

The Division of the Church

Our Catholic Heritage

The Schism Between the East and West

By FATHER THOMAS McMANUS
 "When the Queens of the Earth are at enmity, the whole world will weep." (Bishop Peter of Antioch, 11th century)

Of all the crosses the Church has had to bear in her 20 centuries of pilgrimage, the most bitter has been that of the schism between East and West. From the day Constantine left Rome and founded his new capital at Byzantium, the Bishop of Rome and the Patriarch of Constantinople entered a conflict which remains unresolved.

As early as the year 431 signs of strain were beginning to show, and the fathers of the Council of Ephesus had to proclaim:

"None can doubt that the holy Apostle Peter, Prince and Chief of the Apostles, lives, presides and judges to this day and always, in his successors, the Bishops of the Holy See of Rome."

This was and is, Catholic doctrine. The growing might of Constantinople led her to challenge the authority

of the Apostolic See. In 451, at the Council of Chalcedon, in a canon never ratified by Rome, the gauntlet was thrown down.

"The fathers judge that the city in which the empire and the senate are honored should have an equality of privilege with the ancient mistress, Rome, even in ecclesiastical affairs."

During the sixth and seventh centuries, the Byzantine rulers developed a penchant for kidnapping popes to force theological issues. The Emperor Justinian seized Pope Silverius in 538 A.D. and Pope Vigilius in 545 A.D. The Emperor Constantine kidnapped Pope St. Martin in 653 A.D. Martin is honored as a martyr. The Pope did not help matters in 800 A.D. when he crowned Charlemagne as Holy Roman Emperor, an event viewed by the Byzantines as "the surreptitious coronation of a barbarian!"

Between 858 and 879 A.D., full-fledged schism developed during the reigns of Pope St. Nicholas the Great and Patriarch Photius. The final

tragic blow came in the year 1054 as a result of conflict between Pope St. Leo IX and Patriarch Caerularius. Leo was the founder of the medieval reform movement in the West. Caerularius was accomplished and ambitious, bent on acquiring power. Their conflict ended in mutual excommunications which stood until 1965.

Relations worsened during the Crusades, especially after the western armies raped the city of Constantinople in 1204. Attempts at reunion would be made at the Second Council of Lyons (1274) and the Council of Florence (1437), but to no avail. The fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1452 seemed the end of hope for reunion.

Five long centuries would pass before the angel of God would stir the waters of healing again. The Second Vatican Council made the quest for reunion one of its first priorities. On Dec. 7, 1965, two brave and holy men, Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras, issued simultaneous statements in their respective cities:

"They regret the offensive words, the reproaches without foundation, and the reprehensible gestures which, on both sides have marked or accompanied the sad events of this period."

"They likewise regret and remove both from the memory and from the midst of the Church the sentences of excommunication which followed these events, the memory of which has influenced actions up to our own day and has hindered close relations in charity. They commit these excommunications to oblivion . . ." (Documents of Vatican II)

So begins the long road of reconciliation.

"We entrust to Mary our sincere resolution not to rest until the end of the way is reached. We seem to hear from her lips the Apostle's words: let there be no quarrelling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, conceit and disorder among you." (John Paul II, at the House of Mary, Ephesus, Turkey on Nov. 30, 1979).

Pope St. Nicholas — Last of 'the Great' Popes

By FATHER THOMAS McMANUS

"He gave orders to kings and rulers as though he were lord of the world. To good bishops and priests, to religious lay people, he was kind and gentle and modest. To evildoers he was terrible and stern. It is rightly said that in him God raised up a second Elias."

St. Nicholas the Great (pope from 853 to 867) was the greatest pontiff between Gregory the Great and Hildebrand. He is the last of the popes accorded the title "the Great." Details of his early life are uncertain. He rose to the papacy at a critical moment in the affairs of the West.

The strong hand of Charlemagne no longer controlled Frankish affairs. His empire was breaking up and the independence of the papacy could be asserted again.

"We beg you, do not make any claim to the privileges of God's Church, for that Church does nothing to the prejudice of your dominion . . . Do not usurp the things that are her own. Do not seek to take from her the things that have been entrusted to her alone." (Letter to the Emperor Michael)

Nicholas had to intervene twice against kings on behalf of the sanctity and freedom of marriage. He



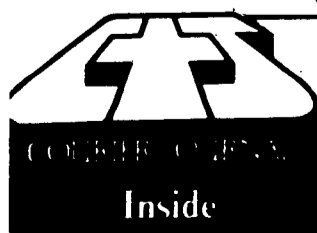
Pope St. Nicholas the Great

was a strong disciplinarian of recalcitrant clergy, even bishops.

"The Holy Roman Church is head of all the Churches. She has earned this right through Blessed Peter, the Chief of the Apostles, who earned his right of primacy over the Church from the mouth of the Lord."

Nicholas' reign coincided with the Photian schism, one of the long series of painful breaches between Rome and Constantinople. Both Nicholas and Photius were brilliant and holy men. After a complex dispute involving corrupt episcopal elections, civil politics, and mission policies, Photius was excommunicated. A council was summoned at Constantinople which confirmed the authority of the Bishop of Rome over the whole Church. The peace lasted long enough for Nicholas to die and Photius to return to power.

When he died in 867, Nicholas was remembered as "patient and temperate, humble and chaste, beautiful in face and graceful body. His speech was both learned and modest, illustrious though he was by great deeds. He was devoted to penance and the Holy Mysteries, the friend of widows and orphans, and the champion of all the people." (Liber Pontificalis)



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Fr. Albe Shamou

Word for S

The Old Wise M

Sunday's Lk. 1:26-38, 5, 8-12, 14, 16:25-27.

The Church year out, celebrating seasons and events and Easter. Having ears, is one thing; another to understand! Th to battolog knows that heart of unde

That is useless to Christmas st One such sto Other Wise may one da lesson of Ch to others for Christ.

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