

CHAPTER 14 : THE GREAT SCHISM AND THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

At the same time as the Romish Papacy was working in partnership with the Holy Roman Emperor, the relationship between the Western and Eastern churches was unraveling. There was already ill will between the Eastern and Western churches long before, but in 1054 AD the Great Schism took place between Rome and Constantinople, which led the Church of the West- the Roman Catholic Church- to become distinct from the Churches of the East. There were doctrinal and political issues like the filioque clause and the authority of the Pope involved in the split. And cultural and linguistic differences exacerbated the situation, the Greek East splitting from the Latin West.

Even after iconoclasm had been suppressed in the East, the Eastern church still maintained a stricter policy towards images than the West. The Greeks made a rule that there might be pictures of sacred subjects in their churches, but no sculpted images, and to this they have kept ever since. The Latins would not agree to this, and kept both sculpted images and pictures; and thus began a feeling of distrust between the two branches.

The power the Pope enjoyed had done little good, for it made ambitious men covet the appointment, and they ruled their branch of the Church so as to ensure their own gain, more than for the sake of what was right. The Patriarchs of Constantinople greatly disapproved of this, and made the most of all the differences of opinion and practice. When the Council of Constantinople had added to the Nicene Creed the sentence which asserts the Godhead of the Third Holy Person of the Ever Blessed Trinity, the third clause had been " Who proceedeth from the Father." Of late the Western Church had added the words "and the Son." Now the Greeks said that the Latins ought not to put words into the Creed that no Council had yet authorized; and thus a great dispute arose, over what is called the filioque clause.

Besides, the Popes had begun to think themselves universal Bishops, heads over all other Patriarchs; and to this the Patriarch of Constantinople would not submit. The Patriarch asserted that from the old times all Patriarchs had been equal, and had no right to take authority over one another. At last matters ran so high, that the Pope sent three legates or messengers, who laid on the altar of St. Sophia an act breaking the communion between the two Churches, and then shook off the dust from their feet. This was in the year 1056.

There were many other differences as well. The Greeks and Latins reckoned the time of keeping Easter in different ways, and had not the same way of shaving the heads of their clergy. Besides, the Greeks thought that when Paul said an elder might be the husband of one wife, he meant that a parish priest must be married; so if a clergyman's wife died, they put him into a convent, and took away his parish. The Roman Catholics said, on the contrary, that the clergy were better unmarried; and by-and-by they forbade even those who were not monks to have wives. The Romish clergy said that there was no need for the people to partake of the Cup at the Holy Eucharist, so they were cut off from that privilege, though our Lord had said, "Drink ye ALL." The clergy said it was all the same

whether the people drank of it or not, since Flesh and Blood were one; but this was a poor rationale for contradicting scriptural precedent.

All of these factors, and more, played a role in the schism between East and West. With ties to the West generally severed, the Eastern church developed independently. Until 1453 when the Byzantine Empire fell, Eastern Christendom was dominated from Constantinople, the empire's capital.

The Byzantine Empire had already been reduced in size by the Arab Muslims in the centuries before the Great Schism, due in no small measure to the church's sin of idolatry. But the empire still enjoyed some glory days under the Macedonian emperors of the 10th and early 11th centuries. They held back further encroachment by the Muslims for many years by dividing into a system of military provinces called *themes* to face permanent assault. Attempts to conquer Constantinople failed in the face of the Byzantines' superior navy and their monopoly of the still mysterious incendiary weapon Greek fire.

Like Rome before it, the Byzantine Empire soon fell into a period of difficulties, caused to a large extent by the growth of the landed aristocracy, which undermined the *theme* system. Facing its old enemies, the Holy Roman Empire and the Abbasid caliphate, it might have recovered, but around the same time God raised up new invaders who had little reason to respect its reputation - the Norman Vikings, who conquered Italy, and the Seljuk Turks, who were mainly interested in defeating Egypt but still made moves into Asia Minor, the main recruiting ground for the Byzantine armies. With the defeat at Manzikert of emperor Romanus IV in 1071 by Alp Arslan, sultan of the Seljuk Turks, most of that province was lost.

The last few centuries of Byzantine life were affected by a political usurper, Alexius Comnenus, who began to reestablish an army on the basis of feudal grants and made significant advances against the Seljuk Turks. His plea for western aid brought about the First Crusade. In response to this plea, in 1095 Roman Catholic Pope Urban II called upon all Christians to join a war against the Turks, a war which would count according to Romish superstition as full penance for sins committed. Crusader armies marched up towards Jerusalem, sacking several cities on their way. In 1099, they took Jerusalem, massacring the Jewish and Muslim population. As a result of the First Crusade, several small states were created, notably the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

Later crusades grew increasingly antagonistic to Byzantine interests. After a period of relative peace, in which Christians and Muslims coexisted in the Holy Land, Bernard of Clairvaux - primary builder of the Cistercian order of monks in the Romish Church - called for the Second Crusade when the town of Edessa was conquered by the Turks. French and German armies marched to Asia Minor in 1147, but failed to accomplish any major successes. In 1149, both leaders had returned to their countries without any result. In 1187, the Muslim leader Saladin captured Jerusalem. Pope Gregory VIII preached a Third Crusade, which was led by several of Europe's most important leaders: Richard I of England, Philip II of France and Frederick I, Holy Roman Emperor. Frederick

drowned in Cilicia in 1190, leaving an unstable alliance between the English and the French. Philip left in 1191 after the fall of Acre, while Richard left the following year after establishing a truce with Saladin. Meantime, Byzantine Emperor Alexius had granted the city of Venice access to many Byzantine ports for trade. The Venetians became a major threat to the Empire. Under their influence the Fourth Crusade - initiated by Pope Innocent III - captured Constantinople in 1204, founding a short-lived feudal kingdom and permanently weakening Byzantine power. Thus we witness the folly of the Byzantine emperor calling upon the wicked Papacy for assistance.

The Crusades themselves ended in failure. Following the Fourth Crusade, the succeeding crusades were largely efforts of the Papacy in its political struggle against the secular powers of Western Europe, to divert the military energies of the European nations toward the East. The result was a series of tragedies. Surely the most pathetic was the Children's Crusade in 1212. Led by a visionary French peasant boy, children embarked at Marseilles, France, hoping that they would succeed in the cause that their elders had betrayed. They were sold into slavery by unscrupulous skippers. Another group, made up of German children, went to Italy; most of them perished of hunger and disease.

As for the Byzantine Empire, three Byzantine successor states were left - Nicaea, Epirus, and Trebizond. The first managed to reclaim Constantinople in 1261, so reviving the empire but turning attention to Europe when Asia was the primary concern. For awhile the empire survived simply because the Muslims were too divided to attack, but eventually the Ottomans overran all but a handful of port cities. Constantinople was initially considered not worth the effort, but with the advent of cannons it fell after a two-year siege to Mehmed II on May 29, 1453. By the end of the century the remaining cities - like Trebizond and Mistra - also fell.

The Byzantine Empire played an important role in the transmission of classical knowledge to the Islamic world. Its most lasting influence, though, lies in the Orthodox churches of the East. Early Byzantine missionary work spread Orthodox Christianity to various Slavic peoples, and it is still predominant among them and the Greeks. The Byzantine empire - while it lasted - was the center of Orthodox Christianity. But when the Byzantine empire fell in 1453, Orthodoxy was very strong in Russia; and so Moscow became the new center of the Orthodox churches at that time.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

CHAPTER 14 : THE GREAT SCHISM AND THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE

This second volume in a two-part series on church history is primarily an edited version of the following works on church history and Biblical interpretation:

James A. Wylie, *The History of Protestantism* (Cassell & Company, Limited: London, Paris & New York. 1878). (see electronic version at <http://www.whatsaiththescriture.com/Fellowship/James.A.Wylie.html>)

Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Logos Research Systems, Inc.: Oak Harbor, WA, 1997). (see electronic version at <http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/history/About.htm>)

J. Parnell McCarter, *Sabbath Bible Survey Tests and Assignments* (PHSC: Grand Rapids, MI, 2003). (see electronic version at <http://www.puritans.net/curriculum/>)

J. Parnell McCarter, *Let My People Go* (PHSC: Grand Rapids, MI, 2003). (see electronic version at <http://www.puritans.net/curriculum/>)

The on-line resources of Historicism Research Foundation at <http://www.historicism.net/> also proved invaluable for my understanding of Biblical prophecy. Biblical prophecy concerning Christian church history, especially as revealed in the book of Revelation, serves as the foundation upon which all church histories should be based.