

The Schism Between Byzantium and Rome

by Sebastian R. Fama

The seeds of the schism between the Eastern Orthodox Churches led by Constantinople and the Catholic Church were sown in the late ninth century, when Byzantine Emperor Michael III dishonestly sought to depose Ignatius the bishop of Constantinople. Ignatius had refused Holy Communion to Michael's uncle, Bardas, who was allegedly engaged in an incestuous relationship with his daughter-in-law. This angered Michael who appealed to Rome and succeeded in having Ignatius deposed and replaced by a government official named Photius. Photius was rushed into the priesthood in a matter of six days. Shortly thereafter he was ordained Patriarch of Constantinople. However, when the reigning Pope, Nicholas I, discovered that the circumstances surrounding Ignatius' dethroning had been misrepresented to him, he reversed his decision and restored Ignatius to his earlier status. This caused resentment among some in the church at Constantinople. Unfortunately this resentment was cultivated and carried down through the years.

It was against this backdrop that the subsequent events of 1053-1054 would take place. At that time, Michael Cerularius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, closed some churches for using the Latin rather than the Greek Liturgy. The following year, Rome sent a delegation led by Cardinal Humbert of Silva Candida to investigate. Cerularius refused to see the cardinal for a number of months. When they finally did meet tensions were understandably high. The two failed to agree and, as a result, Cardinal Humbert excommunicated Cerularius. Cerularius countered by excommunicating Cardinal Humbert. This was the first of many problems that would eventually lead to schism.

The real tragedy of 1054 was the fact that Michael Cerularius represented Constantinople and Cardinal Humbert represented Rome. Both men were irrational hot heads who were led more by their pride than devotion to truth. Both of them had authored false charges against the other. Both of them had described the other with the vilest of descriptions. Had reasonable men occupied their positions the history of the Church could have been very different.

The Orthodox contend that the schism between Constantinople and Rome occurred mainly for two reasons:

- 1) The Bishop of Rome split from the four eastern Patriarchates (Constantinople, Jerusalem, Antioch, and Alexandria) by proclaiming himself the universal head of the church. They contend that before this time all bishops possessed equal authority.
- 2) Rome's insertion of the "Filioque Clause" into The Creed. The Clause asserts that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. The Orthodox believe that the Spirit proceeds only from The Father.

The Fathers on Peter's Primacy and the Primacy of the Bishop of Rome

After the fifteenth century the list of doctrinal differences between Catholics and Orthodox expanded. The Orthodox Churches claim that their teachings are consistent with Scripture and the early Church. By making such a claim, the Orthodox Churches publicly acknowledge that fidelity to apostolic teaching is a mark of the true Church. Unlike the Orthodox Churches, the Early Church believed in the primacy of Rome. Church Fathers from two of the four Patriarchates that split with Rome attest to this:

Clement of Alexandria

[T]he blessed Peter, the chosen, the preeminent, the first among the disciples, for whom alone with himself the Savior paid the tribute [Matt. 17:27], quickly grasped and understood their meaning. And what does he say? "Behold, we have left all and have followed You" [Matt. 19:27, Mark 10:28] (*Who is the Rich Man That is Saved?* 21:3-5 [A.D. 200]).

Cyril Bishop of Jerusalem

In the power of the same Holy Spirit, Peter, both **the chief of the apostles and the keeper of the keys of the kingdom of heaven**, in the name of Christ healed Aeneas the paralytic at Lydda, which is now called Diospolis [Acts 9:32-34] (*Catechetical Lectures* 17:27 [A.D. 350]).

From the beginning Rome was seen as the seat of authority:

Irenaeus Bishop of Lyon

...the greatest and most ancient church known to all, founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles. Peter and Paul, that Church which has the tradition and the faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the apostles. **With that church, because of its superior origin, all the churches must agree, that is, all the faithful in the whole world**, and it is in her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the apostolic tradition (*Against Heresies* 3:3:2 [inter A.D. 180-190]).

Cyprian Bishop of Carthage

With a false bishop appointed for themselves by heretics, they dare even to set sail and carry letters from schismatics and blasphemers to **the Chair of Peter and to the principal church [at Rome], in which sacerdotal unity has its source**" (*Epistle to Cornelius* [Bishop of Rome] 59:14 [A.D. 252]).

Eastern Orthodox Objections

Commenting on such passages, the Orthodox state that St. Peter's primacy had consisted of his only being the first among equals. All the Apostles were equals insofar as they were all priests and bishops. And this is true of the bishops who were their successors. However, the wording in the above quotes goes beyond that as does Scripture. In Matthew 16:15-19 we read the following:

But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this Rock I will build my Church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matthew 16:15-19).

The Orthodox claim that this passage refers to all the apostles. This, of course, presents us with two dilemmas. First, if Jesus had intended this reference to include all the apostles why didn't He specifically state that? Why would He confuse the issue by declaring only St. Peter as the Rock? Remember he said to one alone: "You are Peter (Rock)." Does this indicate that all the apostles are Peter?

Second, for the sake of argument, let's assume that Matthew 16 does apply to all the apostles. Let's also remember that in this passage Jesus states that the powers of death (Satan) will not prevail against His Church. If all bishops as successors of the Apostles "were Rock" they could never teach error. But some of them have.

Many Eastern bishops were guilty of teaching heresy. In fact, the East was the birthplace of a number of heresies. They include Arianism (a denial of Christ's divinity), Nestorianism (a variation of Arianism) and Monophysitism (which denied the two natures of Christ, divine and human). Severus, a Monophysite, was Bishop of Antioch (A.D. 512-518). Nestorius, the originator of the Nestorian heresy was Bishop of Constantinople (A.D. 428-431). It is hard to imagine just how the teaching of these bishops could be considered equal in authority with the Bishop who above all others preserved orthodoxy, the Bishop of Rome. And what about those people living within a heretical bishop's jurisdiction? How were they to know what to believe? Jesus said He would not leave us orphans (John 14:18) and he didn't. He gave us an authoritative Church built upon the Rock of Peter and his successors with one unchanging standard of truth.

The Orthodox churches consider the first seven ecumenical councils to be legitimate and authoritative. That Peter and his successors enjoyed a primacy of authority is illustrated by the following quotes from three of those councils:

1) Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431) – Thus the Fathers of Ephesus declare that they "are compelled" to condemn the heresy of Nestorius "by the sacred canons and by the letter of our holy father and co-minister, Celestine the Bishop of Rome." (Third Ecumenical Council).

2) Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) – The Fathers of Chalcedon, after hearing Leo's letter read, make themselves responsible for the statement: "So do we all believe . . . Peter has spoken through Leo (Pope Leo I). (Fourth Ecumenical Council).

3) Third Council of Constantinople (A.D. 680 – 681) – Once again the same formula is repeated, “Peter has spoken through Agatho (Pope Agatho). (Sixth Ecumenical Council)

Catholic Encyclopedia © 1910, Vol. 7, (article on Infallibility):

The argument is sometimes made that St. Peter was the first bishop of Antioch and, as such, Antioch ought to retain primacy. Others say that the Church was born in Jerusalem and therefore logically Jerusalem should retain primacy. But these arguments miss an obvious point--primacy was given to the person of St. Peter and his office as chief bishop not to the city of Rome. St. Peter died while he was bishop of Rome and his successor in Rome assumed his responsibilities. And it has been so ever since.

It is interesting to note that in their effort to depose Ignatius the Emperor Michael and Photius appealed to the Bishop of Rome for a ruling. Apparently, and contrary to what the Orthodox tell us, the Eastern Church recognized Rome's universal authority long before the final split. Furthermore, I find it ironic that the split between Rome and Constantinople began when the Bishop of Rome defended the Bishop of Constantinople. Moreover, Photius never rejected Roman authority, and he died in communion with Rome.

Catholics can know true doctrine because they have a Church that teaches with the authority of Christ. The alternative proposed by the Orthodox is confusing, to say the least. Fr. Brian Harrison illustrated this in an article that appeared in “*This Rock*” magazine. He begins by acknowledging the Orthodox position concerning how one can find the true church:

Christians can come to know with certainty what is true doctrine by recognizing the solemn doctrinal decisions of those councils which are ... subsequently accepted as such by the whole community of those Christians who adhere to true Christian doctrine (*This Rock* October 2008).

In other words, the true church is that which teaches the true doctrine. He then points out how illogical such a proposition is:

We want to identify true Christian doctrine with certainty, but the proffered solution to our problem assumes we already know the very thing we are seeking to discover. We are being told, “To discover what is true Christian doctrine, you must pay heed the teaching of those who adhere to true Christian doctrine” (*This Rock* October 2008).

But where is the true doctrine when bishops themselves disagree about what is true doctrine? Moreover, if a bishop's decisions must be ratified by those in his jurisdiction, he has no real authority. He merely has a platform to present his thoughts. And that is exactly how it played out at the Council of Florence in 1439. After much discussion, most of the Greek Orthodox bishops came to agree with the Catholic Church on the doctrinal issues that had separated east and west. Most were in favor of reuniting with Rome. However, when their decision was presented to the people of the east, it was rejected and the churches split for a final time.

Were the eastern bishops and the people who rejected them “The Rock” upon which Christ built His one True Church? This brings us back to the Orthodox contention that all bishops have equal authority. As we saw, the split began with some in the east appealing to Rome in their effort to oppose their bishop. And the split became final when the orthodox in the east rejected the authority of their bishops. A confusing scenario to say the least.

Dogmatic Dispute over the Filioque

The Orthodox view of the “Filioque Clause,” moreover, is inconsistent with their own tradition:

St. Epiphanius of Salamis

For the Only-Begotten Himself calls Him "the Spirit of the Father," and says of Him that "He proceeds from the Father," and "will receive of mine," so that He is reckoned as not being foreign to the Father nor to the Son, but is of their same substance, of the same Godhead; He is Spirit divine,... of God, and He is God. For he is Spirit of God, Spirit of the Father and Spirit of the Son, not by some kind of synthesis, like soul and body in us, but in the midst of Father and Son, of the Father and of the Son, a third by appellation. ... The Father always existed and the Son always existed, and **the Spirit breathes from the Father and the Son**; and neither is the Son created nor is the Spirit created (*The Man Well Anchored* [A.D. 374]).

St. Cyril of Alexandria

Since the Holy Spirit when He is in us effects our being conformed to God, and **He actually proceeds from Father and Son**, it is abundantly clear that He is of the divine essence, in it in essence and proceeding from it. [Thesis 34] (*Treasury of the Holy and Consubstantial Trinity* [A.D. 424]).

Scripture is clear, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son:

- 1) The Holy Spirit is the Son's Spirit: "For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance" (Philippians 1:19). "God has sent the spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'" (Galatians 4:6).
- 2) "But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him" (Romans 8:9).
- 3) The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son: "He saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior" (Titus 3:5-6).
- 4) The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son: "I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you" (John 16:7).
- 5) And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22).

The Orthodox would argue that these verses refer to the Holy Spirit's temporal role (the sanctification of souls). But wouldn't that at least imply an eternal procession? The early Fathers thought so. The Creed tells us that the Son is of one substance with the Father. Jesus said: "The Father and I are one" (John 10:30). Some say this means they are one in purpose. But Jesus also said: "All that the Father has is mine" (John 16:15). Surely this indicates a oneness in the strictest sense. Jesus is claiming for His own that which belongs to the Father.

The Dispute Over Purgatory

While the Orthodox pray for the dead they state inconsistently that they don't believe in Purgatory. That a purgatory exists is clearly taught by the early Fathers of the Church:

Clement of Alexandria

The believer through discipline divests himself of his passions and passes to the mansion which is better than the former one, passes to the greatest torment, taking with him the characteristic of repentance for the faults he may have committed after baptism. He is tortured then still more, not yet attaining what he sees others have acquired. The greatest torments are assigned to the believer, for God's righteousness is good, and His goodness righteous, and though these punishments cease in the course of the expiation and purification of each one, "yet" etc. . . . (*Patres Groeci*. IX, col. 332 [A.D. 150-215]).

Origen

If a man departs this life with lighter faults, he is condemned to fire which burns away the lighter materials, and prepares the soul for the kingdom of God, where nothing defiled may enter. For if on the foundation of Christ you have built not only gold and silver and precious stones (I Cor., 3); but also wood and hay and stubble, what do you expect when the soul shall be separated from the body? Would you enter into heaven with your wood and hay and stubble and thus defile the kingdom of God; or on account of these hindrances would you remain without and receive no reward for your gold and silver and precious stones? Neither is this just. It remains then that you be committed to the fire which will burn the light materials; for our God to those who can comprehend heavenly things is called a cleansing fire. But this fire consumes not the creature, but what the creature has himself built, wood, and hay and stubble. It is manifest that the fire destroys the wood of our transgressions and then returns to us the reward of our great works. (*Patres Groeci*. XIII, col. 445, 448 [A.D. 185-232]).

John Chrysostom Archbishop of Constantinople

Let us help and commemorate them. If Job's sons were purified by their father's sacrifice [Job 1:5], why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? **Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them** (*Homilies on First Corinthians* 41:5 [A.D. 392]).

Such prayer for the dead demonstrates that a state for cleansing and purifying exists in the afterlife.

Orthodox Denial of Ancient Church Teaching on Contraception and Divorce-and-Remarriage

Not only do the Orthodox Churches not agree with the early church, they don't agree with the Orthodox Churches of the last century. They have seen fit to change their teachings on artificial contraception and divorce and remarriage.

Up until 1930 every Christian denomination taught that artificial contraception was a sinful practice. Representing the Orthodox view, Rev. Constantine N. Callinicos, wrote the following in 1926:

The seventh commandment orders us to respect the conjugal honor of our neighbor, on which is founded the sanctity of marriage, the peaceful cohabitation of man and wife, and **the unadulterated transmission of life** (*The Greek Orthodox Catechism*, pages 67-68).

The Early Church Fathers agreed:

Clement of Alexandria

Because of its divine institution for the propagation of man, **the seed is not to be vainly ejaculated, nor is it to be damaged, nor is it to be wasted** (*The Instructor of Children* 2:10:91:2 [A.D. 191]).

John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople

Why do you sow where the field is eager to destroy the fruit, where there are **medicines of sterility** [oral contraceptives], where there is murder before birth? . . . Indeed, it is something worse than murder, and I do not know what to call it; for she does not kill what is formed but prevents its formation. What then? Do you condemn the gift of God and Fight with his [natural] laws? (*Homilies on Romans* 24 [A.D. 391]).

Despite all of this some Orthodox Churches have changed the ancient teaching and now allow for the use of contraceptives. Why is that? Are they pursuing truth or bowing to popular sentiment? Clearly the latter.

The Bible and the early fathers (both east and west) clearly condemn divorce and remarriage. For instance:

Hermas

What then shall the husband do, if the wife continue in this disposition [adultery]? **Let him divorce her, and let the husband remain single.** But if he divorces his wife and marries another, he too commits adultery (*Shepherd* 4:1:6 [A.D. 80]).

Justin Martyr

In regard to chastity, [Jesus] has this to say: If anyone look with lust at a woman, he has already before God committed adultery in his heart. "And, whoever marries a woman who has been divorced from another husband, commits adultery." **According to our Teacher, just as they are sinners who contract a second marriage, even though it be in accord with human law**, so also are they sinners who look with lustful desire at a woman. He repudiates not only one who actually commits adultery, but even one who wishes to do so; for not only our actions are manifest to God, but even our thoughts (*First Apology* 15 [A.D. 151]).

Clement of Alexandria

That Scripture counsels marriage, however, and never allows any release from the union is expressly contained in the law: "You shall not divorce a wife, except for reason of immorality." **And it regards as**

adultery the marriage of a spouse, while the one from whom a separation was made is still alive. "Whoever takes a divorced woman as wife commits adultery," (Miscellanies 2:23:145:3 [A.D. 208]).

Until recently the Orthodox Churches agreed. Once again, we quote from Rev. Constantine N. Callinicos:

The Sacrament of Marriage is the Sacrament in which, while the celebrating priest joins the hands of those two who wish to get united by the bonds of matrimony, and while he invokes the divine blessing upon them, the grace of God really descends upon them to unite them in an indissoluble union for mutual help and the procreation of children in Christ. Such is marriage, which was established originally by God, Who joined Adam and Eve in Paradise as husband and wife; it was blessed by the presence of our Lord at Cana; and was explicitly spoken of by St. Paul as a "great mystery" (Ephesians 5:23). The same St. Paul, by comparing the relations of the married couple to the relations existing between Christ and His Church, exalts the sanctity of wedlock, and declares that, by its nature, it is indissoluble, since our Lord Himself shall be in a state of unity with His beloved Church throughout all the ages (*The Greek Orthodox Catechism*, page 44).

Once again, the Orthodox Churches of today allow the practice. In fact, up to three marriages are allowed with the following rationale:

The Church does not deal with divorce legalistically, but with compassion. After appropriate pastoral counsel, divorce may be allowed when avenues for reconciliation have been exhausted. **If there is a remarriage, the service for a second marriage includes prayers offering repentance for the earlier divorce, asking God's forgiveness, and protection for the new union** (<http://www.antiochian.org/1123706833>)

"...if there is a remarriage? St. Paul tells us that there cannot be one. In 1 Corinthians 7:10-11 he says: "To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that **the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, let her remain single** or else be reconciled to her husband) and that the husband should not divorce the wife." Why would Paul say this? Because Jesus said: **"Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery"** (Luke 16:18).

In an effort to sidestep this, the Orthodox appeal to Matthew 5:31 where Jesus says: "It was also said, 'whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

And so they reason, "If my spouse cheats on me, I am free to divorce and remarry." But that is not the case. As St. Paul states in the above quote a married couple may separate for a good reason but they cannot remarry. Note also that Jesus says nothing about remarriage after divorce.

Second, let's look at this logically. If the critics are correct in their interpretation of Matthew 5:31 then divorce for any reason is permissible. Think about it, if a couple wants to divorce and subsequently remarry, all that would be necessary is for one or both of them to engage in an extramarital affair.

How can anyone believe that obedience to Christ is legalistic or lacking in compassion? No one is more loving or compassionate than Jesus. "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). The Orthodox are correct when they claim the Christian faith cannot be changed. Unfortunately, their teachings fail to reflect that. The Catholic Church alone has remained unchanged in her teachings. And as the Orthodox Churches will tell you, that is a mark of the true Church.