

THE SCHISM OF 1054: LESSONS ON PERSONAL INTEREST AND COMMON GOOD FOR THE NIGERIAN LOCAL CHURCH

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Abstract

It is a known fact that there was a major disagreement and subsequent separation between the Western and Eastern Churches in the eleventh century. It was an episode that threatened and indeed severed the bond that existed for centuries between the two rites. What may not be widely known were the detailed events and contributions of some Church personnel that eventually led to that fateful separation. There was an interplay of personal sentiments and biases that consequently escalated to a major rift in the Church. It is quite unfortunate that personal sentiments were allowed to dictate the status of relationship between people and nations knit together in the same faith. An enabling factor that acted as a carriage-support for these excesses was the socio-religious culture of the time, where Church personnel commanded an unquestionable loyalty among the people. In comparison, the religious disposition of some African and particularly Nigerian Catholics bear similar features with that of Medieval Europe in terms of strong sentiments of faith and respect for Church leaders, the words and actions of religious ministers carry a lot of weight even beyond spiritual matters. As such, personal excesses of some members of the clergy, if not checked, can become a breeding ground for potential crisis in the Church. This is quite true especially in rural communities where priority of dignity is given to the local priest even in secular matters. This work tries to revisit the contextual details of what led to the division between the Western and Eastern Churches, as a cautionary reference for the Nigerian Church.

Keywords: Western Church, Eastern Church, Schism, Nigerian Clergy

1. The Status before 1054

The first community of Christians was founded in Jerusalem with the apostles as leaders. This community was majorly composed of those who were baptized during the Pentecost. As the apostles embarked on *missio ad extra*, the Church expanded from Jerusalem to different parts of the ancient Roman empire². The

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² The ancient Roman empire is considered the largest in history by geographical dimensions; it involved the lands in North Africa, Europe and Middle East. Christopher Kelly, *The Roman Empire: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford University Press, 2007), 3.

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Christian world in those days considered themselves as one people united by their faith in Jesus as the Messiah. The distances between lands were only geographic differences that had no effect to the unity of Christendom. Of course, there were some cultural distinctions between Rome and Constantinople, even though they had a common origin³. One of the prominent peculiarities was in language, the Western part of the empire adopted Latin language while the East favored Greek. However, the bond of their Christian origin was a stronger reference than their cultural differences. Christians living on both sides of the empire considered one another as ‘one body’. Some of the apostles like Andrew even founded Churches in the East⁴. One of the uniting factors for Christians during this era was persecution. With Christians being easy prey to the imperial government across the empire, they found strength through solidarity⁵.

The unity of ancient Christendom became more solidified in the first part of the fourth century, ushered in by the reign of Constantine who declared himself the Protector of Christianity⁶. The emperor transferred the seat of government from Rome to Constantinople and made the pope the custodian of Rome⁷. Hence, the East was the seat of government while the West was the center of faith. These developments created a political unity between the East and West. Consequently, with Christianity enjoying a royal support, more than ever, Christians from both sides of the empire were more united and spoke with one voice.

This unity was most defined during the ecumenical councils. Interestingly, the first four major Councils (Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus and Chalcedon) were held in Eastern provinces but still had the western bishops in attendance. The bishops and abbots from the West were not hesitant to travel to the East for a matter involving the faith despite the pope residing in the West, because they regarded the whole Christendom as one family

³ Both were rooted in the ancient Roman empire; Byzantine was formerly referred to as Eastern Roman Empire. Greg Woolf, *Capitals of the Roman Empire: Constantinople & Rome*, (Oxford University Press, 2021), <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1882/capitals-of-the-roman-empire-constantinople--rome/>, accessed 20 November, 2024.

⁴ Andrew founded the Church in Byzantium in AD 38 and Eusebius mentioned that he preached the gospel in Scythia, in present day Iran. Everett Ferguson, *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*: Second Edition. (Routledge, 2013), 51.

⁵ Charles L. Tieszen, *Agonizing for you: Christian responses to religious persecution*, <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC38986>, accessed 17 November, 2024.

⁶ R. Gerberding and J. H. Moran Cruz, *Medieval Worlds* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), 55–56

⁷ <https://www.history.com/topics/middle-east/constantinople>, accessed 25 November 2024.

2. Cracks and Divisions

The unity and mutual coexistence between the Eastern and Western Churches in ancient times started experiencing some setbacks from the fifth century, culminating to a schism in the early part of the eleventh century. Interestingly, the same factors that fostered unity also harbored the catalysts of disunity. The first crack in the unity of the Church was rooted in the proceedings and decisions of the Council of Constantinople (381AD). The two most important outcomes of the Council caused tensions between the East and West. First, in defining the Third Person of the Trinity, the council fathers said that the Holy Spirit is ‘the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, and Who spoke through the prophets’⁸. Also, in the Third canon of the Council, the bishops asserted, ‘the Bishop of Constantinople, however, shall have the prerogative of honour after the Bishop of Rome because Constantinople is New Rome’⁹. These two decisions were the first fruits of division.

After the Council of Constantinople, theologians of the West, in trying to emphasize the role of Christ, altered the Creed of the council. Precisely in the fifth century, the second Council of Toledo (non-ecumenical) in 447AD, modified the procession of the Holy Spirit in the Creed, ‘...the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father *and the Son...*’ (the *filioque*). This addition of ‘...and the son’ to the procession of the Holy Spirit was later adopted by the third Council of Toledo (non-ecumenical) in 589AD. Despite being an outcome of a non-ecumenical council, the *filioque* gradually started being popular among dioceses of the Western Church. Initially, Popes were reluctant to accept the *filioque* addition, specifically Pope Leo III in 809 AD refused to add it to the Nicene Creed¹⁰. However, after much pressure from bishops and theologians, Pope Benedict VIII officially added the *filioque* to the Nicene Creed in 1024. This caused uproar in the East, the Eastern bishops were vehemently against any alteration to the Creed, maintaining that the Pope or anybody else cannot add or subtract the doctrinal definition of a Council without convoking a new council on the matter. Consequently, in the West, *filioque*¹¹ was added while the East

⁸First Council of Constantinople 381, Papal Encyclicals, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum02.htm>, accessed 05 November 2024.

⁹*The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, in *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*, <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04308a.htm>, accessed 01 November, 2024.

¹⁰ Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, (eds.), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. xiv, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf214.ix.viii.iv.html>, accessed 01 Novemebr, 2024.

¹¹ *Filioque* (...and the Son), refers to the Trinitarian definition that adds the Second Person of the Trinity in the procession of the Holy Spirit.

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maintained the Creed of the council. This was the first major challenge to Christian unity – one Church, two creeds.

The other controversy was on the status of Constantinople. The Bishop of Rome and some western bishops were not comfortable with the status given to the See of Constantinople as next in dignity to Rome. Although this elevation of Constantinople did not affect the primacy of Rome directly, it affected the ancient Sees of Alexandria and Antioch, which till then had ranked next after the See of Rome. On this note, Pope Leo I refused to acknowledge the new status of Constantinople¹². Despite the reservations of Rome, the Eastern Church followed the recommendations of the Council and regarded the Bishop of Constantinople as next in dignity to the Bishop of Rome, in addition, he was also regarded as the ‘first bishop of the East’¹³.

Another point of divergence was on the political structure of the empire. In 800AD, Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne as the Holy Roman Emperor, thus claiming independence from the imperial court of Constantinople¹⁴. The crowning of Charlemagne was considered a betrayal by the East because there was already a substantive emperor residing in Constantinople¹⁵. The East accused Rome of breaking the ancient imperial tradition¹⁶ and weakening the authority of Constantinople. With the crowning of Charlemagne as the emperor of the West, the once ‘one united empire’ became ‘two independent empires’.

¹² ‘*The Canons of the Council of Nicaea (325)* - the original Greek text with English Translation - and Latin versions’, https://www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/nicaea_canons.htm, accessed 18 November 2024.

¹³ In the Justinian Imperial Constitutions, Book Five stated ‘we decree that the most holy Pope of Old Rome, according to the decrees of the holy synods is the first of all priests, and that the most blessed bishop of Constantinople and of New Rome, should have the second place after the Apostolic Throne of the Elder Rome, and should be superior in honour to all others’, Schaff, *A Select Library*, <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf214.ix.viii.iv.html>, accessed 01 November, 2024.

¹⁴ T. Noble, *The Republic of St. Peter: The Birth of the Papal State, 680-825*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

¹⁵ This coronation marked the creation of the Western/Roman Empire which remained a threat to the East. D. Holmes and B. Bickers, *A Short History of the Catholic Church*, (London: Burns & Oates, 1983), 57.

¹⁶ The political arrangement of Constantine was that there will only be a sole emperor who resides in Constantinople while the pope resides in Rome. At the time of Pope Leo III, the successor to the imperial throne in Constantinople was a woman, Irene empress of the Roman Empire. As Leo III and other westerners were not so comfortable with Irene, they formed an alliance with Charles the Frankish King and crowned him the emperor of the West. J. Osborne, ‘Leo III and Charlemagne’, in *Rome in the Eighth Century: A History in Art*, (Cambridge University Press; 2020), 219-230.

The creation of a separate Western empire bestowed on the Popes enormous spiritual and imperial powers. Gradually, the papacy considered universal supremacy over all Christians as the prerogative of the successor of Peter; the Greeks held a contrary view, for them, in matters of the faith the final decision rested not with the pope alone, but with a Council representing all the bishops of the Church. Consequently, there arose two different conceptions of the visible organization of the Church. The Eastern sentiments on this issue were admirably expressed by a twelfth-century writer, Nicetas, Archbishop of Nicomedia:

My dearest brother, we do not deny to the Roman Church the primacy amongst the five sister Patriarchates; and we recognize her right to the most honourable seat at an Ecumenical Council. But she has separated herself from us by her own deeds, when through pride she assumed a monarchy which does not belong to her office ... How shall we accept decrees from her that have been issued without consulting us and even without our knowledge¹⁷.

Going further, another significant debate bothered on liturgical practice. The Eucharist was celebrated with unleavened bread in the West while the East maintained the leavened bread. The East regarded the western practice as an abuse of ancient practice and to some extent, a doctrinal aberration¹⁸. The East emphasized the leavened bread to signify the resurrection of Jesus. For them, unleavened bread belonged to the Old Testament while bread with yeast (leavened), was a symbol of the resurrection of Christ¹⁹.

These historical details, which spanned in years, indicated a rumble in the circle; the unity of the Church was at the edge, but it was not completely severed. Initially, these controversies did not hinder the collaborative responsibility of Church leaders from both sides especially in condemning heresies, an instance of this lingering unity was during the Third Council of Constantinople (680 CE) where both sides unanimously condemned the monoenergism heresy²⁰.

¹⁷*The Great Schism: The Estrangement of Eastern and Western Christendom*, <http://orthodoxinfo.com/general/greatschism.aspx>, accessed 10 November, 2024.

¹⁸ The Azymite controversy, the East accused the West of adopting Jewish practices in their Liturgy. Anthony Sicienski, ed., (2022), *The Azyme Debate: The Fourth Crusade to the Modern Era*, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367630425_The_Azyme_Debate_The_Fourth_Crusade_to_the_Modern_Era/citation/download, accessed 10 November 2024.

¹⁹ The reason is based on the fact that yeast is the substance that makes the bread to rise – signifying resurrection. The East also contend that Jesus used the leavened bread at the Last Supper, though this is yet to be historically established among theologians.

²⁰ Monoenergism was a Christological heresy of the medieval period which taught that Jesus Christ had two natures but only one energy. Further reading, Cyril Hovorun, *Will, Action*

3. From Feuds to Schism: Proximate Causes

The East and the West may have their reservations for each other, but they still regarded the concept of ‘one faith’ as important, a good example of this being their collaborated zeal in stamping out heresies that threatened the orthodoxy of the Church. However, subsequent developments further weakened this unity. In 1043, Michael Cerularius was appointed the Patriarch of Constantinople²¹. Known for his intelligence and resolute will, he was vehemently keen in condemning some Latin customs: he maintained that Rome erred by altering the Creed and by using unleavened bread for the eucharist²². Meanwhile, in 1048 a French bishop was elected as Pope Leo IX. He had the desire to introduce reforms in the Church. For instance, Leo’s papacy focused on restoring the supremacy of the Pope, and despite opposition from the East, to adhere literally to the provisions of the ‘Donation of Constantine’²³.

Tension arose between the West and the East in 1040s, when Norman warriors attacked and defeated Southern Italy, replacing Greek bishops with Latin bishops and suppressing the Eastern liturgical rite²⁴. With the imposition of western traditions on churches hitherto eastern, crises crippled in, differences over clerical marriage, the bread used for the Eucharist, days of fasting became major issues of contention. When Patriarch Cerularius heard that the Normans were forbidding Greek customs in Southern Italy, he closed the Latin churches in Constantinople in 1052. Consequently, accusations and condemnations trailed the relationship between the two Churches. In the East, Leo of Achrida wrote a treatise condemning the use of unleavened bread and declared that the Latin Eucharist was not a genuine sacrament²⁵. Likewise in the West, Cardinal Humbert wrote the *Adversus Graecorum calumnias*²⁶ (‘Against the Slanders of the Greeks’) which condemned the eastern practices.

and Freedom: Christological Controversies in the Seventh Century, (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2008)

²¹ Michael Cerularius, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Michael-Cerularius>, accessed 19 November 2024.

²² Anthony Siecienski, *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy*, (Oxford University Press, 2010).

²³ Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum*, Nova Amplissima Collectio, Vol. 19 (xix) Col. 635-656.

²⁴ Further Reading, Paul Brown, *Mercenaries to Conquerors: Norman Warfare in the Eleventh and Twelfth-Century Mediterranean*, (South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword, 2016).

²⁵ Andrew Louth, *Greek East and Latin West: The Church AD 681-1071* (Crestwood, N.Y., St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007), .307.

²⁶ Galland, ‘Humbertus’ https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/02m/1010-1061_Humbertus_Silvae_Candidae_Episcopus_Adversus_Graecorum_Calumnias_MLT.pdf, accessed 23 November 2024.

Despite these tensions, both sides never intended a schism within the Body of Christ. In 1053, Cerularius wrote to Pope Leo IX, offering for resolutions, and as a gesture of peace²⁷, he promised to restore the Leo's name to the Diptychs, an Eastern list of names of Church leaders in communion with the East²⁸. The two parties agreed to converge in Constantinople. Leo IX, already frail in health, sent three delegates with Cardinal Humbert the Bishop of Silva Candida as the Head²⁹.

The Schism of 1054: when personal interest overrides common good

When Cerularius and Leo IX decided for a meeting to resolve the misunderstandings between the East and West, it was not expected that such would eventually escalate to a schism in the Church. There was still this convergent belief by both sides that the Church was still one visible Body of Christ³⁰. A resolution was intended, but a schism was achieved. Eventually, the meeting between Patriarch Cerularius and the pope's delegates ended in the most unfavorable manner due to the personal excesses and prejudice of the representatives. Humbert was a theologian but was also known as an intransigent papalist, unapologetic in his disdain for what he called the liturgical aberrations of the East and their disregard of the pope's supremacy³¹. On the other hand, Cerularius had his grudges against Humbert because of his public condemnation of Eastern practices. When the papal delegates arrived Constantinople, it was a display of personal enmity and flair for arrogance. Cerularius in his bid to humiliate his rival Humbert, demanded that he would only listen to the papal delegates on the condition that they pay obeisance to him and that the delegates must seat behind and not in front of the metropolitans. Feeling offended by the patriarch's disposition, Humbert, without

²⁷ Axel Bayer, *Spaltung der Christenheit: das sogenannte Morgenländische Schisma von 1054* [Christianity Split: the so-called Oriental Schism of 1054], (Vienna: Böhlau, 2004), 80.

²⁸ 'Diptych' is a word derived from the Greek διπτυχα (diptycha) which literally means a 'pair of writing tablets'. It referred to an object with two flat sides, joined together to form a pair, it was the ancient version of modern notebooks. In the ancient and medieval periods, the Orthodox Church usually wrote the names of recognized Patriarchs and Popes, living or departed in the Diptych. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 'diptych', <https://www.britannica.com/topic/diptych>, accessed 3 November 2024.

²⁹ Other delegates alongside Humbert were Leo IX's secretary Frederick of Lorraine, and Archbishop Peter of Amalfi.

³⁰ This re-union was also desired even by the Emperor Constantine IX Monomachus who expressed to the Pope his desire for a reenactment of the East-West unity as in ancient times, *Constantine IX Monomachus* <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Constantine-IX-Monomachus>, accessed 3 November 2024.

³¹ A year before the negotiation, Humbert denounced the liturgical practices of the East, he wrote a treatise in 1053 titled *Adversus Graecorum calumnias* ('Against the Slanders of the Greeks'), condemning the use of leavened bread by the East, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Humbert-of-Silva-Candida>, accessed 3 November 2024.

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the usual salutations or formal discussion, threw the Pope's letter at the feet of the Patriarch and left³². The letter, drafted by Humbert, was described as unfriendly and antagonistic in tone³³. Subsequently, the Patriarch refused to have further dealings with the delegates. Humbert's anger stirred his impatience, he hastily condemned Cerularius and laid a Bull of Excommunication against Cerularius and all his supporters on the altar of the Hagia Sophia Basilica on the 16th of July 1054, at the time the sacred liturgy was about to begin and in the presence of all the clergy and people. Humbert and his delegation then left the city; and as they departed, they shook the dust off their feet and publicly declared '*Videat Deus et judicat*' (May God be our witness and our judge!)³⁴. In response, on the 24th of July 1054, Patriarch Cerularius convened a council representing all Eastern Christianity, he recapitulated the grievances of the Greek against the Roman Church, condemned the Bull by Humbert and pronounced an 'anathema' on the papal legates and '*all who helped in drawing it up, whether by their advice or even by their prayers*'³⁵. He went further to maintain that reconciliation with Rome was neither necessary nor even desirable³⁶. This was a definitive moment that severed the relationship between the Western and Eastern Churches. It is quite unfortunate that the Body of Christ had to suffer this regrettable and unsavory division due to the personal sentiments and rivalry of two individuals.

The event of 1054 signaled the official split of the unity between the Western and Eastern churches. Although subsequent events in the course of history, like the sack of Constantinople in 1204³⁷, went further to fortify this rupture.

Analysis

The events of 1054 hinged primarily on personal prejudices. The representatives of both churches, in allowing their personal biases to dictate the tune of the

³² Mark Galli, *The Great Divorce*, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/1997/04/great-divorce/>, accessed 19 November 2024.

³³The Great Schism: The Estrangement of Eastern and Western Christendom, <http://orthodoxinfo.com/general/greatschism.aspx>, accessed 3 November 2024.

³⁴James Likoudis, 'A Formal Schism in 1054 A.D. What really Happened?', <https://jameslikoudispage.com/Ecumenic/pamiccer.htm>, accessed 21 November 2024.

³⁵ Cambridge Medieval History, IV, 268.

³⁶ D. Holmes, *A Short History*, 57.

³⁷ En route to Jerusalem in 1204, the Western Crusade army changed their course to Constantinople in order to resolve some political disputes. But in the end, the troops plundered Constantinople. They destroyed or confiscated valuables as they attacked the city's sacred sites. Numerous people died and churches and monasteries were looted. The hostility between the West and the East was cemented for generations by this incident. Further reading, David Nicolle, *The Fourth Crusade 1202–04: The betrayal of Byzantium*, (UK: Osprey Publishing, 2011).

discussion, forgot or neglected the fact that the common good of the Church was priority. Prior to this meeting, Cardinal Humbert had his personal reservations for the East, he considered them as drifters from tradition. In 1053, he wrote a treatise *Adversus Graecorum calumnias*, where he categorically condemned the Eastern Church, accusing them of unorthodox practices and disregard for tradition. In one of the sections, he clearly asserted, 'the Holy Sion, which is the first church, has faithfully preserved this institution of the Eucharist, revered by both angels and men, down to these modern times, in the same way as it had received it from the apostles, so much so that some of the pontiffs of Jerusalem have indicated in the epistles they sent how much their institution is different from that of the Greeks!'³⁸.

Furthermore, before the 1054 meeting, Humbert accused Cerularius as the obstacle to the Eastern submission to the papacy, while Cerularius considered Humbert as the deceptive voice behind Rome's disdain for the Eastern Church. Cerularius once described Humbert and his followers as 'wild wolves and beings of general darkness' while Humbert retorted and referred to Cerularius as '*a neophyte patriarch through abuse of office, who took on the monastic habit out of fear of men alone [and not out of piety]*'³⁹. In essence, the vile of vengeance coupled with the imprudent personality made the two poised to humiliate the other. In the Bull of Excommunication by Humbert, we read the following phrases:

For as far as the columns of the imperial power and its honored and wise citizens go, this city is most Christian and orthodox. But as far as Michael, who is called patriarch through an abuse of the term, and the backers of his foolishness are concerned, innumerable tares of heresies are daily sown in its midst.⁴⁰

The choice of words in addressing Cerularius reveals the anger and imprudence of Humbert, especially in his role as a delegate and negotiator. The concluding part of the Bull was just a depiction of an abuse of power and trust,

Michael, neophyte patriarch...and all their followers in the aforementioned errors and acts of presumption: Let them be anathema Maranatha with the Simoniacs, Valesians, Arians, Donatists, Nicolaitists, Severians, Pneumatomachoi, Manichaeans, Nazarenes, and all the heretics — nay, with the devil himself and his angels, unless they should repent. AMEN, AMEN, AMEN.

³⁸ C. Will, (ed.), 'Humbert' in *Acta et scripta quae de controversiis ecclesiae graecae et latinae saeculo undecimo composita extant*. Leipzig 1861, 109 = PL 143, col. 951–952). For bibliography on Humbert's Dialogus, see [https://www. Geschichtsquellen .de/werk/2960](https://www.Geschichtsquellen.de/werk/2960).

³⁹ Aidan Nichols, *Rome and the Eastern Churches: A Study in Schism*, (Ignatius, 2010), <https://archive.org/details/romeeasternchurc0000aida>, accessed 26 November 2024.

⁴⁰ *Classical Christianity*, <https://classicalchristianity.com/2014/07/03/the-papal-bull-of-excommunication-in-1054/>, accessed 5 November 2024.

Some historians are of the view that if Leo IX had seen the text of the excommunication, he would never have approved of it. Unfortunately, the Pope had died when Humbert and other delegates arrived Constantinople. Humbert acted not in the name of the pope but according to his own personal judgement, he allowed his personal prejudice to override his administrative responsibility⁴¹.

On the other hand, Cerularius may be justified in his counter reaction to the excommunication by Humbert. Also, he may be justified in his refusal to meet with the delegates, being aware of the death of the pope, he felt the delegation was thus rendered invalid. However, he allowed his personal dispositions to dictate the common good of the Eastern Church. His contemporaries like Michael Psellos described him as a man of ‘savage reserve, vindictiveness, and unbounded pride who behaved as if he held the first place in Christendom’⁴². Being aware of the pope’s death, he should have known that Humbert’s excommunication was not valid, thus, no need to retaliate and rumble the circle. The Bull of Excommunication was of course an affront on the Patriarch, but being the Head of a Church, much was expected of him than using an official platform for personal vendetta. When the papal legates arrived in Constantinople in 1054, the emperor received them cordially but the Patriarch, based on the identity of some of the legates, denied their competence to deal with the problem, invariably, he snubbed the delegates and questioned their competence which may have triggered Humbert’s rage.

In reviewing the events of 1054, Hussey asserts, ‘One has only to look at the documents to realize the deliberate provocation and discourtesy towards each other of both Humbert and Cerularius...’⁴³.

The Social Dimension

Strictly speaking, the mutual vendetta between Humbert and Cerularius had specific targets. The Bull of Humbert mentioned only three names -Michael the Patriarch, Leo and Constantine. Also, Cerularius’ *anathema* was specifically for Humbert and any other person that supported him. So, why had the quarrel a wide range effect on the people? One major factor that made the altercation between Humbert and Cerularius to gain strong momentum was the socio-religious culture

⁴¹‘Michael Cerularius’, Encyclopedia Britannica, 27 Mar. 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Michael-Cerularius>, accessed 6 November 2024.

⁴²James Likoudis, ‘A Formal Schism in 1054 A.D.? What really Happened?’, <https://jameslikoudispage.com/Ecumenic/pamiccer.htm>, accessed 21 November 2024.

⁴³ J.M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire*, (Oxford University Press, 1986), 135-136.

of medieval times. This period in history was prominently focused and dependent on religion, the people relied on the Church not only in spiritual matters but also in secular issues. Simply put, the Church regulated the life of the society. Elites and nobles spent their wealth building gigantic Churches to be recognized in the society⁴⁴. Politically, the Church had a stake in governance, popes were influential in the choice of emperors, and in some cases, emperors needed the support of the popes to sustain their reign⁴⁵. Although this period also witnessed fragments of pagan beliefs, the Christian faith was at the center of society in Europe and old Byzantine territory. The medieval world was a religious world. Cultural artifacts, music, and prose mostly expressed tenets of faith. Consequently, Church leaders commanded strong influences, their words and actions were regarded as sacrosanct by the people. In fact, due to the dominance of religion within this period, the Renaissance thinkers referred to the Medieval times derogatively as ‘dark ages’, they opined that the much emphasis placed on religion made people lose the lustre of original thoughts and development of human potentials⁴⁶.

Such was the society of Humbert and Cerularius. As respected leaders of their different Churches, their pronouncements and actions carried a lot of weight in the affairs of the society. The people had an unquestionable loyalty to the Church. In such a scenario, hardly will anyone question the dictates of the clergy or subject their actions to critical evaluation as obtained in some western societies today. Hence, even though the details of the encounter between Humbert and Cerularius represented more of an inter-personal squabble, the socio-religious culture of the time gave it a nationalistic identity: it permeated the different strata of the society, religious and political alike. In other words, the 1054 Schism between the West and the East was facilitated by the religious dispositions and sentiments of the medieval people.

4. Conclusion: Caution for Local Pastoral Agents in Nigeria

The influence of the socio-religious culture in the 1054 schism prompted the interest of this paper. A closer observation of the socio-cultural disposition of a typical Nigerian Christian portrays a similarity with that of the medieval populace. This comparison is restricted only to the aspect of religious sentimentality and does

⁴⁴*Middle Ages: Arts and Culture*, <https://materchristi.libguides.com/c.php?g=169421&p=6148419>, accessed 11 November, 2024.

⁴⁵ Pope Gregory VII deposed Emperor Henry.

⁴⁶ ‘Middle Ages’ or ‘Dark Ages’ was a coinage invented originally with an unpleasant intention. For the Renaissance thinkers, there was a great decline in Europe after the collapse of Roman civilization. They insisted that the classical and marvelous strides accomplished in knowledge, literature, art and architecture in the ancient period suffered a serious setback in the middle-ages, *Middle Ages*, Encyclopedia Britannica, 24 October 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Middle-Ages>, accessed 11 November, 2024.

OCHO: The Schism of 1054: Lessons on Personal Interest and Common Good for the Nigerian Local Church

not in any manner, compare the Nigerian society wholistically with the Medieval period. The Christian gospel is approximately 185 years old in Nigeria. This chronological reality, coupled with poor economic and political advancement, makes the typical Nigerian Christian to be strongly sentimental as regards religion: the worldview of the typical Nigerian is dotted with religious perspectives. Societal values are intrinsically attached to faith and there is an intensive and extensive reference to the supernatural in most human affairs: sicknesses, natural disasters are still believed to be either divine curses or spiritual manipulation while success or failure even in purely secular details is wholly dependent on supernatural forces. Based on this religious emphasis, anything connected to the divine has a priority place in the minds of the people. Comparatively, one can rightly say that as religion was dominant in the life of the ordinary Christian in the Medieval times, so also does it command a strong influence for the ordinary Nigerian Christian of this age.

Naturally, in a society with strong attachment to religion like Nigeria, the clergy are always held in high esteem, Catholic priests are well respected. The ordination of candidates to the priesthood is so cherished by the people that it is always a community affair. In Parishes, the Parish Priests are regarded with high dignity and for the rural communities, he is sometimes the most influential person both in spiritual and secular matters. Families, including non-Catholic families prefer to refer their issues to the Parish Priest because of the trust placed on him; the council of Chiefs or elders in villages are more comfortable when there is a collaborative understanding with the priest. In other words, just like the Medieval times of Humbert and Cerularius, the clergy in the present Nigerian milieu have determining influence in the life of the society.

In such a religiously determinant clime like Nigeria, what a religious leader, specifically, a priest says will be absorbed by most people. For people who are religiously sensitive, to disobey a priest implies a direct disobedience to God. In same manner, most rural dwellers convincingly assume that the words and actions of a priest are invariably the words and actions of the Church or of God. The person of the priest, for the people is an extension of the Church. This assumption, as much as it showcases a strong understanding of the theological aphorism of the priest as ‘alter Christus’, retains the risk of literally assessing the faith from the prism of a priest’s character. As naive as it sounds, that is the level of faith for some Nigerian Catholics. On this note, the event of 1054 between Humbert and Cerularius should serve as a caution for priests, especially the rural parish priests. Followership enjoyed by Catholic ministers in Nigeria can be intense. Evidence from the incidents of Prayer Ministries gives a clear picture of how ‘emotionally attached’ the trust of some Christians on their minister. There are continuous incidents of church ministers demanding the unimaginable or making absurd

claims and yet getting an unalloyed cooperation from their congregations, including the learned and elites: some call it gullibility; others call it faith.

There is an exigent need for priests to be aware of the responsibility, dependence and trust placed on them, and what adverse effects can be accrued when there is a betrayal of this trust. The priority of personal interest over the common good of the Church was the major catalyst of the 1054 schism. Pastors of souls should be able to differentiate between issues pertaining to them as individuals and those that concern their priestly office. When a priest pursues personal vendetta due to some perceived or actual harm to his personal dignity, there is always the temptation to use the pulpit as a court to settle scores: it may be against the Church hierarchy, fellow priest or even a parishioner, in all cases, the resultant effect is always division, hatred, mutual prejudice and slack in faith, all of which affects the Church of Christ and sows seeds of discord.

The spiritual authority of priests is of the most delegated by the Church represented by the bishop. Delegation involves a subdivision of certain aspects of power or task by a superior to a subordinate. Subdivision necessary implies a limitation, because it involves only a part of a whole. A delegate therefore cannot act under certain assumptions, especially when such is clearly not within his delineated duty. The schism of 1054 was a consequence of an abuse of a delegated authority. Priests should always be aware that their spiritual authority has limitations. Therefore, it behooves on the person the moral and legal responsibility to act only within the confines of such subdivision and avoid all kinds of unfounded assumptions. The tendency for such abuse of delegation abounds more in rural communities where the people may be less informed about the administrative organigram of the Church. There are certain cases of parish priests denying the faithful of sacraments and burials without due consultation and on reasons beyond the jurisdiction of the priest, in some cases, due to personal bias. In most cases, the helpless faithful adhere to such abuse without seeking proper canonical recourse. In same vein, there are also instances where the statements of priests led to the faithful's hatred and calumny of the bishop, former parish priests of a parish or even the successors. In one of the dioceses in the East, the faithful went into rampage destroying Church properties on the assumption that their 'favorite priest' was maltreated by the Church's hierarchy, an assumption which they deduced from the statements of the priest. Local communities have witnessed divisions and rivalry even among Catholics based on the utterances and administrative methodologies of some Parish Priests.

The events of 1054 should be a cautionary reference for the Nigerian Catholic priests. The socio-religious culture in Nigeria gives the priest a place of honour among the people. This privilege should be guarded with utmost responsibility and discipline. As revered members of communities and trusted ministers of God, priests should not allow their personal interests, biases and ambition to override the common good of the Church: the good of the Church is priority.