

## LATERAN I— GOING “MEDIEVAL”: PROTECTING THE LIBERTY OF THE CHURCH

Last week, we focused on the growing **mistrust** between east and west in the Church. After Constantinople IV, nearly two and a half centuries passed before a council was held that later was deemed to be ecumenical. The landscape had clearly **shifted**, and the Church’s **unity** was formally breached in 1054 A.D., a rift that resulted in the Orthodox churches of today. Mutual excommunications were pronounced between Rome and Constantinople, and despite hopes of reunification, efforts towards unity had failed. The **schism hardened**, especially after the sack of Constantinople by Crusaders in 1204 A.D. Lateran Council I was held at the **Apostolic Palace of the Lateran** in Rome, in the news lately with Pope Francis’ expressed desire to turn much of it into a museum, as it is apparently no longer needed for offices of the Diocese of Rome.

The Palace originally belonged to the Laterani family, then to the Emperor Constantine, who eventually gave it to the Pope. The **Basilica of St. John Lateran** sits adjacent to the palace. Popes resided there until after the return from Avignon in the late 14th century, when they relocated to the Vatican. Due to the lack of representation from the East, the status of Lateran Council I is a matter of **dispute** between Catholics and the Orthodox. In other words, was it truly ecumenical, or only a general council of the West? I am not even certain that this question would have occurred to the people at the time, as they certainly accepted the **universal jurisdiction** of the pope in matters of Church doctrine and practice. That discussion of the ecumenicity of Lateran I is clearly **above my pay grade** and needn’t concern us. However, the significance of these Lateran councils **may not** be dismissed. The effect of this council was substantial.

In a letter written in the summer of 1122, **Pope Callistus II** called for a council to be held “for various important matters of the Church” the following year. Yep, that is why one would typically call a Council! It met in March and April of 1123, with the pope presiding and at least 300 bishops in attendance. The acts of the council itself have not survived, but its canons have been reconstructed from various sources. It is not known with certainty if there was any representation from the east (probably not!), nor is there any record that the Holy Roman Emperor Henry V participated. What **we do know** is that a key concern at that time was church-state relations. Specifically, the *libertas ecclesiae*, the **freedom of the Church**. Oh my, how little some things have changed, even after nearly 900 years.

Interference by the state into church matters led to nepotism, favoritism and the politicization of church offices, never a good result. In medieval days, prelates (i.e. bishops and abbots) were often invested by secular powers. The **freedom of the Church** was a major concern. The **Concordat of Worms** (1122) paved the way to end a fifty-year struggle over imperial investiture of bishops. This alone solidifies Pope Callistus’ place in Church history as a consequential leader and defender of Church rights. When I ponder the idea of “Christendom,” images abound of a Church and state so closely united that it is difficult to discern where secular power begins or ends. Kings had private chaplains, the state contributed to the support of the Church (it still does in some European countries) and the Church was able to flourish in many ways. But **too many strings** were attached.

Internally, the church was dealing with **simony**, an abhorrent practice in which Church offices were conferred upon noble families for a price. All too often upon individuals who had **no real calling** to an ecclesiastical office. The Council wasted little time. **Canon 1** was crystal clear, noting “by the authority of the apostolic see we all together forbid anyone to be ordained or promoted in the church of God for money.” **Canon 8** expands to include “if any prince or lay person should

arrogate to himself the disposition or donation of ecclesiastical things or possessions, let him be regarded as sacrilegious.” If all is going well between church and state, there were some who felt that a good relationship only **strengthened** the Church. Careful what you wish for; it cuts both ways. Secular powers may well do a 180° turn and clamp down on the Church. The experience of the Church in Russia and China are modern day examples.

The Council’s canons also reveal a mistrust between secular clergy (i.e., diocesan priests like me!) and religious orders, specifically monks. There was concern that **abbots and monks** were exercising undue influence on the faithful and not minding to their own business in the monastery! “Stay in your lane,” seems to have been the idea here. Another Canon supported the prohibition of marriages between blood-relatives. No brainer? Well, not so fast. Forbidding marriages to the **7th degree of consanguinity** meant that marriage was forbidden between two people, if they shared even one of their 64 **great-great-great-great-great** grandparents. Does your head hurt yet? Practically, this laid the groundwork for marriages outside of one’s community and the growth of arranged marriages. (The rule was later modified.) In short, the Church was now squarely centered in Rome. Popes would exert **greater influence** in successive councils, codifying Church practice and doctrine, resulting in an era of tremendous growth.

- I offer congratulations to those making their **First Communion** today. Last Sunday was the 50th anniversary of my special day. We are praying for you and rejoice with you today. I hope your memories of this day will remain as vivid as have mine.
- Ouch! Talk about firing up the squad. An NFL player returned to his alma mater (University of Arizona) and set a world record by catching a football **dropped 600 feet** from a helicopter! He achieved the feat on the third try, but I cannot imagine how much it must have hurt. The ball was estimated to have been traveling at **127 miles per hour**.
- I deeply appreciate your attention to **social distancing** by six feet between different households. While I take seriously any study emanating from the **Massachusetts Institute of Technology** (MIT), we also strive to cooperate with the common good by means of observing state protocols for the pandemic. The MIT study concludes that time inside is far more significant than distancing. Nevertheless, your cooperation is vital; we strive to keep our liturgies to under an hour.
- Though **Napoléon Bonaparte** died in exile **200 years** ago this Wednesday (May 5, 1821) on the island of St. Helena, his impact upon the Catholic Church in France is felt to this day. His **combative relationship** with the papacy (he kidnapped two popes!) following the French Revolution is widely known. The Revolution produced countless martyrs whose lives inspired generations. Still, the gradual secularization of the nation is obvious and sad to see.
- Today’s **Rosary Procession** begins promptly at **2:00 p.m.** from the State Capitol grounds. Those not processing may go directly to the Cathedral to pray the Rosary. Bring the whole family!
- Thank you, New York! If the state of **New York** had counted just **89 more people** in the 2020 Census, they would have kept a U.S. House seat and Minnesota would have lost one! As it stands, we **retain** all 8 congressional seats.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel, Rector