

Schism: Power and the search for Identity.

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Introduction

Schism and heresy are two phenomena within ecclesiastical experience that often accompany one another, but not always. A succinct definition of both schism and heresy is dissent and doctrinal error respectively.¹ As in most disagreements there are multiple perspectives to dissenting and several questions can, and should be, asked when trying to understand the justification for dissent. Why was formal dissent considered necessary? What were the circumstances that helped facilitate the right time for dissent? What was the shift in power and authority as a result of the dissent, and what identity was sought by the dissent? This paper will address schism within Christianity while attempting to answer these questions mentioned above; however, the purpose of this paper is not to give an exhaustive analysis of the historical factors involved in the various schisms discussed, but rather to focus on the power dynamic within schism and to analyze the apparent need for schism in an attempt by one group seeking to preserve an identity.

The areas of analysis for this paper are three schisms involving the Roman Catholic Church; the Great Schism of 1054 CE; the schism of the Anglican Church; and, the modern schism involving Catholic traditionalists. Next I will explore the Uniate movement of the Carpatho-Russian Greek Catholics; their return to Catholicism and then back to Orthodoxy. Finally, I will briefly explore the rampant nature of schism amongst various independent sacramental Christian jurisdictions.

¹ Runciman, Steven. *The Eastern Schism: A Study of the Papacy and The Eastern Churches During the XIth and XII Centuries*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956. Page 1.

The Great Schism of 1054 CE

The Great Schism of 1054 was the culmination of conflict between the Western and Eastern Church; namely, the Papacy in Rome and the Patriarch of Constantinople. Aidan Nichols explains the difference between East and West with,

...the East abhors heresy far more than it does schism. The Western church is more liable to tolerate heretical opinions on the ground of the need to preserve the unity of the body, at least as long as such opinion are not too publically canvassed. In the East, ruptures of communion are seen as a sickness of the body of Christ, not a life and death affair.²

This difference between the Eastern and Western churches would seem to indicate that the differences between the two churches could have easily been overlooked in the name of Christian unity; however, it seems that the division is not a question exclusively of Christian unity, but rather a maneuver to solidify power by creating a polarization between the two distinct communities – but to what end? The difference between East and West had become more pronounced through the centuries leading up 1054 CE, as the papacy was gaining in authority in Western Europe while the Byzantine emperor was attempting to maintain an empire. Both East and West had developed a different culture which included liturgical and language differences and different theological positions; however, the schism certainly involves pride, and primacy – examples of which include, but are not limited to, a communication to the Patriarch of Constantinople where he is simply referred to as “Bishop Michael of Constantinople,” and a subsequent letter to the Pope addressed as “brother” instead of the typical “Father.”³

² Nichols, Aidan. *Rome and the Eastern Churches*. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992. Page 129.

³ Runciman. Page 42 – 43.

The culmination of the animosity between East and West occurred on July 16, 1054 when papal legates of Pope Leo presented a bull of excommunication addressed to the Patriarch of Constantinople and those perceived as loyal to him. Michael Cerularius, Patriarch of Constantinople, did not receive the legates well, and even seemed to welcome the animosity between himself and the Papacy; in fact, his position within Orthodoxy was strengthened as Runciman notes, “It was probably the influence of the Western attacks on Cerularius that turned him thus into an Orthodox national hero.”⁴ Cerularius, cut off from the Western church, attempted to consolidate power by manipulating the Byzantine emperor, Constantine, and his successors Theodora, Michael VI, and finally Isaac Comnenus. Cerularius was even so bold as to wear the purple attire common to an emperor, which wasn’t received well by the populace, and he was deposed as patriarch by the military and died shortly afterwards in 1058.⁵

Ecclesiologically, what developed in the aftermath of 1054 in the West was a growing sense that “the Pope’s authority over all the Churches of Christendom should be unquestioned and complete.”⁶ Whereas, in the Eastern churches the view was that the Papacy was simply a senior patriarchy worthy of dignity, but not absolute allegiance. With the Church of Rome and the Church of Constantinople in a veritable feud it was possible for each to develop their own ecclesiology without the influence of the other shadowing over them; certainly, this was seen as a benefit by those individuals who preferred a more homogenous expression of church over the illusion of unity. The authority of the Pope increased, and his hard stance on the “unruly” Byzantines was a testament to a non-compromising disposition of the evolving papacy. The opposition party to papal authority had been cut off from dialogue; moreover, the Byzantine side of Christianity was able to develop into nationalistic churches each valuing its own autonomy

⁴ Ibid. Page 51.

⁵ Ibid. Page 53 – 54.

⁶ Ibid. Page 58.

without interference from Rome; while still enjoying fellowship and communion with the rest of Orthodoxy (with the exception of course of the “Oriental Orthodox”⁷). Christian unity aside, the schism of 1054 seemed a reasonable divorce.

The Anglican Schism

The schism of the English Church culminating in 1534 with the English parliament declaring the King as the supreme head of the Church of England is an obvious example of power-politics,

Although concern for religious reform and national interests underlay the motivations for an independent English church, it was Henry’s well-known desire to shed Catherine of Aragon in order to marry Ann Boleyn that precipitated the break with Rome.⁸

The situation leading up to the English schism from the Roman Church is complex, and changing European religious sentiment was creeping into England like it had on the mainland. The effective combination of ecclesiastical and political authority in England is evident in the person of Thomas Wolsey, who served as Lord Chancellor, Archbishop of York, and papal legate.⁹ Wolsey had both political and ecclesiastical authority and utilized it to promote the agenda of Henry VIII, who was motivated by his infatuation with Ann Boleyn.

Over one hundred years after the Anglican schism John Bramhall, Archbishop of Armagh, argued that the separation of the English Church from the papacy wasn’t a schism but rather a natural course of action since authority, by nature, rests within the sovereign,

⁷ The “Oriental Orthodox” including, but not limited to, the Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox and the Syrian Orthodox.

⁸ Haugaard, William P. "From the Reformation to the Eighteenth Century." In *The Study of Anglicanism*, Stephen Sykes John Booty, and Jonathan Knight, 3-30. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998. Page 6.

⁹ Ibid. Page 4.

If the King be ‘Head of the body politic consisting of the spirituality and temporality;’ then in England the King is the political Head of the clergy as well as of the laity. So he ought to be, and not he only, but all the sovereign princes throughout the world, by the very law of nature.¹⁰

The counter argument to the thesis of Bramhall would be that Kings are not, by default, spiritual heads. This line of thinking does not further the cause of separation between the Anglican Church and the Roman Church, because the supremacy of the sovereign within Anglican ecclesiology is essential to their justification of autonomy and separation/dissent with the Church of Rome. Whereas, the Great Schism between the Eastern and Western church in 1054 was about consolidating ideological power and preserving identity; the Anglican schism was primarily motivated by lust, followed by localizing spiritual authority and then an attempt was made to establish a more unique English Christian identity. Once the schism was in full force it did not take long for the Anglican Church to suppress monastic communities, allow for married clergy, and vernacular liturgies, to name just a few of the post-schism reforms.¹¹

The changing character of the English Church after the schism initiated by Henry VIII illustrates the nature of power, in that “Power is always-everywhere. Power is relational: it is re-created by a certain positionality of social agents, not by clear boundaries between the powerful and the powerless.”¹² The Anglican schism didn’t end when Henry died, and the schism itself was justified and spun throughout the history of the Church with archbishop John Bramhall as an example of an Anglican Church leader attempting to justify the position of the Church in relation to the rest of Christendom; and every Anglican since Henry has a stake in perpetuating the schism as a means of perpetuating the ecclesiology of Henry VIII and his

¹⁰ Bramhall, John. *The Works of the Most Reverend Father in God, John Bramhall, D.D.* 1842. Page 115.

¹¹ Haugaard. Page 7.

¹² Sidorov, Dmitrii. *Orthodoxy and Difference*. San Jose, Cal.: Pickwick Publications, 2001. Page 31.

successors. In the contemporary Anglican Church the position of the ruling royal elite is not nearly as formidable within the Church as it was during the time of Henry VIII, but the two cannot fully be divorced without bringing a sense of irrationality to the justifications for schism promoted in the past.

The Schism of Roman Catholic Traditionalism

A modern schism of Roman Catholic Traditionalists involving the Roman Catholic Church is directly tied to the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council. While the schism of 1054 and the Anglican schism are example of large nationalized schisms the schism of Catholic Traditionalists is instead along ideological lines. There are two primary strands of dissent amongst Catholic Traditionalists. The first involve those priests and laity loyal to the ideology of French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre and his Society of St. Pius X. The second strand of dissent comes from priests and bishops ordained by Vietnamese Archbishop Pierre Martin Ngo-Dhin-Thuc.

According to William D. Dinges the Traditionalist movement is described,

As a social movement phenomenon, Catholic traditionalism consists of a segmented network of associations, organizations, publishing initiatives, home schooling programs, priories, religious orders and foundations, and chapel and Mass location sites. Until his death at age eighty-six in 1991, French archbishop Marcel Lefebvre (and his clerical Society of St. Pius X [SSPX], founded in 1970 in Ecône, Switzerland) was the most media-visible symbol of traditionalist dissent both here and abroad. To date, the SSPX remains the largest and best-known traditionalist initiative.¹³

¹³ Dinges, William D. In *Being Right: Conservative Catholics in America*, Mary Jo Weaver and R. Scott Appleby, 241-269. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995. Page 241 – 242.

The position of Lefebvre and his SSPX was a sectarian response and repudiation of Vatican II. The most drastic change ushered by Vatican II was liturgical in nature with the Tridentine Mass being replaced by the Novus Ordo Missae; moreover, the traditionalist movement attempted to resist the changes and maintain a strong Catholic identity in the midst of a changing Catholic climate that seemed to favor a pro-Protestant disposition. When Lefebvre consecrated four of his priests to the episcopacy he was excommunicated along with his Society; however, this didn't diminish his position within the growing traditionalist movement.¹⁴ While the priests, and bishops, of the SSPX were outside of official communion with the Roman Catholic Church they still maintained some sense of contact and communication with the Vatican, and have been working towards an accord since the excommunication while remaining steadfast in their adherence to Catholic tradition; they deny being schismatics.¹⁵ The clergy of the SSPX still acknowledge the primacy of the Pope, but dissent because they believe the Tridentine Mass and Catholic tradition is timeless and cannot be altered by the Church – even with an ecumenical council such as Vatican II. The SSPX is in stark contrast to the second strand of Catholic traditionalism; the apostolic line of Pierre Martin Ngo-Dinh-Thuc.

Archbishop Thuc was an attendee of Vatican II and was living in Rome after the council because of hostilities in Vietnam. While living in Rome he was approached by traditional minded Catholics intent on preserving their interpretation of Catholic tradition. Thuc ordained and consecrated these men in Spain in 1975 and over the years Thuc consecrated several other men to the priesthood and episcopacy from all over the world in support of the growing traditionalist movement; and these new bishops in turn consecrated bishops of their own.¹⁶

Whereas the SSPX has only four bishops, there are countless bishops holding Thuc lineage with

¹⁴ Ibid. Page 249.

¹⁵ Ibid. Page 253.

¹⁶ Ibid. Page 258.

most of them operating independently of one another. The difference between the SSPX and the Thuc lineage priests and bishops is the theological distinction of sedevacantism,

Sedevacantist traditionalist hold that the See of Peter is vacant because the current pope and his conciliar predecessors have advanced doctrines (“heresies”) and established laws from the Chair of Peter that are “plainly contrary” to the church’s solemn teachings (which he could not do were he a valid pope, since the charisma of the office preserves its occupant from promulgating error).¹⁷

While the SSPX holds the view that their dissent, while being profound, is not schismatic; whereas, the Thuc-line traditionalists make no reservations that they consider the Papacy in a state of apostasy. This position clearly places them in a schismatic status regarding their relation to Rome.

The traditionalist schism is a schism of identity, with traditional minded Catholics unable to cope with the “modernizations” of the Second Vatican Council; preferring instead to adhere to Catholic traditional piety and liturgy. The schism of Catholic traditionalism, in either the SSPX form or the Thuc-line form, is one of identity and not necessarily opportunity, although opportunity cannot be fully ruled out as a motivation even if only partially so. In this, the Catholic traditionalist schismatics have more similarities with the great schism of 1054 than with the Anglican schism of opportunity of Henry VIII. Both the Eastern and Western churches were developing different ecclesiological perspectives, which would have been difficult with both branches of the Church in full communion; likewise, with the traditionalist Catholics. The progressive modernisms of the post-Vatican II Catholic Church are not palatable to the ultra-conservative traditional Catholics; therefore, it is necessary for the traditionalists to dissent in order to have the church environment they so desire. The problem, and even paradox, of the

¹⁷ Ibid. Page 257.

predicament traditional Catholics find themselves in is the Papacy itself. Loyalty to the Pope is important for Roman Catholic identity, and that loyalty needs to be reconciled even by schismatic traditionalists. The Catechism of the Catholic Church mentions that heresy, apostasy, and schism are all sins¹⁸ against Christian unity and this has serious implications for any Catholic desiring to be faithful to Catholicism. The Schism of Sedevacantism is the easy route to overcoming this paradox, but the position of the SSPX is problematic because they attempt to maintain communication with Rome without obedience. The claim of traditionalists like the SSPX is that they remain loyal to Catholic tradition, while ignoring what are considered modernist demands placed upon them by the normative Catholic hierarchy.

The Carpatho-Russian Greek Catholic Schism

Another modern schism, and a tragic misunderstanding, also involved the Roman Catholic Church and involved what became the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church. Since 1054 CE there has been a rift between the Roman Catholic Church and the various Orthodox national Churches throughout Europe and the Middle East; however, at various times in history parts of these Orthodox Churches have sought out full communion with Rome; often, after being persuaded by Catholic hierarchs and government officials. One such example occurred in 1596 in the White Russian town of Brest (now modern day Belarus),

The former Orthodox, now “united with Rome,” were permitted to keep all of their externals of worship, including the liturgical tradition of Constantinople, which they followed, and their discipline which included a married priesthood.

¹⁸ Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal, ed. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Liguori, Mo.: Liguori Publications, 1994. Page 216.

But they had to submit to Roman theology and doctrine and to acknowledge the primacy of jurisdiction of the pope of Rome.¹⁹

These new “Uniate Catholics,” meaning united, in the eighteenth century became known as “Greek Catholics,” according to Barriger, “...a term which showed that they were Catholics who followed the Greek rite of the Church of Constantinople rather than Roman Catholics who followed the rite of the Church of Rome.”²⁰

Another attempt at unification occurred in the town of Uzhorod in 1614 (located in modern day Ukraine) and saw several Orthodox Carpatho-Russians in full communion with Rome as Carpatho-Russian Uniates through what became known as the Union of Uzhorod.²¹ These Uniate jurisdictions were not a problem for the Roman Catholic Church because they ultimately increased the influence of the Vatican into Eastern Europe in lands often controlled by Hungarians or Polish authorities. In the 19th century Catholicism in the United States was growing with the immigration of German, Irish, and Italian Catholics. It was easy for Roman Catholic hierarchs to discount the various Greek Catholic jurisdictions because they existed primarily in Eastern European countries and in small Middle Eastern enclaves; however, the Greek Catholics became problematic when Eastern Europeans started to migrate to the United States and their priests followed suit; often, these priests were married. In 1895 Pope Leo XIII issued an encyclical titled “*Orientalium Dignitas*” where he instructed Greek Catholics to become members of the Roman Catholic (Latin Rite) Churches.²² This encyclical wasn’t received well by Greek Catholics and was used by Orthodox Christians to entice them back to Orthodoxy. Some Greek Catholics advocated for an independent Greek Catholic Church being

¹⁹ Barriger, Lawrence. *Good Victory*. Brookline, Mass.: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1985. Page 9.

²⁰ Ibid. Page 10.

²¹ Ibid. Page 10 – 11.

²² Ibid. Page 30.

neither Roman Catholic nor Orthodox,²³ while Rome increasingly restricted the Greek Catholics in the United States including the requirement, in 1890, that all Greek Catholic priests in America be celibate.²⁴

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Rome periodically stated that Greek Catholic priests should be celibate in the United States; however, this was often overlooked because of priest shortages amongst the Uniates.²⁵ In 1929 the Vatican issued another decree, *Cum Data Fuerit*, again demanding celibacy amongst Uniate priests in the United States; Rome was starting to get serious about enforcing this policy. In protest of their second class status as Catholics in the United States Fr. Orestes Chornock, a married Carpatho-Russian Greek Catholic priest, dissented against his bishop, Basil Takach, and along with several other priests and laity organized the Carpatho-Russian Greek Catholic Diocese of the Eastern Rite of the United States of North America on March 3, 1936.²⁶ It was not the intention of Fr. Orestes to break away from Rome, but rather to organize Carpatho-Russian Greek Catholics to negotiate with Rome under the conditions set forth in the Union of Uzhorod.²⁷ Rome was not sympathetic to Fr. Orestes, the new administrator of this new diocese, and declared him schismatic. On September 18, 1938 Fr. Orestes Chornock, now a widower, was consecrated a bishop in Constantinople by three bishops of the Holy Synod.²⁸ The American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church was established, and all connection with Rome severed. The reason for the schism wasn't about power and control, as was evident in the Anglican schism

²³ Ibid. Page 33.

²⁴ Ibid. Page 50.

²⁵ Ibid. Page 50.

²⁶ Ibid. Page 97.

²⁷ Ibid. Page 97.

²⁸ Ibid. Page 120.

mentioned above; “Rather it was the result of a crisis of identity that has always existed in the Carpatho-Russian Greek Catholic Church.”²⁹

The Schisms of the Independent Sacramental Movement

The final group to be addressed within this paper is the independent sacramental movement (ISM), a modern phenomenon with old roots,

By the independent sacramental movement, I refer to a broad range of communities which share a number of characteristics in common: small communities and/or solitary clergy; experimentation in theology and liturgy; mostly unpaid clergy; ordination available to a large percentage of the membership; a sacramental and Eucharistic spirituality, with a mediatory priesthood, in most cases preserving the historic episcopate.³⁰

The ISM has roots both in Western and Eastern branches of Christendom. The Western root is primarily through the Old Catholic Church of Utrecht (located in modern day Netherlands shortly after the First Vatican Council in protest of papal infallibility), and through the Anglican Church,³¹ whereas, the Eastern link is primarily through connection with the Syrian Orthodox Church.³² It would be impossible to list an exhaustive list of all the schisms that transpired to constitute the current make up of the independent sacramental movement due in part because “independent sacramental churches are often under the radar – small, moving, and not always easy to find.”³³ What I will do is highlight the diversity found within the ISM and contrast it with the schisms previously mentioned.

²⁹ Ibid. Page 123.

³⁰ Plummer, John P. *The Many Paths of the Independent Sacramental Movement: A Study of its liturgy, doctrine and leadership in America*. Dallas: Newt Books, 2004. Page 1.

³¹ Ibid. Page 15.

³² Ibid. Page 26.

³³ Ibid. Page 2.

An easy way to view the independent sacramental movement is to juxtapose them in relation to the three large liturgical churches; namely, the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church, and the Anglican Communion. The ISM, while rooted in these churches, are distinctly independent of them and as such individual ISM jurisdictions often refer to themselves as independent Catholic, Orthodox, or Anglican respectively. The primary factor that ties the ISM with these three liturgical churches is the idea of an historic episcopacy; that is, the idea of apostolic succession or the laying on of hands from one bishop to another in an assumed unbroken lineage to the initial apostles and therefore to Jesus himself. This characteristic of the ISM is the link to the three mentioned liturgical churches and is the foundation of ISM identity typically placing them outside of the realm of traditional Protestantism.

Independent sacramental churches and denominations are often formed through schismatic means with the same intentionality as mentioned above. For example, in the above discussion of Greek Catholics there was the consideration to become independent of both Catholicism and Orthodoxy and to become something wholly unique; likewise, the Thuc-line traditionalists Catholics, while claiming to be true Catholics, clearly fall into the category of independent sacramental Christians. An example of an ISM church with similar frustrations as the Greek Catholics mentioned above is the Polish National Catholic Church founded in 1904 by Polish Catholics as "...a protest against the control of the Roman church in the United States by an Irish and German hierarchy."³⁴ Likewise, another example is the schism of Catholic priest George Stallings who in 1989 formed the Imani Temple, and the African American Catholic Congregation, in Washington DC due to his argument that the Roman Catholic Church was unable to understand the needs of African American Catholics.

³⁴ Ibid. Page 41.

The independent character of the ISM lends itself to further schisms and even theologically tight organizations like the Society of St. Pius X, with their questionable status with Rome, has seen their own schisms. In 1983 several former SSPX priests founded the Society of St. Pius V and eventually accepted the sedevacantist view of the papacy.³⁵ The SSPV is a small schism and most schisms within the ISM are typically small; however, there are exceptions. The Polish National Catholic Church, mentioned above, was a sizable schism; other, larger schisms include that of Bishop Carlos Duarte Costa of Brazil, a former Roman Catholic bishop, who founded the Brazilian Catholic Apostolic Church and was formally excommunicated by Rome on July 7th, 1945.³⁶ Another large schism was the Czechoslovak Hussite Church founded in Czechoslovakia in January 8, 1920 by former Roman Catholic priest Karel Farsky.³⁷ Both Farsky and Costa advocated for liberal social causes and the abolishment of mandated clerical celibacy.

The question that presents itself, after looking at these various forms of schism, is why? Why would groups of people separate themselves from their known spiritual and religious ties and pursue a new endeavor? The answer is both complex and simple. The case of Henry VIII and the Anglican schism seems simple enough, the need for re-marriage was first and foremost the motivation of Henry VIII – and an ecclesiology needed to be generated to accommodate this pursuit. The schism of the various traditionalist Catholics are a little different, in that they sought to retain – or were attracted to – Catholic tradition in light of modernizing elements within the Church. The Carpatho-Russian Greek Catholics, like the Roman Catholic traditionalists, sought to retain their customs in the New World refusing to sacrifice their own unique characteristics, they resisted the notion of Latinization into their Rite and eventually felt

³⁵ Dinges. Page 250.

³⁶ Plummer. Page 23 – 24.

³⁷ Ibid. Page 23.

no other recourse than to disassociate themselves from the very source that make them Uniates; namely, Rome. The plight of the Greek Catholics is a mirror image of the Great Schism of 1054 CE in that the Roman West did not seem to fully understand the Orthodox East and communication and understanding broke down until both sides of the argument issued excommunications and anathemas at one another. While the many schisms that comprise the various churches and denominations of the independent sacramental movement reflect a myriad of reasons for not remaining a part of the churches from which they sprang.

Like the various theological disputes of the Protestant Reformation the various schisms investigated herein represent a glimpse into the need for identity within the context of religious/spiritual self-awareness. The answer to the question, why? Ultimately the response to this question rests in the realm of ecclesiology and the vision for “church” that is realized by those who choose to enter into a schismatic state. The power dynamics of schism certainly exist. In order for an individual or group to be schismatic they have to show disobedience to another authority and dissent from that authority; therefore, placing a power dynamic upon themselves. Most schisms seem to be orchestrated by a charismatic figure already in possession of some form of ecclesiastical (either in practice or assumed) authority. It would seem; however, that power is not the sole motivation for schism. The need for an appealing sense of identity seems to be the foundation for all forms of schism. Henry VIII did not want to see himself as a son-less monarch, and fashioned an identity that could not be reconciled with continued marriage to Catherine of Aragon. Likewise, both traditionalist Catholics and the Carpatho-Russian Greek Catholics could not reconcile the change thrust upon them with a legitimate sense of spiritual and religious community, and their recourse was to dissent; furthermore, the schism of the various independent sacramental Christians are typically also related to identity in their often common,

but by no means universal, support of women's ordination; gay and lesbian clergy; and progressive theological positions.