risen to nothing short of a fever pitch. Ancient Western customs, such as omitting the singing of "alleluia" during Lent and the manner of preparing the bread and wine for the Eucharist, etc., were bitterly attacked.

THE CRUSADES -- 1096 TO 1290 A.D.

The Church is often affected not so much at the intellectual level or the dogmatic level as at the gut level. This was certainly true as the shadow cast by the Great Schism deepened over time, and the main catalyst is usually considered to be the Crusades. Crusades, of course, were Western holy wars, and absolution of sins was promised by the Western Church to soldiers who died in battle. The **First Crusade** was stirred up by Pope Urban II (1096), and was successful in capturing much of the Levant and establishing a Latin Kingdom there. Of course, Latin bishops were installed where Greek Bishops had governed, and for the first time the practical effects of the Schism were felt in the East. Bishop was set against bishop, altar against altar, and both claimed to represent the One Church of Christ. After the **Second Crusade**, stirred up by Bernard of Clairvaux, the Westerners living in Constantinople were massacred (1186). Obviously, emotions were heated, but the final blow to any hope of reconciliation between Roman West and Byzantine East came in 1204, when participants in the **Fourth Crusade** turned their weapons not on the Muslims but on their fellow Christians.

THE SACK OF CONSTANTINOPLE - 1204 A.D.

For three days in 1204, Christian blood ran in the streets of New Rome as her churches and holy things were desecrated. Prostitutes were placed upon the altars of the churches, and many relics and other holy things were destroyed in the name of the Papacy. It is difficult for Western people to imagine the horror felt by Orthodox Christians at this violence; it continues to smoulder even today.

PART TWO OF THE HISTORY: [CLICK HERE.](#)

The text above, by Fr. Aidan (Keller) of Austin, has been available in book format since 1994 under the title of *A Pocket Church History for Orthodox Christians*. For ordering information, [click here.](#)

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