

Life Notes

THE HISTORY OF CHRIST'S CHURCH

Pastor Stephen Chitty

#12. Summary of The Church in the Eleventh Century

The church was still in a difficult place during the 11th century. It was in 1054 that an event referred to as “The Great Schism” took place. It was during this time that the growing division between the eastern and western branches of Christendom seemed to become fixed and total.

The Pope of Rome and the Patriarch of Constantinople traded barbs by excommunicating each other, and the two branches of the church became enemies. The flashpoint had been smoldering for years. The Nicene Creed (325/381) was the context for the split. There was a small addition to the creed that was the catalyst — the small phrase “and from the Son.” Western theologians, as early as the fifth century, had determined that The Holy Spirit proceeded not only from The Father, but from The Son as well. The result was what is known as “the filioque,” which changed the Creed to “I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life; who proceedeth from the Father and the Son.” The Eastern congregations took issue, stating that the Church in the West did not have authority to alter dogma adopted by a church council. It is possible, however, that the deeper issue was disagreement over whether the Pope in the west was the supreme bishop of all Christians and was “the vicar” or representative of Christ Jesus on earth. It seems the dissension which had been simmering for centuries finally reached a boiling point resulting in a split that replicated itself and continues to this day.

Another point of contention is known as Investiture Controversy. Since the days of Constantine, kings had claimed the right to appoint bishops, bestowing upon them titles, possessions, and recognition by the state. Pope Gregory VII challenged this practice, claiming such privilege belonged to the church, and solidified his view by declaring the church in reality had power over the Holy Roman Emperor, pointing to the coronation of Charlemagne in 800 AD. For three hundred years this dissension grew until matters of power seemed to fall into the domain of Papal authority.

Unfortunately, this shift during the 11th and 12th centuries made the Pope, of necessity, turn to political and economic supervision as well as tending to ecclesiastical matters. Such a broad dominion required previously unheard of financial provision. The stage was set for further corruption and syncretism. Whether intentional or not, the church was entering a day of compromise, secularism, and corruption that would endure for hundreds of years.

As usual, however, God was also working to establish His Church, and there was progress made during this era as well by men like Anselm of Canterbury, a truly spiritual man with tremendous intellectual capacity as well. He wrote several works devoted to establishing the existence and nature of God. Not only does God exist, Anselm said, but because of His nature, God's justice required Him to punish sin. As the guilty sinners, our only hope is through Jesus, who was the perfect and complete mediator and the full satisfaction to God for our willful rebellion. In particular, Anselm explained Jesus as uniquely qualified to bear the brunt of such judgment. He was fully God and fully man, explained Anselm, and was a completely satisfactory instrument of atonement. His most famous book is *Cur Deus Homo* or *Why Did God Become Man?*

In the days ahead, the church would embark on a long endeavor known as The Crusades, and the debate over the true nature and purpose of the Church would escalate.

Though the difference seemed subtle, there was a widening difference of opinion over whether Christ was determined to establish “Christianity” or “Christendom.” In this troubling century, some of the most significant seeds of reformation were about to be scattered.