



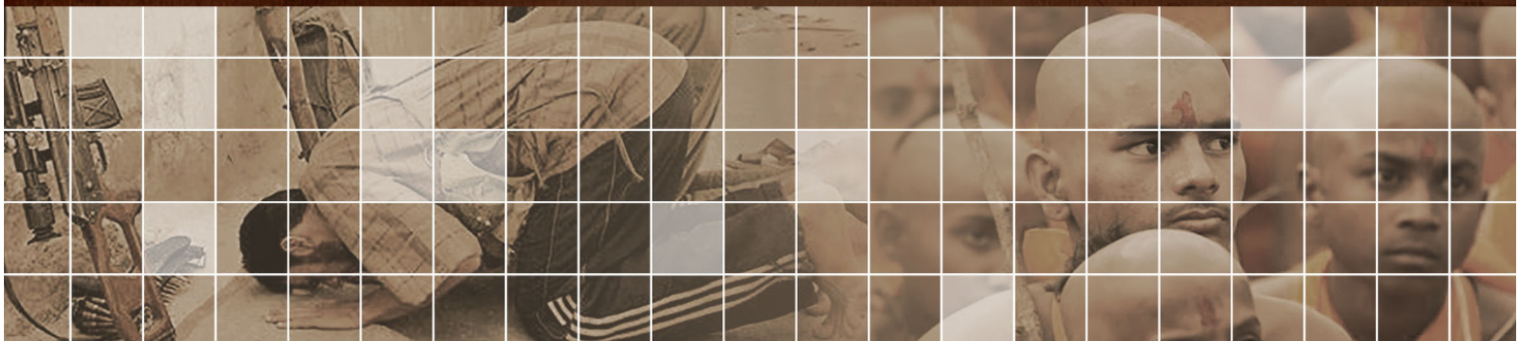
WORLD RELIGIONS

DENOMINATIONS



COMMUNITY
BIBLE CHURCH

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?



“How’d We Get Here?” (Part 2)

The Emperor Constantine did two things that were of great import to the Church: 1) he “converted” the Empire to Christianity, and 2) he moved the capital of the Empire from Rome to Constantinople in 330 (present day Istanbul, Turkey). Constantine’s conversion (312) had a number of effects on the Church, some good, but most detrimental. One positive effect was the cessation of persecution of Christians. The Emperor also directed the financing of churches and other favorable projects for the Church. On the other hand, this newfound acceptability meant that, unlike the first three centuries, some would become “Christian” merely because of the “bandwagon effect.” It also meant wedding the Church and State, a union to have consequences for centuries to come.

The second of Constantine’s contributions, the move of the capital from Rome to Constantinople, created a vacuum of temporal power in the West. The Bishop of Rome was in a perfect position to fill this void. The people began to look to the Bishop for both spiritual and temporal leadership. For example, the city of Rome was threatened by barbarians many times in the fourth and fifth centuries. It was the Bishop of Rome who on several occasions was able to cut a deal with the invaders. For this, the people gave their allegiance to the Bishop.

These developments conspired to create an environment ready-made for a skilled leader. In 590, Gregory became Bishop of Rome. His able administrative leadership and political savvy further advanced the authority and esteem of the Roman Bishop. On one occasion Gregory was able to fund an army that turned back an invading force. Further, Gregory asserted his leadership over the other bishops and the Patriarch of Constantinople.

For several centuries after the fall of Rome (476), political survival was a main concern for the Pope. With the rival patriarchs vying for supremacy (or, at least, equality) and invading hordes of barbarians knocking at the city gates, the popes formed political alliances with rulers who could protect them. In addition, the popes were able to advance their own power while securing badly needed military assistance. The eventual result of this political maneuvering was the development of the Holy Roman Empire. Historian Earle Cairns notes:

*The Lombards...knocked on the gates of Rome more than once during this period. These difficulties forced the Pope to look around for a powerful ally who would support his claims to spiritual power and to temporal possessions in Italy. The Frankish rulers seemed to be the most promising allies, and with them the popes made an alliance that was to influence both ecclesiastical and political affairs during the Middle Ages.*⁸⁴

However, William Webster, author of *The Church of Rome at the Bar of History*, comments:

The papacy could never have emerged without a fundamental restructuring of the Constitution of the Church and of men’s perceptions of the history of that Constitution. As long as the true facts of Church history were well known, it would serve as a buffer against any unlawful ambitions. However, in the 9th century, a literary forgery occurred which completely revolutionized the ancient government of the Church in the West. It provided a legal foundation for the ascendancy of the papacy in Western Christendom. This forgery is known as the Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals, written around 845. The Decretals are a complete fabrication of Church history. They set forth precedents for the exercise of sovereign authority of the popes over the universal Church prior to

⁸⁴ Cairns, p. 181.

the fourth century and make it appear that the popes had always exercised sovereign dominion and had ultimate authority even over Church Councils.⁸⁵

I. The Zenith of Papal Power

A. The Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals and other spurious documents⁸⁶

Roman Catholic historian Johann von Dollinger confirms that these documents are false and provides a summary of their history and impact:

In the middle of the ninth century—about 845—there arose the huge fabrication of the Isidorian decretals...About a hundred pretended decrees of the earliest Popes, together with certain spurious writings of other Church dignitaries and acts of Synods, were then fabricated in the west of Gaul, and eagerly seized upon Pope Nicholas I at Rome, to be used as genuine documents in support of the new claims put forward by himself and his successors. That the pseudo-Isidorian principles eventually revolutionized the whole constitution of the Church, and introduced a new system in place of the old—on that point there can be no controversy among candid historians.

The most potent instrument of the new Papal system was Gratian's Decretum, which issued about the middle of the twelfth century from the first school of Law in Europe, the juristic teacher of the whole of Western Christendom, Bologna. In this work the Isidorian forgeries were combined with those of the other Gregorian (Gregory VII) writers...and with Gratia's own additions. His work displaced all the older collections of canon law, and became the manual and repertory, not for canonists only, but for the scholastic theologians, who, for the most part, derived all their knowledge of Fathers and Councils from it. No book has ever come near it in its influence in the Church, although there is scarcely another so chokeful of gross errors, both intentional and unintentional.⁸⁷

The Protestant historian, George Salmon, explains the importance and influence of *Pseudo-Isidore*:

In the ninth century another collection of papal letters...was published under the name of Isidore, by whom, no doubt, a celebrated Spanish bishop of much learning was intended. In these are to be found precedents for all manner of instances of the exercise of sovereign dominion by the pope over other Churches. You must take notice of this, that it was by furnishing precedents that these letters helped the growth of papal power. Thenceforth the popes could hardly claim any privilege but they would find in these letters supposed proofs that the privilege in question was no more than had been always claimed by their predecessors, and always exercised without any objection...On these spurious decretals is built the whole fabric of Canon Law. The great schoolman, Thomas Aquinas, was taken in by them, and he was induced by them to set the example of making a chapter on the prerogatives of the pope an essential part of the treatises on the Church...Yet completely successful as was this forgery, I suppose there never was a more clumsy one. These decretal epistles had undisputed authority for some seven hundred

⁸⁵ From *Forgeries and the Papacy* at <http://www.christiantruth.com/articles/forgeries.html> (accessed 2 Oct 2014).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Johann Joseph Ignaz von Döllinger, *The Pope and the Council* (Boston: Roberts, 1870), pp. 76–77, 79, 115–116.

years, that is to say, down to the time of the Reformation.

*If we want to know what share these letters had in the building of the Roman fabric we have only to look at the Canon Law. The 'Decretum' of Gratia quotes three hundred and twenty-four times the epistles of the popes of the first four centuries; and of these three hundred and twenty-four quotations, three hundred and thirteen are from the letters which are now universally known to be spurious.*⁸⁸

The authority claims of Roman Catholicism ultimately devolve upon the institution of the papacy. The papacy is the center and source from which all authority flows for Roman Catholicism. Rome has long claimed that this institution was established by Christ and has been in force in the Church from the very beginning. But the historical record gives a very different picture. This institution was promoted primarily through the falsification of historical fact through the extensive use of forgeries...Forgery is its foundation.⁸⁹ As an institution it was a much later development in Church history, beginning with the Gregorian reforms of pope Gregory VII in the 11th century and was restricted completely to the West. The Eastern Church never accepted the false claims of the Roman Church and refused to submit to its insistence that the Bishop of Rome was supreme ruler of the Church. This they knew was not true to the historical record and was a perversion of the true teaching of Scripture, the papal exegesis of which was not taught by the Church fathers.

B. Excommunication and the interdict

A couple historical examples will suffice to show the power of the popes during the Middle Ages.

1. Henry IV versus Pope Gregory VII

Henry was the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and came into conflict with Gregory over who had the authority to elevate and individual to a church office. Henry called a council in January 1076 at Worms. The council rejected papal authority. Gregory met this bitter denunciation and rejection of his authority by excommunicating Henry and releasing all his subjects from allegiance to him. This was as bold a step as any pope had ever taken with the temporal power.

In the fall of 1076, Henry was urged by his people to seek release from Gregory's excommunication or else they would depose him! Henry capitulated and, with his wife and his baby son, crossed the Alps in the winter of 1077 to meet Gregory at Canossa. It was a difficult journey; and when Henry finally reached Canossa, Gregory let him stand barefoot in the snow outside the gates of the palace for three successive days before he would admit him to his presence. He then released him from his sentence of excommunication.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ George Salmon, *The Infallibility of the Church* (London: John Murray, 1914), pp. 449, 451, 453.

⁸⁹ See Appendix B for further documentation of this issue.

⁹⁰ Cairns, p. 213.

2. Pope Innocent III versus Philip of France

Philip forced the bishops of France to annul his marriage to his first wife and took another. Innocent ordered Philip to put away the new wife and to restore his first as his lawful wife. When Philip refused, Innocent placed France under an interdict in 1200. The interdict, which affected everyone in the nation, closed all churches, except for the baptism of infants and the granting of extreme unction (last rites) to the dying; forbade the celebration of the mass, except for those who were sick or dying; and banned burial in the consecrated ground. The priest was not allowed to preach except in the open air. The uproar that the interdict created all over France forced Philip to submit to the pope, and he sent his new wife away and brought back his first. Thus, Innocent, by the use of spiritual weapons had forced the ruler of one of the great new nation-states to obey the moral law.⁹¹

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 215.

Divisions in the East and West

Historian Earle Cairns ably summarizes the growing tensions between the Eastern and Western Church:⁹²

When Constantine moved his capital to Constantinople in 330, he paved the way for political and, finally, ecclesiastical separation of the church into the East and the West. The church in the East was under the jurisdiction of the emperor, but the pope in Rome was too far away to be brought under his control. In the absence of effective political control in the West, the pope became a temporal as well as spiritual leader in times of crisis. Emperors were almost popes in the East, and in the West popes were almost emperors. This gave the two churches an entirely different outlook concerning temporal power.

The intellectual outlook of the West also differed from that of the East. The Latin West was more inclined to consider practical matters of polity and had little trouble formulating orthodox dogma. The Greek mind of the East was more interested in solving theological problems along philosophical lines. Most of the theological controversies between 325 and 451 arose in the East, but in most cases the same problems caused little difficulty in the West.

Another difference between the two churches concerned celibacy. Marriage of all parish clergy below the rank of bishop was permitted in the East, but in the West the clergy were not allowed to marry. Disputes even arose on some occasions over the wearing of beards. The priest in the West might shave his face, but the clergymen in the East had to wear a beard. Also, the West stressed the use of Latin while the Eastern churches used Greek. This occasionally led to misunderstanding. Though these and similar matters may seem trivial now, they were of great importance at that time to both sections of the church.

The two churches clashed over doctrinal matters. In 867 Photius, the patriarch in the East, charged Nicholas I and the church in the West with heresy because the West had the filioque clause in its form in the Nicene Creed (“the Son proceeds from the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son”). The West accepted the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Son, but this was rejected by the East.

Then a series of controversies embittered relations between the East and West. With each dispute the hostility increased.

The iconoclastic controversy in the Eastern church in the eighth and the ninth centuries caused many hard feelings. In 726, Leo III, as emperor of the East, forbade any kneeling before pictures or images and in 730 he ordered all except the cross removed from the churches and destroyed to [in part]...refute Muslim charges of idolatry. This attempt at lay revival in the Eastern church ran into the vested opposition of the parish and monastic clergy. In the West the pope and even the emperor Charlemagne took a stand in favor of the use of visible symbols of divine reality. This interference by the West in the affairs of the church in the East increased the antagonism between the two areas. The church in the West continued to use pictures and statues in worship; the church in the East, however, finally eliminated statues but kept icons, usually pictures of Christ which were to be accorded reverence but not worship, which belong to God alone.

⁹² Cairns, pp. 203–206.

The people of the East particularly resented the attempt by Pope Nicholas I in the middle of the ninth century to interfere with the appointment of the patriarch of the church in the East... Though Nicholas was not successful, his interference, in what many in the East felt was a matter for the East alone, intensified the bad feeling between the two churches.

I. The Eastern (Greek) Orthodox Church

In 1054, the final controversy revolved around what was apparently a minor matter. Michael Cerularius, patriarch of Constantinople from 1043 to 1059, condemned the church in the West for the use of unleavened bread in the Eucharist. Such use had been a growing practice in the West since the ninth century. Pope Leo IX sent Cardinal Humbert and two other legates to the East to end the dispute. The differences of opinion widened as the discussions went on. On July 16, 1054, the Roman legates finally put a decree of excommunication of the patriarch and his followers on the high altar of the cathedral church of Saint Sophia. The patriarch was not to be outdone, and thereupon...he anathematized the pope of Rome and his followers. The first great schism in Christianity broke the unity of the church. From this time on the Roman Catholic church and the Greek Orthodox church went their separate ways. This mutual excommunication was not removed until December 7, 1965, by Paul VI and Athenagoras.⁹³

Teachings of the Greek Orthodox Church:

A. Authority

As indicated in our study of Roman Catholicism, the foundational issue for any church is that of authority. We saw that Roman Catholicism grants equal authority to Tradition and Scripture. So, too, does the Greek Orthodox Church:

Generally speaking, the Orthodox...affirm that the Orthodox churches have kept the Deposit of Faith undistorted, just as the apostolic church received it...The Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent (1546–1563) declared that “both saving truth and moral discipline” are “contained in the written books and the unwritten traditions, and it belongs to holy mother church...to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Holy Scriptures.”

Similarly, the Orthodox claim that the content of revelation has been transmitted in the Scriptures and the Holy tradition. The 1962 Almanac of the Greek Archdiocese of North and South America states, “eternal truths are expressed in the Holy Scripture and the Sacred Tradition, both of which are equal and are represented pure and unadulterated by the true Church established by Christ to continue His mission: man’s salvation.”

B. Salvation – by works

The means whereby human beings [are saved] are the sacraments and human effort. The Orthodox stress on the sacraments as the means of [salvation] lead to the logical conclusion that [such] is impossible outside the church. Coniaris writes, “From the Church, Christ reaches out to us with the Sacraments to bring to us His grace and love. Every sacrament puts us in touch with Christ and applies to us the power of the Cross

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 205–206.

*and the Resurrection...Thus salvation...is possible only in and through the church, because "the Church and the Sacraments are the way to God, for the Church is in absolute reality the Body of Christ."*⁹⁴

II. Denominations from the Protestant Reformation

A. The Reformation in Germany (1521–1580) – Lutheran

It was not Martin Luther's intention to begin a new church but rather to reform the existing church. However, after his refusal to recant his writings in Worms in 1521, he was excommunicated by the Roman Catholic Church. As a result, Luther, faced the need to develop doctrine and organization for the church in Germany.

1. Church Government
2. Worship

B. The Reformation in Switzerland (1521–1564) – Reformed/Presbyterian

1. Church Government
2. Worship
 - a. Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531)
 - b. John Calvin (1509–1564)

C. The Reformation in England (1532–1620) – Anglicanism

1. Church Government
2. Worship

D. The "Radical Reformation" (1525–1580) – Anabaptist

⁹⁴ *Christian Research Journal*, Eastern Orthodoxy (January–March 1998).