

On the Papacy

Today we celebrate St. Leo the Great (†461), the 45th pope of Rome who was instrumental in calling the Fourth Ecumenical Council (451) where his famous *Tome* was accepted as *the* Orthodox teaching concerning the two natures of Christ. The 630 bishops present at the council proclaimed, after the reading of the *Tome of St. Leo*: “Peter has spoken thus through Leo! . . . This is the true faith!” I like to recall St. Leo when I hear “The Orthodox do not have a pope.” Actually, we have 152 of them, right up until Pope Leo IX, who *reposed before* the mutual excommunication that took place between Rome and Constantinople, when Cardinal Humbert placed what was an invalid (because the Pope had reposed 3 months before) papal bull of excommunication upon the Altar of Hagia Sophia and the Patriarch of Constantinople responded by excommunicating the Cardinal and the other papal representatives. Many of these bishops of Rome are recognized as saints by the Orthodox Church, among them Sts. Urban, Anterus, Sixtus, Caius, Sylvester, Celestine, Gregory, Martin, Agatho, and a number of others (20 in all).

With the worldwide attention on the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI and the calling of the Curia to select a new pope, let us pause and consider the relationship between the Orthodox Church and Catholicism. First, it is important to note that the theological dispute between Cardinal Humbert and the Patriarch of Constantinople grew to be more than a dispute between Rome and Constantinople. Over time, the Patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, the most ancient Christian sees, also excommunicated the Roman church. This was not a dispute between two brothers, but an instance of an errant brother separating himself from four other siblings. What was it about?

1. The appropriate understanding of the bishop of Rome. The Orthodox maintained that the bishop of the city of the martyrdom of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul—the pope—should be given a place of honor as “first among equals” among the other bishops. The Roman position maintained that the pope “alone can with right be called universal,” “alone can depose or reinstate bishops,” and that “of the pope alone all princes shall kiss the feet” (from the *Dictatus Papae* of Pope Gregory VII). To the Orthodox, it all seemed more than a little much, far from historic (The Acts of the Apostles itself records St. James, first Bishop of Jerusalem, heading the Apostolic Council, *not* the bishop of Rome), excessive, and a blatant political effort to secure worldly power.

2. The Roman Church insisted on keeping the *filioque* (“and the Son”) in the Creed, which was a late introduction. First used in the fifth or sixth century, it was not even included in the Creed said in Rome until the eleventh century.

3. Little remarked today was an important issue at the time of the Schism: Whether the Communion Bread should be leavened or not. The Orthodox always used leavened Bread and communed from a chalice to which warm water was added, both of which signified life. The Roman Catholic practice of using unleavened wafers only became popular in the eleventh century. There is even a seventh-century Council of Toledo (A Western council) decree against using wafers for Communion. Catholics do not add warm water to the chalice.

There have been, of course, a number of other serious distinctions that have developed in the subsequent millennia: the inflation of the cult of the Mother of God (including theological pronouncements like the Immaculate Conception), encouragement to use the imagination in prayer, the reduction of theology to a kind of legalistic collection of axioms, the introduction of utterly novel pieties (like venerating body parts: the Sacred Heart, for example), the watering down and simplification of ancient liturgical traditions, mandatory celibacy for priests, the evisceration of monasticism, and, some would say, the movement in emphasis from the Mystery to the mental.

Finally, there are the events that have been hard to take. Since the Schism (1054), the following have occurred in the West: the selling of indulgences (1095-1567); the calling of the Crusades (1096-1291); the Fourth Crusade (1204), in which Constantinople—a Christian city—was captured and thousands were killed; the Inquisition (1184-1860), the conquistador-style “missionizing” of the Americas (1450-1640), and the declaration of Papal Infallibility in 1870, which St. Justin Popović (†1979) likened to the Fall of Adam and that of Judas Iscariot! Importantly, though, unlike these falls, there is still time for repentance. Let us pray to St. Leo and all pope saints for “the union of all,” echoing the Lord’s prayer in Gethsemane that “they all may be one.”

Fr. Daniel
3 March 2013