

“THREATS FROM ALL SIDES”: LYON I AND A NERVOUS CHURCH

For just 30 episodes in 1966-67, Irwin Allen’s Sci-Fi program “**The Time Tunnel**” ran on ABC. The premise was far-fetched. Buried 800 feet beneath the desert, a **secret** U.S. government project sought to perfect time travel. I vaguely recall the early 1970’s reruns. The **special effects** are laughable by today’s standards—check them out on MeTV, Saturday mornings at 3:00 a.m.! The show’s narrator was the voice of “Robot” from *Lost in Space*. Those were the days! If I were to enter the time machine, it would be fascinating to be plopped down in 13th century France or Italy. Would I have been a serf, peasant, villein or a member of the aristocracy? In a **highly stratified** society, there were significant disparities among groups. Would I have been a Knight on horseback? Nah, I’d be scared of getting bucked off a horse. My best bet? Travel back in time as a **monk**, spending my early morning *Lectio Divina* perusing Latin **manuscripts** by candlelight in the library. Yes, now that would be perfect!

But even this image of medieval daily life had begun to change. In western Europe, **serfdom** (indentured servants) was gradually eliminated, as **agricultural** labor became less financially advantageous to wealthy landowners. What developed were **craft guilds** of skilled laborers who organized to construct the magnificent **gothic** cathedrals. They included stone masons who sculpted figures of saints, **glass blowers** and painters who fashioned the stunning stained-glass windows of **Chartres**. Later, those who designed the Cathedral’s pipe organ (1353) and 24-hour astronomical clock (1528) demonstrated the rapid advances of science and **technology**. Construction at Chartres (1145-1252) took over a century. Archbishop John Ireland could never possibly have been so patient, had he lived then!

Many of us have romantic visions of how a chivalrous society must have functioned. The reality was far less romantic. The mortality rate was high, especially among infants. Conservatively, 15-20% of babies died in their first year. Nor was life all rosy in the Church. The Ecumenical Council **Lyons I** convened, not in Rome, but in France. **Pope Innocent IV** was sharp enough to **shift** effectively beyond the territorial control of the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II. The first order of business was a lengthy **papal denunciation** of the emperor, who was accused of perjury, sacrilege, and suspicion of heresy. How do you like them apples, Fred?! In truth, Frederick had once held no fewer than 100 bishops as **prisoners**! Gutsy move! Still, the emperor’s sarcophagus is prominently located within the Cathedral in Palermo, Sicily! Power disputes between **mitre** and **crown** aside, for the laity, such disputes were out of sight, out of mind.

Held over **four sessions** in June and July of 1245, Lyons I is the second briefest in history, only behind Lateran II which lasted just a week. That’s my kind of council! The pope invited the emperor to attend, not as an observer, but as a defendant! The initial council decrees are called **constitutions** and read much more like a dry set of Saint Paul city code regulations. After all, church and state were so intertwined, our conception of two separate spheres simply would not have occurred to them. Many dealt with judicial issues, including (I’m unsure whether to be amused or scandalized) Constitution #18, which stated: “...we decree that if any prince, prelate or any ecclesiastical or secular person shall cause the death of any Christian by **such assassins**, or even command it...he automatically incurs the sentence of excommunication and of deposition from dignity, honor, order, office and benefice...” Wow!

Others dealt with more mundane topics such as the management of church **debts** (I know all about that!) and imploring bishops to encourage their flocks to financially **support** the **Holy Land**,

something we still do! Though magnificent cathedrals dotted the landscape, the dark clouds of invaders threatened the peace. Four years before the Council, the **Tatars** sacked the city of **Budapest!** Tatars were Muslim Turkic peoples from central Asia. Constitution #49 excoriates “the wicked race of the Tatars, seeking to subdue, or rather utterly destroy the Christian people, having gathered for a long time past the strength of all their tribes, have entered Poland, Russia, Hungary and other Christian countries... Thus when, God forbid, the world is bereaved of the faithful, faith may turn aside from the world to lament its followers destroyed by the barbarity of this people.”

After the Tatars massacred **500,000 Hungarians**, the Church panicked! The Church enlisted missionaries (unsuccessfully) to convert the Mongols after the period of the “Mongol invasion” of Europe. Its most notorious leader was **Genghis Khan** (†1227 AD). Thus, while harshly worded, the above papal decree must be understood in its **historical context**, as also was the Councils call to yet another Crusade. Arguably, the **zenith** of the Church’s world influence was in the 13th century. Still, the Church must confront the issues of its own day. That this council was **less** doctrinal and **more** heavily focused on growing outside threats to Christendom testified to this principle. (To be continued).

- On Oct 11, 1521 – **500 years ago** Monday– Pope Leo X bestowed upon **King Henry VIII** of England the title “Fidei Defensor” (Defender of the Faith). It recognized his **defense** of the sacrament of **marriage**, the supremacy of the Pope, and his opposition to the Reformation and the ideas of Martin Luther. The title has been inherited by all British monarchs ever since.
- When the **Dead Sea Scrolls** were discovered in 1947, they contained Old Testament fragments 1000 years older than any previously existing manuscript. And its **wording agreed 99.5%** of the time with existing copies! Still, some doubt the bible’s authenticity because the **oldest** complete **text** of the bible is dated “only” from ca. 325-350 A.D. Hmnn, the earliest surviving copy of Plato’s *The Republic* dates from 900 A.D., **13 centuries after** he wrote it. Does anyone doubt the authenticity of that work?
- The Church permits cremation as an option after death. However—and for good reason—the remains are to be **interred**. Sometimes, families **delay burial** and may even never quite get around to it. Stuff happens. Catholic Cemeteries has launched the **“Bringing Them Home”** campaign. Anyone presenting pre-2016 or COVID-delayed cremated remains from home is eligible to have them interred properly in a communal crypt for just \$200. On All Souls Day, Archbishop Hebda will lead the committal prayer service at Resurrection Cemetery.
- The tiny **Republic of San Marino** (24 sq mi, pop. 33,860) is surrounded by Italy on all sides. It recently voted overwhelmingly to legalize abortion, ending a 150-year-old ban. October is Respect Life Month. We must never tire of trying to change hearts and minds on this, the preeminent life issue of our day.
- Please know of my **gratitude** for your tremendous generosity for last month’s missionary appeal. You contributed **\$15,160** towards the medical clinic in the **Diocese of Same, Tanzania**.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector