

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

CHAPTER 10. The Second General Council of the Lateran, 1139

The tenth General Council, the Second General Council of the Lateran, took place only fifteen years after that just described. It was a council of much the same kind, in its procedure, in its legislation, and in the vast interest it aroused, and it should be seen as complementary to the council of 1123. As the reader may guess, it would never have been summoned but for a new crisis in church affairs. The crisis, this time, was a double papal election, at Rome, made by the cardinals, and an ensuing schism when for some years two rivals, each claiming to be the lawful pope, divided the Church.

When Calixtus II died, in 1124, there was elected in his place, the Cardinal Lambert who had negotiated the great concordat, a veteran of the papal service and one of the last survivors of the band who had stood around Urban II in the grim years that followed the death of Gregory VII. He took the name Honorius II, and lived out all his pontificate in Rome-- the first pope to live continuously in Rome for nearly a hundred years. It was by no means a peaceful city. The old baronial feuds had revived during the years when it so rarely had a resident ruler. Here was the source of the double election after the death of Honorius in 1130. The Pierleoni brought about the election of one of that family -- he took the name Anacletus II. The Frangipani faction elected Innocent II. That the better man of the two was Innocent seems certain. But which was the lawfully elected? Neither had been elected precisely as the somewhat vague law of 1059 prescribed.

Anacletus, however, the scion of a wealthy Roman clan, was master of Rome, and Innocent fled for support beyond the Alps. Thanks to Louis VI of France, and above all to the spiritual genius who towers above all the men of this age, St. Bernard, abbot of Clairvaux, he soon had the support of France and the empire, of England, and of the Spanish kingdoms also. But, except intermittently, Innocent was never master in Rome -- the Norman king of Sicily being the staunch supporter of his rival -- until

1138, when Anacletus died and his successor, yielding to the influence of St. Bernard, made his submission to Innocent. Once again the spectacle of a wandering pope had been turned to the profit of the reform movement, and four great councils are associated with Innocent's presence, Clermont in 1130, Reims in 1131, Piacenza in 1132 and Pisa in 1135.

Rid of the burden of the schism, the pope now summoned the General Council of 1139, but in no such amiable spirit towards his late adversaries as Calixtus II had shown. St. Bernard pleaded for them, but in vain. Innocent showed himself a singularly un-Roman pope when he dealt harshly with the subjected foe.

There were more than five hundred bishops present at the council and, it is said, a thousand abbots -- the mention of St. Bernard's role in the schism is a reminder that this is the century of the most remarkable sudden expansion of the monastic orders ever known, the Cistercian century. Again the acta of the council have perished. We know that it was opened on April 4, 1139, in the Lateran Church, and that there were three sessions. All that remains to us are the thirty canons enacted, and a chronicler's story of the pope's fiery reception of one of his recent opponents. This bishop made his way to the papal throne, and laid down his mitre at the pope's feet, in token of submission. But the pope arose, and kicked the mitre down the church, calling out, "Away, henceforth you are no bishop of mine."

The canons of this council, or the list as we possess it rather, is the same kind of *omnium gatherum* as the list of 1123. Of the thirty canons a half merely repeat the canons of that list, and a half of the remainder do little more than repeat verbatim the canons enacted by Innocent in the great provincial councils of 1130-35.

There are five new canons about clerical life. With regard to the old trouble of clergy who marry, there is the highly important declaration that these unions are not true marriages.[1] The faithful people are forbidden to attend mass said by such married clergy, whose sons are not to be

ordained unless they become monks or canons regular. All are warned that in the Church there are no such things as hereditary benefices. Clerics who put forward claims of this sort will be severely punished for their impudence. Clerical dress must be seemly, no riotous colours or the indecent fashions of the day. And the cleric is protected by a law which strikes with an ipso facto excommunication whoever maliciously assaults him--an excommunication which the pope alone can remove.[2]

In what concerns the Catholic's relation with the world in which he lives--the virtue of social justice in the large sense--the council has six laws to propose. The ancient custom that the populace pillage the house of a deceased bishop is to cease. Usurers, i.e., those who -- in this day when money is a nonproductive piece of metal, useful only in exchange for goods--charge a borrower interest for the convenience he has enjoyed, when he brings back the gold piece borrowed, are to be held (says the council) as they have always been held, as infamous and to be shunned by all. They are forbidden the sacraments, and if they die unrepentant are not to be given Christian burial. The "Truce of God" is now set out for the whole of Christendom in the detail of Urban II's law of 1095,[3] and the bishops are warned that slackness in excommunicating for breaches of the truce may cost them their place. There is a special prohibition against molesting merchants, country people engaged in agriculture and their stock, as well as the clergy. Another class of criminal (about whom there are three canons) is the incendiary. Those who repent of this crime are not to be absolved without heavy penance, i.e., a year's service with the Crusade, in Spain or in the Holy Land. Tournaments are most stringently forbidden. Knights killed in these "detestable jousts" are not to be given Christian burial. And the new military weapon of the catapult, that hurls immense masses of stone at the walls of besieged castles and cities, and over the walls, is condemned as a thing "detested by God." It is never to be used against Christian men under penalty of excommunication.

There are two canons that have to do with a Christian's belief. In one of these (canon 22) bishops are commanded to instruct their people that the outward acts of penance are of no avail without true inward repentance. Practices of this sort are the straight road to hell. The second (canon 23) condemns a whole series of anti-Christian notions, the undercurrent that never ceased to affect medieval life. Those who hold these ideas present the appearance of great zeal for true religion, says the council, but they reject the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, the baptism of infants, the priesthood, and marriage. Those who hold these heretical beliefs the state must coerce. Those who defend the heretics are excommunicated along with them.

NOTES

1. Huiusmodi namque copulationem, quam contra ecclesiasticam regulam constat esse contractam, matrimonium non esse censemus. Qui etiam ab invicem separati pro tantis excessibus condignam poenitentiam agant (canon 7). This is a repetition of a canon enacted at Pisa, 1135.
2. The earliest example of a papal reservation of a censure by statute.
3. See preceding page 196.