

Frankfurt Halts Veneration of Icons; Assault on Leo III; Epistle of the Jerusalem Monks; Filioque Challenged; Leo Caves; Filioque Allowed; the Great Schism

Charlemagne had enlarged his Frankish kingdom as far as prudence would allow. The larger the empire the more difficult to control its borders and to maintain order within the commonwealth. The title, emperor of Rome, put the authority of the Roman church behind Charles's official title, king of the Franks.

Charlemagne perceived that Leo wished to separate the Western church from Constantinople and having been given the honorary title of emperor, Charles's position was strengthened. Charlemagne had already taken significant steps in reforming the Western church in 794 when at Frankfort he diminished its church's icons to a status of religious art. They were to be referenced for educational purposes but were not to be venerated. Further, they no longer were to be used in the services of the church.

The question that followed this decision was whether the Eastern church would follow suit. It was a political issue as well as a theological one. There were two camps in Constantinople: the Iconodules, who believed that the icons should be worshiped, and the iconoclasts who denounced their use.

Charlemagne determined to widen this fissure into a chasm with his Council of Frankfurt. By allowing the icons to remain as teaching aids but denying their veneration, he positioned himself to argue the orthodoxy of whichever faction won the debate in the East. At the time, Pope Adrian was sympathetic with the East, but Charles's desire was to remove the influence of the icons. His strategy was to exploit the schism in Constantinople by stripping the icons in the Frankish churches of their religious significance, but keeping them around as decorative bric-a-brac.

When Leo III succeeded Pope Adrian I, he was not well-received by the former pope's family who tried to depose him. Charlemagne was ready and willing to help Leo restore his papal authority after which Leo conferred upon Charles his honorific title. Bringing Leo around to his way of thinking was Charles's next project.

Playing into his hands was a small group of Frankish monks who were missionaries to Jerusalem residing at Mount Olivet. Their obedience to the amended Nicene Creed was challenged as heresy by a monk in the Eastern church named John. Confused by his accusations the Western monks wrote an epistle to Pope Leo asking for clarification. The text reads, in part, as follows:

THE EPISTLE OF THE PILGRIM MONKS LIVING ON MOUNT OLIVET TO THE ROMAN PONTIFF

John, who was from the Monastery of St. Sabbas \săb'-as\ ... said that the Franks who are on Mount Olivet are heretics. He also said to us that "all the Franks are heretics," and he reproved our faith by saying that it is no better than heresy. And we said to him: "Brother, be silent, because if you call us heretics, you are calling the holy, Apostolic See [the pope] heretical." He sent laymen who wanted to throw us out, saying, "You are heretics and the books which you have are heretical." We responded: "Fathers and brothers, look at this man who says such things against us and against the holy Roman Faith, because such things we have never heard about our people. In the Creed we say more than you, 'Who proceeds from the Father and the Son,' because of which words that John, an enemy of his own soul, says that we are heretics."

We begged the men of Jerusalem saying, "If you say that we are heretics, you impute heresy to the throne of Blessed Peter, and if you say that, you lead yourselves to sin." Most benign Father, while I your servant ... was in your holy presence, and in the devout presence of your son, the most pious Emperor Lord Charles, we heard it said in his chapel in the Creed of faith: "Who proceeds from the Father and the Son." Whence, holy Father, again and again, we ask and beseech you, prostrate upon the ground with tears, that you deign to search out both in the Greek as well as in the Latin the holy Fathers who composed the Creed concerning that phrase where it is said, "Who proceeds from the Father and the Son." For in the Greek they do not say as we do, but rather say: "Who proceeds from the Father," and they view that phrase which we say in the Latin a serious matter.

Deign to give an order to your son the Emperor Lord Charles because we heard the words, "Who proceeds from the Father and the Son" in his chapel.

The writers of this "epistle" are missionary monks who are from Charlemagne's Frankish kingdom. Their antagonist is an Eastern monk named John who was assigned to the St. Sabbas monastery in Jerusalem. Having heard the Frankish monks recite the Nicene Creed that included *filioque*, John accused them of heresy.

John's complaint was not only their recitation of an edited Nicene Creed but also that the Franks had no clue that their version was a violation of the decision of the Council of Constantinople which, in 381, held that the Creed was unalterable.

Not only were the Frankish monks caught unawares of any violation on their part, they were also concerned that John's assertion would damage their reputation among those with whom they ministered in Jerusalem. It was an extremely troubling dilemma for these Western missionaries.

Their epistle communicates the dire situation they face. They firmly believe they are properly representing Western theology backed by the authority of the pope. If the Eastern provinces are in disagreement then somebody is involved in heresy. The implication is, "If we are correct, then Byzantium is into heresy; if we are incorrect, then Rome is into heresy."

The monks then record in their epistle the exact wording they contend is an orthodox representation of the Nicene Creed: "Who proceeds from the Father and the Son," which has earned them John's charge of heresy.

What the Frankish monks do not know in the year 807 is that the original Creed had been amended throughout Western Europe. They are apparently not even aware of the original reading.

As they examine the charges against them they are caught between two alternatives: either we have added to the Creed or the Greeks have subtracted from it.

The Greek Church was no doubt well-prepared to show abundant documentation of the original reading from the First Council of Nicaea. At the same time, the Franks are confident they learned to recite the Creed with *filioque* included at Charlemagne's chapel in Aix-la-Chapelle \eks-la-sha-pel', present-day Aachen.

This conundrum faced by these innocent monks suggests that since their instruction in the recitation of the Nicene Creed occurred in the Charlemagne's chapel, then it is possible that Charles the Great purposely sent them to Jerusalem in order to force Leo's hand regarding the *filioque* clause.

The monks are not involved in a “he (Charlemagne) said, you (Leo) said.” They are documenting what they heard at Aix-la-Chappelle and are warning Leo that somebody is involved in heresy and they don’t know who it is. But they do know that the resolution of the issue, no matter which side is right, will result in a rift between Byzantium and Rome.

An important fact to stress is that at this time the Western church in Italy, in general, and Rome, in particular, had not officially recognized the Toledo version of the Nicene Creed but at the same time it had not suppressed its widespread use in the Western provinces outside of Italy. It was 807 and the *filioque* was introduced in the West in 589 – some 218 years.

Charlemagne’s strategy has boxed Rome into a corner. He is confident that the *filioque* clause produces the correct doctrine of procession and wants to uphold it in the West, even though its absence from the Nicene Creed is the orthodox reading for both the Eastern and Western churches.

Charles has set up a situation where those who are in high positions of authority in both Constantinople and Rome are going to have to make a decision for truth. He is committed to the veracity of *filioque* and wants someone to show their hand either in support of it or in opposition to it. The letter from the Frankish monks to Leo will force the pope to make a choice.

What if Leo contests the insertion of *filioque* into the Nicene Creed? He has no choice but to excommunicate virtually everyone in positions of church leadership outside of Italy. The effective result of such a decision would make the Roman church inferior to the Eastern which in turn would rob the pope of his supremacy since the office could be shown to have tolerated heresy since the Third Council of Toledo in 589.

On the other hand, if Leo sides with the Jerusalem monks it will create a schism that will remove the Eastern Church from Roman authority and influence.

Charlemagne pressed the issue in 813 by convening the Council of Aachen where his bishops decreed that *filioque* is *dogma de fide*, “a doctrine of the faith which must be believed.” This gave the Nicene Creed with its famous phrase the stamp of official orthodoxy and incorporated it into the universal church’s canon law, the East included.

The research that enabled the bishops at Aachen to include *filioque* in the Creed was done by Bishop Paulinus, Patriarch of Aquileia \ä-kwē-lā'-yā\, Italy, who convened the Council of Friuli \frē'-ü-lē\ in 797. The conclusion reached by the Council was that the *filioque* phrase was *dogma de fide*, a decision reached by interpolation: an act of altering a text by inserting a word or words.

To justify the insertion, the Council of Friuli cited the Council of Constantinople in 381 which had revised the Nicene Creed in an effort to clarify what the Nicene bishops had decreed. Paulinus rationalized that his Council had the same authority if they could prove that the “intention” of the Nicene Council was to include the meaning behind the *filioque* clause.

This decision enabled the Council of Aachen to officially insert *filioque* into the Nicene Creed thus confronting Leo with a theological Gordian knot. Leo chose to leave it tied.

Leo made the decision to refute the inclusion of *filioque* and gave the order that it was not to be recited within Charlemagne's jurisdiction throughout Western Europe. To drive the point home and insure obedience, Leo ordered the construction of two silver shields which he displayed in the Basilica of St. Peter's in Rome. One was engraved with the Nicene Creed in Latin and the other in Greek. Neither included *filioque*. He also informed the Frankish monks in Jerusalem that he had no authority to alter the Creed established by the Council of Nicaea.

For the moment the Eastern church was victorious. But although the original Creed had the backing of the various Councils and Pope Leo himself, the decision gave legitimacy to a doctrine that was unbiblical and therefore heretical.

Charlemagne knew it, the bishops throughout Western Europe knew it, and the people knew it. And Leo knew it, too, although maintaining papal supremacy motivated him to retain the absence of *filioque* in the Creed.

Regardless of what was decreed official, the Western churches retained *filioque* in its liturgy while the Eastern church continued without it. And so the situation stood for exactly 200 years until Benedict VIII became the new pope in 1014.

Benedict crowned Henry II as Holy Roman Emperor and at Henry's request, ordered that the controversial *filioque* be sung as a part of the Creed during the mass. This granted permission to continue what was already going on throughout the West and initiated its practice in Rome. The year was 1017.

The seriousness of the schism intensified over the next forty years and was brought to a head when Michael I, patriarch of Constantinople, released a letter that was distributed to all the Western bishops and Pope Leo IX.

The letter accused the Roman Church of "Judaistic practices." Leo in turn responded by sending three emissaries, led by Cardinal Humbert \œn-ber\, to present his response to Patriarch Michael I.

The envoys arrived in Constantinople in April of 1054 and presented Leo's response to Michael reminding him of the pope's supremacy over the patriarchs of the Byzantine Church. Among several charges of heresy, Leo included the issue of the East's omission of *filioque* from its liturgy. The gist was that if Michael didn't come back into line he would be excommunicated. Just a few days later this tug of war was interrupted by the death of Leo IX which simultaneously terminated the papal bull's order of excommunication.

Not to be denied, Humbert and his associates entered into the Church of Hagia Sophia [Ἁγία Σοφία], at the time the largest cathedral in the world and the epitome of Byzantine architecture. It is today a museum. On the occasion of July 16, 1054, it was the site of a Saturday afternoon divine liturgy. Humbert entered during the service and placed Leo the IX's expired papal bull of Michael's excommunication squarely on the altar.

Thus began the Great Schism, and although efforts have been made over the centuries to heal the breach, the two churches remain at odds. Today the Byzantine Church is called the Eastern or Greek Orthodox Church while the Roman Church is known as the Roman Catholic Church.