

The Council of Basle-Florence

1431-1445

Pope Martin V and especially his successor, Eugene IV, expressed reservations about the decrees of Constance. However, in accordance with them, Martin called a Council at Siena in 1423 but showed no interest in it and, when few attended, dissolved it with the promise to call another in *Basle* (also spelled Basel), Switzerland in 1431. Martin died in 1431 and Eugene IV was elected.

Pope Eugene IV



Eugene appointed a representative to open the *Council of Basle*. However, within five months Eugene, mistrusting the council, precipitously moved it to Ferrara in northern Italy. This created consternation at *Basle* and the council refused to disperse, noting that the Council of Constance had decreed that a general council is superior to a pope, and issued an ultimatum to Eugene. Only 6 cardinals were on Eugene's side and a schism seemed inevitable but was avoided largely through mediation of German King Sigismund, newly crowned emperor at

Byzantine Emperor
John VIII Palaeologus



Rome. Sigismund demanded that Eugene withdraw his dissolution and acknowledge the council's legitimacy. Interestingly, it was the desire of both Eugene and the Basle conferees to unify the Eastern and Western Churches that gave Eugene leverage in their disagreement. The Eastern Church, preferring to negotiate with the pope, agreed to meet at *Ferrara* rather than *Basle*. Then, Eugene transferred the Council to *Ferrara*, opening it in 1438 thru his legate, but then moving it to *Florence* due to threat of the Plague. An East-West church union was urgent for the Byzantine Emperor due to an eminent threat of a Turkish invasion since he hoped the union would gain him western military support.

The Councils at *Basle* and *Florence* issued other decrees but given here are those most prominent.

The Council at Basle continued on in spite of Pope Eugene's dissolution.

The Papacy



All papal elections must be made by the General Council.

A new pope must swear obedience to the General Council.

A pope cannot dissolve or move a General Council.

Deposed Eugene IV and elected Felix V (who would later abdicate).

Result: Basle soon became dominated by more extreme elements. When they elected Felix and when the Eastern Church chose to go to Ferrara, the Basle council lost most of its participants and adherents. It gradually lost significance and voted to dissolve itself in 1449.

The Council at Florence moved ahead with the union of Eastern and Western Churches.

The Agreement of
East and West



Recognized the pope's primacy. Accepted statements on purgatory, the Eucharist, and the 'Filioque'.

Result: Upon returning home, the eastern participants were in conflict over the agreements made at Florence and the Eastern Church did not accept the results. Thus, the union was not achieved.

Comment: *'Conciliarism...flourished during the crisis of the schism...but it faltered in its own extremism...'**

* 'The General Councils', Christopher M. Bellitto (2002) Paulist Press. New York