

Church History I

(Early Church to Scholasticism)

Week 9 – Reform and The Great Schism

Introduction: “No two churches in the world are at this day so much alike, and yet so averse to each other as the Oriental or Greek, and the Occidental (Western) or Roman. They hold, as an inheritance from the patristic age, essentially the same body of doctrine, the same canons of discipline, the same form of worship; and yet their antagonism seems irreconcilable. The very affinity breeds jealousy and friction. They are equally exclusive: the Oriental Church claims exclusive *orthodoxy*, and looks upon Western Christendom as heretical; the Roman Church claims exclusive *catholicity*, and considers all other churches as heretical or schismatical sects. The one is proud of her creed, the other of her dominion.”¹

I. The Need for Reformation Church Wide

- A. Last week we focused extensively on the Difficulties and need for restoration in the west, particularly in church leadership and among the monastic orders.
 1. Papal reform – Pope Leo IX (Bruno), Nicholas II, and the Gregory VII reforms in particular.
 - i. The Gregorian Reform transformed the medieval Church from a network of local, semi-independent clerical offices under secular control into a centralized, disciplined, and papally led institution claiming spiritual supremacy over kings and emperors.
 - ii. A great example of this is seen clearly in Henry IV’s walk to Canossa. The Walk to Canossa (1077) occurred during the Investiture Controversy between Pope Gregory VII and Emperor Henry IV over who had the authority to appoint bishops. After Gregory excommunicated Henry for defying papal orders, Henry lost support from his nobles, who threatened to depose him unless he reconciled with the pope. To regain legitimacy, Henry traveled in the middle of winter to Canossa Castle in northern Italy, where Gregory was staying. For three days, Henry stood barefoot in the snow as a penitent, seeking forgiveness. Gregory eventually lifted the excommunication, symbolizing the pope’s moral authority over even emperors, though the political struggle continued afterward.
 2. Cluny Reform
 - i. Which incorporated a reformation over Benedictine traditions and removed outside authority from controlling the monastery itself.
 - ii. Thus, it could grow and become what it ought to, which worked out fine for a couple of hundred years until it got too lax due to the monastery’s financial gain.
- B. However, there were other reasons for the need for reformation among the general populations of different Western provinces. That is seen most in mass conversions.
 1. We saw this earlier in history with the barbarian groups that had come to faith.
 2. Another example of this taking place in the latter part of the first millennium A.D. was due to the invasions of the Vikings.

¹ Philip Schaff and David Schley Schaff, [*History of the Christian Church*](#), vol. 4 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910), 306.

- i. “The first explorers from Scandinavia to explore the Anglo-Saxon and Frankish areas were only traders; but later, attracted by the relative wealth of the Carolingian world, they organized themselves into small bands of warriors who looked for foreign targets to plunder.”²
- ii. “The fearsome invaders appeared in their warships without much notice, and without much resistance raided isolated monasteries, churches, and castles (virtually the only reliable repositories of any significant wealth in the early medieval era). From around 750 to 1100, kingdoms from England to Constantinople suffered the wrath of the Norsemen.”³ **PTQ**
- iii. “The Vikings also traveled overseas in the Viking longship, a masterwork of nautical engineering, its narrow and light design allowing it to coast easily through otherwise unnavigable rivers and oceans around the continent. The longships enabled their excursion parties to reach faraway inland destinations, such as Seville, the capital of Islamic Spain, and Kiev in the Ukraine.”⁴ **PTQ**
- iv. It is important to note that the Vikings did not always win. A Great example of this is that of Alfred the Great.
 - a) “By the end of the 800s, the Vikings controlled all of England except for the territory of Wessex in the south of England, held by King Alfred (later given the honorific “the Great”).”⁵
 - b) “In 870, a year known as the “year of battles,” Alfred and his brother, King Aethelred, won multiple skirmishes over what the Saxons called the Great Heathen Army, a large band of Scandinavian fighters led by the spectacularly named Ivar the Boneless. In 871, Athelred died in battle, leaving the twenty-two-year-old Alfred as king, “trusting in the aid of God alone, ever to withstand such great fierceness of the heathen.” **PTQ**
 - c) Over the next six years, Alfred waged dozens, perhaps hundreds, of fights against the Scandinavian invaders, fending off “countless attacks by day and by night.” By 877, his force was reduced to a small band of men hiding in the forests and marshes of Wessex. But he managed to mount an effective campaign of guerrilla warfare, proving himself capable of slaughtering a king and eight hundred of his men in one of his forays.”⁶
 - d) After making a final defeat of the Vikings in his war he created a power sharing agreement and the Danish king in England was required to be converted to Christianity and was baptized by Alfred himself. **PTQ**
 - e) Alfred won wars like David and ruled his people in wisdom like Solomon. Even though he was less book smart than he wished.

² William J. Bennett, [*Tried by Fire: The Story of Christianity's First Thousand Years*](#) (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2016), 348.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Bennett, [*Tried by Fire*](#), 348.

⁵ Ibid., 349.

⁶ Ibid.,

- f) By the end of the tenth century, the Scandinavians who had settled in England had assimilated into the local populations, and in 975, Alfred's grandson Edgar achieved the reunification of England under Anglo-Saxon rule. But England would soon be reconquered; in 1015, the Danish king Canute sailed for England with a massive army of Scandinavians.⁷ **PTQ**
 - g) Over the years of 800-1100, missionaries reached the northern peoples of the Danes and the Swedes. However, many of the initial followers were won by the edge of the sword. Thus, it took a good bit of time before Christianity managed a reasonable hold in the North. It did not even receive an archdiocese until the 1100s.
- C. The East also found itself in desperate need of conversions, reform, and change while making decisions that caused significant issues.
1. The Check Republic **PTQ**
 - i. "In 863, two Slavic princes of Moravia (in today's Czech Republic) wrote to Emperor Michael III and the Patriarch Photius, requesting that he send some missionaries to Christianize their peoples."⁸
 - ii. "The Byzantine emperor appointed two brothers from the Greek town of Salonika (today, Thessaloniki) to serve as missionaries to the Slavs. Cyril (the younger brother) and Methodius (the elder) were the sons of a high-ranking imperial official in the Byzantine Empire who died when the brothers were boys."⁹
 - iii. "The two made a formidable duo: Cyril having been through the best institutions of learning in the Byzantine realm, and his brother the contemplative sage. By 863, the brothers had undertaken their historically meaningful mission to Moravia... Their work produced what is now called the Glagolitic alphabet, the predecessor of the modern Cyrillic alphabet used to write the Russian, Serbian, and Bosnian languages. This written language was perhaps the greatest legacy that Cyril and Methodius bequeathed to Europe, since it also allowed for further conversions of the Slavic peoples."¹⁰
 - iv. "In 870, he (Methodius) was formally made the bishop of Moravia and Pannonia. This move angered the Catholic Church at Salzburg, which considered Methodius's archdiocese a place that should be under their own control. Moreover, the Germans were repulsed at the idea that Methodius would hold a mass in the native language of the Slavs. Methodius was taken and shut up under house arrest for two years until the pope intervened. Toward the end of his life, Methodius spent a great deal of time translating other parts of the Bible and patristic writings into the first written Slavic language, now referred to as Old Church Slavonic."¹¹ **PTQ**
 2. The Extension of Orthodox into Russia **PTQ**

⁷ Bennett, [*Tried by Fire*](#), .

⁸ Bennett, [*Tried by Fire*](#), .

⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁰ Ibid.,

¹¹ Ibid.,

- i. “In 867, the patriarch of Constantinople, perhaps inspired by the work of Cyril and Methodius, commissioned a new missionary effort to the area of modern-day Kiev, Ukraine. Photius even deemed it right to send a bishop to the peoples of the Ukraine, known as the *Rus’*. But Christianity never really caught on in the Russian space until the kingship of Prince Vladimir, which began in the late tenth century.”¹²
 - ii. Vladimir and his leaders had checked out different religious beliefs and found the beauty and expression of the Orthodox most compelling, but many people were not converted right away. It seems to have actually taken victory in battle and a political marriage to make Vladimir want to convert. When he did convert and get baptized, he is said to have been healed of an ocular issue, which helped bolster his faith. He required his citizens to be baptized, and other more eastern Russian groups ended up doing the same. **PTQ**
 - iii. On the day he and his citizens were baptized, he opened the service in this prayer, “O God, who hast created heaven and earth, look down, I beseech thee, on this thy new people, and grant them, O Lord, to know thee as the true God, even as the other Christian nations have known thee. Confirm in them the true and unalterable faith, and aid me, O Lord, against the hostile adversary, so that, hoping in thee and in thy might, I may overcome his malice.”¹³
 - iv. Because the religion was forced on the populace, it is fair to ask how many legitimate Christians there were. To that, the answer is probably not many, but the introduction to the Christian scriptures and liturgy helped give a basis in those areas. **PTQ**
 - v. Russia eventually became the seat of orthodoxy for many, and the capital was referenced as the 3rd Rome, which is why the Russian rulers went by Czar. (Caesar).
3. Earlier, we addressed some of the more well-known and capable leaders in the East, but sadly, the East continued to go down instead of up.

II. The Issues Leading up to the Schism.

- A. The spread of Christianity across the Roman Empire created geographical, linguistic, political, and theological differences between the Eastern and Western churches.¹⁴ Specifically, these differences included:
1. Disputes over the celebration of Easter, clergy marriage, influence in newly Christianized regions, the Filioque clause, and papal authority¹⁵ **PTQ**
 - i. An interesting note on this idea was given by Sinclair Ferguson. If the spirit who leads and directs the church proceeds from the Son and the Pope is the Vicar of Christ, it therefore follows that the Pope must lead the whole of the church because the spirit flows from him outward.¹⁶ **PTQ**

¹² Bennett, [Tried by Fire](#), .

¹³ Ibid.,

¹⁴ Jessica Parks, [“The Church Separates into East and West.”](#) in *Church History Themes*, ed. Zachariah Carter (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2022).

¹⁵ Bennett, [Tried by Fire](#), .

¹⁶ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *In the Year of Our Lord: Reflections on Twenty Centuries of Church History* (Orlando, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2018), 117.

2. Liturgical practices, such as the use of unleavened bread in the Eucharist, which the Eastern Patriarch Michael Cerularius criticized as a “heresy”
3. Accusations of improper practices, including rebaptizing Latins, priests living in wedlock, and differences in baptismal practices.¹⁷
4. Disagreements over icon veneration, complicated by translation issues and cultural suspicions¹⁸
 - i. “As mentioned previously, icon veneration was accepted in the West until the time of the Frankish kings who founded the Holy Roman Empire. The reasons that many of the early Frankish kings became mild iconoclasts had much to do with the pagan roots of the Germanic culture from which the Frankish kingdoms arose.”¹⁹
 - ii. The movement began in the early eighth century when Emperor Leo III launched an attack on religious icons, openly declaring his opposition after repelling Muslim armies. He replaced the patriarch of Constantinople with one who supported his views.²⁰
 - iii. The iconoclastic period can be divided into three key phases: the war on images (726-754), a reaction in favor of image-worship (754-787), and a final conflict resulting in the triumph of image-worship (842)²¹ **PTQ**
 - iv. Ultimately, icons were affirmed by the Second Council of Nicaea, which established that icons could be venerated as representations that direct people’s thoughts to the subjects they depict, while maintaining that true worship belongs only to the divine nature.²² **PTQ**
5. Political conflicts, such as the Photian Schism, which involved complex papal interventions and excommunications
 - i. The Photian Schism (863–867) was a conflict between Patriarch Photius of Constantinople and Pope Nicholas I over the legitimacy of Photius’s appointment and papal authority in the East. **PTQ**
 - ii. The dispute arose when the Byzantine emperor deposed Patriarch Ignatius and installed Photius, which Rome refused to recognize. Photius, in turn, condemned the pope for interfering in Eastern affairs and for adding the Filioque clause (“and the Son”) to the Western Creed.²³
 - iii. Though temporarily resolved when Ignatius was restored, the schism deepened mistrust between the Eastern and Western Churches.

¹⁷ Schaff and Schaff, [*History of the Christian Church*](#), Vol 4. 318–320.

¹⁸ Bennett, [*Tried by Fire*](#), .

¹⁹ Ibid.,

²⁰ Bruce L. Shelley, [*Church History in Plain Language*](#), ed. Marshall Shelley (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), [185–186](#).

²¹ Schaff and Schaff, [*History of the Christian Church*](#), Vol. 4. 454-455.

²² Mark A. Noll, [*Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*](#), Third Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 129.

²³ Bennett, [*Tried by Fire*](#),

- B. Near the end, things had gotten so bad that neither was beginning to consider the other a part of the true church.
- “Patriarchs of Constantinople from the year 1009 no longer included the name of the Roman bishop in the diptychs, or the formal lists maintained at Constantinople of the other patriarchs living and dead whom Constantinople recognized as doctrinally sound.”²⁴ **PTQ**

III. The Great Schism

- A. As you have read, this was the result of nearly 800 years of disagreement, suspicion, difference and difficulty in the churches, which, honestly, I’m surprised it took that long.
- B. The straw that broke the camel’s back was an issue in Sicily. **PTQ**
- C. “Sicily had formerly been a colony of the Byzantine Empire, and many churches there had an Eastern orientation. When a group of Normans (French descendants of Vikings) conquered parts of the island in the 1040s, the Normans replaced Greek bishops with Latin ones and changed long-held church customs. When the Greek patriarch, Michael Cerularius, heard about what was happening, he ordered Latin churches in Constantinople closed and commanded the archbishop of Bulgaria, Leo of Ohrid, to inveigh against the Latin custom of using unleavened bread in communion and keeping clergy unmarried.”²⁵
- D. Pope Leo IX sent legates to Constantinople in 1054 mainly to address growing tensions between the Eastern and Western Churches and to assert papal authority. Although the mission was meant to negotiate peace and unity, the legates’ rigid stance and mutual hostility led instead to mutual excommunications, formally igniting the Great Schism.
- E. The schism was never healed and the two sides only unanathematized each other in the 1900’s. **PTQ**
- 1095–1270: The Crusades solidify the divide between East and West.
 - 1215: Fourth Lateran Council establishes papal authority over all the church.²⁶

CAUSE	EASTERN CHURCH	WESTERN CHURCH
POLITICAL RIVALRY	Byzantine Empire	Holy Roman Empire
CLAIMS OF PAPACY	Patriarch of Constantinople was considered second in primacy to bishop of Rome.	Bishop of Rome claimed supremacy over the entire church.
THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT	Stagnated after Council of Chalcedon.	Continued to change and grow through controversies and expansion.
FILIOQUE CONTROVERSY	Declared that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father.	Declared that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

²⁴ Noll, [Turning Points](#), 123.

²⁵ Bennett, [Tried by Fire](#), .

²⁶ Jessica Parks, [“The Church Separates into East and West,”](#) in *Church History Themes*, ed. Zachariah Carter (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, 2022).

ICONOCLASTIC CONTROVERSY	Engaged in 120 - year dispute over the use of icons in worship; finally concluded they could be used (statues prohibited).	Made constant attempts to interfere in what was purely an Eastern dispute (statues permitted).
DIFFERENCES IN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE	Greek/Oriental	Latin/Occidental
CLERICAL CELIBACY	Lower clergy were permitted to marry.	All clergy were required to be celibate.
OUTSIDE PRESSURES	Muslims constricted and put continual pressure on Eastern church.	Western barbarians were Christianized and assimilated by Western church.
MUTUAL EXCOMMUNICATIONS OF 1054	Michael Cerularius anathematized Pope Leo IX after having been excommunicated by him.	Leo IX excommunicated Patriarch Michael Cerularius of Constantinople. ²⁷

²⁷ Robert C. Walton, [*Chronological and Background Charts of Church History*](#), Revised Edition, ZondervanCharts (Zondervan, 2018), 37.

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