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The Schism of the Eastern and Western Churches

By L. W. SPITZ

FOR a thousand years the church was regarded as a unit in spite of various sects and occasional violent disagreements among prominent churchmen. Nine hundred years ago it broke into a Greek and a Roman segment. Repeated efforts have been made to heal the breach, but only with passing success. It took a millennium to effect the schism; there is at present no indication that the two segments will ever reunite. The year 1054 has been accepted as the date of the schism. This date, however, merely serves the convenience of the historian. It is a handy road marker along the path of history. Actually the break between the East and the West had taken place in the hearts of many long before the dramatic incident of that year, when, on July 13, Cardinal Humbert desecrated the altar of the Hagia Sophia with his blasphemous pronouncement of the Patriarch's excommunication. Large bodies like the church nine centuries ago do not break without a period, perhaps a long period, of provocation. In fact, the break may be due, in part, to conflicting elements inherent in the group. The schism of 1054 cannot be understood apart from Greek and Roman history — political, economic, intellectual, and religious. When Romulus Augustulus was deposed and the Empire collapsed in the West, the East continued to prosper under various strong rulers. But the Patriarchs in the East were subservient to the emperors, whereas the bishops of Rome, not equally dependent on strong secular rulers, grew stronger from century to century and increasingly independent. The rise of the kingdom of the Franks, and particularly of Charlemagne's empire, added to the tension

Concordia Theological Monthly, Vol. 25 [1954], Art. 69

between East and West. The bishops of Rome turned to the Franks for assistance, whereas the Patriarchs remained under the political pressure of the Greeks.

The great theological controversies of the early centuries were largely fought on Greek soil. As Greece gave the world philosophy, so she later produced theology. In the various theological controversies of those early centuries the Popes were usually, though not always, on the orthodox side — ready followers of orthodox theologians. The Sixth Ecumenical Council, which met in Constantinople in 680, found it necessary to condemn Pope Honorius as well as the Monothelete Patriarch of Constantinople. The emperors, unlike the Popes, were frequently, especially in the Arian controversy, on the wrong side. It must have been increasingly difficult to respect rulers who so often supported heresy.

In the course of time the Western Church had also come of age in its theological development. No longer did it turn to the East for theological leadership. A bit awkward at first, Roman theologians continued to grow in learning and theological skill. Their real leader was, of course, an African — St. Augustine, who had laid the foundation for their theological structure centuries ago. Many of their great thinkers lived a century and more after the schism. But it should be remembered that at the time of the schism St. Anselm was already twenty-one years of age.

In a millennium many incidents may occur which have a tendency to estrange people living apart and cherishing different memories. In the case of an ecclesiastical schism it may be a matter of ritualistic observances. The Patriarch Photius, in his encyclical against the Pope, lists such complaints as fasting on Saturday, which, he says, confuses the entire *Quadragesima,* the Manichaean error of priestly celibacy, and forbidding the right to the priest to administer the chrism, even though he could distribute the body and blood of Christ. He did not, of course, overlook the addition of the *filioque* to the Nicene Creed, which appeared to him as a definite falsification. He recites fourteen reasons against this ἄθεος γνώμη. As in the case of war, the reasons stated for a schism in the church may not be the actual ones.

Three important events may be considered as contributing factors in the schism of 1054. The Iconoclastic Controversy, the quarrel

of the Pope with Photius, and the quarrel about the *filioque* deserve particular investigation.

The use of images was both encouraged and discouraged at various times in the East as well as in the West. The use of pictures in the churches had become popular as early as the close of the third century. The use of painted and carved symbols is as old as the Christian burials in the Roman catacombs. Quite early the use of images must also have led to abuse. About the year 306 the synod of Elvira in Spain already forbade the use of pictures in churches. It seems that the example of paganism as well as the influence of Alexandrian Christology popularized their use. Alexandria emphasized the permeation of the earthly nature by the divine. Basil the Great taught that "the honor paid to the image passes on to the prototype."[1] Some ascribed a measure of personality to the image itself. In view of the various conflicting uses and abuses, it is not surprising that Bishop Serinus of Marseilles ordered the destruction of all sacred images in his diocese. On the other hand, it is easy to understand why Gregory the Great, disapproving of the bishop's action, declared pictures to be the books of the uneducated, declaring: "What those who can read learn by means of writings, that do the ignorant learn by looking at a picture."

The great Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy began between 724 and 726. Though it affected chiefly the politics and the culture of the Greek Empire, it had its serious repercussions also in the Western Church. It disturbed the East and the West for more than a century, especially the former, until its peaceful conclusion in the Feast of Orthodoxy in 842. The emperors who were chiefly responsible — and it should be noted that the responsibility was theirs and not the Patriarchs' — were Leo III (717—741) and his son Constantine V (741—775), and then, after the iconophile intermezzo of Irene's reign (780—802) and the temporary rehabilitation of the holy images by the second Council of Nicaea in 787, again Leo V (813—820), Michael II (820—829), and Theophilus (829—842). These were some of the most enlightened and efficient rulers in the trying times of a turbulent century.

Why these laymen inaugurated such a long and vigorous campaign against the use of images is a mooted question. One can only

speculate. Unfortunately most of the iconoclastic sources have been lost or were destroyed after the victory of orthodoxy. Hence the historian must rely chiefly on the reports of the iconophiles. According to these, Leo III was moved to declare war on images by certain bishops of Asia Minor who had been influenced by Islamic and Jewish hostility against the supposedly idolatrous use of images. In a letter addressed to Thomas of Claudiopolis about 724 and preserved in the acts of the second Council of Nicaea in 787, the Patriarch Germanus of Constantinople reproves Thomas for removing the images of Christ and the saints from his episcopal town. He condemns the removal as an inconsiderate innovation. Germanus speaks of the words and deeds of the infidels intended to injure the church of Christ and says that the Jews, too, reproached the Christians for idolatry in the form of the use of images. He declares that though true worshipers of idols, they only try to abuse the pure and divine faith of the Christians and are eager to prevent them from their devotion for things made by human hands.[2] Germanus says in the same letter that also the Saracens offer a similar criticism, but that they can be easily refuted, because they venerate a real idol, in the Kaaba, the Black Stone of Mecca. Germanus holds that there would be danger for the belief in the church's infallibility if the images were now rejected, for enemies of the Cross could boast that idolatry had been practiced for centuries by the Christians.[3] Germanus seems to think that iconoclasm was stimulated by Jewish and Islamic example.

In his report at the second Council of Nicaea, Presbyter John, representative of the Anatolian bishops, states that a Jewish magician from Tiberias, Τεσσαρακοντάπηχυς by name, induced the Caliph Yazid II (720—724) to order the destruction of all images, promising a long reign for him if he would do so. This Yazid did. He removed the pictures from the Christian churches throughout his empire. According to the acts of Nicaea, which have preserved John's report, this happened before iconoclasm invaded the Byzantine Empire. The report adds that when the pseudobishop of Nacolia — Constantine of Nacolia — and his followers had heard of these events, they imitated the Jews and Arabs in their crimes against the churches.[4] The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople, writing against Constantine V (d. 775) during the first quarter of

the ninth century, likewise blames Yazid II for the iconoclastic evil in the empire.[5] On such evidence as this the theory is based that iconoclasm was in response to Moslem and Jewish influence. The fact is that the Byzantine emperors were facing real trouble. The Moslem tide, which had flooded much of their Asiatic empire, was now beating upon the very shores of the Bosporus. Only the timely invention of Greek fire saved Constantinople itself about the time the Iconoclastic Controversy began. It is just possible that the emperors feared that God's wrath was being poured out over them because of image worship, as it was poured upon the Israelites in ancient days whenever they turned from Jehovah to worship strange gods.

In the course of the controversy the religious aspects of image worship were, as a matter of fact, by no means overlooked. Image worship was the chief object of criticism, though not the only one. The iconoclasts opposed the use of all images for religious purposes. This, again, is not surprising. In the heat of a controversy the opponents often go beyond the points for which they were at first striving. It is possible that the Iconoclastic Controversy developed from a mere question of liturgical import to a political struggle between church and state, that is, between the emperor and the church. Gerhart B. Ladner holds that iconoclasm was from its beginning an attack upon the visible representation of the *civitas Dei* on this earth. He says: "Not only because the images had such an important place in the Byzantine Church, theologically and liturgically, that an attack against them was *ipso facto* an attack against the Church but also and still more because . . . the emperors showed unmistakably that even in maintaining the belief in the supreme, supernatural government of Christ, they did not wish to permit on this earth *any other but their own image* or more exactly the imagery of their own imperial natural world."[6] He believes that the emperors wanted the empire to be the material form of Christendom in the terrestrial world; the church would then be only the liturgical function of the empire. Accordingly, the supernatural should remain abstract, Christ and His heavenly world should not and could not be expressed visibly in images.[7] Ladner draws attention to the fact that stressing of the imperial portraits and of scenes in which the emperor, his court, or his profane world in general,

appear is the one main feature of imperial art in the iconoclastic period. The other one, he says, is the reintroduction of representations of animals, plants, and ornaments which were destined to replace the Christian scenes as in early Christian art, although it had not lacked human representations and symbols of Christian character.[8] Whatever the causes of the Iconoclastic Controversy may have been, the Popes became involved in it. Popes Gregory II (715—731)[9] and Gregory III (731—741) condemned Emperor Leo III. Stephen II (752) and Stephen III (752—757) excommunicated Emperor Constantine V. It can hardly be doubted that these involvements added to the estrangement between the Eastern and Western churches.

Charlemagne became involved in the controversy when he disapproved the action taken by the second Council of Nicaea (787), which the delegates of Pope Adrian I had attended. Charlemagne had neither been consulted, nor had he been represented by anyone. Resentment over this omission may have induced him to order a critical examination of the Council's resolutions, particularly since the Latin translation ascribed to the images *adoration and divine homage.* The *Libri Carolini* (790) rejected both the adoration and veneration of images and likewise their destruction. They declared that adoration belongs only to God, and veneration to the saints and their relics. Images beautify the churches, awaken memories of the past, and take the place of the Scriptures for the illiterate. The synod at Frankfort in 794 endorsed this view. After Charlemagne's death and upon the decline of Carolingian power, Rome approached the position of the East more closely, though it was never willing to admit the veneration of images to be the perfection of the Christological dogma and the climax of the religious life of the believer, as the East held.[10] It seems that in the matter of images Charlemagne was a better theologian than Pope Adrian I. His interference in the Iconoclastic Controversy appears to indicate, however, that the cleavage between East and West was more than merely a theological one. It extended into the realm of secular politics as well.

The ecclesiastical duel between Pope Nicholas I and Patriarch Photius is a mere incident in the long and intense rivalry between Popes and Patriarchs, but it was one of the most significant. Quite

early in the history of these ecclesiastical heads the bishop of Rome had repeatedly asserted his claim to superiority over the patriarch of Constantinople. Thus Felix III excommunicated Patriarch Akakios in 484.[11] Peace was restored in 519, but the ill will created by that incident remained. This was true in an ever larger measure in the case of Photius and Nicholas. Emperor Michael III (842 to 867) had deposed the previous Patriarch Ignatius and replaced him with Photius, his secretary of state. The supporters of Ignatius thereupon appealed to the Pope. Nicholas I intervened in favor of Ignatius and rejected the appointment of Photius because he had not been consulted and because Photius had been raised, within a single week, from a mere layman to the rank of archbishop. A synod, convened in Constantinople in 861, attended by the Pope's delegates, endorsed the selection of Photius. Nicholas I thereupon convened a synod in Rome in 863 and excommunicated Photius. The latter responded by directing an encyclical to the Patriarchs of the East (867), in which he denounced the Pope, among other things, for corrupting the faith by inserting into the Nicene Creed the term *filioque*. Emperor Michael was murdered by Basil the Macedonian, his adopted son (867), who had himself proclaimed emperor in Michael's stead. Basil deposed Photius for refusing to administer the Sacraments to him after his murderous deed, reinstated Ignatius, and then turned to the Pope for support. Pope Adrian II demanded an official condemnation of Photius by a synod as the price for his support. The synod was convened in 869. Under imperial pressure the bishops voted as the Pope's delegates hoped they would. Photius was anathematized and degraded as a "patricide and a new Judas." The Pope was acknowledged as "supreme and absolute head of all the churches, superior even to Ecumenical Synods." However, at a synod convened in Constantinople in 879 the action of the synod of 869 was unanimously denounced. The Pope's delegates were not present.

Of much greater and more lasting effect was the controversy concerning the Western addition of the term *filioque* to the Nicene Creed. George Smeaton divides the history of the doctrine into three periods, which, he says, may be identified with the three names of Athanasius, Theodoret, and Photius.

In the first period, from the rise of Greek theology till the time of Epiphanius (d. 403), he found both Greek and Latin writers sharing the view that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Smeaton quotes Didymus, a blind monk of Alexandria, who said: "Christ said of the Comforter, 'He will not speak of Himself, but shall receive of Mine' — that is, because He is not of Himself, but of the Father and Me — for *His personality (hoc enim quod subsistit)* He *has from the Father and Me.*" He quotes Epiphanius as saying: "If Christ is believed to be from the Father, God of God, so the Spirit is believed to be from Christ, or from them both." Gregory of Nyssa and Basil, he says, use the same language in various passages, and Athanasius ascribes to the Holy Spirit the same order and nature in relation to the Son that the Son has to the Father.[12] It should be said that the East regards some of the ancient passages quoted by the West as spurious. Some theologians in the East were quite willing to admit that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *through* the Son. Thus Tertullian already declared: "Quia Spiritum non aliunde puto, quam, a Patre per Filium."[13] In the West it was St. Augustine who insisted on the *filioque.* He speaks of it repeatedly. He says, for instance: "Filius enim solius Patris est Filius, et Pater solius Filii est Pater: Spiritus autem sanctus non est unius eorum Spiritus, sed amborum."[14] Again: "Spiritus sanctus sic procedit a Filio, sicut procedit a Patre, et sic detur a Filio sicut datur a Patre."[15] This in answer to the question whether the Holy Spirit proceeds also from the Son. In the same tractate he argues: "If, then, the Holy Spirit proceedeth both from the Father and from the Son, why said the Son, 'He proceedeth from the Father'? Why do you think, but just because it is to Him He is wont to attribute even that which is His own, of whom He Himself also is?"[16]

In the second period, beginning with the Council of Ephesus (431), some objections are voiced against the *filioque.* Theodore of Mopsuestia declared in his creed, which was condemned by the Council of Ephesus, that the Holy Spirit did not receive His subsistence through the Son, thus departing from the wording of Tertullian. Cyril, on the other hand, soon thereafter, in his anathemas against Nestorius, declared: "If anyone shall not confess that the Spirit, by whom He wrought miracles, was His own,

let him be anathema." To this Theodoret, friend of Nestorius, replied: "That the Spirit is the Son's own Spirit we shall confess and accept as a pious utterance, if he meant of the same nature and proceeding from the Father; but if he meant that He has His subsistence from the Son or by the Son, we repudiate it as blasphemous and impious." [17] In the East no definite decision was reached regarding the question of the procession for many years; in the West Augustine's position gradually prevailed. Reinhold Seeberg, quoting the relevant sources, which are here omitted, offers the following historical outline regarding the *filioque:* "The formula, *a patre filioque procedens* first meets us, excepting in the Athanasian Creed, in Leo I; then in the confessions of faith of a Council at Toledo (probably about A. D. 444); also in the confession of faith of Reccared and the Gothic bishops (A. D. 589); in Gregory the Great; and in A. D. 633, 638, and 675, in confessions of Toledo. From Spain the term reached the Franks. A Council at Gentilly, so early as A. D. 767, appears to have pronounced in its favor. In the Confession of Reccared it already appears inserted in the Constantinopolitan Creed. In this enlarged form the confession was used under Charlemagne in the Frankish Church. Certain Frankish monks were called to account for this at Jerusalem. As Charlemagne had, at an earlier day, instructed his theologians to advocate the *filioque,* so Theodulf of Orleans now wrote a defense of it, and the Council at Aachen, A. D. 809, adopted the doctrine and, most probably, also the term itself." [18]

The Greeks at first objected to the addition as a question of correct procedure. Previous ecumenical councils had declared that no additions should be made to the Nicene Creed without ecumenical sanction. Soon, however, the controversy became a dogmatic one. The Greeks, as a body, began to deny the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Son, though some still acknowledged the procession from the Father *through* the Son. Their explanations of this wording varied. Whereas Charlemagne had no compunctions about offending the Greeks by insisting on the *filioque,* Pope Leo III (795—816) was eager to maintain friendly relations with them. To demonstrate his opposition to the addition of the term to the Nicene Creed, he caused the unaltered Creed to be engraved on

a silver plate (some say on two silver plates) for the Church of St. Peter (Adolph Harnack says St. Paul) in Rome.

The third period took its rise with Photius, whose writing against the *filioque* has already been mentioned. Photius condemned as blasphemous the opinion entertained in the West. Various attempts to reconcile the viewpoints of the East and the West, usually under political pressure, have failed. Such attempts were made at the Council of Constance (1414—18) and again at Ferrara in 1438 and Florence in 1439. By that time too much scar tissue had covered the wounds for a successful and lasting reconciliation.

The final break between the Eastern and the Western churches was inaugurated by a letter which Michael Cerularius, Patriarch of Constantinople, had written to Bishop John of Trania in Italy, enumerating the innovations introduced by the Roman Church and begging him to give this letter a wide hearing in order that the truth might prevail. Upon receiving a copy of this letter, Pope Leo IX sent the Patriarch a sharp reply, severely rebuking him for presuming to censure a church which had never before been censured by anyone. Leo somewhat forgot his history at that point. The Byzantine emperor attempted to heal the breach between the Patriarch and the Pope by sending the latter a most conciliatory reply. He invited the Pope to send his legates to study the situation with a view to restoring friendly relations. The Pope unfortunately chose the fiery Cardinal Humbert, a firm supporter of papal supremacy. Both sides were given a hearing by the emperor; the results were negative. Cardinal Humbert now entered the Hagia Sophia and laid on the altar a bull of excommunication against the Eastern Church, stigmatizing her as the repository of all the heresies of the past, and hastily disappeared.[19] The Patriarch responded by likewise drawing up a sentence of excommunication against the Western Church, which the other Patriarchs jointly signed. Thus the cleavage between the two churches was properly documented. That was nine hundred years ago. For historical convenience we write the year 1054.

The question might be asked why, if the *filioque* is a doctrine of such importance, it was not added to the Nicene Creed at its first formulation. One can only speculate. The composition of the Nicene Creed has its problems. One answer to this specific ques-

tion might be that at the time the Creed was put into its final form, the problem facing the church was the doctrine of the deity of the Holy Spirit. As the deity of the Son had at an earlier time been supported by reference to the fact that He was begotten of the Father, so the deity of the Holy Spirit could equally well be supported by referring to the fact that He proceeded from the Father. Thus the two arguments would parallel each other. In that case it was not necessary to prove that the Spirit proceeded from both the Father and the Son. The *filioque* was important not so much to prove the deity of the Holy Spirit as to strengthen still more the doctrine of the deity of the Son. The Son is begotten of the Father; the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. But Father, Son, and Spirit, though not identical the one with the other, are one God. This does away with any form of monarchianism or subordinationism; it scotches Arianism and Nestorianism. It may be more than a mere accident that the *filioque* was first added to the Nicene Creed by a synod in Spain, where an Arian king had just espoused the orthodox faith.

St. Louis, Mo.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, VIII, 28.
2. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, XIII, 109.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., pp. 197 ff.
5. Gerhard B. Ladner, "Origin and Significance of the Byzantine Iconoclastic Controversy," *Mediaeval Studies*, II (1940), 131.
6. Ibid., pp. 134 f.
7. Ibid., p. 135.
8. Ibid., p. 137.
9. Mansi, XII, 959 ff.
10. J. L. Neve, *A History of Christian Thought*, I, 177.
11. Mirbt No. 185.
12. George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, pp. 317 f.
13. Migne, II, 159.
14. Ibid., XXXV, 1888.
15. Ibid., LXV, 418.
16. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, VII, 384.
17. Smeaton, p. 319.
18. Reinhold Seeberg, *Textbook of the History of Doctrine*, II, 30.
19. Mirbt No. 269.