CHURCH HISTORY SERIES • LESSON 2 • NOLL TURNING POINT 5

The Great Schism of 1054

How the church of the Apostles broke into East and West — and how Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Christians came to hold different Bibles and different views of the Pope.

By Shane Gunn • Following Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points*, ch. 5

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Where this fits: Lesson 2 in the Pleasant Springs *Church History* series. This is Mark Noll's fifth *turning point*. For the apostolic foundation assumed in this lesson, see **Lesson 1 — The Apostles and the Writing of the New Testament**. Nicaea (325) and Chalcedon (451), which this lesson references, will get their own lessons later in the series.

WHY THIS LESSON MATTERS

For the first thousand years, the church of Jesus Christ was, at least officially, *one*. It called itself the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church," met in ecumenical councils from Nicaea (325) onward, and confessed a single creed. On **16 July 1054**, in the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, a cardinal from Rome laid a written excommunication on the altar against the Patriarch of Constantinople. The Patriarch excommunicated him back. The visible unity of the church fractured, and the world got **Eastern Orthodoxy** and **Roman Catholicism** as two distinct branches. Five centuries later a German monk would split the Western side again and produce a third — **Protestantism**.

Three practical consequences of that break land on our pew today: our three traditions read *different Bibles*, hold different views of *the Pope*, and describe the same Lord's Supper with

different words. This lesson tells what happened, what the three canons actually are, and what Western Catholic doctrine says the Pope's job is.

PART 1 — CHRISTENDOM BEFORE THE BREAK

By AD 500 the church had organized itself around **five great patriarchates**, known as the *Pentarchy*. In order of traditional precedence:

> **1. Rome** — the only patriarchate in the Latin-speaking West, claiming apostolic foundation through Peter and Paul.

> **2. Constantinople** — the "New Rome" founded by Constantine in 330 to be the Christian capital; granted honor equal to Rome by the Council of Chalcedon (451) canon 28 (a canon Rome never accepted).

> **3. Alexandria** — apostolic tradition traced to Mark the Evangelist; intellectual centre of early theology.

> **4. Antioch** — the city of Acts 11:26 where disciples were first called Christians; apostolic see of Peter before Rome.

> **5. Jerusalem** — the mother church of Pentecost; symbolically first, administratively last.

Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem were largely overrun by the Arab-Muslim conquests of the 7th century. This left **Rome** and **Constantinople** as the two surviving superpowers of Christian leadership — one in the Latin West, one in the Greek East — and steadily drifting apart.

PART 2 — THE SLOW DRIFT (C. 400–1054)

The break of 1054 did not come out of nowhere. Six centuries of cultural and theological drift made it almost inevitable:

> • **Language.** The Western church worshipped and argued in *Latin*; the Eastern church in *Greek*. By the 9th century most Eastern bishops could not read a Latin theological treatise, and most Western bishops could not read Greek. Theology diverged in the literal sense that theologians could no longer read one another.

> • **Politics.** The Western Roman Empire collapsed in 476; the Eastern Roman ("Byzantine") Empire continued another thousand years. The Pope in Rome had no emperor at his door; the Patriarch in Constantinople had one across the square. Different civic settings produced different instincts about church authority.

> • **The coronation of Charlemagne (Christmas 800).** When Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne "Emperor of the Romans" in St. Peter's, Constantinople read it as Rome setting up a rival to the Byzantine emperor — a breach of the old order of Christendom. (Noll treats this as his fourth turning point.)

> • **The Filioque controversy.** The Nicene Creed (381) confessed that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father." Beginning at a regional council at Toledo in 589 and gradually spreading across the West, Latin-speaking Christians began adding *filioque* — "and from the Son" — to the creed. The East regarded this as a unilateral alteration of an ecumenical creed, and a theological error: it seemed to compromise the monarchy of the Father within the Trinity. Rome eventually endorsed the addition; Constantinople never accepted it. The filioque remains the single sharpest doctrinal wound between East and West today.

> • **Papal primacy.** Rome increasingly claimed not just *honor* among the patriarchates but *jurisdiction* over the whole church. The East held the ancient position: the Bishop of Rome is *primus inter pares* — first among equals — with a primacy of honor, not of authority over the other patriarchs. What the West came to call "papal supremacy," the East called innovation.

> • **Azymes.** Rome celebrated the Eucharist with *unleavened* bread (following the Passover pattern of Jesus' Last Supper); the East used *leavened* bread (symbolizing the risen Christ). Each side accused the other of liturgical error.

PART 3 — JULY 16, 1054 — THE DRAMATIC MOMENT

The spark that lit the powder was a diplomatic mission that went catastrophically wrong. Pope Leo IX sent a delegation to Constantinople, led by **Cardinal Humbert of Silva Candida**, to negotiate. Pope Leo died while the delegation was en route, technically voiding Humbert's authority — but Humbert pressed on. Patriarch **Michael Cerularius** refused to meet with him.

On Saturday, **16 July 1054**, as the afternoon liturgy was about to begin in the Hagia Sophia, Humbert and two companions strode up the aisle, placed a written bull of excommunication on the high altar against Cerularius and his followers, and walked out shaking the dust from their feet. A deacon ran after them with the bull; they refused to take it back. Days later, Cerularius convened a synod and excommunicated Humbert and his delegation in return.

Technically the excommunications were personal — Humbert against Cerularius, not Rome against Constantinople. At the time, few outside those two cities even knew what had happened. Yet history treats **16 July 1054** as the day the visible unity of the church of the first thousand years ended.

> *"The bull of excommunication of 1054 was not, in the event, the end of communion between East and West. It was the moment at which it became visible that communion had already quietly ceased."*
>
> **— summary of Jaroslav Pelikan's analysis, *The Christian Tradition*, vol. 2**

PART 4 — DEEPER WOUNDS (1204, 1439, 1453, 1965)

Four later moments made the 1054 wound far worse:

> • **1204 — The Fourth Crusade sacks Constantinople.** A Western crusader army, diverted from its stated target of Jerusalem, attacked and looted the greatest Christian city in the East. Horses were stabled in the Hagia Sophia; relics were carted back to Venice. This was not a theological argument; it was a Latin-against-Greek invasion. Eastern Christians never really forgot.

> • **1439 — The Council of Florence.** A desperate attempt at reunion under the shadow of the advancing Ottoman Turks; a reunion decree was signed, but the Eastern populace and most Eastern clergy rejected it when their delegates returned home.

> • **1453 — Constantinople falls to the Ottoman Turks.** The Byzantine Empire ended. The Patriarchate of Constantinople survived under Muslim rule, and the centre of Orthodox gravity began to shift north to Moscow ("the Third Rome").

> • **1965 — The Joint Declaration.** On 7 December 1965 — the eve of the final day of the Second Vatican Council — Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras I simultaneously lifted the mutual excommunications of 1054, declaring the anathemas "consigned to oblivion." The schism was not healed, but the personal excommunications were revoked after 911 years.

PART 5 — THREE BIBLICAL CANONS

One of the most tangible legacies of the schisms — both the 1054 East-West split and the 16th-century Protestant Reformation — is that the three branches of historic Christianity do not carry exactly the same Bible. The differences are almost entirely in the **Old Testament**. All three branches agree on the **27 books of the New Testament**.

PROTESTANT • 66

39 OT + 27 NT = 66 books.

Follows the Hebrew **Masoretic Text** for the Old Testament — the same 24 books Jewish tradition counts (rearranged into 39 by Christian numbering). No "Apocrypha" in the canon itself.

Luther in 1534 placed the disputed books in a separate section between the Testaments, labelled "Apocrypha: books which are not held equal to the Holy Scriptures, and yet are useful and good to read." The King James Version of 1611 followed suit.

ROMAN CATHOLIC • 73

46 OT + 27 NT = 73 books.

Follows the broader **Septuagint (LXX)** tradition, including seven *Deuterocanonical* books: *Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Baruch, 1 Maccabees, 2 Maccabees*, plus Greek additions to Esther and Daniel (Prayer of Azariah, Song of the Three, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon).

Fixed as dogma at the **Council of Trent, 8 April 1546**, in direct response to the Reformation.

EASTERN ORTHODOX • 76+

Typically 49–50 OT + 27 NT = 76+ books.

Includes everything in the Catholic canon *plus*: *1 Esdras, Prayer of Manasseh, Psalm 151, 3 Maccabees*, with *4 Maccabees* as an appendix in many Greek editions. Called the *anagignoskomena* — "books worthy to be read."

Affirmed in regional form at the **Synod of Jerusalem, 1672**, but grounded in the Septuagint usage of the early Greek church.

Why the differences? The fork lies in what the church received as "Scripture" in the first place.

> • **The Septuagint (LXX)** was the standard Greek Old Testament of the apostolic and early Christian world. It included the Deuterocanonical books. Most New Testament Old-Testament quotations are from the LXX. For the first Christian centuries, this was simply "the Old Testament."

> • **The Masoretic Text (MT)** was the consonantal Hebrew text preserved and vocalized by Jewish scribes (the *Masoretes*) between roughly AD 500 and 1000. It is based on the shorter Hebrew canon affirmed in rabbinic tradition after the Fall of Jerusalem.

> • **Jerome**, translating the Latin *Vulgate* (c. 382–405), noted that the Deuterocanonicals were not in the Hebrew; he rendered them anyway, but flagged the distinction. (Jerome's work will be Lesson 8 of this series.)

> • **The Reformers** argued that if the Old Testament is the Scripture of Israel, it should be measured by Israel's Bible — the Hebrew canon. They therefore returned to the Masoretic list.

> • **Trent (1546)** responded by locking in the wider Septuagint-based canon for Rome.

A note on terms. "Apocrypha" (Greek "hidden things") is the Protestant term for these books. "Deuterocanonical" ("second canon") is the Catholic term; it denotes later reception, not lesser authority. "Anagignoskomena" ("worthy to be read") is the Orthodox term.

PART 6 — THE POPE'S ROLE (WESTERN CATHOLIC DOCTRINE)

In Roman Catholic teaching, the Pope (Latin *papa*, "father") is the **Bishop of Rome** and the **visible head of the universal church on earth**. This is the settled doctrine of Rome today, codified at the First Vatican Council (1870) and carried forward by the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992).

The biblical texts Catholics cite. Three passages stand at the foundation of Catholic teaching about Peter and his successors:

> *Greek NT (Matt 16:18–19): συ᾽ εἶ Πέτρος, και᾽ ἐπι᾽ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τη᾽ν ἐκκλησίαν… δώσω σοι τα᾽ς κλεῖδας τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν.*

> Matthew 16:18–19 (ESV): “You are Peter (Πέτρος, Petros), and on this rock (πέτρᾳ, petra) I will build my church… I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”

> *Greek NT (Luke 22:31–32): Σίμων Σίμων, ἰδου ̀ ὁ Σατανᾶς ἐξῃτήσατο ὑμᾶς… ἐγω ̀ δε ̀ ἐδεήθην περι ̀ σοῦ ἵνα μη ̀ ἐκλίπῃ ἡ πίστις σου· και ̀ σύ ποτε ἐπιστρέψας στήρισον του ̀ς ἀδελφούς σου.*
>
> Luke 22:31–32 (ESV): “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you… but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

> *Greek NT (John 21:15–17): λέγει αὐτῷ· βόσκε τα ̀ ἀρνία μου… ποίμαινε τα ̀ πρόβατά μου… βόσκε τα ̀ πρόβατά μου.*
>
> John 21:15–17 (ESV): “Feed my lambs… Tend my sheep… Feed my sheep.”

The Pope’s office — what Catholic doctrine actually claims. From the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (§§ 880–892) and the First Vatican Council’s dogmatic constitution *Pastor Aeternus* (1870):

> **1. Successor of Peter.** The Pope is the lawful successor of Peter in the See of Rome. Peter’s unique authority is held to pass to the Bishop of Rome in unbroken succession.

> **2. Universal jurisdiction.** The Pope has “full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, which he can always exercise unhindered” (*Lumen Gentium* 22). He is not merely first in honor; he has real authority over every bishop, every diocese, and every Catholic.

> **3. Visible principle of unity.** The Pope is “the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful” (*Lumen Gentium* 23). Where the Pope is, there the visible church is.

> **4. Pastor of the universal church.** He teaches, sanctifies, and governs. Concretely: he appoints bishops, convenes and approves councils, issues encyclicals, canonizes saints,

and guards doctrine.

5. Papal infallibility (Vatican I, 1870). When the Pope speaks *ex cathedra* — "from the chair" of Peter, with the explicit intention of defining doctrine on faith or morals for the whole church — his teaching is preserved by the Holy Spirit from error. This is a narrow category: in the 155 years since the definition, it has been invoked once (Pius XII's 1950 definition of the Assumption of Mary) and is also held to have operated in Pius IX's 1854 definition of the Immaculate Conception.

6. Titles. *Bishop of Rome. Vicar of Christ. Successor of the Prince of the Apostles. Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church. Primate of Italy. Sovereign of the Vatican City State. Servant of the Servants of God* (*Servus servorum Dei*, a title in continuous use since Gregory the Great, r. 590–604).

Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* (1964) added the doctrine of **collegiality**: the world's bishops, in communion with the Pope, share the supreme teaching and pastoral office. Collegiality tempers but does not replace papal supremacy; the Pope retains his authority even when acting alone.

PART 7 — HOW THE THREE BRANCHES SEE THE PAPACY

PROTESTANT VIEW

The "rock" of Matt 16:18 is *Peter's confession* ("You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," v. 16) or *Christ himself* (1 Cor 10:4; Eph 2:20) — not Peter's person, and certainly not a Roman

ORTHODOX VIEW

Rome's *primacy of honor* among the ancient patriarchates is ancient and proper — *primus inter pares*, first among equals. Rome is not an ordinary see.

ROMAN CATHOLIC VIEW

The Pope is Peter's direct successor in an unbroken line; the universal jurisdiction and infallibility defined at Vatican I (1870) are not new inventions but explicit statements of

office built around him.

Scripture alone (*sola scriptura*) is the church's final authority. There is no earthly head of the universal church; Christ alone is head (Col 1:18). The priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:9) rules out any priestly caste above the laity.

Luther called papal infallibility "the highest blasphemy"; most Protestants today frame it more mildly as simply unbiblical.

But *universal jurisdiction* and *infallibility* are 19th-century novelties that Orthodox believe the Pope added to his own office. The final authority in the church belongs to the *ecumenical councils* and to the conscience of the whole believing community (the *sensus fidelium*).

Orthodoxy governs itself through autocephalous (self-headed) churches — Constantinople, Moscow, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Romania, Serbia, Greece, and others — in conciliar communion.

what was always implicit in the office.

Vatican II softened the rhetoric with *collegiality* (bishops with the Pope), but did not retract the authority. The Pope remains "the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity" of the whole church.

Orthodox churches are called "sister churches" with valid sacraments; Protestant bodies are called "ecclesial communities" — a careful distinction.

PART 8 — THE GREEK WORDPLAY OF MATTHEW 16:18

Much of the argument about the papacy turns on a Greek pun. The passage, in the original:

> *Greek NT (Matt 16:18): συ᾽ εἶ Πέτρος, και᾽ ἐπι᾽ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τη᾽ν ἐκκλησίαν.*

> Matthew 16:18 (ESV): "You are Peter (*Petros*), and on this rock (*petra*) I will build my church."

In Greek, *Πέτρος* (masculine) and *πέτρα* (feminine) are clearly related but not identical words. Traditionally:

> • **Catholic reading:** the two words are functionally a single name; the change is only for grammatical gender. Jesus is saying "*You*, Peter, *are* the rock." The church is built on Peter personally — and, by extension, on his successors.

> • **Protestant reading:** the gender change is deliberate and meaningful. *Petros* is a small stone; *petra* is the bedrock (as in Matt 7:24–25's house built *on the rock*). The bedrock is Peter's *confession* in v. 16 — the truth that Jesus is the Messiah. Peter is the first of many stones (1 Pet 2:5) built on that foundation.

> • **Orthodox reading:** the rock is Peter's *faith*, which every bishop (not just the Bishop of Rome) succeeds to. The Eastern fathers (John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria) read the passage this way; Peter is an apostolic prototype, not the head of a Roman office.

The underlying Aramaic that Jesus himself spoke is relevant: the Aramaic word *kepha* ("rock") is used for both Simon's new name (*Cephas*, John 1:42) and for the rock itself — which supports the Catholic reading that the wordplay is more identity than distinction. Protestants counter that Matthew deliberately chose Greek gender forms that do distinguish. The verse remains one of the most exegeted sentences in the New Testament.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR US

Three disciplines land on us when we take the schism of 1054 and its aftermath seriously:

> • **Humility about our own tradition.** Every Christian reading this lesson inherited a branch of the family. None of us stand in some "pure" original Christianity uncontaminated by the choices of later centuries. The Protestant who prizes the Bible

inherits a canon settled by the medieval Catholic West. The Catholic who prizes the Mass inherits liturgical forms the Orthodox would barely recognize. Humility begins by knowing what we owe to whom.

• **Charity toward the other branches.** Noll's *Turning Points* argues that the deepest scandal of the divided church is not that the branches disagree but that they forget they are *branches of the same tree*. Paul's grief over the divisions at Corinth (1 Cor 1:10–13) applies to divisions that are a thousand years old.

• **Hunger for the Lord's own prayer.** On the night before his death Jesus prayed "that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you" (John 17:21). The Great Schism, the Protestant Reformation, and the proliferation of denominations are measurable failures of that prayer's visible fulfilment. Praying for the church's reunion — patiently, without betraying truth — is Jesus-shaped work.

Greek NT (John 17:20–21): ἵνα πάντες ἓν ὦσιν, καθω ̀ς σύ, πάτερ, ἐν ἐμοι ̀ κἀγω ̀ ἐν σοί… ἵνα ὁ κόσμος πιστεύσῃ ὅτι σύ με ἀπέστειλας.

John 17:20–21 (ESV): "That they may all be one… so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which of the six pre-1054 drifts (language, politics, Charlemagne, filioque, papal primacy, azymes) do you think was most decisive — and why?

2. The three branches all agree on the 27 New Testament books but differ on the Old. What does that agreement tell us? What does the disagreement tell us?

3. Read Matthew 16:13–19 slowly in your own Bible. Which of the three readings of "on this rock" fits the passage best in *context*?

4. Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox each have a central image of church authority: the open Bible, the Pope's chair, the ecumenical council. Where does each image get its strength — and where does it get brittle?

5. Jesus prayed "that they may all be one" (John 17:21). What does faithful unity look like in a church that fractured a thousand years ago? What does it *not* look like?

6. What is one thing from another branch of the family (a prayer, a practice, a doctrine articulated differently) that you could gratefully receive this year without abandoning your own tradition?

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, Head of the one church, we confess that your body on earth is visibly divided. We thank you for the Apostles, the councils, the martyrs, and the translators who kept the gospel through the breaks. Forgive our arrogance toward brothers and sisters of other traditions, and our laziness toward your own prayer for our unity. Teach us to love truth enough not to paper over real differences, and to love you enough not to be satisfied with those differences either. Build your church, O Lord, on the rock of confessing you — Peter's confession and ours: you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Amen.

FURTHER READING

Primary sources:

- The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381); *filioque* in the Latin tradition from Toledo (589).
- The bull of excommunication, Cardinal Humbert, 16 July 1054.
- Council of Trent, *Decree Concerning the Canonical Scriptures*, Session IV, 8 April 1546.
- Synod of Jerusalem (1672), Confession of Dositheus.
- First Vatican Council, *Pastor Aeternus* (1870) — papal primacy and infallibility.
- Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* (1964), esp. §§ 22–25 on collegiality.
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), §§ 880–896.
- Joint Catholic-Orthodox Declaration of Paul VI and Athenagoras I, 7 December 1965.

Modern studies:

- **Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points*** (3rd ed., 2012), ch. 5: "Division Between East and West: The Great Schism (1054)."
- Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition, vol. 2: The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600–1700).*
- Timothy (Kallistos) Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (rev. ed., 2015).
- F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (1988) — on the canonical differences.
- Steven Runciman, *The Eastern Schism* (1955).
- Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes* (4th ed., 2014).

Next in series: The Fall of Jerusalem (AD 70) — Noll's first turning point