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## The Great Schism – 1054

AS noted earlier, there were growing tensions between Greek Orthodox in the east and Latin Catholics in the west. For centuries the relations between the two branches of Christianity continued to decline and grow apart, even though they were both orthodox (in the right sense of the word). They had been one great body during the first five centuries of the Church's existence, though not without differences and difficulties, but by this time their distinctions had clearly delineated them as the East and the West. Reasons for these tensions are several and, if carefully examined, the seeds of the Great Schism can be seen as early as the second century.

What are some of the reasons that brought about this great division between the East and the West? First, there was the cultural barrier of language. The New Testament was written in *koine* (*common*) Greek, and until the early part of the third



century, all theological writing was done in Greek. Tertullian changed that tradition by being the first theologian to write in Latin. The West followed his lead and continued to write in Latin. One difficulty during the first four ecumenical councils was the language barrier. Latin-speaking westerners could not grasp all the nuances of Greek, and Greek-speaking easterners could not comprehend the vagaries of Latin. The West was further entrenched in its inflexible loyalty to Latin by Jerome's *Vulgate* (event #12). Misunderstanding and jumping to the wrong conclusions abounded on both sides.

Second, there were theological differences. Both branches embraced the creeds and definitions of the first four ecumenical councils and thus believed in 'one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.' Both were devoutly Trinitarian and made equal contributions in the exegetical formulations of this truth. However, each had different emphases. Western Latins stressed the unity of the Godhead; eastern Greeks accented the threeness of the Persons. Regarding Christology, the West highlighted the incarnate, dying Christ (i.e., Christ the Victim); the East underscored the resurrected, triumphant Christ (i.e., Christ the Victor). This is still seen; the cross in Roman Catholic churches always has a statue of Christ hanging on it (the crucifix), and in Orthodox churches the cross contains no statue of Christ hanging on it. The two views of Christ are not mutually exclusive, however; each has its proper place in biblical theology. Their discord caused the two groups to go to extremes, and forget the necessity and value of the other's viewpoint. The Greek interpretation of salvation was more speculative; the Roman focused on the practical. The Orthodox viewed theology more in the context of worship and the Divine

Liturgy, and Roman theology stemmed more from the legal or judicial. Furthermore, the East was uncomfortable with the West's doctrine of temporary, refining punishment of believers after death, called Purgatory.

What should have been secondary 'things indifferent' (at least for them) became primary theological issues, which widened the chasm of division even more. In both branches, the central point of worship had shifted from the ministry of the Word to observance of the Lord's Supper (i.e., mass, Eucharist); in these matters, their differences surfaced and forms of worship differed. The East used leavened bread and the West unleavened. Eastern clergy could marry and have families; in the West priests could not marry. Eastern clergy wore beards, western priests were clean-shaven.

Ecclesiastical and political bickering was the next reason for division. The West believed that Rome was the sacred and eternal city of God because both the apostles Peter and Paul were martyred there. Stemming from the time when Constantine the Great united the empire and shifted the capital east to Constantinople, which was dubbed the 'New Rome,' strong tensions and rivalries existed. The Council of Chalcedon decreed that Rome was the primary See in Christendom and Constantinople the second. As moving the capital east did not sit well with the Latins, so the decree did not set well with the Greeks. There was a willingness in the East to grant ecclesiastical preference to the bishop of Rome as 'first among equals,' but there was an unwillingness to submit unconditionally to him. The East regarded him as only one of several key patriarchs. Thus, the four original Eastern patriarchates (Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Constantinople) set into motion a scheme to create a position called the 'Ecumenical

Patriarch,' which would counter the perceived Western power play. Leaders who should have been spiritually minded and zealous for the expansion of Christ's kingdom into all the world became provincial, jealous, and petty over which was the greatest, much like the apostles in Luke 22:24-27.

Philosophical perspectives gave another cause for division. The East was mystical and speculative, desiring to stimulate meditation and discussion about ethereal realities. The West was more objective and rational, desiring to promote action and truth. As early as the late second century, Clement of Alexandria biasedly enlisted aid for Christianity from the choicest thoughts that pagan (Greek) philosophers had to offer. Tertullian, conversely, challenged the pagan cultures and philosophies of his day with his famous axiom, 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?'

Historians agree the 'straw that broke the camel's back' was what is known as the Filioque clause. The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381, see Appendix II), an expansion of the Nicene Creed, states that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. From the sixth century onward, the Latin churches added and started using '*and the Son*' (*filioque*). The Greeks (now joined by the Russians) argued that the Latins acted unilaterally, violated the explicit canon of the council, and were in great theological error. By failing to equalize the relationships among the members of the Trinity, the Latins retorted, the East had negated the full personality of the Holy Spirit and crippled the church's understanding of the Spirit's work. Neither would give in and both were unmovable.

Two stubborn and strong-willed men brought the division to a head. Michael Cerularius became Patriarch of Constantinople



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in 1043 and Leo IX became pope in 1049. The four original Eastern patriarchates elected Cerularius to be the 'Ecumenical Patriarch.' Leo wanted to bring an end to the division, but he also wanted the East to submit to his absolute headship of the universal church. He dispatched a papal delegation to Constantinople led by Cardinal Humbert. Its mission was to dissuade Cerularius from becoming the 'Ecumenical Patriarch' and demand the East to recognize the *filioque* clause. Leo died while the delegation was en route to the Byzantine capital. Cerularius refused to meet the delegation upon its arrival in Constantinople, so Humbert decided, without any papal authority, to take action that was so severe that its effects are felt even to this day.

As afternoon prayers were about to begin on Saturday, July 16, 1054, Cardinal Humbert pompously marched into the cathedral of Hagia Sophia. Without paying any respects to the patriarch or the other bishops, he marched right up to the main altar and placed on it a parchment that declared the Patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Cerularius, to be excommunicated. He then paraded out of the church, shook its dust off his feet, and left the city. One week later, the Patriarch of Constantinople excommunicated the Cardinal, his delegation, and the Pope of Rome. Needlessly stubborn theological bias, carnal appetites for prestige, and ecclesiastical jockeying for power prevailed, and once again the serpent entered Christ's vineyard.

In his *Turning Points*, Mark Noll reports that, on December 7, 1965, Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I issued a joint statement deploring the 'vexing events' of the Great Schism and removed 'both from memory and from the midst of the Church the sentences of excommunication.' Nevertheless, the division





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of theological barriers, cultural diversity, and ecclesiastical distrust remains. The unhealed rupture is a reminder of the soul-damaging harm that proud, despotic, unprincipled men can do to Christianity and the cause of Christ.

