

## THE DOMINICANS AT FLORENCE IN 1439

The part played by the Dominican Order in the General Councils of the Church would make a very interesting study in Ecclesiastical history. The idea of the Order came to fruition in the mind of Saint Dominic when he was attending the Fourth General Council of the Lateran as companion and vicar-general to the bishop of Toulouse. It was then that he opened his mind to the great pontiff Innocent III who eagerly seized on a plan so conformable to the one he himself had already advocated, namely, the creation of groups of preachers to help the bishops in their task of preaching. In the first General Council of Lyons held by Innocent IV in 1245, a leading figure was the renowned theologian and scripture scholar, Hugh of St. Cher, the Order's first cardinal. In the second of Lyons held in 1274 the greatest figure was the venerable ex-Bishop of Ratisbon, Saint Albert the Great. Other prominent Dominicans were Peter of Tarentaise, dean of the sacred college and soon to become the Order's first pope as Blessed Innocent V; Robert Kilwardby, Archbishop of Canterbury and England's foremost scholar; and William of Moerbeke, Archbishop of Corinth, the translator of Aristotle, whose knowledge of Greek was so useful in arranging the re-union with the West and Eastern Churches. It is well known that Saint Thomas Aquinas died on his way to this same Council to which he had been summoned by Pope Gregory X. In the next General Council, that of Vienne in 1311, although no lists are extant of the prelates who attended, we are told by chroniclers that the great number of Dominican bishops present caused some embarrassment and no little jealousy. Three of the cardinals there were also members of the Order, including Nicholas de Prato, the dean of the sacred college. At the Council of Constance, which in 1417 healed the Schism of the West, the Blessed John Dominici, cardinal and archbishop of Ragusa, took a leading part in the deliberations, and handed

to the Fathers of the Council the resignation of the legitimate pontiff, Pope Gregory XII, an action which restored peace to a Christendom hitherto divided into three allegiances. More than twenty prelates of the Order sat in the same Council. The Acts of the Council of Trent as collected by the great Jesuit historian, Cardinal Pallavicino, preserve the names of thirty Dominican bishops and fifty-seven theologians present during the the various sessions of this the best known Council of the Church. But if the Dominicans were more numerous at Trent than at any other General Council, the one in which they played the most important part was that of Florence, or, to give it its correct title, the Council of Ferrara-Florence, 1438-1439, whose centenary is to be celebrated next year.

This Council was first assembled at Basle in 1431 by the direction of Pope Martin V, and confirmed the same year by his successor, Eugenius IV. As only one bishop, two or three abbots and a score of doctors came to the meeting, the Pope early in December wrote to Cardinal Cesarini, whom he had appointed president, that if he thought it expedient he should suspend the Council, with a view to holding it in some other city, and suggested Bologna. This the Cardinal considered inopportune and opened the first formal session at Basle on December 14, in the presence of not more than six bishops. From the commencement this handful of Fathers, assisted by a number of secular and regular clerks, manifested a strong feeling of antagonism to the Holy See, and in the most arrogant manner acted as if they formed the chief authority in the Church, even summoning the Holy Father himself to appear before them, and inviting the heretical Czechs to attend the Council and debate on doctrines already condemned by the Council of Constance and the Holy See. After the deliberations at Basle had dragged on for two years it seemed that the members had reached a better frame of mind, and Eugenius therefore, in 1433, recognised the assembly as a true Council. But the spirit of opposition again soon manifested itself, and finally, after four years of extraordinary patience, the Pope,

by a bull dated September 18, 1437, transferred the seat of the Council to Ferrara. The assembly at Basle which at no period of its history counted more than thirty-two bishops and some abbots, rapidly disappeared into a schism, which culminated in the election of the Duke of Savoy as antipope, under the title of Felix V. In view of the fewness of their numbers this action of the Basilian faction cannot be considered as anything but farcical. Actually it was the work of one cardinal and eleven bishops, assisted by about forty secular and regular clerks. In 1443 the miserable proceedings at Basle had practically worked themselves out and under Pope Nicholas V in 1449 the antipope submitted. The leading schismatic, Cardinal Louis Allemand, Archbishop of Arles, also repenting of a schism into which his mis-directed zeal for reform had led him, retired into a Franciscan friary, where he died the following year, full of repentance for his fall and with such evident marks of sanctity that Pope Clement VII in 1527 declared him Blessed. His feast is kept on September 17.

The Dominican Order, all through this miserable business, remained, with one notable exception, staunchly loyal to the Holy See. The notable exception was John de Stojkovic, a Dominican of Dalmatia, better known as John of Ragusa. A great theologian and procurator-general of the Order in the Roman Court, he was one of the principal figures at Basle, of which he once acted as vice-president in the absence of Cardinal Cesarini. The Council mostly relied on him in the debates with the Hussite Czechs, and, in a speech lasting part of eight days, he answered all their arguments, and dealt particularly with the true doctrine concerning the Blessed Sacrament. Unhappily he adhered to the Council after its suppression by the Pope, and went so far as to accept the cardinalate and a bishopric from the antipope Felix V. He died in 1443, so it is said, but the date is doubtful, and there is no record of his having been reconciled to the Holy See. This man's defection was more than compensated by a quartet of famous theologians of the Order who stoutly supported the papal claims. They were Andrew of

Constantinople, a Greek, and Archbishop of Colossus (Rhodes), John of Montenero, Provincial of Lombardy, John Torquemada—"Fidei Defensor" Eugenius styled him—and Henry Kalteisen of Coblenz.

Andrew was by origin a Greek and a member of the orthodox church, but was converted to Catholicism in his youth and entered the Dominican Order in the convent of Pera in the suburbs of Constantinople. From there he passed to Italy, and, being a skilled theologian, was appointed by Martin V, Master of the Sacred Palace in 1426. In 1432 he became Archbishop of Colossus and was sent as papal ambassador to Basle to counteract, if possible, the antipapal feelings of that body. It was undoubtedly in part due to his exertions that the bitterness was to some extent removed, and a way opened to the Council's recognition by the Pope. At Ferrara, to which city the Council was transferred in 1437, Andrew was chosen on the Latin side to lead the debates with the Greeks on the insertion of the word *Filioque* in the Creed. During the whole of October he combatted almost single-handed the contending Greeks whose main argument was that the word *Filioque* was not traditional in the Church, and had been added to the Creed in defiance of the decrees of early Councils which had prohibited any addition. Andrew's final address occupied several days in which he demolished the contentions of the Greek protagonist, Mark Eugenikos, Archbishop of Ephesus.

In December Pope Eugenius decided to remove the Council once more, this time to friendly Florence, whose citizens offered to contribute considerably to the vast expense of supporting the Greek Emperor and his numerous followers. There was also a severe epidemic raging in Ferrara to which several members of the Council had already succumbed. Eugenius was delighted to take advantage of the Florentine offer, for he himself had already been in residence there since his own subjects in Rome had driven him out in 1434, and he greatly appreciated the kindness then shown him. He accordingly returned there in January, 1439, and took up his residence once more amongst the

Dominicans in the glorious priory of S. Maria Novella, and with them he remained until the year 1443. Thus he had been their guest for eight years, and remained always their friend. It was during these years that he made the acquaintance of the heavenly painter Giovanni da Fiesole; (Fra Angelico), and the saintly Fra Antonino, whom he made Archbishop of Florence and whom, when he found himself dying, he summoned to his deathbed in Rome in 1447 that he might die in his arms.

On the transference of the Council to Florence the Council made another Dominican their chief spokesman, and Andrew of Constantinople withdrew to his place amongst the prelates. The Greeks it seemed had become a little fractious at being worsted by one of their own nationality. After the union with the Greeks had been achieved Andrew was sent as legate to the East where he persuaded the Archbishops of the Chaldeans and Maronites to enter the Roman communion, a union which was accomplished in 1445 when the Council had been withdrawn to Rome. The new leader of the conciliar debates was John of Montenero, from the village of that name in Etruria, who since the year 1432 had been Provincial of his Order in Lower Lombardy, in which office he died in 1444, having refused all the Pope's offers of ecclesiastical dignities. Throughout the Acts of the Council he is simply and consistently styled *Provincialis*. He had already made his reputation as a stout defender of the papal claims at Basle, where, as a consequence, he had not been popular. At Florence he was called upon to continue the discussion concerning the *Filioque*, from the point where it had been broken off at Ferrara. The Greeks, forced to surrender their contention that the addition of the *Filioque* was in direct conflict with the prohibition of the Council of Ephesus, now directed their attacks against the doctrine contained in the phrase. John de Montenero battled with his adversaries during six complete sessions, held between March 2 and 21; and, after the intransigent Mark of Ephesus, who throughout had shown his dislike of the projected union, had been silenced by his emperor, the Greeks

declared themselves content, and agreed to the legitimacy of the insertion of the debated word in the Creed.

Shortly after this the patriarch of Constantinople died very suddenly, June 9, but on his table was found a document the genuineness of which was attested even by the Greeks, testifying that he died in communion with the see of Rome, whose bishop he recognized as the successor of Saint Peter and the Vicar of Christ. There is no valid reason for rejecting the document, as some non-Catholic writers have done, considering that the patriarch had already, three days earlier, agreed to the proposed union in presence of the Greek delegates. The day following, June 10, saw his burial in the church of the Novella where, amongst the great dead of the Dominican Order, his tomb is still to be seen. His death had a great effect in hastening on the work of the union, for the Greeks sent a delegation to the Pope praying him to bring the issue to a quick conclusion as they were without a spiritual leader. Eugenius thereupon demanded whether, having now made accord with the Latins on the question of the *Filioque*, they were in equal agreement with them on the three other questions, namely of the sacrifice of the Mass, Purgatory and the Primacy of the Holy See. The delegates replied that they could not answer for all the Greeks, and reported to the emperor the Pope's request. He, in concert with his prelates, thought it best to receive some instruction on the Latin teachings on the three doctrines before they made their decision, whereupon the Pope requested the Provincial to address the whole Council on the subject of the Primacy which he accordingly did on June 16th, and was followed in the rostrum by Torquemada who explained the Latin use of unleavened bread and clearly demonstrated that the consecration at Mass took place by the power of the words used by Our Lord. He showed that the Latins did not contest the validity of the consecration of leavened bread, as used by the Greeks, and throughout his address showed a wonderful moderation and tact in dealing with disputed points, and in this was supported by the Pope himself who declared that John had not implied that

## BLACKFRIARS

the Greeks taught otherwise concerning the words of consecration, but had treated of the subject to avoid any misunderstanding, and for the sake of the ignorant.

This was not Torquemada's first contribution to the deliberations at Florence, but it was perhaps his most important address. Four days later a debate took place between Bessarion, the Archbishop of Nicea, and the Provincial on the matter of the Primacy, and this was followed by an important discourse by Torquemada on the subject of the Consecration in the Mass.

Torquemada was, without any doubt, the most considerable theologian at the Council, and after the union with the Greeks had been achieved he was deservedly raised to the cardinalate by Eugenius, December 18, 1439. In Protestant countries he is far less known than his namesake, and relative, Thomas the Inquisitor, but historically he was probably the greatest churchman of his time.

On July 5th (1439) the Latin Fathers of the Council came to the Dominican priory where in the presence of the Pope and six Greeks they signed the decree of union, whilst the Greeks signed in the Petruzzi Palace where the emperor was lodged. On the morrow, during the High Mass celebrated by the Pope himself, the decree was publicly read in Latin by Cardinal Cesarini and by Archbishop Bessarion in Greek. Amongst the sixty-three bishops who signed the decree were six Dominicans, Andrew of Constantinople, Archbishop of Colossus, already spoken of, Andrew Diego, bishop of Megara in Greece, Anthony de Romulis, bishop of Grasse in France, Nicholas Augusta, bishop of Tricarico in Southern Italy, Julian Antonio, a Florentine, titular bishop of Citarizum in Armenia, and another Florentine, Lawrence Jacomini, titular bishop of Achaia and auxiliary of the Archbishop of Florence. This last-mentioned friar was a great benefactor to the Novella priory during the Council, and his gifts must have been very welcome to the prior and procurator who had to provide food and lodging for so many guests. The papal exchequer doubtless provided all that was necessary for the papal court, but many friars of the Roman

Province, to which the Novella priory belonged, had to be housed and fed. These included the Provincial, Dominic Giani de Corella, the vice-procurator of the Order, Matthew of Tortona, and an ex-procurator, Jerome Giovanni. The actual procurator of the Order was John de Stojkowic, but when he threw in his lot with the schismatics of Basle his post was given to James of Rimini. The Master-General himself, Bartholomew Texier, was also lodged in the priory, as were Nicholas ex-provincial of Lower Lombardy, and his successor John de Montenero. The last two had to pay each month the cost of their board. Mortier, in his History of the Masters General, tells us also that Texier signed the decree of union, but his name does not appear in the lists given by Justiniani and Labbe. As, however, several copies of the decree were, by order of the Pope, drawn up and signed after the conclusion of the union the master-general's name may figure on one of the forgotten lists, for not all the extant lists are complete as the copies were made after several fathers had gone home.

Naturally there were many theologians in attendance at the Council apart from those already noticed, and amongst these we may recall the names of Saint Antonius, five years later appointed archbishop of the city, Blessed Peter de Jeremia, recently returned from lecturing at Oxford, and Leonard de Mansuetis, afterwards master-general. Henry Kalteisen who had been prominent in defence of the rights of the Holy See at Basle does not seem to have been present at Florence, at least there is no record of him previous to 1440 when on May 1st he was nominated Master of the Sacred Palace to fill the vacancy caused by Torquemada's elevation to the cardinalate. It is very probable that he was on embassy to some German court on papal business, especially on the matter of recognition of the Council at Ferrara and Florence. Less than a year after his appointment as Master of the Sacred Palace he was sent as papal nuncio to Germany, and in 1452 was nominated archbishop of Trondhjem in Norway. This see he resigned in 1459 and he died in his native convent of Coblenz in 1465. Three



## BLACKFRIARS

Dominican bishops who were present at Florence during part of its duration were Bartholomew Lapaccio, of Cotrona and a well-known theological writer, Thomas Thomassino of Lesina, and a Spanish prelate, Anthony Munoz, of Scyros.

The prior of the Novella who received Eugenius IV on his first coming to Florence (1434) was Dominic Giani de Corella. When he was elected Provincial of the Roman Province in 1438, the community chose as his successor Friar Sinibaldo de Alighiero, of the family of the great Dante, and it was his privilege to receive the Pope on his coming to preside at the General Council in January, 1439. Whether the extra and heavy responsibilities of entertaining so many great prelates overtaxed his strength we cannot say, but his death occurred in the following April. His successor was Thomas Quercetani, and to his lot it fell to entertain the Pope until March, 1443, when Eugenius transferred the Council to Rome.

The Greeks left Florence in August, a few days after the arrival of the delegates from the Armenian church whose bishops desired union with the Holy See. The deliberations between them and the Council lasted a very short time, and on November 22 of the same year (1439) they accepted a decree handed to them by the Pope which included the Nicene Creed in which was embodied the *Filioque*, the dogmatic definition of Chalcedon relative to the two natures in Jesus Christ, the definition of the sixth General Council concerning the two wills, the doctrine of the Latin Church on the Sacraments as given by Saint Thomas in his opusculum *Contra errores Graecorum*, and the Athanasian Creed. Two things here are of interest to Dominicans, the employment of the works of Saint Thomas, and the success of a union for which the missionaries of the Order had laboured in Armenia for close on two hundred years.

An interesting break in the conciliar proceedings was the consecration of the new Dominican Church of San Marco, recently built in Florence, and Eugenius himself performed the ceremony. It was in the adjacent convent that the Angelic painter and Saint Antoninus dwelt. The ceremony

took place on January 6th, the feast of the Epiphany, 1442, and it was on this occasion that Fra Angelico presented to the Pope his celebrated picture of the Adoration of the Wise Men in whose richly coloured garments we can perhaps see reflected in Angelico's mind the effect of the bizarre robes of the Greek Emperor and his suite.

Eugenius III returned to Rome in March, 1443, regretfully parting from the hospitable Florentines who had treated him with so much honour and kindness for eight years. As to the Dominicans it must have seemed strange to return to a normal existence after having had the Supreme Pontiff a dweller for so long a time in their home. It was indeed a strange coincidence that whilst Eugenius during these anxious years lived amongst the Friars Preachers of Florence, his rival the antipope Felix V, kept his court in the Dominican priory of Basle, until he transferred it to Lausanne in 1442. In 1449 he submitted to Eugenius who created him Cardinal of St. Sabina. Two years later he closed his life.

The final act of the great Council of Ferrara-Florence took place in the Lateran Palace on August 7, 1445, when the Chaldean metropolitan, Timothy of Tarsis, and Elias, bishop of the Maronite church, who had been persuaded to seek union with the Holy See by the apostolic nuncio, the Dominican archbishop, Andrew of Colossus, made their submission to the Pope and received from him a decree of union.

WALTER GUMBLEY, O.P.