

UNIT 2C: TRADITION

58: EAST AND WEST FROM 1054 TO 1453

Introduction: Mutual Misunderstandings in 1054

Lecture 25 in Unit 1C on Church History set out the history of how Rome and Constantinople drifted “further and further apart amidst mutual recrimination.” Now it is appropriate to consider the theological dimensions of that turbulence. The formal division of the Church into its Eastern (Greek) and Western (Latin) branches (which later became known as the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church) was many years in the making, but was heightened in 1054 when the reforming Pope Leo IX (1002-1054) and an angry Patriarch of Constantinople Michael Cerularius (d. 1058) excommunicated each other in a dispute which had begun over whether the bread in the Eucharist should be leavened or unleavened. The Patriarch had complained to the Bishop of Tirani that the Latin Church was following the “Judaistic” practice of using unleavened bread, as set out for Passover in Mosaic Law, as well as inserting *the filioque clause* (i.e. that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son) into the Nicene Creed. The Patriarch’s accusation was widely circulated in the West by the Bishop of Tirani; and the Pope felt obligated to reply, asserting at the same time his supremacy over all other bishops.¹

Because of the emphasis later placed upon the events of 1054, the Schism is worth examining in greater theological detail. The Pope’s bull of excommunication against Patriarch Michael laid angrily on the altar at Hagia Sophia in Constantinople by the papal legates (after the Patriarch had uncharitably refused to discuss the issues) had asserted that the Greek Church had deleted the *Filioque* clause from the Nicene Creed. However, “in fact, it was precisely the opposite: the Greek Church did not delete anything. It was the Latin church that added this phrase to

¹ F. L. Cross & E. A. Livingstone (eds.), *Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed., (Peabody: MA, Hendrickson, 2007), pp. 968, 1063, 233.

the Nicene Creed.”² To support the doctrine of Papal Supremacy, Pope Leo IX cited, in good faith, the Donation of Constantine, an 8th or 9th century forged document, which claimed falsely that the Emperor Constantine had conferred certain privileges upon Pope Sylvester I in 314-315.³ Also, “when Pope Leo died on April 19, 1054, the legates’ authority legally ceased, but they effectively ignored this technicality” when they laid the bull on the altar on the 16th of July.⁴ Thus misunderstandings abounded on all sides. This was a crucial confrontation in which, as Metropolitan Kallistos has pointed out, both participants, the Papal Legate, Cardinal Humbert, and Patriarch Michael I “were men of stiff and intransigent temper,” so that neither party had the ability to resolve (or even to discuss) the disagreement.⁵

It is important to recognise that whereas heresy involves questions of faith, schism raises questions of charity, although the distinction between “doctrine” and “charity” was not always clear-cut in the early Church.⁶ The word “schism” originally meant in Greek, “a crack or tear.” However, the word “developed a precise ecclesiastical meaning as a definite rupture in communion and Church life, ... but not as such involving doctrinal issues that would turn it into heresy.”⁷ Over the centuries, doctrinal elements have come to the fore, but Father Adrian Hastings is correct in his assessment that “the public feuding [between the Greek and Latin churches] and political and cultural divergences, even the arguments over the *filioque*, were insufficient to separate either side from the one visible communion of the Church.”⁸

² John Julius Norwich, *Byzantium: The Apogee*, Vol. 1 (New York: Viking/Penguin, 1991) pp. 320-321.

³ Cross & Livingstone, p. 499.

⁴ Norwich, pp. 320-321.

⁵ See http://orthodoxwiki.org/Great_Schism and Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan & Al Switzler, *Crucial Confrontations: Tools for Resolving Broken Promises, Violated Expectations, and Bad Behavior* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005).

⁶ Cross & Livingstone, p. 1463.

⁷ Adrian Hastings, “Schism” in Adrian Hastings, Alistair Mason & Hugh Pyper (Eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 643.

⁸ Hastings, p. 643.

Stephen Runciman has suggested that “if one wishes to find a villain on the Orthodox side for the development of the Schism,” the strongest candidate is the 12th century Patriarch of Antioch, Balsamon (c. 1140-after 1195), because

Hitherto the chief asset of the Orthodox in the controversy had been their doctrine of economy, the charity that enabled them to overlook and even to condone divergences in the interest of peace and goodwill. But Balsamon was a lawyer; and lawyers like things to be cut and dried. Charity is not one of their characteristics.⁹

An aphorism from the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard is relevant: “Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards.”¹⁰ Today we look backwards and try to understand theologically what happened before, after and during 1054, but the leaders, lawyers and lay Christians of those earlier years could only engage in controversy in good faith, without knowing the future impact of their actions.

The Ukrainian Orthodox priest, Father Anthony Ugolnik is unquestionably right when he contends: “We should invest less time in attacking each other’s answers and more time in recovering each other’s questions.”¹¹ The original question in the 11th century was whether the bread of the Eucharist should be leavened or unleavened. More than 950 years later, the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches still disagree on the answer, but excommunication over that question is not being considered today by either Church.

The West in Transition: From Theology to Philosophy to Secular Rationalism

Among the Western post-Schism theologians there were two conflicting trends. On the one hand, there were those such as Erigena, John the Scot (c. 810-877), who still owed much to the East, but on the other hand, there were many other theologians, such as Anselm (c. 1033-1109), Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153),

⁹ *The Eastern Schism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), p. 138.

¹⁰ *Journal*, 1868, quoted at: www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/6172.Soren_Kierkegaard.

¹¹ “Jacob’s Ladder: Jaroslav Pelikan and the People of the Book” in Valerie Hotchkiss & Patrick Henry (Eds.), *Orthodoxy and Western Culture: A Collection of Essays Honoring Jaroslav Pelikan on His Eightieth Birthday* (Crestwood NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005), p. 79.

Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274) and the scholastics who pulled the West further away from Orthodoxy.

Although Erigena had an exceptionally good knowledge of Greek and wrote in the 9th century in the early stage of the conflict between the Latin and Greek churches, his philosophy became controversial much later, especially his attempt to reconcile the Neoplatonist idea of emanation (i.e. something that issues or proceeds from something else) with the Christian idea of creation.¹² What was happening here was that the earlier interest of the Greek Patristic Fathers in the philosophy of Plato was confronted by a much greater interest in the West in the philosophy of Aristotle.¹³ This contrast between the perspectives of Plato and Aristotle becomes especially important in considering the theology of Thomas Aquinas, as well as the Council of Florence (1438-1445). Intriguingly, while the Greek Church viewed Plato as “the pagan threat to Christianity”, so the Latin Church assigned that role to Aristotle, and both churches sought to integrate these key Greek philosophers into their contrasting theological perspectives.¹⁴

Anselm (c. 1033-1109) has been described as “the most illuminating and penetrating intellect between St Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.”¹⁵ After 34 years as a monk at Bec in Normandy, he reluctantly agreed to become Archbishop of Canterbury in 1093. In his extensive writings and pastoral work he increased the divide between the Latin and Greek churches by: (1) insisting on the Western doctrinal commitment to the double procession of the Holy Spirit (i.e. that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son); (2) supporting the right of Pope Urban II to reject King Henry I’s personal selection and investiture of bishops in England; (3) interpreting atonement (i.e. “man’s reconciliation with God through

¹² Cross & Livingstone, p. 558.

¹³ Cross & Livingstone, pp. 1298-1300, 102-104; See Philip Sherrard, *The Greek East and the Latin West: A Study in the Christian Tradition*, Chapter V, “The Platonic Reaction in the Greek East” and Chapter 6, “From Theology to Philosophy in the Latin West”, pp. 111-164; cf. pp. 5-12, 165-179 (Limni, Evia, Greece: Denise Harvey Publishers, 1995).

¹⁴ Sherrard, p. 167.

¹⁵ Cross & Livingstone, p. 73.

the sacrificial death of Christ”) in the context of satisfaction in which sin “being an infinite offence against God, required a satisfaction equally infinite”; and (4) “preferring to defend the faith by intellectual reasoning instead of employing scriptural and patristic authorities.”¹⁶ Thus Anselm was one of the first examples of what Philip Sherrard has termed “the over-logical mentality of the West ... that prepared the ground in such a way that the spirit of secular rationalism, when it attacked the Western world, was able to expand with a speed and completeness which would not otherwise have been possible.”¹⁷

In 1115, Bernard (1090-1153) established and became Abbot of a Cistercian monastery at Clairvaux in north eastern France. This small group of ascetic, reformed Benedictines was originally composed of Bernard and some 30 of his rich relatives and friends, but was to grow to 93 affiliated monasteries that strongly supported a unified papacy and exerted an influence in the 12th century Latin Church “that overshadowed that of Rome itself.”¹⁸ By greatly strengthening the medieval papacy, drawing up the rules of the Knights Templar and leading thousands to join the failed Second Crusade of 1147, Bernard could be viewed as a humble monk who was out of his depth when confronted with worldly evil. But that would be a misleading interpretation of more than forty years of monastic life. Bernard did believe that “faith is to be produced by persuasion, not imposed by force;” but he also thought that, “it would without doubt be better that [Muslims] should be coerced by the sword than that they should be allowed to draw away many other persons into their error.” Furthermore, “in his opposition to the persecution of the Jews, he stood apart from most of his contemporaries” in the West.¹⁹

Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274) was a Dominican priest who was “the first Christian author to employ at length in the service of Christianity” the newly

¹⁶ Cross & Livingstone, pp. 73-74, 842-843.

¹⁷ Sherrard, p. 165.

¹⁸ www.biographybase.com/biography/Bernard_of_Clairvaux.html .

¹⁹ Cross & Livingstone, pp. 192-193, 436.

available translations of Aristotle.²⁰ Aquinas is now rightly viewed as a prominent Western philosopher, but he himself believed that philosophers always fell “short of the true and proper ‘wisdom’ to be found in the Christian revelation and the living of a life properly focused on Christ as the way to perfect happiness (*beatitudo*).”²¹ Philip Sherrard, in his demolition of Western philosophy, would certainly have agreed with Aquinas’s self-assessment because, as Sherrard sets out in considerable detail, according to Aquinas, “with no innate knowledge, and unable to derive knowledge from a direct intuition of the Divine, man [i.e. humanity] can in fact ... only know anything by a process of abstraction from sensible objects” (Sherrard, p. 147, *passim* pp. 142-164).

This type of thinking leads to great confusion, as when Aquinas “applies the phrase ‘mystical body’ to the Church as a social phenomenon” without any reference to its sacramental significance:

The individual body natural of Christ is understood as an organism acquiring social and corporational functions, and serves as an individual prototype, with head and limbs, of a supra-individual collective, the Church, as *corpus mysticum* with the Pope as its head.²²

There is nothing mystical about the *corpus mysticum*. This is nothing less than the “disintegration of the essentially sacramental understanding of the Church, and its displacement in the Latin West in the Middle Ages by the idea of the Church as a social and corporational organism.”²³ Thus for Aquinas “the Church as an organism becomes a ‘mystical body’ in an almost juristic sense—a mystical [clerical] corporation”—that is not ‘mystical.’”²⁴ And things got worse, because the scholastics, who respected and developed the philosophy and theology of Aquinas, pulled the West further away from Orthodoxy in two quite significant ways—first, through the growth of individualism; and second, through the growth of

²⁰ Brian Davies, “Aquinas, Thomas” in Hastings, pp. 33-36.

²¹ Davies, p. 33.

²² Sherrard, pp. 88-89.

²³ Sherrard, p.87; citing Henri de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, 2nd ed. Paris, 1947; and Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 194-206.

²⁴ Sherrard, p. 89.

collectivism.²⁵ Remember that Thomas Aquinas, like his predecessors Anselm and Bernard of Clairvaux believed that “by using their natural ability to reason, people can arrive at important truths on which those with benefit of Christian revelation can build.”²⁶ Yet all three of these Western thinkers would have been horrified by the way in which their philosophy provided the bedrock on which the secular rationalism of René Descartes (1596-1650) could thrive and claim falsely that “I think, therefore, I am” (French: *Je pense donc je suis*; Latin: *Cogito ergo sum*).²⁷

Because of Thomas Aquinas’s stress upon “the active principle of individuality” as the form of “individual human souls”, Descartes could develop a logical philosophy in which “there is no principle of truth or judgement higher than the entirely subjective and self-sufficient individual human reason.”²⁸ At the same time as this new Thomist mentality of individualism began to thrive, the Papacy became “the representation of the principle of unity in the temporal sphere.” However, precisely because the medieval Papacy built up its power so considerably in the *temporal* sphere its representations of power could be challenged by others; and “these latter claims [to influence] could be considered quite as valid or invalid as those of the Papacy ... from the ... point of view [of] the rational mentality”²⁹

Philip Sherrard brilliantly summarises the transition in the West from theology to philosophy to secular rationalism:

The revolt of the various temporal rules in the later Middle Ages was not so much a revolt against the spiritual power as the consequence of the fact that the Papacy, having assumed temporal power, was invading the spheres of authority of other temporal powers and claiming to rule, in the name of its own larger and more general collectivity, their smaller collectivities; and this revolt in its turn was to introduce others in keeping with the further advance of the rational

²⁵ Sherrard, pp. 162-164.

²⁶ Davies on Aquinas, p. 33.

²⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cogito_ergo_sum . For a comprehensive refutation of mind-body dualism, see Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Grosset/Putnam, 1994) and Guy Claxton, *Intelligence in the Flesh: Why Your Mind Needs Your Body Much More Than It Thinks* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

²⁸ Sherrard, pp. 161-162.

²⁹ Sherrard, p. 163.

and individualist mentality, essentially centrifugal and self-assertive.... Individualism and collectivism are opposite sides of the same coin, and their growth in the West can be traced back to the same secular rationalism which led to the break-up of the medieval Christian ethos and to the formation of modern Western society and culture.³⁰

This steady growth of rationalism was a problem that the Eastern Orthodox Church faced in the West in the years between 1054 and 1700 and still faces today.

As the Irish Nobel Prize-winning poet William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) wrote in “The Second Coming”:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;

In other words, in the widening vortex of rationality, the falcon—a human being—can no longer hear the falconer—God

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.³¹

In the Latin West, from a Greek perspective, things were falling apart, although the Papacy in the centre was trying, unsuccessfully, to hold everything together.

The East Fights Back: St Gregory Palamas (c. 1296-1359) and Hesychasm

The reply of the Greek Church to the excessive Latin commitment to philosophy and rationality has been well summarised by St Gregory Palamas:

It is truly impossible to be united to God unless, besides purifying ourselves, we come to be outside or, rather, above ourselves, having left all that which pertains to the sensible world and risen above all ideas, reasonings, and even all knowledge and above reason itself, being entirely under the influence of the intellectual sense and having reached that ignorance which is above knowledge and (what is the same) above every kind of philosophy.³²

³⁰ Sherrard, pp. 163-164.

³¹ quoted in full at “Yeats”: www.online-literature.com

³² *Twenty-Two Homilies*, pp. 169-170; quoted by Sherrard, p. 140

Here then is the Eastern Orthodox response to the rationalism of the Thomists—negative (or apophatic) theology that will be considered in E-Quip Lecture 60.

There was nothing negative about the life of St Gregory Palamas, and even his insistence on God’s unknowability was calm and balanced in his most important work, *Triads in defence of the Holy Hesychasts* (1338). From his youth, St Gregory had been attracted to the monastic life; and he convinced his brothers and sisters and widowed mother to become monks and nuns, while he himself went to Mount Athos at the age of 22.³³ St Gregory’s tightly integrated theology has been summarised in Frank Cross and Elizabeth Livingstone’s *Dictionary of the Christian Church* (p. 713):

In his theological teaching Palamas stressed the biblical notion of man as a single and united whole, body and soul together; and in virtue of this he argued that the physical exercises used by the Hesychasts in prayer [especially the Jesus Prayer], as well as their claim to see the Divine Light with their bodily eyes, could be defended as legitimate. He distinguished between the essence and the energies of God: God’s essence remains unknowable, but His uncreated energies—which are God Himself—permeate all things and can be directly experienced by man in the form of deifying grace.³⁴

Thus St Gregory Palamas provided a strong defence of Hesychasm (from the Greek word for “quietness”)—“the tradition of inner, mystical prayer associated above all with the monks of Mount Athos.”³⁵

Hesychasm is commonly taken to refer to the originally Athonite practice of the Jesus Prayer in the attentive stillness of the heart into which the purified mind descends. Although this is a fair assessment it fails to account for precursors or variants of this prayer which arguably go back to Jewish mystical practice at the

³³ Cross & Livingstone, p. 713.

³⁴ Cross & Livingstone, p. 713. The authors note in the Preface that Dr K. T. [now Metropolitan] Kallistos Ware “was commissioned to fill gaps in the coverage of Eastern Orthodoxy.”

³⁵ Cross & Livingstone, pp. 763-764. See also Sherrard, pp. 33, 36-37, 39, 42-43, 140-141; Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man: St Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition* (Crestwood NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 199) and Fr John Meyendorff, *St Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (Crestwood NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997).

time of Christ, notably in the *merkabah* tradition (based on Ezekiel's vision in Ezekiel 1:26) and the *ma'aseh bereshit* tradition (a mystical intuition of the secrets of creation). From these origins we may navigate from St. Paul's ascent through the heavenly realms (2 Corinthians 12) through the mystical visions of St. John in his Apocalypse to (especially) Egyptian Christian mysticism which was influenced yet not determined in its form and trajectory by neo-Platonism. The Desert Fathers had identified the dangers of both an overly intellectualised dimension to such Christian mysticism, often gnostic in character and an uncritical reception of visions and other psychic phenomena as a divine illumination, falsely claimed to be superior to that encountered in sacramental participation (Messalianism). The hesychast movement of the 14th century has to be seen therefore as but one key moment of realisation of Orthodox prayer with many centuries of antecedent tradition and practice.

The insistence of St. Gregory Palamas that the believer (and not just the monk) thorough faith, prayer, asceticism and sacramental participation can truly apprehend, receive and be transformed by the Divine Light of Mt. Tabor—that light by which Christ was revealed transfigured in glory—is a fundamental aspect of both Biblical and patristic *theoria*. To cast doubt on this hesychastic transformation is to undermine the possibility of the union of God and humankind which lies at the very heart of the goal of salvation itself—*theosis*. Of course, St. Gregory developed his distinction between the energies and essence of God in order to render intelligible the notion that God is both Unknown and yet Known ... and in the knowing of Him, (which is divine union), the Unknown utterly transforms the creature into his or her divine potential—the very purpose and goal of the Creation of humankind and the Cosmos. This stands in stark contrast to the increasingly rationalistic and intellectualist scholastic approach of the West characterised by St. Gregory's antagonist the Calabrian monk Barlaam, the legacy of which was to lead both to the relative aridity of the schoolmen and the overheated pietism of the radical Reformation.

A Final Controversy: St Mark of Ephesus and the Council of Florence (1439-1445)

To understand the theology of St Mark of Ephesus and the Council of Florence, it must be remembered that the chief aim of this Council was to gain support from Rome for the Greek Church in its battle with the Turks. While Hesychasm was rising and becoming “an accepted part of the Orthodox tradition,” the Byzantine Empire was disintegrating; and by the 1430s the Turks, led by the Ottoman Sultan, were nearing Constantinople.³⁶ This was nothing new: for many years, the Byzantine Empire had been “so reduced and demoralised as to be scarcely identifiable as the glorious Empire it had once been.”³⁷ “The only bargaining chip in the hands of the emperors” and the Patriarchs in Constantinople was to offer “the union of the Western and Byzantine churches in return for financial and military help in their uneven struggles with the empire’s foes.”³⁸ The motivation for the Council was firmly military and economic, rather than theological.

Already, the proposed union of the Latin and Greek Churches had been agreed at the Second Council of Lyons in 1274 (when the Greek Church had capitulated to the Roman Catholic faith and the *filioque* clause in the Creed) but rejected by 1289.³⁹ A similar scenario now unfolded for the Council of Florence when some Greeks again capitulated to Latin views on the *filioque* clause, unleavened bread in the Eucharist, Papal primacy and purgatory, with only St Mark of Ephesus refusing to sign the Decree of Union. However, subsequently, both popular sentiment in the East as well as many of the older Greek bishops who had earlier signed, now rejected the Decree; and its validity ceased when Constantinople was violently besieged and captured by the Turks in 1453 under the leadership of the 21-year-old Sultan Mehmet II.⁴⁰

³⁶ Cross & Livingstone, p. 763, 619.

³⁷ John Julius Norwich, *A Short History of Byzantium* (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 357.

³⁸ Speros Vryonis, Jr., “The Patriarchate of Constantinople and the State,” in Hotchkiss & Henry, *Orthodoxy and Western Culture*, p. 120.

³⁹ Cross & Livingstone, p. 1013.

⁴⁰ Cross & Livingstone, p. 619; Norwich, *A Short History*, pp. 373-381.

St Mark, Archbishop of Ephesus, has been called “the conscience of Orthodoxy.”⁴¹ Certainly, he was a person of considerable courage, respected by both friends and opponents. When Pope Eugenius IV was brought the Act of Union by his cardinals, the Pope discovered that the Archbishop of Ephesus had not signed and commented: “And so we have accomplished nothing.” And the Pope was right, as St Mark continued to preach: “Let no one dominate in our faith: neither emperor, nor hierarch, nor false council, nor anyone else, but only the one God, who both Himself and through His Disciples has handed it down to us.”⁴² Some conservative commentators (such as Pogodin) view the Council of Florence as marking a point at which “Orthodoxy was to cease to exist;” (strangely ignoring Russia), but the decree of the Council remained operative only until Constantinople fell, after which the Ottoman Sultan, Mehmet II, chose as his new Patriarch of Constantinople, the judge Gennardios Scholarios, who had signed the decree of the Council of Florence but then repudiated his consent to the union of the Latin and Greek churches.⁴³ So Orthodoxy was, in a sense, re-established in the Greek world only after the repudiation of the decree of the Council of Florence.

Although in his life St Mark of Ephesus is inexorably linked to the Council of Florence, in his death he is remembered for an unusual miracle many years later:

A very honourable man named Demetrios Zourbaios had a sister who became grievously ill. Wherefore he called in all the doctors of Mesolongion and spent much money on them. They, however, brought no benefit to his sister, but rather she became worse. For three days she lost all speech and movement, being totally unconscious, so that even the doctors decided that she was going to die. Then he and the rest of her relatives began preparing the necessities for the funeral. But, most unexpectedly, they heard a voice and a great groan coming from her, and turning towards them she said, 'Why don't you change my clothes, since I have been drenched?' Her brother became overjoyed upon hearing her speak, and running to her he asked what was the matter and how she became so wet. She answered, 'A certain bishop came here, took me by my hand, and led me to a fountain and put me inside a

⁴¹ http://orthodoxwiki.org/Mark_of_Ephesus.

⁴² Archimandrite Amvrossy Pogodin, “St Mark of Ephesus and the False Union of Florence” at: www.orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/stmark.aspx.

⁴³ Vryonis, Jr., p. 120.

cistern. After he had washed me, he said to me, "Return now; you no longer have any illness." But her brother again asked her, 'Why didn't you ask him that granted you your health who he was?' And she said, 'I asked him, ' Who are you, your holiness? and he told me, "I am the Metropolitan of Ephesus, Mark Eugenikos." And having said these things, she arose immediately from the bed without any remnant of illness. When they took her to change her clothes, they were all amazed—O, the wonder! —seeing that not only were her clothes soaked, but even the bed and the other blankets upon which she had lain. After this miracle, the above-mentioned woman made an icon of St. Mark for a memorial of the miracle, and having lived piously for fifteen more years, she departed to the Lord.⁴⁴

Conclusion: Plato, Aristotle and the Possibility of Cultural Unity in Europe

So what does one conclude from these 400 years of tumultuous experience, with its book ends of the mutual excommunications of 1054 at one end and the fall of Constantinople in 1453 at the other? A possible conclusion is simply to note that we have now implemented the advice of the King of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland*: "Begin at the beginning, and go on until you come to the end: then stop."⁴⁵ However, there is more to be said; and it is rather exciting.

Whereas in the East, the Greek Church was able to integrate the philosophy of Plato into a Christian synthesis, the Latin Church failed to achieve such an integration with Aristotle. As Philip Sherrard reflects:

The Scholastics ... in order to accommodate Aristotle, not only had to disrupt the accepted Augustinian tradition ... but they also had to 'invent' the fiction of the 'double truth', according to which the conclusions of the reason, which constitute the object of human knowledge, may be held to be true as long as they do not contradict the truths of revelation, which cannot be known, but only accepted as articles of faith. In this way, the reason was given a character to continue its investigations without reference to the metaphysical principles of Christian doctrine, with its conclusions only being submitted to a theoretical control. Needless to say, this was a charter of which the new scientific philosophers were not slow to take advantage.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Cited by Pogodin.

⁴⁵ Quoted by Norwich, *A Short History*, p. xxxvii.

⁴⁶ Sherrard, p. 168.

Thus the philosophy of Aristotle, to a considerable extent, undermined St Augustine and Latin theology. However, the Augustinian legacy continued to be strongly articulated by the Protestant Reformers of the 16th century both in theology and piety.

Intriguingly, although the Council of Florence ultimately failed to unite the Latin and Greek churches, that Council did bring together for nearly two years “the intellectual *élite* of Italy and Greece”, providing “the occasion for a cultural exchange of considerable consequences.”⁴⁷ The exchange gathered pace through and beyond the Renaissance. The Greek delegation to the Council included Plethon (c. 1355-1452) and Bessarion (1403-1472), who influenced Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464); and better translations of the Greek classics led to a greatly improved understanding of Plato in the West and, to a lesser extent, St Augustine the East. The possibility of a united *cultural* Europe replaced the impossibility of a united *religious* Europe, leading ultimately to the work and influence of the Christian philosopher Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536).⁴⁸ So the Council of Florence did not meet in vain.

⁴⁷ Sherrard, p. 168.

⁴⁸ Cf. Sherrard, p. 169; Cross & Livingstone, p. 659, 195, 556-557.