

UNIT 1C: CHURCH HISTORY

24: The Greek / Latin Divide

Originally the Christian Church in the Roman Byzantine Empire had been a 'Pentarchy' organized in five 'Patriarchates': Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. Within the Empire (Oecumene) certain local churches enjoyed autonomy (Cyprus and Sinai) and others ranked closely with the five Patriarchates (Carthage, Thessalonica). A sixth Patriarchate at Justiniana (Kosovo) was briefly added to their number to coordinate missions across the Danube. Among them, Rome had always claimed seniority and this was accepted by the others but clearly regarded by them as lacking any practical significance. The ultimate religious authority was in fact increasingly wielded by the Byzantine Emperors – in theory simply presiding over a 'Holy Synod' of bishops.

Beyond the Empire a series of independent Churches came under the authority of one or another 'Catholicos' who presided over a Synod that rarely referred to the Pentarchy. These latter included the Church of the East (Assyria, Chaldaea, Persia) and the Churches of Armenia, Iberia/Georgia, Lazica/Abkhazia and Caucasian Albania/Azerbaijan. Elsewhere Metropolitan bishops titled 'Ethnarchs' came to preside over missionary churches beyond the Black Sea (including Gothia, Zichia/Circassia and Alania/Ossetia). Further afield, the Churches of Ethiopia, Nubia and South India also enjoyed varying degrees of independence. Nevertheless, theological differences aside, contacts were maintained and a loose unity was a general aspiration – at least up to the Muslim conquests (from 632).

However, when the separation of the Oriental Orthodox was followed by the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem, Alexandria and Antioch - the Pentarchy model was severely weakened. Now Rome and Constantinople claimed to speak for all Christians, East and West, and vied for an

'ecumenical' role. While Constantinople was increasingly tainted by the Imperial connection and subjected to the whims, theological and otherwise, of Byzantine Emperors and Courtiers – Rome came to enjoy a greater degree of independence and status. Thus, Rome's claim that its pre-eminence implied authority over the entire church became practical politics. Meanwhile, a series of politically astute Popes in Rome linked this cause with a campaign against so-called 'Caesaro-Papism' – the Imperial direction of religious affairs. We note the promotion in this period, from Rome, of a number of Saints (including St Patricia of Naples – who escaped the attentions of Emperor Justinian) who fled Constantinople to seek sanctuary in Italy and elsewhere in the West.

The fall of the Roman Empire in the West had freed the Popes of Rome from subordination to an Emperor and it had allowed them to represent the Latin peoples to both Byzantines and Barbarians. Even during the restoration of Imperial power in Italy under Justinian the bulk of the Roman See, and therefore of Papal activity and influence, still lay outside the Empire and this allowed for a degree of autonomy. As the distance between the Imperial capital in Constantinople (and even Imperial governors in Ravenna) and Rome further reduced the possibility of interference this autonomy was strengthened. The Popes in Rome did not have to follow the twists and turns of Byzantine Court policy and diplomacy to nearly the same degree as did the Patriarchs of Constantinople and the Greek Metropolitans. In consequence, the comparatively unwavering course of the Roman Papacy made it appear – even in the East – an impartial arbitrator in disputes and an independent source of rulings on Christian issues. This was at a time when the Patriarchate in Constantinople often functioned as a department of state.

At a time when the Greek Church was losing ground to the Oriental Orthodox and then Islam, Rome gained prestige following the conversion to Christianity of the Visigoths (589), Lombards (653), Anglo-Saxons (seventh century) and the peoples of Germany. Furthermore, enjoying the

political patronage of the growing Frankish power (in France, from 486 onwards) the Papacy was strengthened in an entirely temporal sense. This growth was undermined by the separation of South Italy and regions in the Balkans – which were designated as being within the Patriarchate of Constantinople during the Iconoclast controversies. This measure underlined the growing divide between the Greek and Latin Churches. With exceptions, like the Vlachs and Romanians in the East (who were Greek-rite anyway) and the presence of diminishing Greek and Syrian communities in the Western Mediterranean, the West became a solidly Latin/Germanic Church and the East was becoming a Church not only identified with the Byzantine Empire but also the Greek people and their immediate neighbours.

The Byzantines dominated coastal regions of Italy even after the Lombard invasion (568-572) but the city of Rome now came to be ruled by Popes who claimed to act in the name of the Emperor in Constantinople. Open rupture with the East came when the Emperor Leo III embraced Iconoclasm and issued a series of decrees outlawing the veneration of icons¹ in the Byzantine Empire (in 727). The Popes in Rome naturally assumed leadership of the Iconophile movement across the Mediterranean in principled opposition to Iconoclast Emperors, Patriarchs and Synods in Constantinople – and the Byzantine military authorities in Italy. At this point the Popes in Rome were recognized (by St Theodore Studites amongst others) as the champions of the Orthodox, East and West.

Iconoclasm

The origins of the Iconoclast movement are thought to be found on the Eastern fringes of Anatolia towards Armenia and the Caucasus, not least because most of the Iconoclast Emperors

¹ The oldest icons that we possess date from the end of the fifth and from the sixth century and are found only in or around Egypt, notably in that safe, secluded spot, Sinai. They form the earliest examples of small, portable portraits of holy persons and are painted in wax colours upon carefully prepared wood. From the point of view of art history, they link up with the later imperial portraits and with family portraits - which in Egypt were placed with the deceased (whole collections surviving Lake Moeris or Fayoum). There are evident connections with the religious art of other communities - not least with the frescoes of the Jewish synagogue at Dura Europus.

and the military units that supported them were from the Eastern borders of the Byzantine Empire (ethnic Armenians and Isaurians) but also because these regions were home to significant communities for whom the veneration of icons was quite alien. The border provinces contained Armenian and Jacobite Christians (neither supporting icons), Jews and Muslims (both hostile to images) and the militant Paulicians (an apparently Christian/Manichaean group – highly critical of the veneration of icons).

Emperor Leo III the Isaurian took a number of measures against the veneration of icons between 726-730. These started with removal of the revered icon of Christ from the Chalke Gate in Constantinople and ended with the banning of all icons throughout the Byzantine Empire and dependencies. He seemed to be responding to a number of events that ranged from Muslim military successes against the Byzantines and the eruption of the volcano on the island of Thera (Aegean Sea). He failed to convince Patriarch Germanos (who resigned) and antagonized the Popes of Rome but clearly enjoyed the support of the Army – and dissenting groups like the Paulicians in Armenia and Kurdistan. St John of Damascus (676-749) linked the veneration of icons with the proclamation of the Incarnation of the Word of God to express the Iconophile (pro-icon) position – so dealing with the genuine concerns of sincere Christians who were worried about the prominence of icons in Orthodox worship.

At the Council of Hieria in 754 the Emperor Constantine V took these reforms a step further. The invocation of Saints was condemned as was the veneration of relics and icons (both were burnt or thrown into the sea). Monasteries were seized by the state and monks and nuns were expelled, persecuted or killed. Emperor Leo IV (775-780) responded to renewed Iconophile opposition with further campaigns against monastics and their supporters – at home and abroad. Empress Irene (as Regent for her son Constantine VI, 780-797) reversed these policies and restored the veneration of icons. This move was supported by the decisions of the Seventh Ecumenical Council.

Following Bulgarian victories against the Byzantines and a series of natural calamities, Emperor Leo V the Armenian (from 814) reinstated iconoclasm. At the Synod of the Church of Holy Wisdom in 815 it was declared that to make or venerate an image of Christ was a Nestorian act – as inevitably only the Human Jesus was depicted rather than the Christ, the Word of God. Empress Theodora, wife of the iconoclast Emperor Theophilus, returned to the policies of Irene and the Seventh Ecumenical Council – and the icons were finally restored to Orthodox Churches in 843.

Over this period a number of distinct Iconoclast views and theologies had emerged. Some argued that the appearance of icons in Churches was a return to Paganism while others were content that icons should be displayed in Churches –but placed high up the walls beyond the reach of those who would venerate them. St John of Damascus and St Theodore the Studite were the main Iconophile thinkers who responded to this challenge.

Growing Divisions

Although with the end of iconoclasm in 843 a formal reconciliation between Constantinople and Rome took place, both West and East were drifting apart. Differences in outlook, teaching and worship were increasingly noticed and gave rise to a number of controversies. Bitter polemics hindered a common witness in an age of renewed missionary successes. The first area of conflict was Greater Moravia (corresponding to the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and southern Poland). In Greater Moravia the original endeavour was Greek – blessed by St Photios and lead by the brothers St Methodios and St Cyril from Thessaloniki in the 860s. However, the Latin cause was ascendant from 890 onwards and the disciples of St Methodios and St Cyril were killed, enslaved or dispersed.

At the same time Bulgaria (870) and Serbia/Montenegro (879) were converted to Christianity from Constantinople and Croatia (879) turned to Rome. Around the year 1000 both Churches enlarged further; the Eastern by the admission of the Russians (988), the Western by the conversion of the Poles, Hungarians and Scandinavians. In the following decades both churches continued to expand – major missions being launched from Constantinople to convert the Patzinaks, Cumans, Khazars (originally Jewish) and other Turkic peoples of the northern Steppes while, ominously, the Western Church blessed the ‘Reconquest of Spain’ and military campaigns against the Slavs of East Germany.

St Photios, Patriarch of Constantinople

St Photios (810-893) was both a leading theologian and an outstanding intellectual who was at the forefront of a revival in humanism and the classics in Byzantium. Of mixed Armenian and Khazar (Mongol?) descent, he was widely read in the ancient authors, dramatists and poets and amassed a vast library in Constantinople. He composed the ‘Myriobiblon’, a literary encyclopaedia (possibly while working in Baghdad as Ambassador to the Caliph in 845) and the related ‘Lexicon’ - amongst other works.

St Photios was consecrated Patriarch of Constantinople twice, between 853-867 and 877-886, on both occasions replacing the deposed St Ignatios. Critical of Latin customs, he was opposed by Pope Nicholas I of Rome who declared him deposed in 863 (his position as Patriarch had previously been recognized by Rome in 861). By 865 St Photios was engaged in polemics with Rome regarding opposing missions in Greater Bulgaria (Bulgaria, Romania). Here Tsar Boris I had embraced Christianity but was puzzled by the different approaches of the established Greek mission and newly arrived missionaries from Rome. Having supported the Greek mission to Greater Moravia it would appear that St Photios encouraged the disciples of St Methodios and

St Cyril to seek refuge in Bulgaria before 886 – so redirecting their energies and founding an autocephalous Slavonic Church.

Having been excommunicated in Rome, St Photios anathematized the Pope (in 865) on theological grounds – writing against the inclusion of the Filioque in the Creed and the Latin position on the double procession of the Holy Spirit. A reconciliation was secured in 879 but Latin pressure and Venetian interests secured both persecution and the eventual exile of St Photios to a remote monastery in Armenia (886). His legacy to Orthodox Christianity remains – not least in a series of Orthodox Churches, from the Gagauz Orthodox Church (borders of Moldova and Ukraine) to the flowering of Slavonic Christianity (Bulgaria, Serbia, Russia and neighbouring countries).

The Great Schism of 1054

The Latin persecution of Greek missionaries in Central Europe (Greater Moravia) and the undermining of long-established Greek missions in the territories under Bulgarian rule soured the relations between East and West. Where the two Churches collided contacts became increasingly bitter – not least in Croatia (originally leaning towards Constantinople) and Albania (still linked to Constantinople). The writings of St Photios underlined Greek unease with certain ‘innovations’ taken up in the West (the Filioque) and divergent customs (fasting, etc).

On the Latin side the Greeks had come under attack for ‘heresy’ ever since King Charlemagne had established the Holy Roman Empire or Frankish rule (in France, Germany, Austria, north Italy) in 800. Divisions widened when the Normans received the Papal blessing to drive the Greeks out of South Italy between 1017-1071. The Normans forcibly reunited the Church of South Italy and Sicily to Rome and expelled most Greek bishops. In a series of violent campaigns

they proceeded to establish warring enclaves in Anatolia, sacked Thessaloniki in Greece and invaded Albania (1080). Even Antioch was attacked by the Normans - unsurprisingly from Constantinople it looked as if the entire Western Church endorsed this aggression and sought to subjugate the Eastern Churches.

The stage was perfectly set for the Great Schism of 1054 following a series of misunderstandings. A Latin bishop based in Norman held territory, John of Trani, had been in correspondence with Greek theologians. When they received the support of Patriarch Michael Caerularius in criticizing the use of unleavened bread (Azymites) and other Latin customs and in affirming the ancient Pentarchy – and that the 28th clause of the Council of Chalcedon (451) declared Rome and Constantinople to be equal - a ‘diplomatic incident’ was inevitable. Papal Legates sent to Constantinople excommunicated the Patriarch and his supporters – placing the bull of excommunication on the altar of the Church of Holy Wisdom (not necessarily endorsed by the Pope). Inevitably, Patriarch Michael reciprocated with an anathema – but even so the mutual excommunications at this point were only seen as being against individuals rather than entire communions.

Normans and Crusaders

Originally from Scandinavia, the Normans dominated northern France (and later England, after 1066). Throughout this period Norman campaigns in the East were characterized by violence and atrocities and were often followed by raids launched from Venice (previously a Byzantine ally in Italy). The perception developed that this was an all-out assault on the Orthodox Christian East rather than the acts of random adventurers. This idea was reinforced as the Monastic Republics of Mount Olympus, Athos, Latros and the Black Mountain were repeatedly targeted.

Following the campaigns of the Crusaders (1095 onwards) prejudices continued to multiplied on both sides. The Crusaders failed to distinguish Eastern Christians from Muslims and Jews in military campaigns and punitive measures (the slaughter of the citizens of Antioch, Jerusalem). Wherever the Crusaders prevailed the Orthodox clergy were expelled, monasteries and churches were seized by the Western monastic orders – or simply sacked. Latin Patriarchs were appointed to major sees, including Antioch and Jerusalem. The Crusaders claimed that the Byzantines were double-dealing – as they sheltered Muslims (mosques in Constantinople and other cities) and made treaties with the Kurdish Saladin and other Muslim leaders.

In 1182 inter-communal violence in Constantinople resulted in the massacre of the Latin population of the city and the violence spread. Some have argued that this lead directly to the excesses of the Fourth Crusade and the sack of Constantinople in 1204 (Doge Dandolo of Venice who advised the Crusaders had been blinded in the pogroms of 1182). Not only was Constantinople thoroughly looted but the Orthodox Churches were deliberately desecrated to add insult to injury. Icons and relics were all sent to the West alongside other treasures. Libraries were burnt, important monuments were destroyed and what remained was vandalized.

‘Frankish rule’ was inaugurated throughout former Byzantine territories. Greece was renamed ‘New France’ and the Crusaders went on to attack Bulgaria and Serbia. The expulsion of the Orthodox clergy and the promotion of ‘Uniatism’ where this proved difficult continued beyond the arrival of the Ottoman Turks (1453) and cemented the division of East and West.

St Mark Eugenikos (d. 1444)

In the last decade of the Byzantine Empire the relations between the Eastern and Western Churches had deteriorated to such a degree that Notaras, the Prime Minister of Byzantium, could publicly declare that it was preferable to see the Muslim Turks holding Constantinople

rather than the Christian Latins. Although a number of attempts had been made to re-unite the Churches these had been one-sided (favouring the positions of the Papacy) and were unpopular amongst both Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox.

St Mark Eugenikos, an intellectual who was consecrated Metropolitan of Ephesus solely to represent the traditional Orthodox view at the Council of Florence, expressed clear opposition to the 'Latin-minded' (Latinophrones) and those arguing for Christian unity against the Turks regardless of principles compromised or sacrificed. Unlike St Photios, he held that the Latins had fallen into heresy and he condemned: the addition to the Filioque, the Primacy of the See of Rome, the teachings relating to purgatory and limbo, the damnation of non-Christians and the urgency of infant baptism and the system of indulgences.

At the Council of Florence he was the sole representative holding out against 'False Union' dictated by political expedience – necessitated by the military successes of the Ottoman Turks across Eastern Europe. However, he expressed the views of most Orthodox Christians of his time and for many centuries to come. Interestingly, he won the support of both the pro-Union scholar Gennadios (first Patriarch under the Ottoman Turks in 1453) and the 'last pagan philosopher' Gemistos Plethon.

St Mark Eugenikos was courageous in refuting the Roman Catholic Scholars and Uniates (like the Greek Cardinals Bessarion and Isidore of Kiev). He braved the wrath of Pope Eugene IV in Italy and the Imperial Court at home. Expelled from Ephesus by the Turks, he was later imprisoned on the island of Lemnos and died confined in the Mangana Monastery in Constantinople.

We shall now survey two dualistic heresies in the east developing across this whole period before assessing the legacy of the "Greek – Latin Divide."

The Paulicians and the Bogomils

The **Paulicians** appeared on the Byzantine/Armenian borders (at Kibossa) in 657 following a preacher called Constantine of Mananalis (later executed). A Byzantine general, Symeon, sent to drive them out of their mountain castles converted to their cause (690). Communities were established across Asia Minor and an independent state was centred on Tephrike on the border between Byzantium and the Arabs. From here they campaigned across the East and sacked Ephesus in 871. Later Byzantine Emperors (John Tzimiskes) campaigned against the Paulicians and resettled many communities in the Bulgaria.

The Paulicians have been called 'early Protestants' but they were a Christian movement deeply influenced by Manichaeism. They distinguished between the God of the material world and the God of souls – and taught that Christ was a supreme Angel sent to the world by his real mother, the Heavenly Jerusalem. They rejected the Old Testament and had an aversion for icons, relics and monks. The Paulicians were lead by Apostles and Prophets and believed that the true Baptism and Eucharist were hearing the Word of God. The last Paulician communities in Bulgaria were reconciled to the Roman Catholic Church in 1650. They were still active in Armenia in 1837 – teaching from a Sacred Book, 'The Key of Truth.' They had first been condemned in Armenia at a Synod at Duin in 719.

Apparently founded by one Bogomil (Dear to God) the **Bogomils** emerged in Bulgaria in the decades 927-970. Contemporary writers claimed they were linked to the Syrian Massalianoi and Greek Euchites heresies but it is now thought that this was originally a home-grown Church Reform movement that came under the influence of Paulicians and Manichaeans. The imperfect conversion of Bulgaria, the unpopularity of Greek clergy and tensions between the ruled Slavs and Bulgarian rulers probably contributed to their early successes and popularity.

The Bogomils taught that Christ was the Son of God by adoption and that in fact he was the Archangel Michael. His elder brother was the rebellious Satanael who was equally opposed to the good Archangel Uriel. Bogomils established communities lead by twelve Apostles and encouraged women to exercise leadership. They vehemently rejected the Eucharist, icons, monks and the entire Orthodox Church. The Bogomils were active in Russia – as late as the 14th century in Novgorod. They established an independent state in Bosnia where they were also called Patarenes. The Bogomils are the link between the Paulicians and earlier groups and the later Cathars/Albigenses of Provence. A city was founded in Bulgaria to protect Bogomils who had returned to the Orthodox Church; this was Alexiopolis near to Plovdiv (Philippopolis).

The Greek - Latin Divide, a Chasm Widens

The estrangement of the Greek and Latin traditions of the Church over a number of centuries before and after the Great Schism of 1054 in part had its roots not only in the emergence of a reinvigorated papacy, (and in the Carolingian renaissance which had promoted it), but also in the increasingly divergent theological emphases of west and east. The west sought a cultural expression of Christianity which would reinforce the increasingly feudal hierarchy of the Normans and the Franks; themselves the primary champions of a reformed and strengthened papacy. In this regard law and deference to due authority came to triumph over ascetical transformation. In the east, distrust of the Latins was compounded by the Crusades and a gradual isolation between two approaches to Christianity which had sat alongside each other more harmoniously in earlier centuries. The religious and political ascendancy of the west had begun. Christians in the east became increasingly harried by invaders from further east and the south. It would be some time before the newly converted southern Slavs would contribute to an Orthodox Christian Russia to be reckoned with on the world stage.