



37. CATHOLICISM AND ORTHODOXY: THE SPLIT OF THE CHURCH

The first important sees of Christianity were those of Jerusalem, Rome, Alexandria of Egypt and Antioch of Syria. These wealthy cities of the Roman Empire had become the residence of the most influential bishops. St. James, brother of Jesus the Christ and chief of the church¹, was bishop in Jerusalem.

This was the main and most prestigious seat as it was the city destined to be the capital of the Messiah and the place where his martyrdom was set to take place.



1. Inverted Crucifixion of Saint Peter

St. Paul was the first Christian authority to settle in Rome, the caesarean capital of the empire. It was he who probably designated Linus as his successor. Alexandria was the episcopal see of St. Mark the Evangelist that, at the time of Jesus, was just a young boy, but whose reputation was soon to be consecrated as he became the redactor of the earliest of the four canonical gospels. Antioch, instead, was the episcopal see of St. Peter the apostle. However, his certain association with the Antiochian see seems to contradict the generally widespread belief that St. Peter had become bishop of Rome and the first pope.

In fact, there isn't any document proving that St. Peter had ever travelled to Rome, that there he joined Saint Paul to evangelize the Romans and that he was then crucified on the same day that St. Paul was beheaded. The Romanity of Saint Peter appears for the first time through the rumours that began to spread supporting the primacy of the bishop of Rome over the others.

Thanks to the shifting of the capital of the Empire from Rome to Constantinople², the bishopric of the latter, founded by Saint Andrew, rose to new importance. In 431 AD the council of Ephesus elevated these five cities to patriarchal status, assuming a leading role in guiding Christianity. The five patriarchates were remembered with the acronym CARJA: Constantinople, Alexandria, Rome, Jerusalem and Antioch.

From the 5th to the 10th century, Christianity was therefore governed by the pentarchy of the patriarchs. As repeatedly stated in the previous chapter, the patriarch of Rome, the pope³, had often claimed a primacy of representation that was at times recognized in virtue of its coexistence with the imperial seat.

It was therefore natural that, with the translation of the Imperial capital to Constantinople, the patriarch of the 'new Rome' boasted the rights that were then due to him.

¹ From the Greek *ecclesia* (ἐκκλησία); at the beginning of Christianity the term meant "meeting, assembly". Later this took on the sense of administrative and hierarchical organization of external religion.

² The original name of the city was Byzantium. Was then called Constantinople or *Nova Roma* when, in 330 AD, the Emperor Constantine the Great transferred there the Imperial capital by operating the "Etruscan rite".

³ The title of "pope" is not exclusive to the bishop of Rome. Since 231 AD also the patriarch of Alexandria legitimately carries this title, despite the fact that since 451 AD a monophysite (Coptic) bishop sits on that chair.



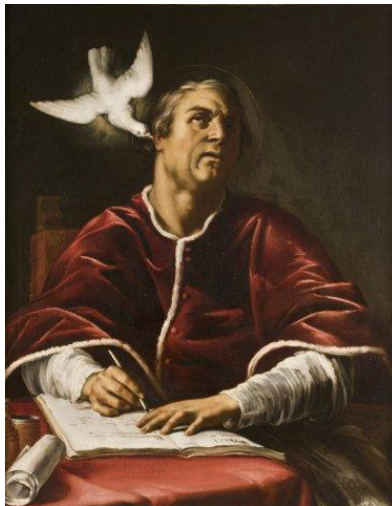


Afterwards, Mauritius (539-602), the Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, in admiration of the ascetic holiness of Saint John Nestsites the Faster, bestowed him with the title of 'Ecumenical Patriarch'. In Greek this title simply meant "patriarch of the whole empire", but it was translated in Latin as *patriarcha universalis*.

Saint Gregorius I the Great was at that time Pope and Patriarch of Rome, and, misinterpreting the Greek sense of the title, protested as follows:

Consider, please, that for this imprudent presumption of yours, the peace of the whole Church is disturbed and that this [title] is in contradiction with the grace that has been granted equally to us all. In this grace without doubt you have the power to grow if you have the will. You will undoubtedly become greater if you refrain from bearing such superb and senseless title; you will grow to the extent that you abstain from wanting to prevail over your brothers. Certainly Peter, who was the first apostle and member of the holy and universal church, and Paul, and Andrew, and John, what were they, if not the chiefs of distinct communities? All of them were, under the same Chief, limbs that made up the Body of the Lord, since they were members of the Church. And none of them ever claimed to be called universal [...] To the bishops of this apostolic see, where I'm a servants by divine will, the Council of Chalcedon had offered the honour of being called "universal", but none of us accepted to be addressed with such title because if any of the pontiffs had arrogated the honour of uniqueness for himself, he would have thus denied that to all his peers¹.

This demonstrate that, in spite of the claims and usurpations of some ancient popes, personalities of great spiritual depth such as the pope-monk Gregorius the Great recognized that the primacy of the bishop of Rome was entirely honorary and did not imply any primacy in religious matters.



2. Saint Gregorius the Great

However, over the centuries the Latin bishops ended up considering the only patriarch of the West, the bishop of Rome, as a *primus inter pares* (first among equals) and to refer only to him and not to the other patriarchs.

Moreover, the use of two different liturgical and spoken languages, Latin and Greek, contributed to the separation between the Roman Empire of the East and that of the West.

During those five centuries, the exoteric theologians proposed different interpretations on the position of the Holy Spirit (corresponding to the sskrt. *Ānanda*) in regard to the Trinity. Two doctrines prevailed. According to the first one, which referred to the formulation of the Creed as established by the Council of Nicaea, the Holy Spirit would proceed directly from the Father-Being (corresponding to the sskrt. *Sat*) in order to intervene inside the creation and bring the divine grace (corresponding to the sskrt. *anugraha*).

¹ Saint Gregorius the Great, *Registrum Gregorii*, V.18.



The second doctrine stipulated that the Holy Spirit proceeds not only from the Father but also from the Son (doctrine of the *filioque*) as Divine Intellect (corresponding to the sskrt. *Cit*).

The Fathers of the Church¹ thought that both perspectives were acceptable. It was the same problem considered from two different angles. However, it was not acceptable to opt for one in opposition to the other².

Charlemagne imposed the addition of the *filioque* to the Nicene Creed to emphasize the importance of the Son's function as the representative of the interventions of the Holy Spirit inside the Creation³.

This was coherent with the theological position of eminent Latin Fathers such as Saint Hilarius, Saint Ambrose, Saint Jerome and Saint Augustine, without being in opposition to the Greek Fathers. Over the centuries other differences of theological opinion joined in.



3. Orthodox clergy and anchorite monk

One of these was the belief of the conception of the Virgin Mary free from original sin. This act of faith was more widespread among Catholics⁴ than Orthodox. These latter claimed that the absence of original sin (that is the lack of a past *karma*, to use the terms of the *Sanātana Dharma*), would not have permitted Mary to obtain a human birth.

Ultimately, the real reason for the separation of the two Churches was the more political than religious claim of the primacy of the pope of Rome over all other bishops and sovereigns of Christendom⁵.

This claim is based on the passage of the Gospel of Saint Matthew that affirms: "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church"⁶. For the Latin Church this affirmation of Jesus would identify Peter with the foundation stone of the Church. The Orthodox interpret this sentence differently, since in

¹ The Fathers of the Church are the theologians who wrote the fundamental texts of Christian doctrine. The Patristic period generally ends in the 5th century, although some rare and exceptional late Greek and Latin thinkers were admitted to the ranks of the Fathers. The last Greek Father was Saint John Damascene (675-749). The last of the Latin Fathers was Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153).

² These two points of view are admirably illustrated by Vladimir Lossky, *La Teologia Mistica della Chiesa d'Oriente*, Bologna, EDB, 1985, pp. 51-52.

³ The Council of Lyon in 1274 declared dogmatic the *filioque* doctrine, thus excluding the Nicene interpretation. This led the Greek patriarchs to consider heretical the decision of the Latin church, increasing in this way the distance between the two churches.

⁴ It must be said, however, that even some great Catholic theologians were averse to the Immaculate Conception, among whom are Saint Anselm, Saint Bernard, Albertus Magnus, Saint Thomas and Saint Bonaventure. The declaration of the dogma was in fact very late and dates back to 1854.

⁵ The Orthodox church always remained Imperial even after the fall of the Roman Empire. Even today, the Greek Church invokes the spiritual protection of the Basileis of the past. Then, when Russia converted to Orthodox Christianity, Moscow was called "the Third Rome" and the Emperor of all the Russias assumed the title of Caesar (Czar). With the recent collapse of the Communism, Russia has now returned to an Imperial form of religious worship.

⁶ *Gospel of Saint Matthew*, XVI.18.



numerous passages of the New Testament it is Christ who is defined as the foundation stone or cornerstone. Therefore, the Church would be founded not on an apostle but on Christ himself¹.



4. Foundation cornerstone

Under the impulse of Gregory VII, the Christian Church moved away progressively from the Patristic theology and elaborated a new theology inspired by the Aristotelian logic, which took the name of Scholastic.

The Orthodox Church, however, continued to take inspiration from the Patristics. Moreover, it has always attributed the highest religious importance to monasticism.



5. Saint Gregorius Palamas

Thus, the monastic initiation continued to flourish there and, as a result of to this, the Hesychasm could reach the culmination of the apophatic doctrine with Saint Gregorius Palamas (1296-1359), considered a new Origen.

Petrus Simonet de Maisonneuve

¹ Even after the 1059 proclamation of the papal primacy over all the other earthly powers, the archbishop of Milan, of Ambrosian rite. and the archbishop of Ravenna, of Greek rite, both Catholic, continued for at least three centuries to reject any subordination to Rome.