The Laurentian Schism: East and West in the Roman Church

JOHN MOORHEAD

In 498, four days after the death of Pope Anastasius II, two men were elected and consecrated bishop of Rome on the one day, the deacon Symmachus and the archpriest Laurentius. Fighting broke out between their supporters and the dispute was referred to Theodoric, the Ostrogothic king of Italy, who declared that Symmachus was to be pope. A synod held in 499 accepted him as pope and passed legislation on church government; it awarded to Laurentius the see of Nuceria. But trouble soon broke out again when Symmachus was accused of improper relations with women, squandering church property and celebrating Easter on the wrong date. While on his way to Ravenna, where Theodoric had summoned him to give an account of himself, he became convinced that he was being framed, and returned secretly to Rome by night without completing his journey. Theodoric reacted by appointing Bishop Peter of Altinum as visitor of the Roman see, but this became a further source of controversy. At some stage Laurentius returned to Rome. Rioting broke out again, with clergy being killed and Symmachus himself being attacked on one occasion. Two more synods failed to pacify in the city or put an end to the schism. This only came years later, in 507 or 508, when Theodoric ordered Festus, Laurentius' noble patron, to hand over the churches of Rome, which had been held by Laurentius, to Symmachus. Laurentius retired to Festus' estates, leaving Symmachus to preside over a reasonably peaceful and united church until his death in 514.

This article seeks to explore two questions relating to the schism. First, what was the issue dividing the parties? This is an issue which has attracted some scholarly discussion, but a new review of the evidence may be useful. Second, how much support was enjoyed within the Roman church by each of the rivals? It will be suggested that, when the answers to these questions are taken together, we will be in a position to make

1. cf. in general E. Caspar, Geschichte des Papsttums II (Tübingen, 1933), pp. 87-129; R. Cessi, “Dalla scisma laurenziano alla pacificazione religiosa con l'oriente,” Archivio della reale società romana di storia patria 43 (1920):225-321; ibid. “Lo scisma laurenziano e le origini della dottrina politica della chiesa di Roma,” Archivio della reale società ... 42 (1910):5-229. It is no part of this paper to consider the political background, on which see for Italy W. Ensslin, Theoderich der Grosse (Munich, 1947) and, for the Empire, C. Capizzi, L'imperatore Anastasio I (Rome, 1969).

Mr. Moorhead is lecturer in the Department of History, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.

125
CHURCH HISTORY

some important comments about factions within the Roman church as the fifth century turned into the sixth.

1. Any analysis of the grounds dividing the parties must begin by examining a schism which occurred during the pontificate of the previous pope, Anastasius. Shortly after becoming pope in 496, Anastasius informed Emperor Anastasius of his election in a letter which indicates that, while the pope was not entirely well-disposed towards the East, he was prepared to go some way towards improving relations which had been envenomed by the Acacian schism since 482. The new pope held that the schismatic Acacius could safely be left to the judgement of God, and the baptisms and ordinations he performed, even after his condemnation, were valid. Pope Anastasius also sent two bishops, Crescensio and Germanus, to the East, apparently in an attempt to negotiate an end to the Acacian schism.

But a large part of the Roman church was in no mood for conciliation, and the Liber Pontificalis, in its biography of Anastasius, indicates that a schism broke out over this issue:

Many clergy and people separated themselves from his communion because without the consent of the bishops priests and clergy of the whole Catholic church he had shared communion with a deacon of Thessalonica, Fotinus (sic), who was in communion with Acacius.

The affair also had repercussions outside Rome, for Photinus later contacted the church of Alexandria, stating (whether truthfully or not) that Anastasius had satisfied him concerning offensive matters in the translation of a letter. Presumably, this means that Anastasius was prepared to smooth over difficulties arising from the Christology of the Tome of Pope Leo. In any case, a priest and a lector of the Alexandrian church were emboldened to write to Festus, a Roman noble then in Constantinople, asking whether this was true and enclosing a statement of their faith to be forwarded to Pope Anastasius. Their confession accepted the councils of Nicaea, Constantine, and Ephesus, but not Chalcedon, and defended Dioscorus, Timothy Aelurus, and Peter Mongus, the anti-Chalcedonian patriarchs of Alexandria. Obviously, its acceptance would have entailed enormous concessions to the Monophysites. It is not certain that Anastasius contemplated making such concessions, but we can say he was fishing in troubled waters. According to his biographer in the Liber Pontificalis, he shared communion with a heretic; he attracted correspondence from Alexandria frankly inviting him to abandon the uncompromising position of earlier popes; and the possibility of his being coerced into abandoning this position seems to have been discussed by a Roman noble with the Emperor. In short, while we cannot specify how far Anastasius was prepared to go, his apparently conciliatory stance, coming as it did after the pontificate of the staunch Latinist Gelasius, attracted interest both within and outside Rome. His biographer was able to state with satisfaction: "And because he wished to recall (revocare) Acacius secretly, and was not able, he was struck down by the divine will."10

The pontificate of Anastasius was thus marked by a schism within the Roman church on the issue of relations with the eastern churches. For this reason alone, we would be entitled to suspect a similar motivation for the Laurentian schism which followed immediately; the candidacy of one of the rivals may have been backed by a faction supporting Anastasius' irenic policy, while the other may have been supported by Anastasius' opponents. As it happens, there is good evidence that this was the case.

The biographies of Symmachus preserved in the Liber Pontificalis and the Laurentian fragment both specify that the noble Festus was Laurentius' particular patron. Indeed, the Laurentian life states that, after Theodoric finally pronounced against Laurentius, the defeated candidate retired to Festus' estates. During the pontificate of Anastasius, Festus had been sent to Constantinople by Theodoric to try to come to an agreement with the emperor about the constitutional position of his kingdom. The embassy was a success, and Anastasius

3. For this schism, documented by Eduard Schwartz, "Schismen zum acacianischen Schisma" (Munich, 1934) in Die auslandischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-hist. Abt. Neue Folge, Hft. 10; see among modern discussions W. H. C. Frend, The Rise of the Monophysite Movement (Cambridge, 1972.)

8. Ibid.
9. While the letter is sent in the names of Dioscorus the priest and Chaeremon the lector, it must have been sent with the consent of the patriarch of Alexandria as it invites Anastasius to write or send a messenger to him (ibid., p. 473).
11. Lib. Pont., p. 46. It is perhaps worth recalling that two lives of Symmachus are preserved, one favorable to him in the Liber Pontificalis (hereafter referred to as the "official life"), and the other favorable to Laurentius in a document generally referred to as the Laurentian fragment (hereafter the "Laurentian life"); cf. Duchesne's comments in his introduction to Lib. Pont., pp. xxx-xxxii.)
Anastasius received clear and direct instructions from the Emperor Zeno, which were connected with the promotion of Anastasius. The Emperor sent as a legation from Constantinople, during the pontificate of Pope Leo I, two ambassadors, East and West. The first was an excellent patrician, the second a man of business. The latter was a former senator, of the Roman fleet. The first was a former senator, of the Roman fleet.

Festus, who was appointed legate of the Roman fleet, was instructed to make with the Emperor a peace of peace between the Emperor and the Pope. This peace was negotiated and signed in the presence of the Pope and the Emperor. The peace was signed in the presence of the Pope and the Emperor.

Festus was instructed to make with the Emperor a peace of peace between the Emperor and the Pope. This peace was negotiated and signed in the presence of the Pope and the Emperor. The peace was signed in the presence of the Pope and the Emperor.

The peace was signed in the presence of the Pope and the Emperor.

Festus was instructed to make with the Emperor a peace of peace between the Emperor and the Pope. This peace was negotiated and signed in the presence of the Pope and the Emperor. The peace was signed in the presence of the Pope and the Emperor.

The peace was signed in the presence of the Pope and the Emperor.
THE LAURENTIAN SCHISM

20. In particular the

19. Ibid., p. 432.

18. Ibid.,

porter. I shall therefore assume that the synod of 499 included men

who had supported and would again support both Symmachus and

Laurentius, while the synod of 501 and 502 contained only supporters

of Symmachus. Let us begin with the deacons. The seven who were present at the

three synods which were held in Rome during the schism contain

lists of participants and signatories which may be summarized as

follows:

Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Synod</th>
<th>Bishops Present</th>
<th>Deacons Present</th>
<th>Priests Present</th>
<th>Priests Signing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Synod of 499</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synod of 501</td>
<td>74</td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synod of 502</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
<td>74</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This material may be used to measure the support given Symmachus
and Laurentius. The first synod, held shortly after Theodoric's initial
decision in favor of Symmachus, was attended not only by his supporters
but also by those who had supported Laurentius. Indeed, Laurentius
himself was present at the synod of 501. By the time the next synod was held, however,
the schism had broken out again, and it is hard to see how anyone who supported
Laurentius could have assented to either of them. The second synod
was therefore quite possible that the Agapetus whom the synod of
502, where he read material on behalf of Symmachus, was ap-

17. The proceedings of the synods are to be found in MGHAA, Vol. 12, pp. 399-455. For

the fall from seven to four in the period 499-502 is clear-cut,

and especially revealing inasmuch as only two of the four present in

502, Hormisdas and Agapetus, have been made deacons since 499. Of these

two, Hormisdas was close to Symmachus; he played a major role in

the synod of 502 (where he read material on behalf of Symmachus, and may

have been made deacon as early as 500). Agapetus is a more elusive figure, but he may well be identified with the

Bishop of Marseilles, who in 535 is referred to as the "Ponificis,

Papae Apapatius, clericus in senatu." The first synod, held shortly

after Theodoric's initial decision in favor of Symmachus, was attended not only by his supporters

but also by those who had supported Laurentius. Indeed, Laurentius

himself was present at the synod of 501. By the time the next synod was held, however,
the schism had broken out again, and it is hard to see how anyone who supported
Laurentius could have assented to either of them. The second synod
was therefore quite possible that the Agapetus whom the synod of
502, where he read material on behalf of Symmachus, was ap-

17. The proceedings of the synods are to be found in MGHAA, Vol. 12, pp. 399-455. For

the fall from seven to four in the period 499-502 is clear-cut,

and especially revealing inasmuch as only two of the four present in

502, Hormisdas and Agapetus, have been made deacons since 499. Of these

two, Hormisdas was close to Symmachus; he played a major role in

the synod of 502 (where he read material on behalf of Symmachus, and may

have been made deacon as early as 500). Agapetus is a more elusive figure, but he may well be identified with the

Bishop of Marseilles, who in 535 is referred to as the "Ponificis,

Papae Apapatius, clericus in senatu." The first synod, held shortly

after Theodoric's initial decision in favor of Symmachus, was attended not only by his supporters

but also by those who had supported Laurentius. Indeed, Laurentius

himself was present at the synod of 501. By the time the next synod was held, however,
the schism had broken out again, and it is hard to see how anyone who supported
Laurentius could have assented to either of them. The second synod
was therefore quite possible that the Agapetus whom the synod of
502, where he read material on behalf of Symmachus, was ap-

17. The proceedings of the synods are to be found in MGHAA, Vol. 12, pp. 399-455. For

the fall from seven to four in the period 499-502 is clear-cut,

and especially revealing inasmuch as only two of the four present in

502, Hormisdas and Agapetus, have been made deacons since 499. Of these

two, Hormisdas was close to Symmachus; he played a major role in

the synod of 502 (where he read material on behalf of Symmachus, and may

have been made deacon as early as 500). Agapetus is a more elusive figure, but he may well be identified with the

Bishop of Marseilles, who in 535 is referred to as the "Ponificis,

Papae Apapatius, clericus in senatu." The first synod, held shortly

after Theodoric's initial decision in favor of Symmachus, was attended not only by his supporters

but also by those who had supported Laurentius. Indeed, Laurentius

himself was present at the synod of 501. By the time the next synod was held, however,
the schism had broken out again, and it is hard to see how anyone who supported
Laurentius could have assented to either of them. The second synod
was therefore quite possible that the Agapetus whom the synod of
502, where he read material on behalf of Symmachus, was ap-
chus by attending the synod of 502 was less than half the number who had attended the synod of 499.²⁵

The degree of the erosion of Symmachus' support within the Roman church can fairly be appreciated by glancing at the figures for the numbers of bishops who were present at and signed the proceedings of the three synods. Obviously, the numbers remained reasonably steady, and we may fairly conclude that the Italian episcopate was by and large loyal to Symmachus.

The lists of participants in the three synods are therefore valuable guides to the strengths of the antagonists. Many, if not most of the priests and deacons who attended the synod of 499 decided for Laurentius; most of the Italian bishops supported Symmachus. This may appear to contradict the Liber Pontificalis which asserts that Symmachus enjoyed greater support within Rome²⁶ but there is no necessary contradiction; we know that the plebs were staunchly for Symmachus and the statement probably refers to them and not the clergy. In any case, the assertion could be mere propaganda. In short, the synod lists make it plain that the Roman church was seriously split.

This conclusion is confirmed by a study of papal ordinances. Table 2 reproduces details of the ordinations of priests, deacons, and bishops performed by each pope from Gelasius to John 1, taken from near the end of their respective biographies in the Liber Pontificalis.²⁷

²⁵. I have ignored deaths. It is known that some of Symmachus' clerical supporters were killed during the schism (Lib. Pont., p. 261), but despite its partiality for Symmachus the official biography mentions only two, a small proportion of the number who attended the synod of 499. Hence it seems reasonable to take the figures at face value, as indicating a drastic weakening of Symmachus' position.

²⁶. One minor problem ought to be considered. Pope Gregory the Great wrote that "Paschasius a deacon of this apostolic see" was until the end of his life an adherent of Laurentius (Gregory, Dialogorum libri 4, 4.42, ed. V. Morica (Rome, 1954), for Paschasius see also the introductory letter to the Vita Severini of Eugippius, ed. P. Knoell, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 9, pt. 2, pp. 1–6). Yet Paschasius is not mentioned in any of the synod lists, even in the full list of deacons present in 499. If we accept Gregory's testimony, Paschasius must either have been made a deacon later by Symmachus, and subsequently changed sides, or made a deacon by Laurentius or Peter of Aluinum. The problem of ordinations is further considered below, pp. 10–12.


²⁸. See n. 25.
If large numbers of the clergy were defecting they must have taken their churches with them. It will be worth our while examining the control Symmachus and Laurentius exercised over the various churches of Rome. The official life of Symmachus preserves a discreet silence on this point and there seems no reason to doubt the assertion of the Laurentian life: "Laurentius held the Roman church for roughly four years."29 The same source later states that Symmachus asked Theodoric to hand over to him "the churches which Laurentius held within the city," and from it we also learn that when Symmachus returned to Rome by night in 501, having decided not to complete a journey to Ravenna, where he had been summoned by Theodoric, he took refuge in St. Peter's basilica—not the basilica Constantiniiana, which was then the usual papal residence.30 This choice of a church across the river from the city is strange, and can best be explained by assuming that it was the only one of the great basilicas open to him. The other churches must have been in the hands of his enemies, as was St. Paul's: in this church a gallery of pictures of the popes would later include the portrait, not of Symmachus, but of Laurentius.31

With this in mind let us examine Symmachus' achievements as a builder in the Roman church. His official life in the Liber Pontificalis gives a list of his achievements which is very detailed, presumably for propaganda purposes (it even includes the toilets which he had built at St. Peter's)32 but two aspects stand out. The first is the small number of occasions on which he had anything to do with churches in Rome. Only three of his works (the construction of a basilica of St. Martin, the provision of steps within the church of St. John and Paul, and the building of an oratory of Ss. Cosmas and Damian in St. Mary's basilica) were within the old city walls. Duchesne has listed all early papal foundations and restorations according to their location, and the data he assembled may be rearranged to form the following table.33

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>constructions and restorations</th>
<th>by Symmachus by other early popes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>in Rome</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in the suburbs</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beyond the suburbs</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

30. Ibid., p. 44.
32. Liber Pontificalis, pp. 261–63. Laurentius is not known to have carried out any building activity.
33. Cf. Liber Pontificalis, pp. cxli–cxlilii. The figures in Table 3 are not large; nevertheless they display a clear-cut trend.

The pattern of Symmachus' extensive building activity was thus radically different from that of the other early popes. How are we to account for this astonishing preference for building in the suburbs and further out of the city? The obvious answer is that for much of the time when he was pope Symmachus did not enjoy easy access to the city. The supporters of Laurentius must have held the city. Perhaps Symmachus' feverish building activity was a form of propaganda; lacking control over the city, he wished to appear powerful nonetheless.34

The second noteworthy feature of Symmachus' activity as a builder is his concentration on St. Peter's. The status of this basilica in modern Rome can easily blind us to its position in the late Roman and early medieval periods. Since its foundation during the pontificate of Pope Sylvester (314–325) it had merely ranked as one among several basilicas. No pope had singled it out for special attention; every extension or donation to it can be paralleled by papal concern for other basilicas. But Symmachus singled it out for special attention, adding to it a sub-basilica and a total of eight oratories. I suggest that this was a deliberate attempt to build up St. Peter's as a rival to the Lateran, which would have been the headquarters of Laurentius. Therefore, in the engaging words of his official biographer, at St. Peter's Symmachus "episcopia in eodem loco dextra levaque feicit."35

One significant detail confirms this interpretation. Symmachus built near the font three oratories "a fundamentum," dedicated to the Holy Cross, St. John Baptist and St. John Evangelist.36 Some decades earlier, Pope Hilary (461–468) built three oratories with precisely the same dedications in the basilica Constantiniiana.37 Symmachus, therefore, was duplicating the setting in which baptisms had been performed, and probably were being performed by Laurentius, in another church. In this context it is worthwhile recalling a story related in one of the Symmachus forgeries.38 Pope Liberius, we are told, was exiled by an heretical emperor, and took up residence just outside Rome. As Easter approached he was desolate because he would not be able to perform the customary baptisms within the Lateran, but on the advice of his priests conducted the ceremony in the Ostian cemetery "ad nymphas S. Petri, ibi S. Petrus baptizatam." Meanwhile the priest Damasius constructed a baptistery at St. Peter's basilica and Liberius was able to hold the Pentecost baptisms there.

The points of contact with Symmachus' situation are obvious. But this

---

35. Liber Pontificalis, p. 262.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., pp. 245–246.
story does not merely justify the basilica of Peter as a suitable place for
baptisms; it also stresses the Apostle himself. This emphasis on Peter was
not accidental; it occurs throughout the pamphlet Ennodius wrote to
validate the synod of 501, especially in the concluding orations which
were given by Peter, Paul and the city of Rome. When the schism was
over, Ennodius wrote that Peter had restored the churches. Sym-
ma-chus' building activity was centered on St. Peter's. In pinning his hopes
on Peter and his basilica, Symmachus was swimming with a strong cur-
cent, for throughout the fifth century the figure of the Apostle was play-
ing an increasingly large part in the thinking of Romans. Pope Leo had
stressed the connections between Peter and Rome, and Peter and the pa-
pacy, and was buried in St. Peter's: from then on it was almost de riguer
for popes to be buried there. City, Patron, and Bishop were becoming
blurred, and Symmachus made capital out of this.

The figure of Symmachus which emerges in the official life in the Liber Pontificalis is a majestic one, that of a great builder and endower of St.
Peter's. The evidence presented here suggests that he was, during the
early part of his pontificate, a less imposing character who almost clung
to the basilica of the Apostle. The synod lists, details of ordinations, and
descriptions of building activity all indicate that Symmachus' position
during the schism was extremely insecure, and that Laurentius may well
have been the stronger of the rivals. While the Italian bishops over-
whelmingly supported Symmachus (cf. Table I above) within Rome the
philobiyzantine Laurentius seems to have at least held his own. In a
Rome being governed from Ravenna by the Ostrogoths, and which was to
see within a few decades the death in captivity of Pope John I shortly
after his return from Constantinople, and the execution of Boethius, who
had defended a fellow senator against a charge of treachery arising
from correspondence with the East, I would suggest that the affairs of
the schism point to a conclusion of some significance: the Roman church
in the late fifth and early sixth centuries harbored a pro-Greek element
whose strength and continuity should not be underestimated.

40. J. C. Picard, "Etude sur l'emplacement des tombes des papes du IIIe au Xe siecle," Mir-
lange d'archeologie et d'histoire 81 (1969):725-732 at pp. 747-749. It is noteworthy that,
as far as we know, in the other major Italian sees during this period John was buried in
the church of St. Agatha (Agnellus qui et Andreas, Codex pontificalis et hagiographicus Ravennas,
ed. A. Testi Rasponi (Bologna, 1924), p. 135), Aurelian in the church of the Apostles (p. 161) and
Ecclesiust in the church of St. Vitalis (p. 167).

Early episcopal catalogues for Milan frequently contradict each other on the burial
places of bishops during this period, but they make it clear that no pattern was emerg-
ing (Anonymi Mediolanensis libelli, Rerum Italicarum Scriptores, fasc. 359-360, p. 98).

"Pro Peccatis Patrum Puniri": A Moral and Legal Problem of the Inquisition
KENNETH PENNINGTON

The first letter in Pope Innocent III's register of his second year was
Vergentis in senium, a letter which he sent to the city of Viterbo in March, 1199. The decretal reflected Innocent's growing concern with heresy in
the papal states and established new and more stringent penalties for
those who rejected or subverted the Christian faith. In Vergentis, perhaps
following the Roman lawyer Placentinus, Innocent imposed the tradi-
tional spiritual punishment of excommunication on heretics, equated
heresy with lese majesty, and applied to convicted heretics the sanctions
for treason in Roman law: complete confiscation of goods, even
 disinheriting innocent children. The punishment was fitting. Innocent
observed, because a heretic injured celestial majesty, a crime far more
heinous than any offense committed against temporal authority. Since
the heretics in Viterbo continued to demand his attention later in his
pontificate, we do not know how effective Innocent's decree was, but
Vergentis did establish a precedent for papal action throughout Chris-
tendom. In order to root out all vestiges of heresy, Innocent extended
the provisions of the decretal from the heretics themselves to their "sup-
porters, defenders, and harborers." The decretal marked the first firm
step of his increasingly grim policy to use all of the resources of the
church to extirpate heresy from Christian lands. The step from Viterbo
to the Albigensian crusade was a short one. And, since heresy was an
ecclesiastical crime, both laymen and clerics who were accused of heresy
had their cases heard in ecclesiastical courts, giving lawyers another item
to add to the list of cases in which the pope could exercise jurisdiction in
the secular world. Until the persecution of heresy fell into desuetude in
the eighteenth century, the law of heresy was governed by the stark pro-
visions of Vergentis. The inquisition's modern chronicler, Henry Charles
Lea, remarked that "if there were those [in the fifteenth and sixteenth

Mr. Pennington is professor in the Department of History, Syracuse University,
Syracuse, New York.