

*The Papacy and the Orthodox: Sources and History of a Debate*

A. Edward Siecienski

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This is a highly erudite work of scholarship which charts the history of one of Christianity's great theological debates: where does authority in the Church lie? Roman Catholics hold that the Bishop of Rome has primacy but Eastern Orthodox Christians have always disputed the nature of his primacy. Siecienski eschews the temptation of trying to prove or disprove the papal position and directs us instead through the principal lines of argument popes and their critics have advanced over the past two millennia. Chapters on 'the Historical Peter' and 'Peter in Scripture' precede six further chronological chapters: on the Church of Rome in the Patristic Era, the Papacy from the Seventh to the Tenth Century, the Age of the Great Schism and the Gregorian Reform, from the Fourth Crusade to the Council of Florence (1431-49), from Florence to Vatican I (1869-70), and in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries. Each chapter is based on deep and comprehensive engagement with scripture and relevant theological texts. Indeed, the range of sources on which Siecienski draws and the clarity with which he explains them is remarkable.

In *The Papacy and the Orthodox*, Siecienski shows how Eastern attitudes to Rome evolved gradually: from indifference, to frustration, rejection, and sometimes outright hostility. Papal claims to primacy initially rested on Rome's prestige as the imperial capital but also on the witness of those church fathers who turned to her bishop to solve local difficulties elsewhere. However, when popes began to make regular statements about Roman

primacy – which they did from Constantine's reign (306-37) onwards – they increasingly did so on the basis of their see's association with Peter. Damasus I (366-84), the pope who presided over Theodosius I's decree that Christianity was to be the state church of the Roman Empire, and his fourth- and fifth-century successors are particularly notable for having amplified earlier claims. Such claims never went uncontested in this period: for a long time conciliar legislation granted Rome only a 'primacy of honour' in the ordering of the patriarchal sees. For Siecienski, the equilibrium which emerged in the first millennium CE was unstable, but it nevertheless survived John IV's augmentation of his title in Constantinople to that of 'Ecumenical Patriarch' in the 580s and the Photian Schism in the 860s. Only the mutual excommunications of 1054 induced a point of no return when the different understandings of Roman primacy between East and West became ecclesiologically incompatible. Thereafter the next four hundred years were something of a stand-off as the two sides negotiated re-unification while adopting very different understandings of what 'union' would actually mean – to popes it meant resubmission by disobedient children, for the Greek Orthodox hierarchy it was merely about restoring communion between sister churches. In any case, Byzantium's subjugation by the Ottomans changed the whole equation, bringing in a third party whose agenda patriarchs now also had to consider. Popes, meanwhile, pursued a new strategy of winning over 'uniate' Eastern churches with some success. Pius IX's decision to promulgate new doctrines of papal infallibility and universal jurisdiction, which some still take to be the moment when reconciliation between East and West became impossible, thus emerges from Siencienski's account as less significant. The two churches had diverged too much by then for the events of Vatican I to have had a decisive effect.

In fact, like the darkness before dawn, Pius IX's prejudicial proclamations came just as geopolitical change in Europe and the Middle East was generating the conditions for a rapprochement of sorts. Greece had already gained its political independence from the Ottomans; Pius and his successors were soon to lose theirs to the Kingdom of Italy. In due course, these changes of circumstances induced a new 'dialogue of love' to commence between the two leaderships; that led, eventually, to the historic encounter in Jerusalem between Paul VI (1963-78) and Patriarch Athenagoras (1948-72) – the first time a pope and patriarch had met for over five hundred years. The way the two sides now write about each other reflects that new spirit of co-operation and mutual respect. Siecienski evidently believes that further reconciliation is still possible and his optimism is creditable. Certainly, if it does happen, his contribution to it as a scholar will have been significant.

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