

## CHAPTER 6

### THE CHURCH IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

#### A. Problem of papal schism

Papal decline during fourteenth century: 1300, Boniface VIII had big jubilee; in 1400, Boniface IX followed his example, but much smaller celebration

Urban VI, the Italian pope, had been succeeded by three more Italian popes; the last one being Gregory XII (1406-1415)

Clement VII, the French pope, had been succeeded by a Spaniard, Benedict XIII (1394-1415, died 1424), who continued claiming to rule until his death

As a condition of their election, the cardinals always made the pope-elect promise to heal the division and reunite the papacy—to no avail

#### B. Council of Pisa (1409)

Council met to do three things:

- 1) Heal schism (1378-1417)
- 2) Stop spread of heresy (views of Wycliffe, Hus)
- 3) Stop corruption

Council summoned the two popes; both refused to come; council deposed both popes, elected a third pope, John XXIII (called here the Pisa pope); he recognized by most of Italy; now three popes

John XXIII later excommunicated Hus, but Hus continued to labor in the church

Council failed to stop corruption in the church

#### C. John Hus (1369-1415)

Name = “goose”; thus, he symbolized by a goose

Poor Czech student at University of Prague; worked way up, became lecturer, then rector at age 33 (1402); good preacher, spoke in the Czech language

Learned and adopted views of Wycliffe:

In 1382, the Czech princess married King Richard II of England; in process, she brought many scholars to study in England, especially Oxford, where Wycliffe had taught (until 1380); these scholars returned to Prague with Wycliffe’s ideas; Hus himself copied many works of Wycliffe (five extant copies in Hus’s own hand)

Openly opposed transubstantiation; popes came out strong against Wycliffe’s views; Hus stronger, for primacy of Bible, Christ alone; fine literary speaker; many faculty and students left Prague as Czechs more assume control (decline from 2500 to 500)

More fights with popes:

Against John XXIII for selling indulgences to pay for war against other pope, etc.; three men beheaded for opposing pope; Hus called for council; Hus excommunicated, Prague under the interdict; Hus moved to voluntary exile to spare Prague

Wrote many works, including great work on church, *De ecclesia* (“The Church”):

- Spiritual unity of true church
- Founded on Christ, not the popes
- Popes and priests have no power over souls

Hussites continued long after his death; took two hundred years to wipe out Hussites

#### D. Council of Constance (1414-1418)

\*One of the most important councils

##### 1. Calling of the council

Most people recognized the need for a council:

- 1) Heal schism
- 2) Deal with heresy

- 3) Bring about reforms:      Pluralism  
   Immorality  
   Simony  
   Nepotism, etc.

Existence of strong conciliar movement (e.g., emperor, University of Paris, Czechs); idea held that pope was subservient to councils

Question: Who should call this council? John XXIII only pope who agreed to call it, asked to do so by Emperor Sigismund; other two popes refused

Held near lake on German-Swiss border, Constance

5,500 people lived in city; 10,000-50,000 visitors; great and conspicuous council

## 2. Organization of council

Before, every bishop one vote; now, voting by nations:

1. Italy
2. France
3. Germany (including England)
4. England (separate later in council)
5. Spain (joined council only near end)

## 3. Actions regarding heresy

### a. John Hus

Hus summoned to council; given a safe-conduct by emperor Sigismund; warned by nobles (including King Wencenslas) not to go, but went anyway; imprisoned when he arrived at Constance (Sigismund protested; church leaders said, "promise to a heretic has no force"; Sigismund sacrificed Hus for church peace); Hus kept in dungeon many months, often questioned

Council discussed Wycliffe (dead thirty years); condemned him; ten years later his bones were dug up, burned, thrown in river

Hus refused to recant; council tried him, condemned him, burned Hus at stake, in spite of safe-conduct; he reportedly said, "You may burn the goose, but after me will come a swan you cannot burn."

b. Jerome of Prague

Jerome of Prague, follower of Hus, invited to defend Hus's views; came a year later; questioned by council; recanted; imprisoned anyway for one year in dark, foul tower; confessed his faith before council; burned also, in same place where Hus burned

c. Some reactions from classical wits

Poggio Bracciolini sent letter from council about Jerome: admired his skill, pitied his misguided faith; he later became secretary to Pope Nicholas V (the first great humanist pope)

Aenaes Sylvius also wrote letter; future pope Pius II

d. Later Hussite developments

Divided into two parties: strong (close to Wycliffe), and conciliatory (willing to compromise in issues not directly in Bible); these parties united to fight against a Catholic "crusade" in 1430; thus the crusade failed

Unitas Fratrum (1450s), encouraged fellowship among both parties and the Waldenses; provided movement leading to the Moravians

Catholic Church compromised, allowed certain freedoms (cup to laity, freer preaching, etc.); thus parties divided again

1462, pope Pius II canceled compromise; further wars thus followed

Ca. 1500, Hussites finally got some freedom; many of them welcomed the Reformation

1621, Battle of White Mountain; wars of counter-Reformation (Thirty-Years War), Hussite leaders wiped out by Austrian emperor

Hussite tradition continued among people; fairly strong Reformed tradition; when Communists took over Czechoslovakia, they found a Hussite Bible on the desk of the foreign minister

#### 4. Actions regarding the papacy

Three current popes:

##### 1) John XXIII (Pisa pope)

Promised to abdicate if council desired; assumed he would be re-elected; had been a wild youth, and lived an immoral life still at the time; his life and sins were described in a pamphlet and distributed (cf. Schaff *HCC* 6:158)

He then was accused by the council with seventy charges; resigned as pope; disguised himself as a groom and left the council; his “friends” found him and “escorted” him back; imprisoned with Hus

Tried and condemned by council; sentenced to life imprisonment; bribed way out for 30,000 gulden; submitted to new pope; was made a cardinal

##### 2) Gregory XII (Roman pope)

Some say council valid only when Gregory came; did not control Rome most of the time; came at last when John XXIII deposed; abdicated, became bishop of Portas

##### 3) Benedict XIII (French pope; Spanish by race)

Had been pope in Avignon; lost support of France and Spain; refused to give up; fled to castle in Spain (Peniscola)

Deposed by council; still acted as a pope (appointed cardinals, etc.); died in the castle; two claimed to be his successor—one settled for a bishopric, the other died in prison

The new pope: Martin V (1417-1431)

For two years, no pope, while council debated what to do = high water mark of council supremacy; decided that cardinals must have two-thirds vote for pope, and that the council must also vote by two-thirds to approve him

Martin V a clever politician, from powerful Colonna family of Rome; promised to institute reforms (never did, church the same for 200 years)

Councils wanted periodic councils, every five, seven, or ten years; Martin V promised them too (again, it did not happen)

The one thing Martin V carried through on that the council wanted was the suppression of heresy—he conducted a fourteen-year crusade against the Christians in Bohemia

## 5. Actions regarding reform

Council decided to let new pope Martin V institute needed reforms; Martin did not reform many things:

Nepotism—appointed fellow Colonnas as cardinals

Simony—Martin sold many church offices himself

Educated clergy—Martin said this item must wait

Pluralism (one person holding many bishoprics)—continued, with many holding many posts and thus having absentee management

Reforms not carried out until after Lutheran Reformation

Order according to Protestants:

- 1) Reformation
- 2) Counter-Reformation

Order according to Roman Catholics:

- 1) Protestant Revolt
- 2) Reformation

## 6. \*Accomplishments of Martin V

Ended schism; finally succeeded in securing loyalty of all Western Europe

Excellent effective in administration; united Roman and Avignon bureaucracies into one successful administration

\*Developed and maintained papal monarchy over the church; thus effectively killed the conciliar movement

Returned to Rome; found city desolate; cleared out bandits, etc.; secured Rome and Papal States; large rebuilding program in Rome

Contained Hussite movement to Bohemia and weakened it by long crusades

E. \*Failure of the conciliar movement

1. Accomplishments of conciliarism

Did end the schism and restore the papacy; council of Constance claimed authority over popes (council was supreme in the church during its fourth and fifth sessions)—this a problem for Roman Catholics

But soon council's power shunted aside; no new powerful, independent councils after Constance; popes quickly became more than "executives"

2. Council of Pavia (1423)

Five years after Constance; called by Martin V to deal with Hussites; poorly attended; quickly dissolved by Martin V, even though Martin previously had committed himself to conciliarism

3. Council of Basel and Ferrara-Florence (1431-1449)

Overlapping locations:

In Basel, Switzerland, 1431-1449

In Ferrara and Florence, 1438-1445

Note time lapses:	Constance → Pavia	5 years
	Pavia → Basel	7 years
	Basel → next council	10 years

etc.

a. Calling of the council

Called by Martin V for Basel (seven years after Pavia), in accordance with instructions received in Constance; Martin died before council convened

\*New pope was Eugenius IV (1431-1447); shrewd; openly approved council, but sought to neutralize it

Only one prelate present at opening date; gradually others arrived; papal legate came to moderate meetings six months later

Council had few bishops, mostly lower clergy and laymen (many professors); most interesting participant--Aeneas Sylvius (later pope Pius II), favored conciliarism

#### b. Initial victory for the council

Council determined to reform church and papacy; asserted its supremacy over Eugenius IV; backed by most of church and princes; performed its work through four powerful committees, each representing all nations

Eugenius got nervous, soon issued bull moving the council to Bologna in Northern Italy (1431); council rebelled, refused to move, summoned Eugenius to appear, declared its own sovereignty

Emperor Sigismund and universities supported council; council threatened to depose Eugenius (Sigismund began to vacillate); but most cardinals supported council

1433, Eugenius issued bull revoking his previous bulls, and pronouncing that the "General Council of Basel [was] legitimate from the time of its opening"; thus he contradicted himself in four official bulls

1434, political revolts in Rome; Eugenius fled, nearly stoned in a boat; exile in Florence nine years

#### c. Compromise with the Bohemians

Hussites had driven back crusaders; Hussites invited to negotiate with council; they came; at beginning they were strong, praised Hus and Jerome of Prague; gradually softened, rejoined Roman church in exchange for relatively minor compromises (cup given to laity, other minor concessions)

Bohemians later divided again; Catholics played them off against each other, then fought victors

Council's compromise with Bohemians displeased Eugenius—said it was “non-papal,” “too compromising”

d. Greek overtures, and the council divided

ca. 1300, Ottoman Turks start expanding in Asia Minor; by 1400, threatening Constantinople, city desperate; Greeks sent two delegations to seek meeting—one to council at Basel, other to Eugenius IV at Florence

Council missed chance by requiring Greeks to come to Basel or Avignon instead of Italy; Greeks decided to deal with pope in Italy

1437, Eugenius proclaimed Basel council transferred to Ferrara on Italian shore; some cardinals left Basel for Ferrara, most stayed behind

Now, two councils: Basel, and Ferrara (moved later to Florence)

Gradually, Basel council lost prestige; Ferrara-Florence council center of attention; state leaders followed pope

e. The Eastern “reunion”

Byzantine church and emperor desperate, had no money; Turks to take over soon; pope paid for their passage both ways and kept them on dole in Florence (700 representatives, including the emperor and the patriarch)

Eugenius soon moved council to Florence, further from shore, to keep Greeks there

Greek delegates gave up in most areas of difference:

- *Filioque* allowed if not read in church
- Primacy of Roman pope
- Agreed to purgatory, and that saints have beatific vision immediately (a doctrine the Greeks had rejected)
- Greeks would be allowed to use leavened bread

\*Official ceremony of union, July 5, 1445

But union rejected when representatives returned to Constantinople; new patriarch appointed

Muslims took Constantinople in 1453

But this “reunion” caused great rejoicing in West; “stole the show” from the council at Basel

#### f. Decline of the Basel council

Conciliarism continued strongly there, but with no effect

Most delegates stayed in Basel; 1437, declared the bull moving council to Ferrara to be void; gave Eugenius sixty days to appear

1439, deposed Eugenius; elected anti-pope (eventually made a cardinal)

Closed with a sigh of relief in 1449, after petering out for ten years

According to Roman Catholic reckoning—seventeenth ecumenical council = first twenty-five sessions in Basel, the sessions in Ferrara and Florence, and the last two sessions in the Lateran in Rome

Theory of conciliarism remained, but papacy had the power

\*1516, fifth Lateran council, proclaimed conciliarism false; the councils receive their authority from the pope

1870, first Vatican council, pope infallible

#### F. The strengthened papacy

Occupied by shrewd men; built up Rome as a center of strength; did not interfere too much with European affairs; Dark Ages fading

For eighty years, little opposition for the popes; built up church and papacy, lived in luxury

#### G. Humanists

##### 1. Beginning of humanism

Today—humanist is one who denies God, seeks only human welfare; then—humanist was one who was interested in history of human civilization, with special interest in Greek, Latin, and/or Hebrew language and literature

Many of the 700 Greek delegates stayed in Europe, had many manuscripts

1453, Constantinople fell; many fled with manuscripts and learning to Europe

Already a few humanists in Italy—e.g., Petrarch (fourteenth century), Poggio Bracciolini (at Constance)

## 2. Nicholas V (1447-1453)

Continued rebuilding Rome; first “pro-humanist” pope; not humanist himself, but encouraged and hired humanists and artists (e.g., Fra Angelico)

Began Vatican Library—search began throughout Europe for rare manuscripts; copyists reproduced them; scholars translated to Latin: Herodotus, Thucydides, Homer, Polybius, Strabo, Greek fathers

## 3. Humanist scholars

Antonio Becadilli—secretary to Nicholas V; wicked life; indecent but brilliant verse

Poggio Bracciolini—secretary to Nicholas V; also indecent; filthy *Jest-Book*; vindictive fight with other humanists

Lorenzo Valla—secretary to Nicholas V; skeptical of religion; great literary critic; proved *Donation of Constantine* and *Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals* to be forgeries; showed Vulgate had textual errors, compared it with Greek text

Pico della Mirandola (Pico Street in Los Angeles named for him)—proto-Protestant views on worship and communion; much better character; followed Savonarola in Florence

Great language scholar (fluent in Latin and Greek when sixteen years old); studied Hebrew from the Cabbalists; \*influenced Reuchlin to study Hebrew, which opened OT studies in Europe; also tried to harmonize Aristotle, Plato, and Christianity

In general, humanists encouraged good study, but brought vanity and wickedness into the church (cf. Schaff, *HCC* 6:610)

## H. Spanish Inquisition

Earlier inquisition (Papal Inquisition), destroyed Albigenses in southern France; also used some against witches in Germany; never allowed in England

Spanish Inquisition resulted from papal order at request from Ferdinand of Aragon (1452-1516, husband of Isabella)

Some heretics in Spain, many Jews in Spain (had special Hebrew pronunciation, now used in Israel); Spanish Jews more aristocratic, had worked way up to wealth; only a few Jews had converted to Christianity; rulers then had used force, many nominal conversions, still hidden Jews

1480, Ferdinand made request for Spanish Inquisition with personnel chosen by the king

To be used against Spanish secret Jews (*Converos* or *Maranos*); forty-day “grace period” given for hidden Jews confessing—they then to go free (not hold office, etc.) if they tell on others

Feb. 6, 1481, six men and women burned; procedure called “Auto-da-Fe” (Portuguese for “Act of Faith”); thousands followed them and were burned at stake (if they repented, they would be strangled first)

Most brutal of all, the first head of the Spanish Inquisition, Tomas de Torquemada; organized it effectively (it lasted three centuries); not answerable to Papal Inquisition; 2,000 executions while he was in charge; many others died of tortures

\*Spanish Inquisition later used to wipe out Protestants in Spain; last Auto-da-Fe in Spain in 1781; last one in Mexico in 1815; Spanish Inquisition finally dissolved in 1835

1492, Torquemada found too many open Jews (they not subject to the Inquisition); moved Ferdinand to expel them from Spain; thousands fled; many exiled to Turkish empire, where they continued a distinct identity

## I. Borgia popes

1. Callistus III (1455-1458)

Alphonso Borgia; Spanish pope, elected as a compromise between two Italian blocks of cardinals

Expended big effort in crusade against Turks in Constantinople; failed

Infamous nepotist; appointed at least five relatives to high positions, including nephew Rodrigo Borgia as a cardinal

Thirty-five years later Rodrigo became pope Alexander VI, worst pope of the Renaissance; Rodrigo tall, handsome, graceful, popular with women; rebuked by next pope Pius II for licentiousness

## 2. Pius II (1458-1464)

[Not a Borgia; no case of a pope succeeded by a relative immediately]

Aenaes Sylvius; famous conciliar proponent at Basel; insisted that councils were higher than popes; became secretary to antipope Felix; saw writing on wall, switched to support pope Eugenius IV

\*As pope, bull *Execrabilis* (1460) declared anathema on all who appeal to councils; said, "Forget Aenaes, remember Pius"

Generally immoral; had two sons

## 3. Paul II (1464-1471)

Nephew of Eugenius IV, from Venice

Made three nephews cardinals; made emperor Frederick III hold his stirrup; painted his face when in public; miser with money and jewels (hid them in apartments)

## 4. Sixtus IV (1478-1484)

Sixtus and next two popes finish fifteenth century; all mostly interested in sensual pleasures

Franciscan general; middle-class family

Appointed many relatives (five bishops, eight cardinals, including one only seventeen years old; his nephew [Julius II] became enemy to Rodrigo Borgia)

Fomented plot to murder rulers of Florence, Lorenzo de Medici and his brother; both were stabbed in church by priests; Lorenzo's brother died (Lorenzo and his brother both had a son as a pope)

\*Built Sistine Chapel; ceiling painted by Michelangelo later, when Julius II pope

Approved Spanish Inquisition in 1478

\*Declared that indulgences could be applied to reduce time in Purgatory (led to immediate cause of Reformation)

#### 5. Innocent VIII (1484-1492)

Rivals for papacy: nephew of Callistus III (Rodrigo Borgia, to be Alexander VI), and nephew of Sixtus IV (to be Julius II); both used bribes and armies

Compromise: cardinals to rule, an oligarchy; cardinal Sibbo elected; did a bad job

Immoral (sixteen children by married women); officially permitted clergy to have concubines; appointed dissolute cardinals

#### 6. Alexander VI (1492-1503)

Rodrigo Borgia; most immoral and wicked of all Renaissance popes

Nephews fight again; Rodrigo lavish spender, won through bribes; strong and able leader; many mistresses, many of them married (bought off husbands with castles, etc.)

Three famous children:

Don Juan—head of army; murdered, perhaps by brother Caesar

Caesar Borgia—ruthless and skillful fighter and politician; murdered all opposing leaders at banquet for peace; admired by Machiavelli in *The Prince*

Note on Niccolò Machiavelli:

Petty official in Florence; Medicis controlled Florence; studied classics; saw successful Caesar Borgia; wrote *The Prince*, dedicated it to minor Medici in charge of Florence; he never read Machiavelli's book, sent Machiavelli a crate of wine; republicans found book; Machiavelli lost all power

Caesar Borgia nearly succeeded in uniting control of Italy under himself, but succumbed to bad luck and fever; killed in skirmish in Spain

Lucretia Borgia—beautiful; sought after; by time twenty-two years old, married four times; happily married to Alfonso of Ferrara; popular court

Alexander VI responsible for Line of Demarcation between Spain and Portugal in the New World (1493)

Died of poisoning he intended for some cardinals; his enemy became next pope, Julius II

## J. Italian Renaissance

About one hundred years, ca. 1450-1550

Dukes competed in building and in painting; popes the greatest contributors:

Nicholas V—literature and painting  
Other popes—especially painting and architecture

Big rewards, attracted greatest talent—e.g., Leonardo de Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, etc.

## K. Savonarola (1452-1498)

Born Sept. 21 in Ferrara, north Italy; most of his activity in Florence

Studied medicine; when about 23 years old became Dominican; hated sinful conditions; studied Augustine, Aquinas, then mainly Bible, memorized much; knew Hebrew and Greek; liked minor prophets (judgment)

Invited to Florence by Lorenzo the Magnificent (Medici) and by Pico della Mirandola; lived there nine years; great preacher; lived in convent of St. Mark's (pictures by Fra Angelico in his rooms); became prior of monastery at St. Mark's

Lorenzo tried to make friends with him; thousands listened to his sermons (one time 10,000); preached against sins of Florence; 1492, Lorenzo dying, wanted Savonarola to come and give blessing; Savonarola's conditions for blessing:

- 1) Turn to Christ (OK)
- 2) Pay back money gained by fraud (OK)
- 3) Restore freedom to Florence (no way)

Therefore, Savonarola refused to give him absolution

Later, Savonarola still more powerful in city; Medicis fled; republic instituted; burned piles of lewd books, city overturned; French king invaded Italy, fulfilling Savonarola's predictions of destruction

Pope Alexander VI wicked; Savonarola denied pope's authority, denounced his wickedness; at first Alexander VI offered to make Savonarola a cardinal if he would be quiet—not accepted; then used threat, excommunication, interdict against Florence

Savonarola offered to endure ordeal—trial by fire—wavered, refused; crowd mad, people turning against him; 1498, seized, tortured, strangled, burned, ashes thrown into river

Later honored by Roman Catholic church; indirect influence on Reformation:

- 1) Exposed wickedness of popes
- 2) Helped in production of Greek NT

Influenced Pico della Mirandola, who influenced Englishman John Colet, who returned to England and influenced his friend Erasmus, who was thus interested in the Greek NT