



THE SABBATH IN THE GREAT SCHISM OF A.D. 1054

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Early in the Christian era there developed a cleavage between the church leaders in Rome and those in Constantinople, a breach which widened with the passing of the centuries until the last tie that bound them together in Christian fellowship snapped in the summer of A.D. 1054.

One of the main issues involved in that controversy was the matter of fasting on the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week. In 1053 the disagreement on this topic became verbally violent. In that year Metropolitan Archbishop Leo of Achrida (Okhrida), then the capital of Bulgaria (but now a city belonging to Albania), and Patriarch Michael Cerularius of Constantinople wrote an open letter to Bishop John of the church in Trani in Ampulia (in southern Italy). This church was on the side of the Greeks in this controversy. The message, written in Greek, was addressed to "your holiness [Bishop John], and through you to all the chief priests, and the priests of the Franks, and the monks, and the peoples, and to the most reverend pope himself."¹ It was a vigorous protest against the Roman practice of making the Sabbath a fast day, of using unleavened bread in the communion service, of requiring the clergy to practice celibacy, of using the blood of animals and the flesh of strangled or suffocated animals for food, etc.

Cardinal Humbert, bishop of Candida Silva, got a copy of that letter and placed a Latin translation of it in the hands of Leo IX, bishop of Rome (1049-1054).

About the same time Nicetas Stethatos (whom the Latins

¹ Michael Cerularius and Leo of Achrida, *Epistle to John of Trani*, in Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. CXX, cols. 835-845; *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. CXLIII, cols. 929-932.

called Pectoratus), a learned monk and presbyter of the monastery of Studion (Studium), in Constantinople, wrote his *Libellus Contra Latinos* (*A Booklet Against the Latins*), in which he attacked those practices of the Roman church.² He accused this church of having violated the injunction of the so-called *Apostolic Constitutions* against fasting on the Sabbath, and of having contravened the canons of various church councils which had forbidden this practice. Moreover, he declared that the Roman clergy had no authority from either the Scriptures or apostolic tradition for making the Sabbath a fast day. His treatise, circulated far and wide, had the approval of the patriarch of Constantinople.

In the meantime the patriarch of Constantinople closed all churches of that city which practiced any of the alleged errors of the Latins.

Leo IX wrote a long letter of 41 chapters, in the latter part of 1053, to Patriarch Michael Cerularius and Archbishop Leo of Achrida, in which he argued that he was the successor of the apostle Peter, that he was invested with supreme authority over the universal church, and that his word was law for the faithful to obey.³ He did not present any other defense for his acts. Cardinal Humbert, a favorite of the Roman bishop, wrote a *Responsio* (*Reply*) to the attack by Nicetas.⁴

Early in 1054 Leo IX sent a papal legation to Constantinople to contend for the pope's claims. This legation consisted of Cardinal Humbert; Frederic, deacon and chancellor of the church of Rome; and Peter, archbishop of Amalfi. By the hand of these legates, Leo IX sent also a long, harsh, haughty, and imperious letter⁵ to the Greek Patriarch Michael Cerula-

² Nicetas Stethatos, *Libellus Contra Latinos*, in Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. CXX, cols. 1011-1022; *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. CXLIII, cols. 973-984.

³ Leo IX, *Epistle 100, to Michael Cerularius and Leo of Achrida*, in Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. CXLIII, cols. 745-768.

⁴ Humbert, *Responsio*, in Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. CXX, cols. 1021-1038; *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. CXLIII, cols. 983-1000.

⁵ Leo IX, *Epistle 102, to Michael Cerularius*, in Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. CXLIII, cols. 775-777.

rius, in which he reiterated his demands that the Roman pontiff and his voice be recognized as supreme in the universal church. By the same means he sent a letter⁶ to the aged Greek Emperor Constantine Monomachos, in which he used moderate and kind language in the hope of enlisting the latter's sympathy and support.

The papal legates arrived at Constantinople prior to the death of Leo IX in April of 1054. The papal see remained vacant for a year thereafter until it was filled by the election of Victor II as pontiff in April of 1055. However, the papal nuncios to Constantinople had received definite instructions, before leaving Rome, as to what they should do in case their mission should fail or succeed. Hence, they did not have to wait for the election of the new pope in order to act.

After their arrival at Constantinople, the legates from Rome interviewed both the patriarch and the emperor, and delivered to each of them his respective letter from the Roman pope. Cerularius, the Greek patriarch, was offended and angered by the letter that Leo IX had written him. Moreover, he felt insulted by Humbert's attitude toward him.

On June 24, 1054, Humbert and his two associates proceeded to the monastery at Studion and publicly debated there with Nicetas Stethatos, in the presence of the emperor, his court, and other persons of high rank in affairs of state and church.⁷ They spent their time thereafter in the city without accomplishing anything of significance. The patriarch refused to be interviewed by them again, feeling that he had been insulted and that such a visit would be useless.

Finally, seeing that their mission to bring the Eastern churches into submission to the bishop of Rome had failed, the papal legates staged the dramatic act that produced the great schism. Proceeding to the Church of St. Sophia on July

⁶ Leo IX, *Epistle 103, to Emperor Constantine Monomachos*, in Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. CXLIII, cols. 777-781.

⁷ Humbert, *Brevis et Succincta Commemoratio*, chaps. 1 and 2, in Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. CXLIII, cols. 1001, 1002.

16 (*xvii Kal. Augusti*), and at about nine o'clock in the morning of that Sabbath day (*jam hora tertia diei Sabbato*), when preparations were being made for the religious services of that day, the Roman emissaries bitterly denounced the Greek patriarch and all who sided with him.⁸ Then, having spoken their piece, they quickly placed upon the principal altar the Vatican's writ of excommunication against the churches of the East and their clergy, and walked away, shaking the dust from their feet. The alert deacons of the church, it is reported, quickly snatched up the document and tossed it out upon the pavement, where it was torn to shreds by the multitude. Michael Cerularius, who quoted it later in a document concerning the whole affair, got a copy of it.⁹

The papal legation, soon on its way back to Rome, was overtaken by the emperor's messengers and urged to return. This final attempt by the emperor to effect a reconciliation between the two great sectors of Christendom proved unsuccessful, and Humbert and his companions were soon on their way again to Rome.

Besides all this, Cardinal Humbert wrote a treatise entitled *Adversus Calumnias Graecorum* (*Against the Calumnies of the Greeks*), which is composed in the form of a debate between a Roman and a Greek. After turning to the Sabbath question by quoting Exodus 20: 8-11; 34: 31, he has the Roman spokesman saying:

Therefore, in such observance of the Sabbath, where and in what way do we [Latins] have anything in common with the Jews? For they are idle and keep a holiday on the Sabbath, neither plowing nor reaping, and by reason of custom do not work, but they hold a festivity and a dinner, and their menservants, maidservants, cattle, and beasts of burden rest. But we [Latins] observe none of these

⁸ *Ibid.*, chap. 3, in Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. CXLIII, cols. 1001-1004.

⁹ Cerularius, *Synodical Decree*, in Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. CXX, cols. 742-746; J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova, et Amplissima Collectio*, Vol. XIX (Venice, 1774), cols. 811-820. See also the remarks of Horace K. Mann in *Lives of the Popes in the Middle Ages*, VI (St. Louis, Mo., 1910), 156, 157. Mann wrote the biographical sketch of Leo IX for *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. IX, p. 162.

things, but we do every (sort of) work, as (we do) on the preceding five days, and we fast as we (are wont to) fast on the sixth day [Friday] next to it.

However, you [Greeks], if you do not judaize, tell (us) why you have something in common with the Jews in a similar observance of the Sabbath? They certainly observe the Sabbath, and you observe (it); they dine, and always break the fast, on the Sabbath. In their 40-day period they break the fast every Sabbath except one, and you [Greeks] in your 40-day period break the fast every Sabbath except one. They [the Jews] have a twofold reason for observing the Sabbath, obviously by reason of the precept of Moses, and because the disciples were saddened and heavy (of heart) on this [Sabbath] day on account of the death of the Lord, whom they did not believe to be about to be resurrected. Wherefore, because you observe the Sabbath with the Jews and with us the [Sunday] Lord's day, you appear by such observance to imitate the sect of the Nazarenes, who in this manner accept Christianity that they might not give up Judaism.

But the Latin church, in compassionate regard for the Lord in (His) suffering and death, rejoices in (His) resurrection on the [Sunday] Lord's day, when concern much troubled the Jews as they were seeking to corrupt the guards of the sepulcher by means of money. Wherefore we [Latins], holding unto the present time the apostolic tradition concerning the Sabbath, and desiring to hold (it) unto the end, are careful to subscribe to that which our ancient and venerable fathers declared and confirmed, among whom the most blessed Pope Sylvester, the spiritual father of the Emperor Constantine the Great, said, among other things:

'If every [Sunday] Lord's day on account of the [Lord's] resurrection is to be kept in the joy of Christians, then every Sabbath day [on account] of the burial is to be estimated in execration of the Jews. For all the disciples of the Lord had a lamentation on the Sabbath, bewailing the buried Lord, and gladness [prevailed] for the exulting Jews. But for the fasting apostles sadness reigned. Let us [Christians], therefore, be sad with the saddened on account of the burial of the Lord, if we would rejoice with them on account of the resurrection of the Lord. For it is not proper that we should observe on account of Jewish custom, the subversions of the foods and ceremonies of the Jews.'¹⁰

These and similar things having been said by St. Sylvester, this

¹⁰ Hadrian I, bishop of Rome (A.D. 792-795), in his *Epistle 70*, to Bishop Egila of Spain, and Nicholas I, bishop of Rome (A.D. 858-867), in his *Epistle 70*, to Archbishop Hincmar and others, not only speak of the papacy's quarrel with the Greeks over fasting on the Sabbath, but both of these popes cite Sylvester I as having endorsed and defended the practice.

tradition of the apostolic see did not please some of the Easterners, but they chose rather to observe the Sabbath with the Jews.¹¹

Afterwards, in a letter to the patriarch of the church in Antioch, Michael Cerularius reported the recent happenings at Constantinople and explained why he had refused to yield to the demands of the papal legates that he submit to the dictates of the bishop of Rome. Concerning the matter of Sabbath observance, he said: "For we are commanded also to honor the Sabbath equally with the [Sunday] Lord's [day], and to keep (it) and not to work on it."¹²

Toward the close of the eleventh century, the rigor of the Roman hierarchy in regard to fasting on the Sabbath began to relax, while in the meantime a notion that the seventh-day of the week should be devoted to the worship of the Virgin was made popular.¹³ Fasting on the Sabbath as a regular

¹¹ Humbert, *Adversus Calumnias Graecorum*, chap. 6, in Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. CXLIII, cols. 936, 937.

¹² Cerularius, *Letter 1*, to the Patriarch of Antioch, chap. 24, in Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. CXX, cols. 777, 778.

¹³ Peter Damian (died A.D. 1072), who ranks among the "doctors" of the Roman Church, wrote that in his time the Sabbath was dedicated to Mary, the mother of Jesus, and he endorsed the practice. See his *Opusculum* 33, "de bono suffragiorum," chaps. 3 and 4, in Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. CXLV, cols. 564-567; his *Opusculum* 54, "de jejuniis Sabbati," chap. 3, in Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. CXLV col. 798. Bernald of Constance, a contemporary of Peter Damian, also taught that the Sabbath was dedicated by Mary. Pope Urban II, who presided over the Council of Clermont in November of A.D. 1095, is credited with declaring: "It is also decreed for all Christians that they should recite the office [church service] of the Blessed Virgin on every Sabbath day." Philip Labbe and Gabriel Cossart, *Sacrosancta Concilia*, Vol. X, col. 511; J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova, et Amplissima Collectio*, XX (Venice, 1775), col. 821. See also the Carthusian rule concerning the Sabbath as devoted to Mary (Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. CLIII, cols. 1144, 1145). The Council of Toulouse, A.D. 1229, in its Canon 25, not only imposed a penalty of 12 *denarios* for failure to attend church services on Sunday and other ecclesiastical festivals, but added: "Also at vespers on the Sabbath let them [the people] attend the churches with devotion in reverence for the Blessed Virgin Mary." J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova, et Amplissima Collectio*, XXIII (Venice, 1779), col. 200; Philip Labbe and Gabriel Cossart, *Sacrosancta Concilia*, Vol. XI, Part 1, (Paris, 1671), cols. 432, 433.

thing has ceased among Roman Catholics in general.¹⁴ Few of them now devote the day especially to the worship of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

The Greek churches, while not officially repudiating Sabbath observance, have so neglected the seventh day that, to all intents and purposes, it has ceased to be regarded as a day of rest and worship among them as it used to be.¹⁵

For further information concerning the modern devotion of the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, to Mary, and concerning the so-called Sabbatine Privilege connected with it, see: Pope Pius XI, *Epistle 1* (dated March 18, 1922), in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, XIV (Rome, 1922), 274; Wm. E. Addis and Thomas Arnold, "Mary, Office of, Saturday," *A Catholic Dictionary*, (3d ed.; New York, 1958), pp. 609, 610; Donald Attwater, "Mary, Saturday Office of the Blessed Virgin," *ibid.*, p. 450; "Saturday," *ibid.*, p. 450; Attwater, "Office of Our Lady, Saturday," *A Dictionary of Mary* (New York, 1956), p. 211; "Sabbatine Privilege," *ibid.*, p. 258; "Saturday and Mary," *ibid.*, pp. 262, 263; Conde B. Pollen and John J. Wynne, "Saturday," *The New Catholic Dictionary* (New York, 1929), p. 867; Juniper B. Carol, *Mariology*, III (Milwaukee, 1961), 53-57, with a good bibliography on the dedication of the Sabbath to Mary; Gabriele M. Roschini, "Sabbato," *Dizionario di Mariologia* (Rome, 1961), p. 447; John F. Sullivan, *The Externals of the Catholic Church* (New York, 1919), pp. 194, 195; "Avignon," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. II, p. 160; "Sabbatine Privilege," *ibid.*, Vol. XIII, pp. 289, 290; "Scapular," *ibid.*, Vol. XIII, pp. 511, 512; "Virgin," *ibid.*, Vol. XV, p. 463, col. 1; "Mary," *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings, VIII (New York, 1928), 480; "Sabbatine Privilege," *Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Zefferts A. Loetscher, II (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1955), 991; "Mary, the Blessed Virgin, the Mother of God," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross, (London, 1958), p. 868; "Sabbatine Privilege," *ibid.*, p. 1197; "Saturday," *ibid.*, pp. 1217, 1218; "Mary the Virgin, Festivals of," *Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, ed. Wm. Smith and Samuel Cheetham, II (London, 1880), 1140, 1148.

¹⁴ On the disuse of the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, as a day of fasting by Roman Catholics, see the following items: "Abstinence," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, I (New York, 1907), 69-71; "Baltimore," *ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 233; "Calendar," Vol. III, p. 166; "Superstition," *ibid.*, Vol. XIV, p. 340; "Abstinence," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 8, col. 2; "Fasts and Fasting," *ibid.*, p. 495; "Saturday," *ibid.*, p. 1217; John Dowden, *The Church Year and Calendar* (Cambridge, 1910), p. 8.

¹⁵ See the remarks of Dowden, *ibid.*, pp. 143, 144.