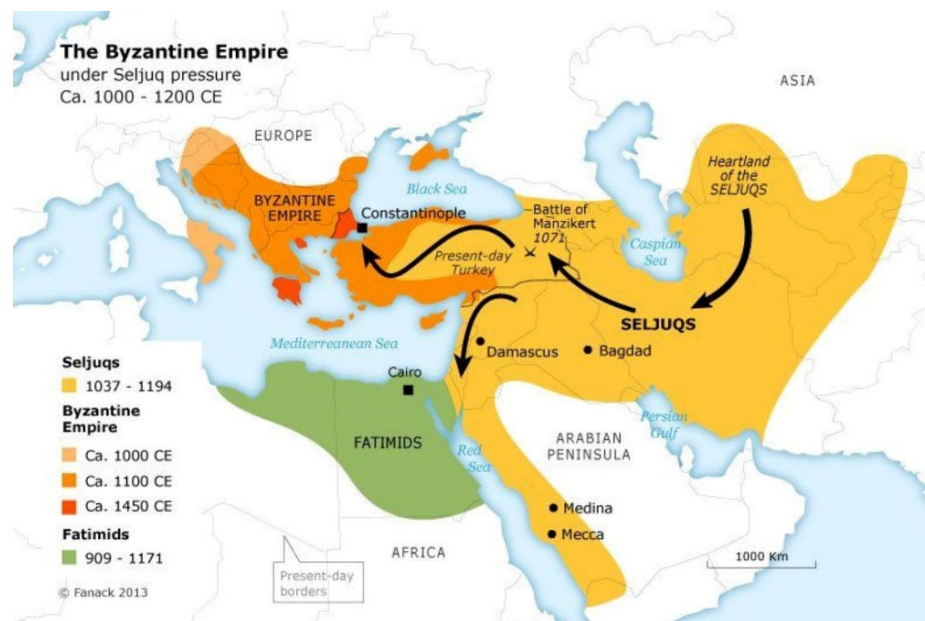


LESSON THIRTY-TWO



**Political & Military History**

- After the Byzantine Empire’s golden age under Emperor Basil II (975-1025), there followed an era of decline and defeat.
- A new power was rising in the East: the Seljuk Turks. Originally Pagans, this great warrior people swept in from central Asia, conquered most of the Muslim Persia, converted to Islam and in 1055 entered Baghdad, capital of the Islamic Empire.
- The caliph of Baghdad, Cayem, recognized the mighty Seljuk leader, Tughril Bey (1038-1063) as Sultan, governing the Empire’s secular affairs on Cayem’s behalf.
- In 1065 the Seljuks invaded Armenia, subduing it by 1067. Their troops then marched in Anatolia, which was the heart of the Byzantine Empire in Asia Minor.
- The Byzantine Emperor Romanus IV (1067-1071) took a huge army to fight off the Seljuks and reconquer Armenia in 1071; the two sides met in battle at Manzikert.
- The Turks completely wiped out the Byzantines, then invaded and took control of all Asia Minor.
- In the same fateful year, the Byzantines lost the city of Bari, their last stronghold in southern Italy, to the Catholic Normans.



- The continued existence of the Byzantine Empire now rested on military intervention from the Catholic West.
- The Emperor Alexius I Comnenus (1081-1118) recovered the western half of Asia Minor from the Turks with the help of Western Catholic troops in the First Crusade (1096-1099), which temporarily broke Turkish power in the Middle East.
- But instead of handing Syrian and Palestinian control back to the Byzantines, the Western leaders set up their own "Crusader States."
- The effects of Catholic intervention in the Middle East did not last long. In the 1140s Islam went back on the offensive, reconquered most of the Crusader States and in 1176 destroyed the Byzantine army at the battle of Myriocephalum (southern Asia Minor).
- Once again, the whole of Asia Minor fell under Muslim control. Exploiting Byzantium's weakness, Hungary, Serbia, and Bulgaria all threw off their allegiance to the devastated Empire.
- Further Catholic involvement in the East proved ultimately disastrous for the Byzantines.
- While the French were in Dalmatia, Alexius Angelus – son of the deposed Byzantine Emperor, Isaac II (1185-1195) – persuaded them to help him regain the Byzantine throne. In return Alexius promised the French Crusaders large payment and the submission of the Orthodox Church to the papacy.
- So, the French army went to Constantinople, deposed the Byzantine Emperor, and placed Alexius on the throne. But when Alexius could not keep his promises of payment, the French and Venetians did what the Muslims had never been able to do – they besieged and captured Constantinople in 1204.
- A French noble, Baldwin of Flanders, was made Emperor of the new Catholic Kingdom of Constantinople; large parts of Byzantium were shared out among other French nobles.
- A Western Catholic Patriarch of Constantinople was appointed and the Orthodox Church was made subject to the pope.
- However, except where Western force compelled them, the Orthodox people of Byzantium remained loyal to their own Church and patriarch.
- The defeated Byzantines formed themselves into three separate states to carry on resistance against their Catholic conquerors.
- These three states were the Empire of Nicaea (northern Asia Minor), the Empire of Trebizond (a coastal strip along the southern shore of the Black Sea), and the Despotate of Epirus (southern and western Balkans).
- They fought fiercely with each other, the Catholics and the Bulgars. The Empire of Nicaea, where the Orthodox patriarchs of Constantinople now resided, came out the winner.
- In 1261, Nicaea's ruler, Michael VIII Palaeologus (1259-1282), reconquered Constantinople from the Catholics and recreated the Orthodox Byzantine Empire.

- Michael was an able ruler in military and political matters, but he brought fierce religious division into Orthodoxy by engineering the “Union of Lyons” in 1274.
- This was a union between Constantinople and Rome, in which Byzantium submitted to the papacy. However, the Union of Lyons was fatally wounded through its utter rejection by most Orthodox believers and it did not survive Michael’s death.
- The Emperors who followed him restored the spiritual independence of Constantinople but they were not very gifted in the arts of war and government.
- The Empire was disturbed by civil strife; serious economic problems caused by Venice and Genoa, the two great Italian trading powers that now dominated the Byzantine economy.
- By 1354 the Ottoman Turks, the new Muslim rulers of the East, had deprived the Byzantine Empire of Asia Minor again.
- By 1400, the Turks had invaded and conquered the Balkans too. There was nothing left of the once glorious Byzantine Empire except parts of Greece and the holy city of Constantinople itself.
- Byzantine Emperors made desperate attempts to persuade the Catholic West to come to their aid but the price of Catholic support was always the same: The Orthodox Churches of the East must submit to the papacy, as they had done in the short-lived Union of Lyons in 1274.
- At the Council of Florence in Italy in 1439, Byzantine Emperor John VIII (1425-1448) and Patriarch Joseph II of Constantinople (1416-1438) yet again accepted this humiliating condition, in an agreement known as the Union of Florence. But once more, most Orthodox believers scornfully rejected this union and no real Catholic military aid was forthcoming.
- In 1453, Turkish forces under Ottoman Emperor Muhammed II besieged and captured Constantinople; the last Byzantine Emperor, Constantine XI (1448-1453), died heroically defending the city.
- The Byzantine Empire, founded in 330 by the first Christian Emperor of Rome, Constantine the Great, was no more; and therefore, the last vestige of the Roman Empire, which had existed for 1500 years died too.

## **Theology & Philosophy in Byzantium**

### **Michael Psellus**

- One of Byzantium’s brightest intellects of this era was Michael Psellus (1018-1078). A native of Nicomedia in Bithynia, Michael was an ardent disciple of the Pagan philosophers of ancient Greece, especially Plato and Aristotle.
- He was a true marvel of learning. Philosophy, theology, music, rhetoric, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, military strategy; nothing seemed to escape Michael’s masterful mind.
- Emperor Constantine IX (1042-1055) appointed this conceited genius as head of the philosophy department at Constantinople University.

- In fact, Michael was Constantine's chief agent in completely reorganizing the University.
- Michael's teaching and writings inspired a whole new generation of students. In some ways he was Byzantium's equivalent of the West's Peter Abelard, supporting the systematic use of reason as a tool for solving problems in theology.
- As well as being a brilliant thinker and teacher, Michael was constantly involved in Byzantine politics as a counsellor to various emperors; he lived through 13 changes of government and wrote a vivid and colorful court history covering all the emperors from Basil II (976-1025) to Michael VII (1071-1078).

### **John Italus**

- Michael's pupil, John Italus was a bold free-thinking spirit and went much further than Michael in reinterpreting orthodox doctrine to make them fit in with Platonic philosophy.
- John's Platonized Christianity reminds us of the great 3<sup>rd</sup> century theologian, Origen, placed on the official list of heretics by the 5<sup>th</sup> ecumenical council of Constantinople in 553. John suffered a similar fate.
- Two patriarchal tribunals in 1076-77 and 1082 condemned him and issued 11 anathemas against his theology.
- John's condemnation marked another turning point in the divergence between East and West. It showed that Byzantium orthodoxy would refuse to accept any fusion between philosophy and theology, in contrast to the marital union the West was soon to celebrate between Catholicism and Aristotle.
- In Byzantium, theologians carried out the enterprise of systematic theology within the traditional context of studying the early Church fathers, rather than the framework of Aristotelian logic and philosophy adopted by Western scholasticism.
- The reverence which Catholic thinkers like Aquinas gave to Aristotle, quoting him as an almost infallible authority in their doctrinal writings was unthinkable for the majority of Eastern Churchmen and just seemed to prove how ungodly the Catholics were.
- The monastery, not the university, remained the well-spring of theological study and creativity in the Orthodox world.

### **Gregory Palamas & the Hesychastic Controversy**

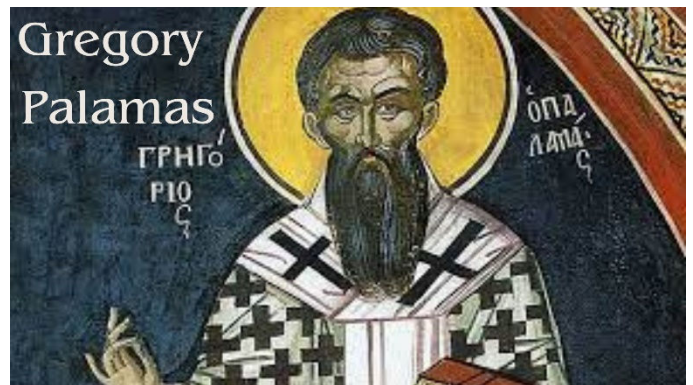
- The triumph of the iconodules in the iconoclastic controversy led to an era of outstanding prosperity for the monasteries of the Byzantine world.
- Monks had supplied the iconodules with their foremost champions and martyrs; with the victory of their cause came honor, expansion, and lavish support from emperors and the ruling class.
- Many monastic communities developed into great landowners, possessing slaves and peasant workers in abundance.

- The monasteries provided the Byzantine Empire with one of its most distinctive expressions of spirituality – hesychasm, from the Greek hesychia meaning “quietness and peace.”
- Simeon the New Theologian (949-1022) had given a great energy within Orthodoxy to the growth and development of hesychasm as a disciplined pattern of praying.
- A person who practiced this prayer-discipline was a hesychast; his purpose was to conquer his passions, attain inner peace and silence, and through constant prayer to aspire to the vision of God as eternal light. Hesychasts employed two special-prayer techniques:
  1. **They recited a special prayer, known as the “Jesus prayer”: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me” (or “have mercy on me, a sinner”). The hesychast would speak this prayer, first by his lips, then silently in his mind, over and over again. The idea was to make the prayer so much a part of a person’s life and being, that he would be ceaselessly praying it in his heart, whatever else he was doing.**
  2. **Hesychasts emphasized the importance of the body in prayer. To assist contemplation, they recommended that a person should rest his chin on his chest and gaze at his heart. The hesychast would breathe in as he prayed the words “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God,” and breathe out as he said “have mercy one me.” These special practices of posture and breathing, however, were secondary to the Jesus prayer itself; teachers of hesychasm regarded the physical techniques simply as useful aids to concentration. Pure inner mental prayer was their goal.<sup>1</sup>**
- One of the greatest leaders of the hesychast movement was Gregory of Sinai (died 1346). Gregory was a native of Asia Minor who was taken captive and enslaved by Turkish Muslims in his youth.
- After being ransomed by fellow Christians, he became a monk in the Saint Catherine monastery on Mount Sinai (hence his name).
- Gregory then spent time on the island of Crete where a hermit called Arsenius taught him hesychasm.
- This was the turning point in Gregory’s life; from now on, he was to be a devout disciple of Simeon the New Theologian, refining and popularizing their philosophy of inner prayer.
- He journeyed to Mount Athos, took up residence there and attracted multitudes of followers, to whom he imparted the wisdom of holy living in general and hesychastic praying in particular. One of his pupils said:

**“When Gregory taught us about purifying the heart and deification through grace, his words awakened in our souls a kind of irresistible divine desire for virtue and a love for God which knew no limits.”<sup>2</sup>**

- Gregory went on to found a monastery in the wilderness of Paroria in Thrace (on the south-eastern borders of Bulgaria).

- From Paroria, Gregory scattered the seeds of hesychasm throughout Bulgaria and Serbia. Gregory summed up the teaching and practice of hesychasm in his major work, a treatise on inner prayer divided into 150 chapters.
- Another mighty champion of hesychasm was Theodosius of Trnovo (died in 1363). A disciple of Gregory of Sinai at Paroria, Theodosius was a Bulgarian who returned to his homeland after Gregory's death and founded the monastery at Kilifarevo, financed by the Bulgarian czar John Alexander.
- From Kilifarevo, Theodosius continued Gregory's work of spreading hesychastic spirituality in Bulgaria.
- Paroria and Kilifarevo were vitally important in propagating hesychasm in Eastern Europe, beyond the political boundaries of Byzantium.
- However, the stronghold of hesychasm remained the great Orthodox "monastic republic" of Mount Athos.
- It was the hesychasm of the Athonite monks that set the scene for the great hesychastic controversy – the most far-reaching theological dispute in the East since the iconoclastic controversy of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries.
- It was a monk of Athos who stepped forth as the supreme advocate of hesychasm and the most famous and influential Orthodox spiritual thinker since Simeon the New Theologian – Gregory Palamas (1296-1359).
- Palamas was born in Constantinople, the son of a Byzantine noble; brought up in the court of the pious Emperor Andronicus II (1282-1328), he trained for a career in the civil service.
- However, the young Palamas was concerned for his eternal destiny as well as his career and entrusted his soul to the oversight of bishop Theoleptus of Philadelphia. Theoleptus was a slightly eccentric character whose life reads like a script for an epic film.
- His spiritual odyssey began as a married deacon in his native Nicaea. However, when Emperor Michael VIII engineered the submission of the Byzantine Church to the papacy in 1274, Theoleptus – ardent foe of all things papal – abandoned his wife and fled from Michael's persecuting fury to the monastic Mountain of Saint Auxentius in Bithynia.
- Here he embraced the life of a monk and never returned to his beautiful and devoted wife. Michael's agents arrested the new monk and the Emperor had him tortured and imprisoned for several years.
- After spending time on Mount Athos, Theoleptus found himself catapulted into fame by the death of Michael VIII in 1282.



- The new Emperor Andronicus II, dissolved the Byzantine Church's union with Rome and showered honors on all who had suffered for opposing it. Among the honored was Theoleptus; Andronicus appointed him bishop of Philadelphia in 1283, where his career continued to be highly colorful.
- This then, was the man whose spiritual influence inspired a young Gregory Palamas, in 1316 at the age of 20, to abandon secular life and settle on Athos as a monk. There Palamas lived for the next 20 years.
- On Athos, Palamas tried as far as possible to live in solitude as a hermit – from 1331, in the Saint Sabbas hermitage above the Great Lavra monastery.
- The spark which ignited the flame of the hesychast controversy was a full-scale assault on hesychasm made by an Orthodox monk from southern Italy, Barlaam of Calabria (died in 1350).
- Barlaam was a learned theologian, well respected within Byzantine Orthodoxy.
- It was Barlaam's writings against Western Catholicism in defense of Eastern Orthodoxy which first made Palamas aware that Barlaam was on a collision course with the teachings of Mount Athos.
- Barlaam argued that Western reliance on Aristotle and his logical methods had given birth to an arrogant over-confidence among Catholic scholastic theologians, especially Thomas Aquinas and his followers, as if with their intellects they had actually mastered God's being and His ways.
- Barlaam held strongly the Eastern "apophatic" views on the incomprehensible nature of God.
- These views led Barlaam to affirm that human beings could know God only in an indirect, secondhand sort of way, glimpsing His shadow from created things; but no actual knowledge of the all-transcendent God Himself was possible to the human soul, however, carefully and brilliantly reasoned.
- Barlaam intended this to be the East's response to the mighty claims and complex systems of Catholic scholasticism.
- It was equally an attack on Eastern monastic piety, which held that human beings could enjoy a genuine personal knowledge of God through prayer and spiritual experience.
- Barlaam and Palamas were soon waging a fierce literary war with each other. Having returned to the Byzantine Empire, Barlaam tried to find out more about his new critic's outlook by joining a hesychastic hermitage, first in Thessalonica, then in Constantinople.
- Here Barlaam tasted hesychastic disciplines of prayer at their wellsprings. Instead of refreshing his mind with sympathy, they filled Barlaam with bitter shock and hostility:

**"The hesychasts have initiated me," he wrote, "into monstrosities and absurd doctrines that a man with any intelligence, or even a little common sense, can hardly debase himself by describing. They are the offspring of false beliefs and reckless imagination."**<sup>3</sup>

Barlaam launched into a sweeping and influential campaign against the entire theory and practice of hesychasm, focusing on two chief points:

- 1. He attacked and ridiculed the hesychasts for their physical prayer techniques of posture and breath control: staring at the heart, breathing in for the first part of the Jesus prayer and out for the second. These practices he argued, were mere superstitions. They had no place in a true Christian understanding of prayer.**
- 2. Hesychasts claimed that the soul could enter into a direct personal experience of God – indeed, union with God – and they labored to attain the fullness of this blessed experience with prayer. Barlaam, by contrast, held that God could be known only in an indirect way, by means of created things. The light that shone from Christ on the mount of transfiguration, and which Simeon the New Theologian and other hesychasts had experienced in prayer, was (according to Barlaam) a merely created light, not a light that actually shone forth from God's very essence. How could God be a pure Spirit, Barlaam asked, if He shone with a light that a human being's physical eyes could see.<sup>4</sup>**

To Barlaam's damaging criticisms, Palamas responded:

- 1. The posture and breath-control techniques of hesychasm were not ridiculous, Palamas argued, but part of a truly Biblical doctrine of human nature. Humanity was both body and soul; and the body was not the soul's enemy, but its friend and partner in the spiritual life. When the Son of God became man, He took human flesh as well as a human soul, and thus sanctified body and soul alike. Therefore, Palamas said, when Christian prayed, it involved their whole being, body as well as soul; the physical techniques of hesychasm were simply a way of bringing body and soul into harmony in the supreme act of prayer.**
- 2. Palamas agreed with Barlaam that God was incomprehensible and unknowable in His divine nature or essence. This was crucial to the whole "apophatic" tradition of the East. However, Palamas said, although God remained forever beyond us in His essence, human beings could know Him and be united with Him in His energies. Earlier Eastern theologians had accepted this distinction between God's essence and His energies. Even so, Palamas explored it more deeply than any previous Eastern thinker and made it central to his entire understanding of union with God.<sup>5</sup>**
  - What did he mean? Palamas reasoned that the Bible clearly taught that Christians became united with God through Jesus Christ. But this could not be a union of natures – our human nature cannot be united with the divine nature. If that were the case, we would be the same as Christ the God-man; we too would be God and man, divine and human, in one person.
  - That was impossible, since Christ is unique. Our humanity must therefore be united with the divine energies, rather than with the divine nature or essence.



- We saw this doctrine of energy before, in the Monothelete controversy of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, where the Church decided that there were “two energies in Christ,” a human and a divine energy, corresponding to Christ’s two natures.
- For Palamas, God’s existence could be approached and expressed in two ways: 1. His innermost nature and essence, which He did not share with any created person, and 2. The activities and energies that streamed forth from His nature, like light and heat radiating from the sun.
- Through the saving work of Christ and the Holy Spirit, Palamas maintained, Christians were truly united with God – but in His outflowing energies, not in His hidden essence.
- So, the Church enjoyed a real union with God and thus a real experience and knowledge of God Himself, without in any way trespassing on His mysterious inner essence which remains forever beyond our grasp.
- Palamas further argued that God’s energies manifested themselves in the world as light – the divine light that transfigured Christ on Mount Tabor.
- This light, Palamas maintained, was not like the created light of the sun, stars or fire; it was the uncreated eternal light of God’s own energies, shining forth from His invisible essence, revealing the deity of Christ.
- Human beings could indeed see this light with their physical eyes, as Peter, James and John did on Mount Tabor, but not by natural eyesight – only by the supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit.
- By defining this light in terms of God’s energies, not His essence and by contending that people could see it only by the sanctifying grace of the Spirit, Palamas tried to set aside Barlaam’s criticisms that the hesychasts had made God into a physical being who could be physically seen.
- Barlaam was a learned and hard-hitting opponent, but two councils in Hagia Sophia upheld Palamas’s teaching in 1341, in June and August, condemning Barlaam. Providence, however, then dealt Palamas a very wild card.
- The Emperor Andronicus III (1328-1341) had died just after the June council; his son was still a child, so power passed into the fumbling hands of Andronicus’s Italian wife, Anne.
- By August political instability had flung the Empire into civil war. It was a grim struggle between John Cantacuzenus, who had been Andronicus’s best friend, prime minister and the real power behind his throne, and Alexis Apocaucus whose ally was John XIV, the bishop of Constantinople.
- Victory fell first to Alexis and the bishop. This resulted in the excommunication of Palamas for having backed Cantacuzenus.
- Cantacuzenus regained power in 1347 and Palamas was restored to favor and elevated to archbishop of Thessalonica.
- A series of councils, the last of them in 1351, triumphantly vindicated his theology. Hesychasm passed into mainstream of Orthodox thought.

- Palamas's teaching gave a powerful undergirding to the central Eastern concept of salvation as deification (the idea was known in the West, but not particularly emphasized or developed).
- Through Christ, humanity becomes divine: not in the same sense of sharing God's essence, which is impossible, but in the sense of participating in God's energies.
- The union between the divine and human natures in Christ meant that Christ's humanity was flooded with the divine energies, thus deifying it; the human nature of the Savior has, therefore, become the source of the divine life which alone can cleanse, heal and sanctify our sinful humanity.
- Through the Holy Spirit, Palamas held, believers enter into saving union with Christ, so that His deified human life comes streaming into our souls (and ultimately in the resurrection of our bodies).
- The believer therefore becomes holy and immortal with God's own holiness and immortality – but only through Christ's glorified humanity, by grace, always in utter dependence on God and never to the same infinite degree as God Himself.
- Palamas remains one of the most important theologians in the later Byzantine world.
- He also displayed a remarkable tolerance towards Islam. When he spent a year as a prisoner of the Turks, Palamas held friendly religious discussions with the son of Turkish emir Orkhan, expressing the hope that "a day will soon come when we [Christians and Muslims] will be able to understand each other."
- The citizens of modern Thessalonica venerate Palamas today as one of their most beloved saints.

### **Attempts at Healing the 1054 Schism**

- Through the East-West schism of 1054, the one holy, Catholic, apostolic and Chalcedonian Church of Europe, Russia and the Middle East had been rent asunder into two separate and hostile Churches.
- Only 44 years after the schism, discussions between Orthodox East and Catholic West were held at Bari (southern Italy) in 1098, although they came to nothing.
- A more serious effort at reunion dominated the reign of Byzantine Emperor Michael VIII (1259-1282).
- Yet no sooner had Michael performed this political miracle than he unleashed storms of religious discord on his kingdom.
- Christmas day 1261, he blinded the boy Emperor John IV, Michael's rightful lord, of whom Michael was legally the guardian and regent.



- He hoped this cruel act would prevent John from being able to rule in his own right as emperor, thus securing the crown of the reborn Empire for Michael alone, without having stained himself with the guilt of actually murdering John.
- Patriarch Arsenius was outraged by Michael's behavior and excommunicated him. None of Michael's attempts at professing repentance impressed Arsenius.
- Michael finally lost all patience, deposing and exiling Arsenius, he installed a new and more pliable patriarch, Joseph I (1268-1275).
- This created the bitter schism of the "Arsenites," those loyal to Arsenius; the movement proved particularly popular among the monks of Asia Minor, who remained stubbornly out of communion with apostate Constantinople for 40 years, until 1310.
- Having split the Byzantine Orthodoxy over Arsenius, Michael then plunged it into even darker water through his negotiations for spiritual reunion with Rome.
- His motives were political and military: Byzantium was under threat from the Ottoman Turks in the East and Charles of Anjou, Catholic King of Sicily in the West.
- Since 1261, the popes had been poised to launch the Western powers on a crusade against Michael, in order to restore the French Catholic kingdom of Constantinople. Surrounded by a host of foes, Michael decided that his only safety lay in winning the papacy over to his side and the stiff but unvarying price of papal favor was the submission of Orthodoxy to Rome.
- After delaying for as long as he could, Michael finally sent ambassadors who arrived in the French city of Lyons in 1274, bearing a letter in which the Byzantine Emperor declared his belief in the filioque clause, purgatory and the supremacy of the pope. On July 6<sup>th</sup>, the decree of union was signed – the "Union of Lyons."
- It provoked outrage among ordinary Easterners, who had not been consulted at any stage. Constantinople seethed with riots; Michael's patriarch, no longer pliable, resigned in protest at what the Emperor had done.
- Michael simply appointed another patriarch, John XI. Then he put to work all the repressive machinery of the Byzantine state to crush dissent.
- His most famous victim was Meletius the Confessor, a hermit of the Mountain of Saint Auxentius in Bithynia, home to many monasteries.
- Appalled by the Union of Lyons, Meletius journeyed to Constantinople together with his friend Galaction, a hieromonk of Mount Auxentius, to protest personally to Emperor Michael.
- Michael's savage response was to inflict on Meletius and Galaction a long ordeal of exile, imprisonment, starvation and trial for heresy; he finally had Meletius's tongue torn out and Galaction blinded.
- However, Michael's brutal efforts bore no fruit. The great mass of Easterners – clergy, monks and laity – rejected the Union with scorn.
- Members of Michael's own family conspired to topple him from the throne. Things also turned sour in the West. The papacy had assumed that if the Emperor of Byzantium converted to Catholicism, his people would submissively follow.

- Now, seeing the Union so widely despised in the East, Pope Martin IV (1281-1285) decided he could tolerate the situation no longer, and excommunicated Michael as a heretic and schismatic in November 1281.
- In December 1282, Michael died, universally despised in both East and West. Andronicus II (1282-1328) then deposed the pro-Union patriarch John XI, reinstated the anti-Union Joseph I, and officially dissolved the Union.
- Those who had been imprisoned or exiled for their loyalty to Orthodoxy came home in triumph, including Meletius and Galaction.
- So, ended the first East-West reunion in dismal failure.
- It seems however, that this potent lesson was wasted on the popes and Byzantine Emperors alike.
- A second and far more concerted attempt at Church reunion on Rome's terms was made 150 years later at the Council of Florence in Italy.
- This Western Catholic Council first met in Basel, Switzerland, in 1431.
- In 1437 pope Eugenius IV (1431-1447) transferred the Council from Basel to Ferrara in Italy, and then in 1439 to Florence.
- At Ferrara and Florence, the Council welcomed a glittering and impressive delegation from the Orthodox world, headed by Byzantine Emperor John VIII (1425-1448) and the patriarch of Constantinople, John II (1416-1439).
- Also present were the bishops of Nicaea, Ephesus and Kiev. Negotiations were opened for healing the breach between East and West.
- What gave this more weight than the Lyons affair was the presence of so many Orthodox bishops.
- Emperor John's motives were purely political and military. John wanted Western help to defend the empire against the Ottoman Turks, who had by now almost overwhelmed Byzantium. To secure Western help, John was willing to submit to Western religion.
- Submission, however, did not come easily; there were nine months of exhausting negotiations, mostly on the filioque clause. The most active spokesperson on the Orthodox side were John Bessarion and Mark of Ephesus.
- Bessarion was one of the most learned man of his day in the East.
- The intellectual brilliance of Western scholastic theology captivated Bessarion, making him ashamed of the comparative ignorance of his Eastern colleagues; he swiftly became the moving spirit in the pro-union party among the Orthodox delegates.
- With Byzantium about to crumble under the Muslim onslaught, Bessarion felt the Western Church – theologically talented, so devoted to academic learning – was alone capable of preserving the noble cultural and spiritual inheritance of Greece and Rome.
- Mark of Ephesus was Bessarion's intellectual equal, but otherwise stood at the opposite end of the ecclesiastical spectrum.

- A disciple of Gergory Palamas, Mark regarded all learning as subservient to spiritual life. His passion was for truth; and if the reunion with Rome meant sacrificing the truth, Mark would fight it his last breath.
- He therefore spent all his mighty theological energies at the Council of Florence arguing against Western Catholic doctrines not recognized in the East, especially the filioque clause and purgatory.
- But the bishop of Ephesus was almost a lone voice; the other Orthodox delegates became increasingly irritated with his awkward insistence on truth rather than political expediency.
- A plan of reunion – the Union of Florence – was finally signed on July 6<sup>th</sup> 1439. By the terms of the Union, the Orthodox agreed to accept three points of Western Catholic doctrine: 1. The theology of the filioque clause, that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son as well as from the Father, although Easterners were not required to recite the clause when they recited the Nicene Creed in worship; 2. The doctrine of purgatory and 3. The supremacy of the pope. The Catholics agreed to allow the Orthodox to use leavened bread in communion. Of the 33 Orthodox delegates, only Mark of Ephesus refused to submit to the agreement.

**“The testimonies of the Western teachers I neither acknowledge nor accept,” he famously declared, “I conclude that they are corrupted. There can be no compromise in matters of the Orthodox faith.”<sup>6</sup>**

- Mark wrote a circular letter to all Orthodox Christians, exhorting them to shun the Union of Florence. Byzantine Emperor John VIII, enraged by Mark’s intrepid one-man opposition to the Union, had him arrested and imprisoned.
- From prison, Mark continued his anti-Union campaign by personal witness and letters.
- Most Eastern bishops and the laity were opposed to the Union and viewed it as a sell-out to the papacy. Ordinary Orthodox laypeople refused to worship in churches whose clergy had submitted to the Union. The Hagia Sophia was virtually deserted.
- Meanwhile the other Eastern patriarchs, of Antioch, Jerusalem and Alexandria, who had not been present at Florence, denounced the Union officially in a public letter sent forth from Jerusalem in 1443.
- Despite the Union, no effective Western military assistance came to Byzantium and Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453, thus bringing an end to a thousand years of Byzantine history.
- The Muslim conqueror of Byzantium, the Turkish sultan Muhammed II, appointed a new patriarch of Constantinople, Gennadius Scholarius (1405-1472), a disciple of Mark of Ephesus.
- Gennadius was totally opposed to the Union of Florence. Under his leadership the Union became a dead letter; in 1472, it was authoritatively rejected by a synod of bishops meeting in Constantinople.

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- <sup>1</sup> 2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume II, Needham Nick, page 372
  - <sup>2</sup> 2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume II, Needham, Nick, page 373
  - <sup>3</sup> 2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume II, Needham, Nick page 377
  - <sup>4</sup> 2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume II, Needham Nick, page 377-378
  - <sup>5</sup> 2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume II, Needham Nick, page 378
  - <sup>6</sup> 2000 Years of Christ's Power, Volume II, Needham Nick, page 388