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THE REAL CAUSES OF ECCLESIASTICAL SCHISM

Abstract

The Christian teaching during the apostolic era was founded on simple ideas, the acknowledgment of which designated an individual as a member of the church. Christians with divergent views or those who had distanced themselves from the apostles for various reasons were not deemed outside the church. But how these Christians were perceived changed throughout time. They were labeled as heretics, schismatics, and members of illegal congregations, for whom suitable regulations for reunification were instituted. Church schisms were sometimes instigated by personal aspirations such as arrogance, suspicion, distrust, and a lust for power. But even though the human aspect was important, it was rarely the only factor that caused division, which was frequently linked to other objective reasons, for example misunderstandings of a linguistic origin. Nationalism may also be attributed a significant part among the causes of religious division. German nationalism was indeed linked to the emergence of the Reformation. The organization of the Church of England is intricately linked to the class division paradigm of English society. Identical reasons are evident in earlier centuries, particularly in the founding of the Christian churches in Armenia and Persia.

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In early Christianity, unity was promoted through commitment to a simple set of principles articulated in the New Testament. It underscored fundamental teachings including the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as a singular entity – and the incarnation of Christ. Early Christians, especially the apostles, focused on these essential ideas rather than doctrinal intricacy.

Initially, heresies and schisms were seen as internal issues. The early church fathers regarded these divisions as internal community difficulties rather than foreign dangers. Over time, ecclesiastical officials adopted a more stringent position, with individuals such as Cyprian of Carthage contending that schismatics and heretics ought to be regarded as entirely outside the church. This move reflected an increasing concern for institutional unity and doctrinal integrity. Nonetheless, the contrast between heresy (doctrinal mistake) and schism (organizational revolt) persisted as significant in theological discourse.

A persistent motif throughout ecclesiastical schisms was the impact of individual ambition and the quest for authority. St. John Chrysostom notably remarked that nothing

incited schisms more than the desire for power. While theological discussions often provoked conflict, personal rivalry frequently worsened these disputes.

The linguistic disparities between the Eastern and Western churches substantially fostered misunderstandings. Theological terminology frequently lacked direct counterparts in Latin and Greek, resulting in ambiguity. For example, crucial terms relating to church authority and doctrine were difficult to explain effectively, complicating theological conversations. Western theologians frequently possessed restricted proficiency in Greek, while Eastern theologians were engrossed in regional theological controversies. This absence of reciprocal comprehension fostered an environment conducive to division.

Nationalism significantly influenced ecclesiastical schisms, particularly in subsequent eras. The Council of Constantinople in 1872 denounced ethnophyletism, the practice of arranging churches along national lines, as antithetical to Christian precepts. However, nationalist feelings were closely linked with church identity in certain locations.

During the Reformation, German nationalism strengthened Martin Luther's endeavors to reform the church. Luther's theological beliefs were significantly amplified by the emergence of German nationalism. His German translation of the Bible rendered scripture accessible to the whole populace, so fostering a sense of national and cultural identity.

Other reformers, like Zwingli, also embraced nationalism, combining patriotism with theological reform. The amalgamation of religious and national identity emerged as a hallmark of the Reformation period.

The Great Schism between the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches in 1054 was a major event in church history. It was driven by a combination of theological, political, and cultural issues, and neither side was wholly to blame since both the Eastern and Western churches contributed to the separation.

The schism was not just a doctrinal conflict but also represented deeper political and cultural divisions between the Byzantine East and the Latin West. Historians emphasize events such as the 1182 murder of Latins in Constantinople and the devastation of the city during the Fourth Crusade in 1204 as illustrations of the profound enmity that evolved over time.

The absence of reciprocal comprehension fostered the estrangement between the two churches. The significance of transparent communication and mutual respect in settling theological differences must be emphasized.

In summary, church schisms frequently stemmed from a complex interaction of theological disputes, personal aspirations, linguistic obstacles, and nationalism movements. Although these divides had considerable repercussions, the fundamental message is one of reconciliation and harmony.

The Great Schism is regarded as a calamity for both the Eastern and Western churches, with both factions bearing culpability for the divide, yet unity is still considered a commendable objective. Despite the hurdles, the Christian church continues to seek ways to bridge the gaps and develop a culture of understanding and collaboration.