

## **The Church in Crisis: A History of the General Councils: 325-1870**

### **CHAPTER 8. The Fourth General Council of Constantinople, 869-70**

The empress Irene came to a bad end. She could not bring herself to step aside as her son came to man's estate. She so lusted for power that she organised a plot against him--he was now approaching thirty--overthrew him, and had him blinded in the very room where she had given birth to him.[1] For four years Irene ruled supreme, then she also was overthrown, banished, and died miserably. Charlemagne, meanwhile, had become an emperor, created such (if this is the right term) by Pope Adrian's successor, Leo III, on Christmas Day, 800 -- one of the dates that every schoolboy is expected to know. He was then fifty-eight, and he lasted another fourteen years. Then came the first weak ruler the family had produced, his son Louis, called the Pious; and an affectionate partitioning of power with his sons, and presently chronic civil war, and the destruction of Charlemagne's achievement.

The Byzantines were not so unlucky as this, but generals fought one another for the supreme place, and one emperor was dethroned and another murdered before stability was attained.

With the accession of Leo the Armenian in 813, the Iconoclastic trouble revived, for the new ruler was himself a passionate Iconoclast, and in a great campaign of more or less learned propaganda he strove to put the clock back sixty years and restore the regime of the council of 753. In the debates which the emperor arranged in order to give some prestige to his jejune ideals, the Catholics were easily victorious, and one of them, Theodore, abbot of the Stoudion monastery, carried the argument well beyond all hairsplitting about the meaning of Old Testament quotations, by asserting that these religious questions lay wholly outside the emperor's sphere of authority. The patriarch of Constantinople was forced out, for standing by the tradition, and in his place a married layman was installed -- an unheard-of novelty. He faithfully carried out the emperor's orders, and called a council of bishops to sanctify the revolution. Here

there were bloody scenes, when the Iconoclasts battered their Catholic opponents into insensibility. From the church the victims were taken off to the emperor's prisons or banished, and it was announced that the council had quashed the decrees of the General Council of 787.

In the persecution that now began, there appeared this novelty of a Catholic leader, Theodore, who strove to unite the Catholics around the twin ideas that the state has no rights in questions of belief, and that the survival of the true tradition of Christian belief lies in the union of Catholics with the Apostolic See of Rome. Never before had these truths been stated so explicitly by a cleric subject to the Byzantine power. Theodore now became the chief target of the emperor's fury, but everywhere bishops, priests, monks were arrested, tortured, banished. As so often happens in persecutions that are systematic and ruthless, thousands gave way--a shocking fact, of course, to the pious whose safety has never been threatened, and who see themselves as instinctively resisting tyrants to the bitter last. Then in 820 the Iconoclast emperor, Leo V, was murdered, and the general who (to save his own life) had organised the deed, took his place; this was Michael II (820-29).

There did not now follow a general reversal of religious policy, but the active persecution was halted. The new ruler hoped for a compromise that would satisfy both the Iconoclasts and their victims. And he strove to enlist, as his ally in the task of winning over the pope to these views, the man whom he now acknowledged as "Emperor of the Franks and the Lombards," Louis the Pious. The imagination easily takes fire as to what might have been the history of the papacy in the next two centuries, striving to maintain its authority in a world where there were now two such blocs of imperial authority -- had they both endured -- and where the Mediterranean sea was a Saracen lake.

Michael II died in 829, his problem unsolved, and the empire heaving uneasily with religious conflict. He was succeeded by his son Theophilus, a conscientious Iconoclast, under whom, for the best part of twelve years,

the business of arrests, imprisonments, floggings and exiles took up once again. All to no real purpose -- the mass of his subjects remained at heart faithful to the tradition. Among these were the emperor's wife and all the womenfolk among his kinsmen.

When Theophilus died, prematurely in 842, leaving a child of three to succeed him, the great men of state -- realising that Iconoclasm was a chronic irritant that no empire endlessly troubled by hostile neighbours could, during a long regency, endure -- made common cause with the empress-mother. Together they got rid of the main obstacle to internal peace, the Iconoclast patriarch, John the Grammarian; a council saw to all the formalities of a restoration of the General Council of 787; and in a great new liturgical feast--the Feast of Orthodoxy[2] -- March 11, 843, the restoration of the cult of the images and of the saints was solemnly inaugurated. Never again did Iconoclasm lift its head.

The imperial church was now just a quarter of a century away from the eighth General Council, and in those twenty-five or six years no new heresy disturbed its peace. Crisis, when it came, would be largely a matter of personal rivalries, conflicting jurisdictions, and resentment at subordination; no longer a matter of self-willed imperial theologians, but of "turbulent priests" -- and tactless handling of the situation generally, to say nothing of misunderstandings that were inevitable in an age when means of communication had all but disappeared, and Rome might wait twelve months before it received replies from Constantinople.[3]

The eighth General Council, Constantinople 869-70, was about the consequences of the expulsion of an intruded patriarch, Photius, and the restoration of the rightful patriarch, his predecessor, Ignatius. The situation, as the legates left the papal chancellery in the summer of 869, was complicated by the fact that the intruder had been in undisturbed possession for nine years; that, in a council called by him, in 867, he had excommunicated the pope, anathematized him and declared him deposed from his see; that he had had on his hands a serious quarrel with Rome of

another sort altogether, about missionary activities among the Bulgarians; and, final complication, that the rightful patriarch, Ignatius, agreed with the usurper Photius about this last matter.

Ignatius, a man of seventy at the time of the council, was the youngest son of the emperor Michael I, dethroned in 813 by Leo the Armenian. He was then forced into a monastery, professed, ordained and as an abbot was a champion of the faith in the days of the Iconoclastic reaction. In 847 he became patriarch of Constantinople. It is regrettable to say it, but he was something of an episcopal czar, and he presently fell foul of the Roman See through his highhanded deposition of the Archbishop of Syracuse, for Rome refused to confirm this until it had heard the archbishop's side of the story. Then, while Ignatius was still making his stand, a palace revolution swept him away. The child successor of Theophilus the Iconoclast was now a young man of 19, Michael III (soon to be known as Michael the Drunkard), and he had just succeeded in getting rid of the chief counsellor of his regency days, by murder, and of promoting in his place his own uncle, Bardas, a capable man but of foul morals, whom Ignatius had to forbid to receive Holy Communion until he amended his notorious life. It was this offence, and a refusal to force the empress-mother and her daughters into a convent, that was punished when, in November 858, Ignatius was summarily arrested and deported, and the announcement was made that he had returned to the monastic life.

Photius, who was now promoted to be patriarch, has a high place in the history of culture as a miraculously learned man, a scholar, one of the great bibliophiles, through whose works a great deal of the bygone classical antiquity has been preserved. He was, at this time, in his forties (perhaps), and in the service of the emperors he had climbed very high, as administrator and diplomatist. Between this accomplished statesman, whose life was a model of decorum, and the joint rulers of the empire there was nothing in common, of course, but Bardas (among other feats) had personally re-created the University of Constantinople, and could

really appreciate the rare quality of the man he now set on the patriarch's throne.

Was he really the lawful patriarch? It is not certain that he was not. Ignatius resigned, but did he do so freely? These are questions still discussed, but the general verdict is that Ignatius executed an abdication that was valid, and it was not until this was done that Photius was consecrated-by that Archbishop of Syracuse whom Ignatius had endeavoured to depose.

Whatever the sentiments of Ignatius, his friends in the episcopate organised against Photius, declaring his election null and void, and drawing upon themselves the inevitable reprisals. At a council in 859 Ignatius was declared deposed, and others also; bishop after bishop was soon toppling from his see. The great monasteries were divided.

Photius notified Rome of his election and consecration, in the customary manner, not hiding, of course, the fact that his predecessor's reign had been ended by an act of state. The letter found at Rome a newly elected pope, Nicholas I -- who was soon to show himself, in event after event, one of the greatest popes of all. He was the last man ever to take such a story as the whole truth of the matter, without asking many pertinent questions. And so, inevitably, between these two first-class intelligences, there was conflict. Nicholas would not send the expected, due recognition until he had a report from Constantinople made by his own men. He sent two Italian bishops to find out the facts. The legation made the long journey, delivered the apostolic letters, to Photius and to the emperor, and then forgetting they had been sent as mere observers, joined with Photius at a second council before which Ignatius was brought to be judged (and deposed) once again -- by (as it now seemed) the papal authority also. This was in April 861. The prisoner put his finger on the weak place in this parade. "I cannot be judged by you," he said to the legates, "for you are not sent here in order to judge me." And when the legates returned with their story of these events the pope broke them, and at a council of

his own he quashed the proceedings of April 861. This was just one year later, and the pope dismissed Photius' plea that in the East the rule forbidding laymen to be elected to sees was a dead letter, by reminding him that what the pope decides, in the exercise of the primacy he has inherited from St. Peter, is final; even in matters of discipline there is no appeal possible from it. And then, some months later, there came in at last to Rome the appeal of Ignatius against his deposition--the whole story of events, from the disciplinary admonition about Holy Communion made to Bardas.

The sequel to this was yet another council at Rome, April 863, in possession, at last, of the whole tale. There was a general deposition of Photius and his friends, Gregory of Syracuse, the legates he had seduced from their duty, all those he had ordained or consecrated. Ignatius was proclaimed the lawful patriarch, and Photius ordered to surrender his see to him. All those bishops deprived and exiled in 859 for their loyalty to Ignatius were likewise restored. No more spectacular sentence had ever been laid upon the life of the splendid capital from this backwoods village in Italy that somehow managed to survive amid the ruins of the great days of long ago. And the pope turned from the problems of Byzantium to the conflict with the Carolingian king, Lothair II, who had taken to himself a second wife while the first was still living, "divorced," on his behalf, by complacent local bishops.

Upon this mighty sentence of Nicholas I there fell a long silence. Our next date, indeed, that of the Roman letter that answers Michael III's reply, is two and a half years later, September 28, 865. The emperor's reply is described in this as "a mass of blasphemies." What else it contained we do not know, for it has not been preserved. But something there was that brought about a change in the pope's line of action, for he now, as it were, reopened what he had settled, and again invited Photius (turned back into a layman in 863) and Ignatius to appear in Rome, personally or by proxy, to put their case. It was a deliberate gesture of conciliation: "We have

moderated our sentence,” the pope wrote, “and we have promised peace, and to restore him to communion with the church.”

And now follows another long silence, not a word that has come down to us from Constantinople, or from Rome, for more than a year. It is broken -- i.e., for us -- by the fierce blast of Pope Nicholas’ letters of November 13, 866. Evidently he has received no reply to his previous letter. The emperor is again severely castigated for the letter “full of blasphemies,” and told that unless he makes amends by burning it publicly, the pope will do so “in the presence of all the bishops of the west.” Did the emperor, and the patriarch, ever receive these last letters? We know nothing, except that the legates who brought them were stopped at the Byzantine frontier, whence they made their way to another band of legates sent by Nicholas to the court of the Bulgarian king, Boris. And with the mention of this personage we touch the hidden conflict between Rome and Constantinople which burned more fiercely than all the disputes about Photius and Ignatius.

This race of warlike barbarians had been, for a hundred and fifty years now, the great standing menace of the empire on its European side, as the Saracens were by sea and in Asia. The Bulgarians had long ago possessed themselves of the territory still called by their name--the ancient Roman province of Thrace--and they commanded what is now the southern part of Yugoslavia, well-nigh to the Adriatic. At some undetermined date during these controversies of which Photius was the centre, Michael III had offered to make peace with the Bulgarians, on condition that their king, Boris, become a Christian. He agreed, and was baptised, the emperor standing godfather, and giving him his own name, Michael. Whereupon, from Constantinople, a flood of missionaries set out to convert the Bulgarians. How, it may be asked, could all this have offended the pope?

Very simply -- too simply, perhaps -- it may be stated that much of this territory had, in times gone by, been under the direct control of the popes, i.e., its bishops supervised as those in Italy, let us say, and not as in Syria

or in Asia Minor. When the emperors, at various times, drew the line that marked where the western and eastern empires divided, they cut across territories directly controlled in spirituals by Rome. Thessalonica, for example, which had stood to Rome as Ravenna or Milan, was now a city that belonged to the empire whose capital was Constantinople. Would it not be logical that it one day passed to the direct spiritual control also of Constantinople? All through the fifth and sixth centuries this question sputtered continually between the two great ecclesiastical points--the question of eastern Illyricum, to speak technically. Then, as has been told, the Iconoclast emperor, Leo III, had formally annexed all these lands to the domain of the patriarch of Constantinople, as well as Sicily and Calabria. To the popes--whose rights never die, especially when they are seen in relation to the maintenance of their vital, divinely given primacy--the appearance of Byzantine missionaries in their own ancient Illyricum, was an affront, and much more than an affront. And while Nicholas I observed what was going on, there was suddenly a break between Boris and his new spiritual guide, Photius. And Boris turned to Rome. How tempting here, to wander away in the reverie that the Balkans never change, to speak of attraction to St. Petersburg or Vienna, to Moscow or London!

What Boris really wanted was a church under his own control--his own patriarch. Photius, of course, could not oblige him here, and he seems to have said his "No" without any of those pleasant accommodating offers that sometimes soften such inevitable refusals. Rome, also, could only say "No," but it offered him an archbishop. Rome too, Boris may have thought, was farther away than Byzantium -- a good year or more away, once embarrassing questions developed.

More important than this kind of speculation is the fact that the neo-Catholic king now was made aware that, in the Catholic Church, there are indeed many mansions; and that life in the Latin mansions differed considerably from life with the Byzantines. And the new Latin



missionaries, now despatched by Nicholas I under one of his leading men--the cardinals of later centuries--namely Formosus, bishop of Porto,[4] were only too happy to point out where the superiority lay. Boris, thereupon, sent back the Greek missionaries to their chief, the patriarch Photius. As to the time when all this happened, Formosus and his band had formed part of the same cavalcade as the legates who took to Constantinople the strong threats of November 866 and, when stopped at the frontier, as has been told, it had been to Formosus at the court of Boris, that these legates betook themselves.

Need it be asked how the happenings in Bulgaria might seem--or be said to seem -- to Photius and his emperor? The patriarch certainly rose to the occasion. In an encyclical letter to the bishops of the East, he set out all the points where Latin ways differed, and condemned them all roundly; and in one point he denounced the Latins for heresy--they believed that the Holy Ghost proceeded from the Father and the Son, and they had corrupted the ancient creed by adding these last words to it.[5] Therefore a council would shortly be held at Constantinople to discuss these matters, to publish the joint condemnation of the churches of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. This sentence would have its effect in the West also, for said Photius, people were getting tired of the tyranny "of him who now, at Rome, is in power." [5a]

The promised council met in the summer of 867, with a great attendance of bishops, and it: assented to Photius sentence of deposition and excommunication against the pope. Also, it called on the emperor in the West to carry out the sentence and expel the pope from Rome. This is the high-water mark of the centuries-old restiveness of New Rome. But, whatever the impudence, or even malice, it is not a denunciation or denial of the Roman claim to be, by divine appointment, the head of all the churches.

Nicholas I never knew to what lengths Photius had gone. The pope had been ailing throughout the summer of 867, and on November 13 he died -- long before the news about the sentence came to Rome.

And somewhere about the time the pope died, Photius had ceased to be patriarch. For a good two years now the young emperor had been fostering a mightier personality than himself, Basil, called the Macedonian. In April 866, this man had brought about the murder of the all-powerful Bardas - - the creator of Photius. Now, on September 24, 867, he had Michael III murdered too, and took his place. In the general sweep-out of the old regime, Photius went with the rest, November 867. And since Ignatius was still available, and willing, he now reappeared on the patriarch's throne in St. Sophia. The new emperor wrote to inform the pope of these changes, and in this letter (December 11, 867 or 868) is the suggestion which developed into the General Council of 869-70.

As so often before, to solve the problems by a council was the emperor's idea, in the first place, and his solutions were not what was in the mind of the pope. Basil I, the successful murderer of his predecessor, meant to unite all parties, to do away with all possible reasons for "lawful" discontent, and in the ecclesiastical sphere to unite the rival parties of Ignatians and Photians. Hence, to say nothing at all about the councils which, on the very eve of the fall of Photius, had presumed to depose a pope. If in the new council these "old issues" could be passed over, and in the blessed presence of the Roman legates the factions be reconciled, how happy it would be for all.

But although the new pope, Adrian II, was not in stature a second Nicholas, he was none the less a pope. And, preparatory to the council proposed by the emperor, he did as Adrian I had done in 787 and Agatho in 680. He called his own council in Rome, June 10, 869, and the sole subject of the debates was precisely the Byzantine council of 867 that had anathematized his predecessor. The acts of this council were produced and ordered to be burned. The proceedings of the earlier Photius councils

of 861 and 859 were likewise condemned. Photius himself was cast out of the church once more, with the special proviso that even should he repent he was never more to be anything but a lay member. The bishops who, at his impious council, had assisted in the excommunication of Pope Nicholas were to be forgiven upon repentance, but those consecrated by Photius were never again to perform any of the sacred rites. Finally the legates were appointed to represent Adrian II at the coming restoration council, and given their instructions, and letters of credence.

The question of Photius v. Ignatius had been solved, it will be seen, without any reference to their mutual rights and wrongs. The unprecedented outrage to the papacy had overshadowed all else. The legates' task was simple. The council was not to reopen past questions, but simply to confirm the decisions expressed by the pope in this council of June 869. In this coming council at Constantinople no bishop consecrated by Photius was to have a seat. Those consecrated previous to his usurpation in 858 were to be allowed a place, provided they signed the retractation brought by the legates -- it was the formula drawn up by Pope Hormisdas three hundred and fifty years before,[6] for the reconciliation of the bishops after the schism of the patriarch Acacius. These were Adrian's express orders to Ignatius.

It is evidence how general had been the support of Photius that it was scarcely possible, on the arrival of the legates, to collect enough bishops to make up a council--bishops qualified, according to the orders of the pope, to sit in the council. Nor did the situation greatly improve in the six months the council lasted. At the first session, October 5, 869, there were present, besides the legates and Ignatius, no more than eighteen bishops. This and the next three sessions were spent in examining whether bishops who came were excluded altogether, because ordained by Photius or, if reconcilable, were willing to sign the formula of Hormisdas. By the eighth session (November 8) the numbers had crept up to 38, by the ninth (February 12, 870) to 65. At the final session (February 28) 102 were

present, 37 of them metropolitans, i.e., archbishops, to whom other bishops were subject. There were ten sessions in all, and between the eighth and ninth a mysterious interval of three months.

The main event of the council was the trial, so to miscall it, of Photius and his associates for the crime of 867--the council, in the mind of the pope, had been called for nothing else. It occupied the fifth, sixth, and seventh sessions (October 5 to November 7). Despite the high officers of state whom, in accordance with the practice since 431, the emperor had sent to keep order in the council, the legates of the pope had their way: this was not to be a trial, but an acceptance of the decisions already reached at Rome. There was to be no debate on the rights and wrongs of Photius, or on the value of the arguments he had used to persuade the bishops to join him in his excommunication of the pope. Whatever Photius might have said, in other circumstances, as things were he made no attempt to defend himself or to explain. Still less was there, from him, a single sign of regret or repentance. He appeared on October 5, to hear the charges made against him, and on November 8 to be sentenced. And he said never a word. Others of his party tried a defence that greatly interested the emperor. Popes, they said, were not above the canon law, and history showed that some of their decisions had later been revoked. But the legates objected to these dissertations. What the bishop who spoke was summoned for, they said, was to say whether or not he would sign the formula--repudiate, that is to say, his schismatical conduct--and acknowledge he had done wrong. The legates held firm, and they had their way. And just a week after the condemnation of Photius, there was a solemn bonfire--as the pope had ordered--of all his antipapal writings and of the proceedings of his council of 867.

The real business of the eighth General Council was now over. All that remained was to put its achievement into shape for the record--to formulate it in twenty-seven canons.

There are two versions of these canons, the Greek and the Latin, of which the Latin set contains thirteen canons not included in the Greek. Ten of these thirteen deal with duties of metropolitans and bishops; their right to dispose of church property by sale or lease, for example; that metropolitans must not burden their suffragans with taxes, nor, giving themselves to public affairs, leave to their suffragans their spiritual tasks. Three canons deal with the choice of bishops. First, promotions in the see of Constantinople are to go to those already eminent by their long service to it, and not to outsiders, to men brought in after a great career as laymen. There is no mention of Photius in the canons, nor any need to mention him. Bishops appointed through intrigues, or imposed by arbitrary action of princes, are to be deposed, as men who have willed to receive the gift of God through human acts. No prince or lay authority is to have any part in the election of bishops, metropolitans, or patriarchs. The choice of these is the exclusive business of the college of bishops, who may, however, invite the ruler to assist in the choice of a suitable successor to the late occupant. Rulers who thrust themselves in uninvited fall under the anathema of the council.

There is a canon restating the right of appeal from the judgment of lower courts to higher, and another to the effect that it is sacrilege for any authority to take away property once given to the church and in its possession for thirty years. A lengthy canon speaks of the sacrilegious debauches of the late emperor, Michael III. Michael is not indeed named, but the phrases, "Certain laymen of senatorial rank, in the time of him who lately reigned," and "If any emperor," in the clause about punishment for future offenders of this sort leave no doubt who the chief culprit was. If, in the future, a patriarch of Constantinople does not suitably correct such offenders he is to be deposed.

Finally, there are two canons where Photius is named. The first recounts how, in the days before he was patriarch, presumably when he was the extremely successful university professor, Photius had gathered written

promises of fidelity from these disciples, then learning from him the wisdom which in God's sight is folly. The council declares that these pledges are null, that they are to be collected and burned, that those who hold any such are to surrender them. The second canon declares that all those ordained or consecrated by Photius two predecessors, Ignatius (847-58) and Methodius (843-47), and who have taken Photius part, and who have not joined with "this holy and universal council," are deposed, and suspended from all their priestly functions, "as, not long before, the most blessed pope Nicholas[7] decided." Nor are they ever to be restored to the catalogue of clergy even when they repent; no more is to be allowed them than to receive Holy Communion, and this as a most merciful concession on our part, say the bishops. For they do not deserve to be restored to their former state, even though they do penance, even though they plead with tears. They are like the detestable Esau.

Of the fourteen canons common to both texts, one is a general renewal of previous laws, one repeats the teaching about images of the council of 787, and a second dogmatic pronouncement condemns a new heretical theory, viz., that man has two souls. Three canons deal with bishops and their affairs: they are rigorously to observe the law about the intervals between ordination to the various ecclesiastical degrees, i.e., one year to be spent as lector, two as subdeacon, three as deacon, and four as priest. No one is to be made a bishop until at least ten years after his first step in the clerical life. The decree speaks plainly of some who, being of senatorial rank and after a career as laymen, become clerics solely to qualify for appointment as patriarch. "Especially do we forbid," say the bishops, the practice of ordaining without observance of these intervals, in cases where the person to be ordained is being promoted by the authority of the emperor. Plainly enough the circumstances of Photius' election are censured here, and his condemnation on this account by Pope Nicholas is endorsed. Lay princes, says another canon, are to give bishops the honour due to their office, and a third canon regulates the wearing of various episcopal insignia.

Next there is a group of canons that deal with the rights of the patriarchs -- the first time this term occurs in the laws made by a general council. They are forbidden to exact from the clergy, or from the bishops subject to them, written pledges of fidelity. This has been the practice of orthodox and legitimate patriarchs of Constantinople, as well as of usurpers. It must now cease: and the canon states a severe penalty for the disobedient--deposition from their dignity. Patriarchs have the right to compel their metropolitans to attend the synods which they summon. It is not a valid reason for staying away that the metropolitan has held his own synod, nor that the patriarch's synod cannot be held unless the emperor is present. Temporal princes have no place in any synod, except in the General Councils of the Church. A further confirmation of the patriarch's position is the canon which declares that no one, not even a bishop, is to withdraw his obedience from his patriarch or cease to make public prayer for him (even though he thinks he knows the patriarch is guilty of some serious crime) until the case has been judged by a council and a sentence given against the patriarch.

Finally, with regard to patriarchs, the council enacts that no lay authority is to depose a patriarch, "and especially the most holy pope of the older Rome ... nor to get up movements against the pope, and to set in circulation writings that suggest he is guilty of serious misconduct, as Photius did recently, and as Dioscoros did long ago. Whoever shall again treat the pope with the impudent arrogance of a Photius or Dioscoros, heaping insults (whether in writing or otherwise) upon the see of Peter, prince of the Apostles, let him receive the same punishment as was given to them." If any lay prince "attempts to drive out the aforesaid Pope of the Apostolic See, or any other patriarch, let him be anathema." And if, in any General Council, there is a dispute about the holy, Roman Church, the matter must be discussed with all the respect and reverence due to it, and some solution found and put forth, "but let none presumptuously give sentence against the supreme pontiffs of the elder Rome."

Photius name has at last appeared, in this summary. It may end with reference to the three canons directed explicitly against him. First we have a canon which enacts that, for all time, the sentences are to be observed which “the most blessed Pope Nicholas, whom we hold as the instrument of the Holy Spirit, and the most holy Pope Adrian his successor” have in their synods decreed for the preservation of the see of Constantinople, namely, about its “most holy patriarch Ignatius, and about the expulsion and condemnation of the latecomer[8] and usurper Photius.” Secondly, it is decreed that Photius was never a bishop, is not now a bishop, and that none of those whom he ordained or consecrated are what he promoted them to be. The churches which he, or they, consecrated are to be reconsecrated. Finally, since it has appeared that Photius (after his just condemnation by Pope Nicholas for his wicked usurpation of the see of Constantinople, and for other wicked acts), picking up from the streets of the capital certain evil flatterers, whom he put forth as vicars of the three other patriarchs, began an action against Pope Nicholas and declared him to be anathema, the council now anathematizes the said Photius, as the man responsible for all this wickedness, and with him all his helpers and collaborators, according to the synodal law of that most courageous champion of true piety, the most holy Martin, pope of Rome.

The eighth General Council was now over. But the legates troubles were not at an end. To the final meeting, the ceremonial closing of the great affair, there had been admitted as spectators an embassy from the Bulgarian king, that had just arrived in the capital. Boris had once more changed his mind. When the pope promised him an archbishop of his own, he asked that the legate Formosus should be appointed, and when it was answered that this could not be, for to translate a bishop from one see to another was unlawful, Boris’ brief affection for Latin ways ended. The embassy had come to ask the emperor and Ignatius to take over the Bulgarian mission. The last act of the legates was to warn the restored Ignatius, under the most serious penalties, that he must do nothing of the kind, and to hand him a letter from the pope, which, in anticipation of this



precise situation, had been sent with them. Ignatius, it is recorded, put the letter aside without opening it, and replied with an evasion. The legates set off on their journey to Rome, and the next news was that Ignatius had consecrated ten bishops for Bulgaria.

That the eighth General Council should leave a critical situation in its wake was nothing new in the history of these institutions, but the sequel, this time, was the strangest of all the series. More strangely still, it is only within the last thirty years -- more than a thousand years after the events -- that the true story of what happened has been discovered.

The legates of Pope Adrian II had a most adventurous return journey, in which they were shipwrecked, captured by pirates, and lost most of their papers. It was not until the June or July of 871 that they reached Rome. They found the pope already prepared for what they had to report, for the most cosmopolitan figure of the time, Anastasius (called the Librarian), who had been at Constantinople as ambassador for the emperor Louis II, had got to Rome months before, and he had brought with him a full report of the council's proceedings. On November 10, after hearing the legates, the pope wrote to the emperor a letter which was, in a way, an approbation of the work the council had done, but principally it was a list of complaints about the negligent way the legates had been treated, the attitude of Ignatius to the Bulgarians (with threats about this), and an excommunication for the Bulgarian king. As to the emperor's plan to reconcile "Photians" and "Ignatians," the pope declared that, unless an enquiry held at Rome brought out some new evidence, the decisions already arrived at must stand. And there the matter remained for the next four or five years.

Meanwhile (December 14, 872) Adrian II died, and was succeeded by a still more resolute personage, John VIII, whose first care was to renew the demands about Bulgaria, and to remind Ignatius that it was only on his promise to withdraw the Greek missionaries that the pope had restored him to his see. Unless he now made good his promises, he would be

deposed. John VIII's mind was very clear about this problem. It was not the matter of prestige that moved him, but the obvious danger that if the new convert nation was so closely related to the Byzantine patriarch, it would be everlastingly in danger of schism and heresy. The pope said this explicitly.

Finally, in April 878, the patience of the pope gave out before the endless delays of Ignatius, and two legates were despatched to Constantinople to give him a final admonition. If within thirty days of this he had not acted, the legates were to excommunicate him, and next to depose him. When the legates arrived, sometime in the summer of that same year, they learnt that Ignatius had been dead nearly a year, dead six months already when John VIII was drafting this sentence against him. Such are the hazards of international relations, in the centuries when no letter goes more quickly than a post horse can run, and when, with the winter, all transport ceases on the stormy Adriatic. What, no doubt, astonished the legates even more than the news about Ignatius was that it was to Photius that they were presented. Without the least trouble in the world, as though indeed he had been *coadjutor cum iure successionis*,<sup>[9]</sup> Photius had immediately taken Ignatius' place--to the almost entire satisfaction of the whole patriarchate.

It seems that, for some years now, Ignatius and he had been on the best of terms, both collaborating wholeheartedly with the policy of the emperor Basil, "No religious faction fighting, at all costs." The legates just did not know what to do, save to report these strange events to their distant master and await what new instructions he chose to send.

In the framing of these papal directions, political considerations played an important part. One of the tasks for which the legates were sent, as well as the Bulgarian trouble, was to put to Basil the pope's urgent plea that he would do something to halt the seemingly impending Mohammedan conquest of Italy. Already the Saracens were masters of Sicily and of various places on the mainland. The wretched remnants of the house of Charlemagne, the potentates whom all mankind mocked as Charles the

Fat, and Charles the Bald, “transient embarrassed phantoms” indeed, could do nothing but hasten the steady political and social decomposition. Constantinople, or so the pope thought, was the only hope. When Basil’s embassy of the spring of 879 arrived in Rome to negotiate the peaceful recognition of the *fait accompli* of Photius, they were certainly in a strong position.

The outcome was a second council at Constantinople, to which 383 bishops came, with Photius as the central figure--but where he presided, and to which the presence of three papal legates gave the full outward sign of the pope’s approval. John VIII had accepted the *fait accompli*, and also the emperor’s plea that “bygones be bygones.” Photius was to acknowledge his great crime, the excommunication of the pope in 867, and at the new council express his sorrow. And the pope agreed to quash all that the eighth General Council had enacted against Photius. The remnants of anti-Photians, at Constantinople and elsewhere, were now told by the pope that he was their lawful patriarch, and that they were not to oppose him in the name of the council of 869, for the former things had passed away. All things were, indeed, made new; for, said the pope, the Apostolic See that can impose such sentences can also remove them. And this it had done. And to mark the pope’s satisfaction, the legates at the council presented the patriarch with a magnificent set of patriarchal insignia, the gift of John VIII.

Of what happened in the next ten years or so this is not the place to write. This is no more than the story of the eighth General Council, and with a reference to the papal act cancelling the council’s principal work, a bare ten years after it had been achieved, the story may end. The reader will notice that it ends as it began--a matter of personalities in conflict, and not ideas, still less doctrines.

## NOTES

1. Finlay, 79.
2. Still one of great annual feast days in the church presided over by the patriarch of Constantinople, and its daughter churches.
3. Cf. Amann, 475, n 4, on “la lenteur des communications entre Rome et Constantinople. Cette lenteur explique bien des choses.”
4. This is the Formosus who will, thirty years later, be pope, and the subject (after death) of the most revolting action of all these barbarous centuries fished out of his tomb, robed and enthroned while a council sat in judgment on him.
5. In Latin, Filioque.
- 5a. Barry, no. 59A, prints a translation of Photius’ letter.
6. See p. 100 supra. Amann, 485, n. 3, notes that in all this the Roman Curia followed very carefully the precedent of 519.
7. Vere, Adrian II (867-72), whose command to the council this was.
8. Neophyte, is the exact word used, whose literal meaning is “newly enlightened,” a common expression in ecclesiastical literature for the newly baptised. The reference here is not to baptism, but holy orders—the rapid translation, at so late a time in life, of the Secretary of State into the Patriarch.
9. A happy “mot” I steal from the great work of Father Francis Dvornik. See Appendix.