

Eighth Ecumenical Council Constantinople IV (879-880)ⁱ

For Roman Catholics the Eighth Ecumenical Council is a Council that was held in Constantinople in 869/870 — also known as the Ignatian Council, because it restored Ignatios to the Patriarchal throne — which among other matters procured the condemnation of Ecumenical Patriarch Photios.¹ It is clearly confirmed by modern scholarship, however, that this Ignatian Council was rejected by another Constantinopolitan Council which was held exactly ten years later in 879/880. This Council is also known as the Photian Council, because it exonerated and restored to the Patriarchal Throne of Constantinople St. Photios and his fellow Hierarchs and was signed by both Easterners and Westerners.² How did it happen that Roman Catholics came to ignore this conciliar fact? Following Papadopoulos Kerameus, Johan Meijer — author of a most thorough study of the Constantinopolitan Council of 879/880 — has pointed out that Roman Catholic canonists first referred to their Eighth Ecumenical Council (the Ignatian one) in the beginning of the twelfth century. In line with Dvornic and others, Meijer also explained that this was done deliberately because these canonists needed at that time canon 22 of that Council. In point of fact, however, they overlooked the fact that "*this Council had been cancelled by another, the Photian Synod of 879-880 — the acts of which were also kept in the pontifical archives.*"³ It is interesting to note that later on the Roman Catholics called this Photian Council "*Conciliabulum Oecumenicum Pseudooctavum*" ("Pseudo-Eighth Ecumenical Council), thereby acknowledging it implicitly as another Eighth Council rival to that of their own choice!⁴

The history of this Constantinopolitan Council, which has left its mark on the career of Ecumenical Patriarch Photios, one of the greatest Patriarchs of the Great Church of Christ, has been thoroughly researched by modern historians. Dvornic's pioneering work has restored the basic facts.⁵ Meijer in 1975,⁶ Phidas in 1994⁷ and Siamakis in 1995⁸ have refined these facts. There is no doubt to anyone who surveys this literature that the Roman Catholic position is untenable. The Photian Council of 879/880 is that which: i) annulled the Ignatian one (869/70), ii) enumerated the Seventh

(787) adding it to the previous Six, iii) restored unity to the Church of Constantinople itself and to the Churches of Old and New Rome, which had been shattered by the arbitrary interference of the popes of Rome in the life of the Eastern Church especially through the Ignatian Council, and iv) laid down the canonical and theological basis of the union of the Church in East and West through its *Horos*.

The significance of the Horos of this Council for the Filioque controversy

The contemporary Orthodox scholarly opinion is unanimous in understanding the *Horos* of the Photian Council of 879/880 as having a direct bearing on the *Filioque* controversy. It condemns the *Filioque* not only as an addition to the Creed but also as a doctrine. It is acknowledged, of course, that this condemnation is *implicit* and not *explicit* in the strong and vehement condemnation in the *Horos* of any kind of addition to the Creed. That this implication is unavoidable is based both on the historical context of this Council — the conflict between Photios and the Frankish theologians, which lies in the foreground and background to this Council. To restrict this implication to a mere "*canonical issue*" which has no theological bearing, is unwarranted by the text and the *dogmengeschichtlich* context which entails Photios' opposition to the Frankish doctrine on the *Filioque*.

This may become more apparent by looking afresh at the *Horos* itself. The whole construction clearly implies that there is some serious problem in the air which, however, is not explicitly named. The focus is the Creed, which is said to be irreplaceable. It is totally unacceptable to replace it with anything else. It is worse, however, to tamper with it, to add or to subtract from it. The addition or subtraction is not merely a formal matter, but has to do with the substance of the faith into which one is baptized and on which salvation in the Church is established. To commit such a mistake can only mean rejection of the faith once delivered to the saints and therefore can only incur expulsion from the Church. What else could St. Photios have in mind but the *Filioque*? Was there any other threat to the Creed at that time?

The *Filioque* was the only problem, which he himself above every one else had detected and denounced earlier on when he became fully aware of its severity. This is also the credal problem, which he will pinpoint again

shortly after this Synod, and will produce his extensive treatise on it. The purpose of this *Horos* could not be anything else but a buffer against the coming storm, which he foresaw. The Frankish theologians had already committed this error and were pressing for it with the Popes. Rome had resisted it, but for how long? He must have thought that an Ecumenical Council's *Horos*, which included severe penalties on those who tampered with the ancient faith, would be respected and the danger would be averted. That this was not only the mind of Photios but of the whole Council becomes obvious in the reactions of the Bishops to the reading of the *Horos*.

We read in the minutes of the Sixth act that after reading the *Horos* the Bishops shouted:

*"Thus we think, thus we believe, into this confession were we baptized and became worthy to enter the priestly orders. We regard, therefore, as enemies of God and of the truth those who think differently as compared to this. If one dares to rewrite another Symbol [Creed] besides this one, or add to it, or subtract from it, or to remove anything from it, and to display the audacity to call it a Rule, he will be condemned and thrown out of the Christian Confession. For to subtract from, or to add to, the holy and consubstantial and undivided Trinity shows that the confession we have always had to this day is imperfect. [In other words the problem which is implied but not named has to do with the Trinitarian doctrine]. It condemns the Apostolic Tradition and the doctrine of the Fathers. If one, then having come to such a point of mindlessness as to dare do what we have said above, and set forth another Symbol and call it a Rule, or to add to or subtract from the one which has been handed down to us by the first great, holy and Ecumenical Synod of Nicaea, let him be Anathema."*⁹

By way of epilogue it may be pointed out that the image of St. Photios that emerges from the acts of the Eighth Ecumenical Council is one of moderation, sensitivity and maturity. Confrontation is avoided but without compromising firmness in matters that relate to the faith. Generosity towards others is displayed and maturity permeates everything. This is indeed the image, which Prof. Henry Chadwick has recently resolved to promote.¹¹ This is the authentic image of the East. The Photian Council of 879/880 is indeed the Eighth Ecumenical of the Catholic Church, Eastern and Western and Orthodox. It is a *Council of Unity* — the last one before

the storm of the great Schism — based on the common Holy Tradition and especially on the unadulterated faith of the Ecumenical Creed.

NOTES

1. On the Eighth Ecumenical Council the Roman Catholic Hubert Jedin writes: "*The Catholic Church recognizes the assembly of 869-70 as an ecumenical council. Not so the Greek Church. St Photios was rehabilitated and at the death of Ignatius he was once again raised to the patriarchal see. A synod assembled by him in 879-80 rejected the decisions of the previous council. The Greeks count this synod as the eighth ecumenical council, but a second schism was apparently avoided*" (from his *Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church: A Historical Outline*, Herder: Freiburg, Nelson: Edinburgh, London 1960, p. 58). Jedin is inaccurate on several counts, but this is typical of most Western writers. The Council was summoned by Emperor Basil and was attended by the legates of Pope John VIII and of all the Eastern Patriarchs. Jedin says that the schism was apparently avoided, but does not explain that this was the case because the Pope through his legates had accepted not only St. Photios' restoration, but also the condemnation of the previous anti-Photian councils in Rome and in Constantinople. We should add here that the Minutes of the Ignatian Council (869/70), which have not survived in the original, are found in two edited versions: Mansi, vol. xvi: 16-208 (Latin) and xvi: 308-420 (Greek) and differ considerably from each other. On this and for a full description of the 10 Acts of these Minutes see Siamakis, *op. cit.* pp. 54-75. It is important to recall here that this Council was most irregular in its composition, since it included false legates from Alexandria and Jerusalem, more royal lay people than bishops (only 12) at the start and during the first two sessions. Eventually 130 bishops are mentioned in the Minutes but only 84 actually appear signing (*op. cit.* p. 56f). Most important irregularity, however, was the fact that the Minutes were mutilated at the most crucial points, especially the section of the condemnation of the *Filioque* (*op. cit.* p. 74)!
2. The condemnation of the Roman Catholic Eighth Council (the anti-Photian Council of Constantinople of 869/70) by Pope John VIII is

first given in this Pope's *Letter to the Emperors Basil, Leo and Alexander*. In this Letter which was read at the second session of the Photian Council of Constantinople of 879/80 and is included in the second Act of the Minutes, Pope John VIII writes: "*And first of all receive Photios the most amazing and most reverend High-Priest of God our Brother Patriarch and co-celebrant who is co-sharer, co-participant and inheritor of the communion which is in the Holy Church of the Romans... receive the man unpretentiously. No one should behave pretentiously [following] the unjust councils which were made against him. No one, as it seems right to many who behave like a herd of cows, should use the negative votes of the blessed Hierarchs who preceded us. Nicholas, I mean, and Hadrian as an excuse [to oppose him]; since they did not prove what had been cunningly concocted against him... Everything that was done against him has now ceased and been banished...*" (The Latin text is this *Ac primum quidem a nobis suscipi Photium praetantissimum ac reverentissimum Dei Pontificem et Patriarcham, in fratrem nostrum et comministram, eundemque communionis cum sancta Romana ecclesia participem, consortem, et haeredem... Suscipite virum sine aliqua exrusatione. Nemo praetexat eas quae contra ipsum factae sunt innjustas synodos. Nemo, ut plerisque videtur imperitis ac rudibus, decessorum nostrorum beatorum Pontificum, Nicolai inquam, et Hadriani, decreta culpet... Finita sunt enim omnia, repudiata omnia, quae adversus cum gesta sunt, infirma irritaque reddita... Mansi vol xvii, cls. 400D & 401BC. For the Greek see Dositheos *op. cit.* p. 281f).*

A similar condemnation is found in Pope John VIII's *Letter to Photios* where he writes: "*As for the Synod that was summoned against your Reverence we have annulled here and have completely banished, and have ejected [it from our archives], because of the other causes and because our blessed predecessor Pope Hadrian did not subscribe to it...*" (Latin text: *Synodum vero, quae contra tuam reverentiam ibidem est habita, rescidimus, damnavimus omnino, et abjecimus: tum ob alias causas, tum quo decessor noster beatus Papa Hadrianus in ea non subscripsit...*" Mansi vol. xvii cl. 416E. For the Greek see Dositheos *op. cit.* p. 292).

Finally in Pope John VIII's *Commonitorium* or *Mandatum* ch. 10, which was read by the papal legates at the third Session of the same Council, we find the following: "*We [Pope John VIII] wish that it is declared before the Synod, that the Synod which took place against the aforementioned Patriarch Photios at the time of Hadrian, the Most holy Pope in Rome, and [the Synod] in Constantinople [869/70] should be ostracized from this present moment and be regarded as annulled and groundless, and should not be co-enumerated with any other holy Synods.*" *The minutes at this point add: "The Holy Synod responded: We have denounced this by our actions and we eject it from the archives and anathematize the so-called [Eighth] Synod, being united to Photios our Most Holy Patriarch. We also anathematize those who fail to eject what was written or said against him by the aforementioned by yourselves, the so-called [Eighth] Synod.*" (Latin text: Caput 10. Volumus coram praesente synodo pomulgari ut synodus quae facta est contra praedictum patriarcham Photium sub Hadriano sanctissimo Papa in urbe Roma et Constantinopoli ex nunc sit rejecta, irrita, et sine robore; neque connumeretur cum altera sancta synodo. Sancta Synodus respondit: Nos rebus ispsis condemnavimus et abjecimus et anathematizavimus dictam a vobis synodum, uniti Photio sanctissimo nostro Patriarchae: et eos qui non rejiciunt scripta dictave nostra cum in hac dicta a vobis synodo, anathematizamus. Mansi vol. xvii, cl. 472AB. See also cls. 489/490E which repeats these points as accepted by the Synod. See also Dositheos *op. cit.* p. 345 and p. 361). I have included these texts here because I repeatedly encounter comments in the works of Western scholars, especially Roman Catholics, who offer confusing and even disputed information about the unanimous Eastern and Western condemnation of the anti-Photian Council of 869/870.

3. *A Successful Council of Union: a theological analysis of the Photian Synod of 879-880*, Thessalonica 1975, p.71.
4. Mansi, *op. cit.*, cl. 365.
5. *The Photian Schism, History and Legend*, Cambridge 1948, repr. 1970.

6. *op. cit.*
7. cf. his *Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἱστορία*, τομ. Β' Ἀπὸ τὴν Εἰκονομαχία μέχρι τὴ Μεταρρύθμιση, Ἀθῆναι 1994, σσ. 92-141.
8. *Τόμος Χαράς*, *op. cit.* pp. 9-148.
9. Siamakis, *op. cit.* pp. 379f. and Mansi, *op. cit.* pp. 516f.
10. This remark is based on a recent exchange of letters between Professor Chadwick and myself.

ⁱ From http://www.geocities.com/trvalentine/orthodox/dragas_eighth.html. We include this treatise only for the purpose of highlighting the errors of the Great Whore of Babylon, the Popish Harlot of Rome. Bob Dinkins Ministries does not agree with many of the statements which appear to elevate the Eastern Orthodox churches above other more legitimate expressions of the Body of Christ. Let the reader discern with prayerful caution.