

UDK: 241.72:263
Izvorni znanstveni članak
Primljeno: 13.09.2011.

THE CONTROVERSY OVER FASTING ON SATURDAY BETWEEN CONSTANTINOPLE AND ROME

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SAŽETAK

Rasprava o postu subotom između Carigrada i Rima

Tema ovoga članka jest tisućljetna raspra između Rima i Carigrada o postu subotom. Pozornost je skrenuta na odluke donijete od otaca na koncilima u Trullu, te ne patrijarha i Fotija i Cerularija, koji su pokušali ostati vjerni predaji apostola i crkvenih otaca. Prema *Apostolskim konstitucijama*, subota nije bila dan posta, nego dan okupljanja kršćana i odmora robova. Posljednji zabilježeni pobornik takvog razumijevanja bio je patrijarh Cerularije koji je izrazio svoje gledište u kontekstu Velike šizme.

Ključne riječi: *post-subotom; Fotije; Cerularije; Apostolske-konstitucije*

Introduction

The question of fasting on Saturday was one of the significant points of theological debate between the Eastern Church and the Western Church during the first millennium of the Christian history.¹ This issue was closely related to the fact that the Christian Church, during the first several centuries after Christ, celebrated side by side both Saturday and Sunday as a weekly day of worship. A church historian of the fifth century, Socrates Scholasticus, writes: "For although almost all churches throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries on the Sabbath of every week, yet the Christians of Alexandria and at Rome, on account of some ancient tradition, have ceased to do this."²

1 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 3 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 3: 378-386.

2 "Ecclesiastical History," *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 14 vols., eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace

The *Apostolic Constitution* compiled in the fourth century states that Christians should keep the Sabbath (Saturday) and the Lord's Day (Sunday) festivals "because the former is the memorial of creation, and the latter of the resurrection."³ It seems logical to believe, on the basis of these statements, that "throughout the world" of Christianity, except in Rome and Alexandria, there were worship services on both Saturday and Sunday as late as the fifth century.⁴

As mentioned in the previous quotation of Socrates Scholasticus, the Western Church frequently emphasized the importance of Sunday as the weekly day of worship. On the other hand, the Eastern Church seemed to be ripped apart by its conflict to remain in harmony with the apostolic tradition and its need to keep good relations with Rome.

The Eastern-Western conflict over the day of worship is related to the question of fasting on Sabbath. These conflicts are especially evident in three historical events: the Fifth-Sixth Ecumenical Synod in Trullo, the ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the Bulgarian Church, and the Great Schism in A.D. 1054.

The purpose of this paper is to describe and critically assess the canons of the Council in Trullo which include the Saturday fasting controversy, the encyclical of Patriarch Photius connected to the status of the Bulgarian Church, and the documents associated to the Great Schism. This analysis attempts to explain why the matter of the fasting on Saturday played such a central role in the disagreements between the Eastern and the Western Churches.

The Fifth-Sixth Ecumenical Council in Trullo

The Council in Trullo was called by the emperor Justinian II in A.D. 691 and met in the imperial banqueting hall (*in trullum*) at Constantinople.⁵ This council is known in church history as *Pentekte* (Greek), *Quinisextum* (Latin) or the Fifth-Sixth Council because it was supposed to complete the work of the Fifth and Sixth Ecumenical Councils.⁶ In the absence of the emperor, the Council in Trullo was presided over by Paul III, the ecumenical Patriarch of Constantino-

(Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 2: 132.

3 "But keep the Sabbath, and the Lord's day festival; because the former is memorial of the creation, and the latter of the resurrection" "I Peter and Paul do make the following constitutions. Let the slaves work five days; but on the Sabbath-day and the Lord's day let them have leisure to go to church for instruction in piety. We have said that the Sabbath is on account of the creation and the Lord's day of resurrection" ("Constitutions of the Holy Apostles," *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols., eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979], 7: 469, 495).

4 Sozomen writes: "The people of Constantinople, and almost everywhere, assemble together on the Sabbath, as well as on the first day of the week, which custom is never observed in Rome or at Alexandria. There are several cities and villages in Egypt where, contrary to the usage established elsewhere, the people meet together on Sabbath evenings, and, although they have dined previously, partake of the mysteries" (Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, 7. 19).

5 The Westminster Dictionary of Church History (1971), "Trullan Synod."

6 The Fifth Ecumenical Council was convened in 553 in order to confirm the anathema on Origen as well as on Didymos the Blind and Evagrius Pontikos for the platonising tendencies. The Sixth Ecumenical Council was also held in *trullum* of the imperial palace in Constantinople from A.D. 680 to A.D. 681 (see Isaias Simonopetrites, "The Pastoral Sensitivity of the Canons of the Council in Trullo [691-692]," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 40 [1995]: 45, 46).

ple. The council was attended by Patriarchs Petros III of Alexandria, Georgios II of Antioch, Anastasios II of Jerusalem, as well as by two hundred and eleven bishops.⁷

There are disagreeing positions on whether or not the Latin Church had its official representatives at this council. The historians and the theologians of the Western Church claim that Rome was not represented at the Council in Trullo. Pope Sergius III rejected certain canons of this council and in particular the statements giving the patriarch of Constantinople equal status with the pope.⁸ Writers of the Eastern Church, on the other hand, emphasize that the pope of Rome, Sergius III, was represented through the delegation of bishops from Eastern Illyricum. In addition to the Illyricum representatives there were four bishops from Crete: Basilius of Gortyna, Nikitas of Kydonia, Sisinos of Chersonisos and Theopemptos. Basilius of Gortyna signed the canons of the Synod in a following way: “Basilius episcopus Gortinae, metropolis Christum amantis Cretae insulae et [. . .] totius synodi sanctae Romanae Ecclesiae” (“Basilius, bishop of Gortyna, metropolis of the Lord loving island of Crete and . . . of the whole synod of the Holy Church of Rome”).⁹ Whether Rome was officially represented or not at the Council in Trullo will probably remain a question of debate between the Western Christianity and its Eastern counterpart. But what is of interest for this work is that out of the 102 canons issued by the Fifth-Sixth Council, the 29th, 52nd, 55th, 56th and 89th refer to the issue of fasting in general as well as fasting on Saturday.¹⁰ Why was so much space in the canons of the Council in Trullo dedicated to the problem of fasting on Saturday and what is the historical background of this controversy?

From apostolic times Christians have practiced fasting, that is, they specified days on which they would abstain from the food and drink.¹¹ Most Christians coming from the Jewish background apparently followed the Jewish custom of fasting and prayer on Mondays and Thursdays. However, contrary to that Jewish practice, the Christian Church, around the end of the first century, adopted Wednesdays and Fridays as the days of fasting.¹² Furthermore, by the end of fifth century the Latin Church replaced Wednesday with Saturday as a fasting day,¹³ probably also in opposition to the Jews and Christians of Jewish background who were reluctant to change their practice of fasting on certain days.¹⁴ Nevertheless, in the Eastern Churches, it was a general rule that there should be no fasting on Saturday and specifically that Saturday as well as Sunday should be exempt from fasting

7 Ibid.

8 “Trullian Synod,” *The Westminster Dictionary of Church History*, ed. Jerald Brauer (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), 830.

9 Ioan Dura, “The Canons of the Sixth Ecumenical Synod Concerning Fasting and Their Application to the Present Needs of the Orthodox Faithful,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 40 (1995), 153, 154.

10 See Archimandrite Akakios, *Fasting in the Orthodox Church* (Etna, CA: [no publisher supplied], 1990), 107.

11 See Acts 13:2; 14:23.

12 Tia M. Kolbaba, *The Byzantine Lists: Errors of the Latins* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 34, 35. See also *The Westminster Dictionary of Church History* (1971), “Fast Days.”

13 Ibid.

14 Augustus Neander, *General History of the Christian Religion and Church* (Edinburgh: T. T. Clark, 1847-1855), 402.

in the period before Easter.¹⁵ The Council of Trullo strongly reacted against these changes made by Rome, claiming that by introducing Saturday as the day of fast, the Roman Church acted against the apostolic tradition clearly expressed in *Apostolic Constitution* which should be followed by all Christians.¹⁶ What follows is a short review of the key points mentioned in the canons 29, 52, 55, 56 and 89 of the Synod in Trullo concerning the controversy of fasting in general and specifically fasting on Saturday.

Canon 29

A canon of the Synod of Carthage says that the holy mysteries of the altar are not to be performed but by men who are fasting, except on the day in the year on which the Supper of the Lord is celebrated. At that time, on account perhaps of certain occasions in those places useful to the Church, even the holy Fathers themselves made use of this dispensation. But since nothing leads us to abandon exact observance, we decree that the Apostolic and Patristic tradition shall be followed; and define that it is not right to break the fast on the fifth feria of the last week of Lent, and thus to do dishonour to the whole of Lent.¹⁷

The pronouncement issued by the Synod in Carthage declared that the Holy Eucharist can be officiated by the non-fasting priests once a year, on Holy Thursdays. The reasoning of the fathers from Carthage behind this pronouncement was that Jesus celebrated the “Pascha of the law” with his disciples before offering his own “spiritual Pascha,” and thus the Apostles had not fasted when they had eaten the latter, since they had already taken “Pascha of the law.”¹⁸

However, the fathers of the Synod in Trullo amended this pronouncement made by the Synod of Carthage by declaring that the clergy should fast whenever they celebrate the holy liturgy, and that the Lenten fast, as well as that of Wednesday and Friday is obligatory. It means that they should follow the tradition of the Apostles and the Fathers, and “the fast should not be broken upon the fifth *feria* (Monday, Thursday) of the last week of Lent, and so the whole Lent be dishonoured.”¹⁹ Therefore, only those priests who are fasting can perform the liturgy.

It seems obvious that this assertion was affirmed in opposition to what was the practice in the Western part of Christianity. Namely, the Church of Rome was allowing its priests to carry out the holy liturgy on the Thursday of Lent without fasting.²⁰

Canon 52

On all days of the holy fast of Lent, except on the Sabbath, the Lord’s Day and the holy day of the Annunciation, the Liturgy of the Presanctified is to be said.²¹

¹⁵ Ibid, 402.

¹⁶ Kolbaba, 34, 35.

¹⁷ “The Canons of the Council in Trullo,” *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 14 vols., eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 14: 378. See also N. Milas, *Pravila Pravoslavne Crkve s Tumacenjima* (Novi Sad, 1895-96), 136.

¹⁸ “The Canons of the Council in Trullo,” 14: 378. See also Dura, 150.

¹⁹ “The Canons of the Council in Trullo,” 14: 378.

²⁰ See Dura, 151.

²¹ “The Canons of the Council in Trullo,” 14: 389.

During Lent the holy liturgy was offered only on Saturdays and Sundays when fasting was not permitted. The Synod of Laodicea in canon 49 established the practice according to which, for the duration of Lent, a part of the gifts sanctified in the liturgy of Saturdays and Sundays should be kept on the altar so that the believers could receive Holy Communion on weekdays.²² “The bread once offered and consecrated is not to be consecrated anew on another day but a new offering is made of what was before consecrated and presanctified.”²³ In order not to interrupt the fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays, the presanctified gifts were received in the evening, after Vespers, when only the liturgy of the presanctified gifts was celebrated and not the complete liturgy.

Nevertheless, on Saturdays and on Sundays when fasting was not permitted the complete liturgy was celebrated. Consequently, the content of the canon 52 of the Synod of Trullo preserved this custom of the liturgy of the presanctified gifts decreed by the Synod of Laodicea.

Although one can find a large number of possible explanations to understand this clear distinction made in this statement between Saturday, Sunday and other days of the week, canon 52 issued by the Council of Trullo makes obvious the fact that the Christian Church from the first centuries of its existence up to the seventh century had a special place in its worship schedule not only for Sunday but for Saturday too. The fact that in the yearly calendar of the Church the period of Lent was considered to be one of the most sacred and significant of all festivals raises the following questions: why was the liturgy during Lent offered on both Saturdays and Sundays, and what was the reason for forbidding fasting on Saturdays and Sundays?

Canon 55

Since we understand that in the city of the Romans, in the holy fast of Lent they fast on the Saturdays, contrary to the ecclesiastical observance which is traditional, it seemed good to the holy synod that also in the Church of the Romans the canon shall immovably stand fast which says: “If any cleric shall be found to fast on a Sunday or Saturday (except on one occasion only) he is to be deposed; and if he is a layman he shall be cut off.”²⁴

In this canon the fathers of the Synod in Trullo reacted against the non-canonical practice of fasting by the church in Rome on Saturdays and Sundays during Lent. The *Apostolic Constitution* 64 states: “If any one of the clergy be found to fast on the Lord’s day, or on the Sabbath-day, excepting one only, let him be deprived; but if he be one of the laity, let him be suspended.”²⁵ On the basis of this statement the Eastern church adopted as a general rule that

22 Ibid. See also Dura, 151.

23 “The Canons of the Council in Trullo,” 14: 389.

24 “The Canons of the Council in Trullo,” 14: 389.

25 “Constitutions of the Holy Apostles,” 7: 504. The *Apostolic Constitution* also states on which days of the week we are to fast and on which we are not to fast and for what reasons: “But let not your fast be with the hypocrites; for they fast on the second and fifth days of the week. But do you either fast the entire five days, or on the fourth day of the week, and on the day of the Preparation, because on the fourth day the condemnation went out against the Lord, Judas then promising to betray Him for money; and you must fast on the day of the Preparation, because on that day the Lord suffered the death of the cross under Pontius Pilate. But keep the Sabbath, and the Lord’s day festival; because the former is the memorial of the creation, and

there should be no fasting on Sabbath and that the Sabbath as well as Sunday should be excluded from the period of fasting before Lent (except one Sabbath in the whole year “which is that of Lord’s burial” “for inasmuch as the Creator was then under the earth, the sorrow for him is more forcible than the joy of creation”).²⁶

Contrary to this position of the Eastern Church and *Apostolic Constitution*, the Western Church, in opposition to the Jews and Judaists, adopted the practice of observing Saturday as a day of fasting. However, Augustine, Ambrose of Milan, and Jerome claimed that this matter had not been decided by divine authority, that there was no particular connection with the essence of faith and of sanctification. They believed that “in such matters each individual should follow the custom of his own church, or of the country in which he resided, and strive that the bond of charity might not be broken by differences in such unimportant matters.”²⁷ Augustine writes that “God did not lay down a rule concerning fasting or eating on the seventh-day of the week, either at the time of His hallowing that day because in it He rested from His works, or afterwards when He gave precepts to the Hebrew nation concerning the observance of that day.”²⁸ Thus, he emphasises that neither the Holy Scriptures nor the universal tradition of the church says anything decisive on this point and that only the weak minds insist on that practice as being the only right one.²⁹

In spite of this position of Augustine, which seems to express a great dose of religious liberty in the domain of “unessential matters,” the historical evidences show something different, namely, that the “Roman church . . . from a very early period required uniformity in things unessential.”³⁰ The Roman church unmistakably claimed that “this custom [of fasting

the latter of the resurrection. But there is one only Sabbath to be observed by you in the whole year, which is that of our Lord’s burial, on which men ought to keep a fast, but not a festival. For inasmuch as the Creator was then under the earth, the sorrow for him is more forcible than the joy for the creation; for the Creator is more honourable by nature and dignity than His own creatures” (Idem., 7: 469).

26 Ibid. The period of fasting before Easter was intended to give an opportunity to Christians to engage into the process of self-examination, repentance, abstinence from the pleasures of the world, the diligent reading of God’s word in order to be able to enter into the process of commemoration of the new creation in humanity which came from the resurrection and glorification of Christ (See Augustus Neander, *General History of the Christian Religion and Church* [Edinburgh: T. T. Clark, 1847], 3: 408).

27 Neander, 3: 402.

28 Augustine, “Epistle to Casulanus,” I, 265-270.

29 Augustine writes: “As to the question on which you wish my opinion, whether it is lawful to fast on the seventh day of the week, I answer, that if it were wholly unlawful, neither Moses nor Elijah, nor our Lord himself, would have fasted for forty successive days. But by the same argument it is proved that even on the Lord’s day fasting is not unlawful. And yet, if any one were to think that the Lord’s day should be appointed a day of fasting, in the same way as the seventh day is observed by some, such a man would be regarded, and not unjustly, as bringing a great cause of offence into the Church. For in those things concerning which the divine Scriptures have laid down no definitive rule, the custom of the people of God, or the practices instituted by their fathers, are to be held as the law of the Church. If we choose to fall into a debate about these things, and to denounce one party merely because their custom differs from that of others, the consequence must be an endless contention, in which the utmost care is necessary lest the storm of conflict overcast with clouds the calmness of brotherly love, while the strength is spent in mere controversy which cannot adduce on either side any decisive testimonies of truth” (Ibid). See also, Neander, 3: 402.

30 Idem., 3: 403.

on Sabbath] came down from Peter, the first of the apostles, and hence ought to be universally observed.”³¹ The Latin Christianity was not even ready to acknowledge that the real origin of the change of the day of fasting was in opposition to the Jewish communities and asserted that the apostle Peter established a fast on the Sabbath in preparing for the dispute with Simon Magus. At the same time when Augustine wrote that the custom of fasting on Sabbath should be held as a principle and that each individual should decide on the basis of the custom of his own church or country whether or not to do this, the Roman bishop Innocent issued a declaration to the Spanish bishop Decentius “that the Sabbath, like Friday, must be observed as a fast day.”³² In opposition to the entire ecclesiastical tradition expressed in the *Apostolic Constitution* that the Sabbath is the commemoration of the joy of creation, Innocent argued that the Sabbath necessarily belongs to the period of sorrow since after Jesus’ crucifixion the apostles were plunged into grief, hid themselves due to fear, and that it preceded Sunday, the joyful day of resurrection.³³

The controversy over fasting on Sabbath unmistakably shows that “the displacement of Saturday by Sunday as the day of weekly Christian worship and rest was a long and slow process. . . Evidence from the fifth century indicates that also at that time both Sabbath and Sunday were observed generally throughout the Christian world, except in Rome and Alexandria.”³⁴ Milas writes:

Christians celebrated Sunday, the day on which Christ was resurrected from death and through this accomplished his work of redemption. This day for Christians was a day of joy and brotherly meetings in Christ as well as the day of repentance for committed sins. Almost the same meaning was attributed to the Sabbath. Christians considered the Sabbath too as a day of joy and remembrance of the creation of the world and the rest of God.³⁵

On Sabbath, in the East, assemblies were held, sermons preached, and communion celebrated.³⁶ Two canons issued by the Synod of Laodicea in Phrygia in A.D. 360 mentioned the Sabbath and some of the activities that the Christians should practice on Sabbath. Canon 29 says: “On Saturday, the Gospels and other portions of the Scripture shall be read aloud.”³⁷

However, in apparently sharp contradiction, canon 16 of the same Synod of Laodicea says:

Christians shall not judaize and be idle on Saturday, but shall work on that day; but the Lord’s Day they shall especially honour, in every way possible as Christians. If however, they are found judaizing, they shall be shut out from Christ.³⁸

31 Ibid.

32 “Sabbato jejunandum esse ratio evidentissima demonstrat” (Ibid).

33 Ibid.

34 Kenneth A. Strand, “The Sabbath and Sunday from the Second through Fifth Centuries,” in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History*, ed. Kenneth A. Strand (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982), 330. See also, Milas, 136.

35 Ibid.

36 Neander, 401.

37 “The Canons of the Council in Trullo,” 14: 133.

38 Ibid., 14: 148.

First of all this canon demonstrates that there were Christians resting on the Sabbath day in the second part of the fourth century following the example of the Creator of the world who also rested on that day. Secondly, Neander rightly states that “In many districts, a punctual Jewish observance of the Sabbath must doubtless have become common: hence the council of Laodicea considered it necessary to order, that Christians should not celebrate this day after the Jewish manner, nor consider themselves bound to abstain from labour.”³⁹ Van Espen also writes that “among the Greeks the Sabbath was kept exactly as the Lord’s Day except so far as the cessation of work was concerned.”⁴⁰

Therefore, the controversy over the fasting on Sabbath, which was the point of debate at the Council in Trullo, is only the by-product of the deep conviction of the Christian Church in the East during the first centuries of the Christian era that the Sabbath is the day of rest established by God at the time of the creation of the world. Three key statements from the *Apostolic Constitution* reinforce the statements of the canon 55 concerning the Sabbath:

1. In the *Apostolic Constitution* 7: 422, 423 the Sabbath is declared along with Sunday to be the day of church assemblies:

But assemble yourselves together every day, morning and evening, singing psalms and praying in the Lord’s house: in the morning saying the sixty-second Psalm, and in the evening the hundred and fortieth, but principally on the Sabbath-day. And of the day of our Lord’s resurrection, which is the Lord’s day meet more diligently, sending praise to God that made the universe by Jesus, and sent him to us, and condescended to let him suffer, and raised Him from the death. Otherwise what apology will he make to God who does not assemble on that day to hear the saving word concerning resurrection . . .?⁴¹

2. *The Apostolic Constitution* states that on the Sabbath and on Sunday the slaves should rest from their labours and attend the church with the rest of Christians to listen to the preaching from the Holy Scriptures:

Let the slaves work five days; but on the Sabbath day and the Lord’s day let them have leisure to go to church for instruction in piety. We have said that the Sabbath is on account of the creation, and the Lord’s Day of resurrection.⁴²

3. *The Apostolic Constitution* declares that there should be no fasting on Sabbath and on Sunday, except one only (Sabbath), given that Sabbath reminds us of the joy and delight of the creation of the world. If somebody refuses to follow this decree he should be excluded from the fellowship of the church.⁴³

Canon 56

We have likewise learned that in the regions of Armenia and in other places certain people eat eggs and cheese on the Sabbaths and Lord’s days of the holy Lent. It seems good therefore that the whole Church of God which is in all the world should follow one rule and keep the fast

39 Neander, 401.

40 “The Canons of the Council in Trullo,” 14: 133.

41 “Constitutions of the Holy Apostles,” 7: 422, 423.

42 Idem., 7: 495.

43 Idem., 7: 504.

perfectly, and as they abstain from everything which is killed, so also should they from eggs and cheese, which are the fruit and produce of those animals from which we abstain. But if any shall not observe this law, if they be clerics, let them be deposed; but if laymen, let them be cut off.⁴⁴

This canon demonstrates that the Christians in the East, although they did not fast on the Sabbaths and on Sundays of Lent, they did however abstain from “everything which is killed . . . from eggs and cheese, which are the fruit and produce of those animals from which”⁴⁵ they refrained during the fasting days. In writing this stipulation, the Fathers of the Synod in Trullo had put an emphasis on the need of the Christian Church to remain faithful to canon 69 of *Apostolic Constitution* which states:

If any bishop, or presbyter, or deacon, or reader, or singer, does not fast the fast of forty days, or the fourth day of the week, and the day of the Preparation, let him be deprived, except he be hindered by weakness of body. But if he be one of the laity, let him be suspended.⁴⁶

It is necessary, according to canon 56, that the whole universal church of God fast in the manner already established by the apostles themselves as it is expressed in *The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*. This warning is especially directed towards the church of Armenia “and in other places,” probably having in mind primarily the church in Rome.

In canon 56 one can easily detect the urge of the fathers of the Synod in Trullo to remain faithful to the teachings of the apostles,⁴⁷ to the earlier traditions, to the “original” and to what ultimately leads to the teachings of the early church and Christ himself. As it was already noticed above, this canon too expresses the strong intent of the Council in Trullo to have some special regulations for the two days in the week, namely Sabbath and Sunday.

Canon 89

The faithful spending the days of the Salutatory Passion in fasting, praying and compunction of heart, ought to fast until the midnight of the Great Sabbath: since the divine Evangelists, Matthew and Luke, have shown us how late at night it was [that the resurrection took place], the one by using the words $\omega\psi\epsilon$ $\Sigma\alpha\beta\beta\alpha\tau\omicron\nu$, and the other by the words $\delta\rho\theta\rho\upsilon$ $\beta\alpha\theta\epsilon\omicron\sigma$.⁴⁸

As we have stated earlier in this work, there was only one Sabbath during the year when, according to the Council in Trullo, the faithful should fast, and it is the Great Sabbath of the Lent. It is the Sabbath of “our Lord’s burial, on which men ought to keep a fast, but not a festival. For inasmuch as the Creator was then under the earth, the sorrow for him is more forcible than the joy for the creation.”⁴⁹ Canon 89 stipulates that the fast on the Great Sabbath should end about the middle of the Holy Saturday night⁵⁰ since “the divine Evangelists, Matthew and Luke, have shown us how late at night” the resurrection took place. At the hour of Lord’s re-

44 “The Canons of the Council in Trullo,” 14: 391.

45 Ibid.

46 “Constitutions of the Holy Apostles,” 7: 504.

47 They believed that the teaching of the apostles was expressed in *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles*.

48 “The Canons of the Council in Trullo,” 14: 403.

49 “Constitutions of the Holy Apostles,” 7: 469.

50 Dura, 159.

urrection, after the days of fasting, contrition and humbling of soul, the faithful should bring to a close the fasting and begin to rejoice.

Regardless of the different positions one might have on the theology of fasting, one can appreciate once more in this canon the preoccupation of the fathers of the Synod in Trullo to remain in harmony with the teachings of the apostolic tradition and to maintain an ecclesiastical unity in the observance of the fasting. Moreover, it is clear that, for them, again and again, the Sabbath day as well as Sunday had to be set apart not just as special day of non-fasting, but also a day of worship on which the faithful should experience the joy of the creation of the world and resurrection of Jesus.

The question over the ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the Church in Bulgaria is the next major event in the long history of controversies between Constantinople and Rome which demonstrates that the issue of fasting on Sabbath and Sunday played an important theological role. This controversy happened almost two centuries subsequent to the Council in Trullo.

The Controversy over the Church in Bulgaria

Long before the controversy over who would have the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the church in Bulgaria in the ninth century, there were numerous quarrels between the Greek and Latin Christianity.⁵¹ For almost two and a half centuries the Christian Church had been using the Greek language, and some of the finest scholars of the whole history of the church wrote in Greek. Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius, Cappadocian theologians wrote in Greek and produced some of the finest theological works. Latin was introduced as the church language only in the middle of the third century.⁵² Although there was some fine scholarship in the East, the Western Church became distrustful of the theology of the East because some theologians from the East also introduced a number of heresies.⁵³

In A.D. 856 Theodora, the empress of the Byzantine Empire,⁵⁴ retired from the court, and her underage son, Michael III, was appointed to succeed her under the protection of her brother, Bardas. Although Bardas was a man who loved and promoted science, he and young Michael III allowed corruption and immorality to become part of their lives and of the life of the whole court.⁵⁵ The patriarch of Constantinople, Ignatius, who was a God-fearing man, refused communion to the young king. This act had infuriated Bardas and Michael, and they removed Ignatius from his position and exiled him.

Ignatius was succeeded by Photius, a layman, who was notable as “the most learned scholar in the world . . . , the highly gifted man, distinguished as a philosopher in a generation,

51 See Jevsevije Popovic, *Opca Crkvena Istorija* (Sremski Karlovci: Srpska Manastirska Stamparija, 1912), 774-796. Frank Gavin, “Breach Between East and West,” in *An Outline of Christianity: The Story of Our Civilization*, 5 vols., eds., A. S. Peake and R. G. Parsons (London: The Waverly Book Company, 1926), 2: 189.

52 *Ibid.*

53 Some of the points of divergence were the use of the unleavened or leavened bread, the veneration of statues of saints or veneration of *ikons* only.

54 In A.D. 330 Constantine I established a second Roman capital at Byzantium (present day Istanbul). When Rome fell in A.D. 476 the Byzantine Empire was founded on the remains of the once great Roman Empire with Constantinople as its capital.

55 See Popovic, 778.

and displaying, as a theologian, qualities which bespeak genius.”⁵⁶ The information about this succession was sent to Pope Nicholas I (858-867), who sent to the East two legates to look into the new circumstances. When the two legates arrived in Constantinople they accepted gifts from Bardas’s supporters, and at the trial of Ignatius they entirely took the side of Bardas. Thus, Ignatius’s removal was confirmed.⁵⁷

However, in A.D. 862 Pope Nicholas I examined the whole controversy again and came to the conclusion that Ignatius was wrongly deposed. Because of this he threatened Photius with excommunication. The strain and tension of this relationship between Rome and Constantinople were further deepened by the question of ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the church in Bulgaria.

Bulgarians had been Christianized by missionaries from Constantinople and had received priests from the East. The Bulgarian king Bogoris (or Boris) himself was baptized by Greek priests. However, Bogoris thought later that this ecclesiastical dependence on Constantinople may put in danger the political independence of Bulgaria. He wrote to Rome asking the so-called “one hundred and five religious questions” and requesting the Pope to send bishops to put the church in Bulgaria in order.⁵⁸ Pope Nichols I sent bishops who introduced the Latin form of worship, and the church in Bulgaria was declared to be the daughter of Rome. The Greek priests were humiliated and sent to Constantinople. Distrust and aversion were transformed into an open hostility.⁵⁹

In the year A.D. 867 the Patriarch of Constantinople, Photius, wrote an encyclical to other Patriarchs of the Eastern Churches accusing the Church of Rome of banditry and robbery of the church in Bulgaria, as well as accusing them of other abuses. The five abuses of Rome mentioned in this encyclical are:

Observing Saturday as a fast day.

1. Giving permission to the people to eat flesh food and animal products (cheese, milk, eggs) in the first week of Easter.
2. Despising the priests from the East who live in a lawful marriage while their (Western) priests live in adultery and concubinage.
3. Declining to give consent to the priests and bishops to conduct the sacrament of confirmation.
4. Teaching that the Holy Spirit proceeds not only from the Father but adding the phrase “and the son” (*filioque*).⁶⁰

This encyclical, which is sometimes called the *Magna Charta* of Eastern Orthodoxy, expresses a forceful declaration of Constantinople’s independence from Rome and finishes with the statement of dethronement and excommunication of Pope Nicholas I. At least during this short period of time, it seemed that Photius won in his criticism of Rome because of the logic of his argument and the support he had from the clergy and people.⁶¹

56 Gavin, 2: 191.

57 Ibid.

58 Popovic, 780.

59 Ibid., 781; Gavin, 2: 192; See also Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 158.

60 Ibid.

61 See Gavin 2: 193.

It is significant for the Saturday/Sunday debate that at this critical point in the history of the relationship between the Eastern and Western part of Christianity, the first point of disagreement mentioned in this encyclical is fasting on Sabbath. It is also interesting to notice that in this document Sunday is not mentioned as the non-fasting day. Of course, that there were other issues behind this encyclical, like the power struggle between the two segments of Christianity and aspirations to control certain territories. However, the problem of fasting on Sabbath is still there in the first place on the agenda of disagreements in the ninth century A.D.

This first excommunication in A.D. 867 would find its echo from the Latin side in the eleventh century. Was fasting on Sabbath still an issue in the later controversy between the two Christian churches?

The Fasting on Sabbath in the Great Schism of A.D. 1054

In A.D. 1042 Constantine Monomachos was inaugurated as the new king of the Byzantine Empire. One year later Michael Cerularius became the Patriarch of the Eastern Church. These two men would become the central protagonists in defending the interests of the Eastern Orthodox Church in the Great Schism of A.D. 1054. Michael Cerularius was the real ruler not only of the church but also of the state, since soon after Constantine Monomachos he became emperor, he suffered from paralysis and became a mere figurehead.⁶²

In Rome the Pope was Leo IX, who believed that he inherited the absolute power over all Christian people and institutions from Peter himself.⁶³ It seems that the Great Schism began with a letter written by the Metropolitan Archbishop Leo of Achrida and Michael Cerularius to Bishop John of the church in Trani in southern Italy. However, the letter was not intended only for Bishop John but through him “to all the chief priests, and the priests of the Franks, and the monks, and the peoples, and to the most reverend pope himself.”⁶⁴ This open letter singles out two distinctive abuses of the western Church. It made a special attack on the practice of the Roman church of making the Sabbath a fast day and the use of the unleavened bread for Eucharist. It is interesting to notice that apparently the most controversial issue, that of the *Filioque*, is not mentioned in this letter.

Around the same time another learned theologian from the East, Nicetas Stethatos, wrote a booklet *Libellus Contra Latinos* in which he accused the Roman church of breaking the rules of the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* against fasting on the Sabbath, as well as of being disobedient to the Scriptures and the canons of other church councils which had forbidden this practice.⁶⁵

To these two accusing documents from the East came two replies from the Western side. Pope Leo IX wrote an apologia for the Roman Church to Michael Cerularius and Leo of Achrida, claiming that “he was the successor of the apostle Peter, that he was invested with supreme

62 Ibid. See also C. T. Marshall, “Schism, The Great,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (1987), 980.

63 Marshall, 981.

64 Michael Cerularius and Leo of Achrida, “Epistle to John of Trani,” in Migne’s *Patrologia Graecae*, CXX: 835-845. See also R. L. Odom, “The Sabbath in the Great Schism of A.D. 1054,” *Andrew University Seminary Studies* 1 (1963): 74-80.

65 Nicetas Stethatos, “*Libellus Contra Latinos*,” in Migne’s *Patrologis Graeca*, CXX: 1011-1022.

authority over the universal church, and that his word was law for the faithful to obey.”⁶⁶ The second reply came from Cardinal Humbert who wrote his *Responsio* to Nicetas Stethatos.⁶⁷

Moreover, Pope Leo IX decided early in 1054 to send a group of theologians to Constantinople to discuss the contended issues further. This group consisted of three papal legates: Cardinal Humbert; Frederic, deacon and chancellor of the Church of Rome; and Peter, archbishop of Amalfi. Upon their arrival the papal legates discussed the disputed issues with the Patriarch, the Emperor, and publicly with Nicetas Stethatos in the presence of the Emperor, his court, and other persons of high rank in affairs of state and church.⁶⁸ Patriarch Michael Cerularius was offended by the letter brought to him by the legates from Pope Leo IX as well as by Humbert’s attitude toward him.

After these unsuccessful discussions and other attempts to bring the Eastern Church into submission to the Church of Rome, there occurred one of the most dramatic and most devastating events in the history of Christianity. Namely, on July 16, 1054, on the Sabbath day, when preparations had been made for the liturgy on that day, the three papal legates entered the church of St. Sophia and laid the bull of excommunication on the altar of that church and walked away, towards Rome, shaking the dust from their feet. From that day on the fracture between Constantinople and Rome has never been healed and the Church of Rome has considered Eastern Orthodox Christendom as excommunicated and heretical.

In his work *Adversus Calumnias Graecorum* (Against the Calumnies of the Greek) Cardinal Humbert wrote:

Therefore, in such observance of the Sabbath, where and in what way do we [Latins] have anything in common with the Jews? For they are idle and keep a holiday on the Sabbath, neither ploughing nor reaping, and by reason of custom do not work, but they hold a festivity and a dinner, and their menservants, maidservants, cattle, and beasts of burden rest. But we [Latins] observe none of these things, but we do every (sort of) work, as (we do) on the preceding five days, and we fast as we (are wont to) fast on the sixth day [Friday] next to it.

However, you [Greeks], if you do not judaize, tell (us) why do you have something in common with the Jews with the similar observance of the Sabbath? They certainly observe the Sabbath, and you observe (it); they dine, and always break the fast, on the Sabbath. In their forty-day period they break the fast every Sabbath except one, and you [Greeks] in your forty day period break the fast every Sabbath except one. They [the Jews] have a twofold reason for observing the Sabbath, obviously by reason of the precept of Moses, and because the disciples were saddened and heavy (of heart) on this (Sabbath) day on account of the death of the Lord, whom they do not believe to be about to be resurrected. Wherefore, because you observe Sabbath with the Jews and with us Sunday, Lord’s day, you appear by such observance to imitate the sect of the Nazarenes, who in this manner accept the Christianity that they might not give up Judaism.

But the Latin church, in compassionate regard for the Lord in (His) suffering and death,

66 Leo IX, “Epistle 100, to Michael Cerularius and Leo of Achrida,” in Migne’s *Patrologia Latina*, CXLIII: 745-768. See also, Odom, 75.

67 Humbert, “Responsio,” in Migne’s *Patrologia Graeca*, CXX: 1021-1038.

68 Humbert, “Brevis et Succincta Commemoratio,” in Migne’s *Patrologia Latina*, CXLIII: 1001, 1002.

rejoice in (His) resurrection on the [Sunday] Lord's day, when concern much troubled the Jews as they were seeking to corrupt the guards of the sepulchre by means of money. Wherefore, we [Latins], holding unto the present time the apostolic tradition concerning the Sabbath, and desiring to hold (it) unto the end, are careful to subscribe to that which our ancient and venerable fathers declared and confirmed, among whom the most blessed Pope Sylvester, the spiritual father of the Emperor Constantine the Great, said, among other things:

"If every [Sunday] Lord's day on account of the [Lord's] resurrection is to be kept in the joy of Christians, then every Sabbath day [on account] of the burial is to be estimated in execration of the Jews. For all the disciples of the Lord had a lamentation on the Sabbath, bewailing the buried Lord, and gladness [prevailed] for the exulting Jews. But for the fasting apostles sadness reigned. Let us [Christians], therefore, be sad with the saddened on account of the burial of the Lord, if we would rejoice with them on account of the resurrection of the Lord. For it is not proper that we should observe on account of Jewish custom, the subversions of the foods and ceremonies of the Jews."

These and similar things having been said by St. Sylvester, this tradition of the apostolic see did not please some of the Easterners, but they choose rather to observe the Sabbath with the Jews.⁶⁹

The patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Cerularius, responded to the accusations concerning the Sabbath observance by saying:

For we are commanded also to honour the Sabbath equally with the [Sunday] Lord's [Day], and to keep [it] and not to work on it.⁷⁰

The two quotes mentioned above from Cardinal Humbert and Patriarch Cerularius are highly revealing and useful for better understanding the theological positions of the two churches. Cardinal Humbert argues that the Christians from the East celebrate the Sabbath in a similar way as do the Jews ("... why you have something in common with the Jews in a similar observance of the Sabbath?"; "They certainly observe the Sabbath, and you observe [it]"). He also states that the Jews and by analogy the Christians from the East "are idle and keep a holiday on the Sabbath, neither ploughing nor reaping, and by the reason of custom do not work." Cardinal Humbert also explains the theological reasons why the Jews and the Christians from the East observe the Sabbath. The first reason he gives is "the precept of Moses," meaning probably the revelation given to humanity through the prophet Moses in the Pentateuch and more specifically the Ten Commandments. The second reason mentioned by Cardinal Humbert is related to the fasting of the Orthodox Church on only one Sabbath during the year, and that is the day when Christ was in the tomb and "the disciples were saddened and heavy (of heart) on this (Sabbath) day on account of the death of the Lord." Cardinal Humbert concludes that since the Christians from the East "observe the Sabbath with the Jews" and the Lord's Day (Sunday) with the Latin Church, they must be designated as a sect.

Equally important or even more so is the response given by Patriarch Michael Cerularius in which he evidently states that the Christians are "commanded also to honour the Sabbath equally with the (Sunday) Lord's (day), and to keep (it) and not to work on it." Consequently, Cerularius does not deny the accusations made by Humbert but undoubtedly and

69 Humbert, "Adversus Calumnias Graecorum," in Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, CXLIII: 936, 937.

70 Cerularius, "Letter I," in Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*, CXX: 777, 778.

unquestionably argues that the Christians are “commanded,” probably meaning by the Biblical revelation and the apostolic tradition, to honour, worship, and not work on the Sabbath, even as on Sunday.

Conclusion

The dispute between Rome and Constantinople on the fasting on Sabbath had been one of the most controversial theological issues between the two segments of Christianity which lasted for more than a thousand years. Although sometimes this theological quarrel is every so often blurred with cultural and non-biblical elements, one cannot but appreciate the resolve of the Fathers of the Council of Trullo, Patriarch Photius and Patriarch Cerularius, to remain faithful to the tradition of the apostles and church fathers.

Five canons of the Synod in Trullo emphasize, in one way or another (four directly), the necessity for the Christian Church to remain faithful to the truth about not fasting on Sabbath as expressed in the *Apostolic Constitution*. The Sabbath along with Sunday was the day when Christians should assemble, sing psalms and pray in the house of the Lord. On Sabbath the slaves should rest from their labours, attend the church, and listen to the preaching from the Holy Scriptures with the rest of Christians. And there should be no fasting on Sabbath (and Sunday) because the Sabbath reminds us of the joy and delight of the creation of the world.

In the dispute between the East and the West on the subject of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the Church in Bulgaria, Patriarch Photius in his encyclical against the Rome mentioned in the first place, the fasting on Sabbath, that is, the decision of the Roman Church to reject and disregard the *Apostolic Constitution* and to pronounce the Sabbath the day of fasting. It means that the struggle to understand the mystery of the Sabbath is still there in the ninth century A.D.

Finally, in the eleventh century, after the Great Schism in 1054, Patriarch Cerularius made a tremendous statement that “Christians are commanded to honour the Sabbath . . . to keep (it) and not to work on it.”⁷¹ Unfortunately the Eastern Orthodox Church did not follow the words of Patriarch Michael Cerularius. In the centuries to follow, little by little Eastern Orthodoxy has distanced itself in its understanding of the Sabbath from the *Apostolic Constitution*, from the Fathers assembled in the Synod of Trullo, and from the Patriarchs Photius and Cerularius and came closer to the Church of Rome’s understanding of the Sabbath.

SUMMARY

The Controversy over fasting on saturday between Constantinople and Rome

The topic of this article is the millennium-lasting dispute between Rome and Constantinople on the fasting on Sabbath. The attention has been paid to the decisions made by Fathers of the Council of Trullo, as well as to Patriarch Photius and Patriarch Cerularius, who attempted to remain faithful to the tradition of the apostles and church fathers. According to the *Apostolic Constitution*, Sabbath was not the day for fasting. It was the day of assembly for Christians and of rest for the slaves. The last recorded eastern-orthodox advocate of such understanding was Patriarch Cerularius who expressed his view within the context of the Great Schism.

Key words: *fasting on Saturday, Photius, Cerularius, Apostolic Constitution*

71 Cerularius, CXX: 777, 778.

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