

Politics and the Councils of the Fifteenth Century

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Much, perhaps too much, of my theme will be illustrated from the Council of Constance. Of the six general councils of the Church in the first half of the fifteenth century, which are familiar to English-speaking historians as the conciliar movement, it is neither the first, the longest, nor the last; but it is the most significant.¹ It is also the one known best to me. One of the most spirited contemporary accounts of this council was written by a citizen of Constance, Ulrich of Richenthal; and one of the most spirited illustrations of the manuscript of Ulrich's chronicle which is still preserved in Constance shows Pope John XXIII being thrown from a cart (hardly to be dignified as a carriage) as he crossed the Alps from Italy.² The illustrator knew what John XXIII only suspected: that the Pope was riding for a fall. The incident was no more than a traveller's hazard, but it gains a symbolic value from the decision of Cardinal Roncalli nearly five hundred and fifty years later, when he in his turn was elected successor of St. Peter,

¹ The Roman Catholic Church recognizes 21 oecumenical councils, *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, V, New York, 1967, p. 376, H. Jedin, *Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church, an Historical Outline*, Edinburgh, London, 1960, p. 3 (The English translation by E. Graf of *Kleine Konziliengeschichte*, Freiburg, 1959). Two of these are among the councils of the first half of the fifteenth century: Constance, 1414-18 and Ferrara-Florence, 1438-c. 1445. The other four general councils of this period are the Councils of Pisa 1409, of Rome 1413, of Pavia-Siena 1423-4, and of Basle 1431-1449. Opinions vary whether the Council of Basle, which was canonically summoned by Eugenius IV and for periods recognized him, should be included with Ferrara-Florence as the seventeenth oecumenical council or not, Jedin, *op. cit.*, p. 127, E. I. Watkin, *The Church in Council*, London, New York, 1960, pp. 165, 167.

² Ulrich Richenthal, *Das Konzil zu Konstanz. Kommentar and Text*, bearbeitet von Otto Feger, Starnberg, Constance, 1964, f. 9a. This is a facsimile edition of the MS in the Rosgartenmuseum, Constance. Richenthal comments on the incident, *Chronik des Constanzer Concils*, ed. M. R. Buck, Tübingen, 1882, pp. 24-5 (Bibliothek des litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart, CLVIII), *The Council of Constance, The Unification of the Church*, translation L. R. Loomis, ed. J. H. Mundy and K. M. Woody, New York, London, 1961, p. 88 (cited hereafter as Loomis).

to revive the papal title of John XXIII.³ Moreover, the later John XXIII went on to rehabilitate the past in a more substantial way when, with different but perhaps no less real misgivings than those of his namesake, he called another general council of the Church, the Second Vatican Council, for October 1962. It is not necessary to emphasize that, from the first, Vatican II insisted on collective examination of the Church's needs in the middle of the twentieth century, and that it thereby revived interest in the councils of the fifteenth century, which were only three or four places removed from it in the recognized sequence of these assemblies, but which in time were half a millennium away, and were further separated from the present by many revolutions, religious, political, economic and social, and cultural. Notwithstanding the length of the interval and its character, the leading issue of the fifteenth century councils was found to be relevant to the discussions of Vatican II, and the legacy from the Council of Constance, which had sat from 1414-18, had a prominent place in the later Council.

One of the problems facing Vatican II was to determine how conclusively the constitution *Pastor Aeternus* of the First Vatican Council had defined the source of authority in the Church. In many respects this was the central problem. The Council of Trent and, earlier, the Fifth Lateran Council of 1512-17, which were the immediate predecessors of Vatican I, had not contributed notably to its elucidation; but for three of the councils of the fifteenth century, Pisa, Constance and Basle, it had also been the major issue. This identity of interest caused theologians, from the time that the Second Vatican Council was proposed in 1959, to look again at these earlier councils in order to see what arguments and precedents could be borrowed in support of their own view of the contemporary issue. Their interest produced a great quantity of literature.⁴ However, because of

³ The coronation of Cardinal Roncalli as Pope John XXIII took place on 9 November 1958, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, VII, p. 1018.

⁴ The following may be instanced as among the most prominent contributions: P. de Vooght, "Le conciliarisme à Constance et à Bâle," in *Le Concile et les conciles. Contribution à l'histoire de la Vie conciliaire de l'Eglise*, Chevetogne, Paris, 1960, pp. 143-18; P. de Vooght, *Les Pouvoirs du Concile et l'Autorité du Pape au Concile de Constance*, Paris, 1965 (Unam Sanctam, 56); H. Küng, *Strukturen der Kirche*, Freiburg, Basle, Vienna, 1962, English translation. *Structures of the Church*, by S. Attanasio, New York, 1965; P. Franzen, *L'Autorité des Conciles Problèmes d'Autorité*, Paris, 1962 (Unam Sanctam, 38); H. Jedin, *Bischöfliches Konzil oder Kirchenparlament*, Basle, Stuttgart, 1963; A. Franzen, "Das Konzil der Einheit. Einigungsbemühungen und konziliare Gedanken auf dem Konstanzer Konzil. Die Dekrete *Hoec Sancta* and *Frequens*," in *Das Konzil von Konstanz, Beiträge zu seiner Geschichte and Theologie*, ed. A. Franzen and W. Müller, Freiburg, Basle, Vienna, 1964, pp. 69-112; H. Riedlinger, "Hermeneutische Überlegungen zu den Konstanzer Dekreten," in *Das Konzil von Konstanz*, ed. Franzen and Müller, pp. 214-238; J. Gill, "The Fifth Session of the Council of Constance," in *The Heythrop Journal*, V, 1964, pp.

the setting in which it was conducted and because of the purposes which it was intended to serve, much of the literature dealt with the question in theological rather than in historical terms. This was appropriate to the task of establishing positions at Vatican II. It is not my purpose to deny the legitimacy of all interpretations of the fifteenth century councils made for such relatively partisan purposes. The discussion has directed attention to important aspects of the conciliar movement which had been neglected because of the practical failure of many of the measures in their own time. The trend to hermeneutics, however, may have gone too far, and in this short paper I shall try to re-establish the importance, I think that I would say the primacy, of political decisions over theological decisions in determining the outcome of these late medieval assemblies.

At this point I wish to digress for a moment. The digression gives me an opportunity to reflect on an aspect of my own recent experience, which may be of general interest. I am an Englishman and I learnt my history in England. Coming to Canada I have been impressed by the strength of an historiographical tradition which is only weakly represented in British schools. On the other side of the Atlantic notable work has been done on constitutional history – that goes without saying. Less typically there have been some excellent contributions to the examination of constitutional ideas. There has been pioneering work in economic history and in social history. The possibilities of the history of technology have not been ignored. British historians of the Middle Ages have not failed to read the signs of their own times.⁵ On the other hand it is not easy to think of comparable work by native practitioners who are interested in the history of ideas for its own sake. The exception which immediately springs to mind is instructive. At Cambridge there has been a school of historians who have pursued interests in intellectual history. These are chiefly the pupils of Walter Ullmann; but Dr. Ullmann has until recently never received much recognition outside Cambridge, and this is his adopted university. He served his apprenticeship in Austria and Germany, and he is one of the benisons which Hitler's violent career bestowed on medieval studies in Britain.⁶ Hitler was no less dishonourably generous in steering medievalists to America; but on this side of the Atlantic (or so it seems to a foreigner) intellectual history is a fashion, not to say a passion,

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Historical presentism, currently a fashionable taste among students, is not always an advantage to historical science; but the revival of interest in the councils of the fifteenth century is certainly a case where it has been.

⁵ Without going beyond the history of the later Middle Ages some prominent names may be cited such as S. B. Chrimes, Eileen Power, Michael Postan, Eleanor Carus-Wilson, K. B. McFarlane, Edward Miller, G. A. Holmes, M. W. Beresford, Rupert Hall, Martin Jope.

⁶ I have relied on Dr. Ullmann's entry in the current *Who's Who* rather than on personal knowledge. Even in Cambridge, Ullmann was not appointed to a chair until 1966, in Medieval Ecclesiastical History.

that flourishes independently of these windfalls of European politics in the nineteen-thirties. American medievalists have long gone to school on the continent of Europe, and their roots lie there to at least an equal extent as they grow from English traditions. It would be false to the facts to represent the contrast which I have sketched too sharply. Everyone will be able to think of a number of exceptions to it.⁷ All the same, I believe that it has some substance.

Let me return to the firmer ground of my main theme, the influence of political considerations on the decisions made in the councils of the fifteenth century, where by "political" I mean pre-eminently those considerations affected by the interests of a secular government or ruler. At first the discussion serves, also, to illustrate the contrasting historical traditions which I have just identified.

Professor Brian Tierney, who began his studies under the eye of Dr. Ullmann, has contributed a perceptive paper on "Hermeneutics and History: The Problem of *Hæc Sancta*" to the collection of essays presented to Bertie Wilkinson and published earlier this year.⁸ *Hæc Sancta* was the decree passed by the Council of Constance, which claimed the direct authority of Christ for the Council and asserted that even the Pope was "bound to obey it in matters which pertain to the faith, the rooting out of the said schism and the general reform of the Church in head and members."⁹ Tierney gives examples of the arguments which took place among theologians at the time of Vatican II about the authority to be accorded to

⁷ Among British historians who have furthered intellectual history the names of A. J. and R. W. Carlyle and of H. Rashdall may be cited from an earlier generation, and from contemporaries those of R. W. Southern, Beryl Smalley, and Denys Hay. Of the latter none as yet, I would have thought, has established a following as identifiable as Ullmann's. Perhaps the nearest to this from Oxford would be the pupils of the late Father Daniel Callus, O.P.

⁸ *Essays in Medieval History presented to Bertie Wilkinson*, ed. T. A. Sandquist and M. R. Powicke, Toronto, 1969, pp. 354-370.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 356, Tierney's translation. In the past this decree has been ordinarily, but less correctly, called *Sacrosancta*, as may be seen from the following selection of examples: *Documents of the Christian Church*, ed. H. Bettenson, London, 1943, p. 188; M. Spinka, *Advocates of Reform from Wyclif to Erasmus*, London, 1953, p. 105, 182 n.22 (Library of Christian Classics, XIV); B. Tierney, *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory, the Contribution of the Medieval Canonists from Gratian to the Great Schism*, Cambridge, 1955, p. 6; *A History of Christianity*, 1, Readings in the History of the Early and Medieval Church, ed. Ray C. Petry, London, 1962, p. 533; E. Delaruelle, E. R. Labande, P. Ourliac, *L'Eglise au temps du Grand Schisme et la Crise conciliaire, 1378-1449*, [Paris], 1962, pp. 179, 188 (Histoire de L'Eglise, 14); *Renaissance and Reformation, 1300-1648*, ed. G. R. Elton, New York, London, 1963, p. 14 (*Ideas and Institutions in Western Civilization*, ed. N. F. Cantor, III); Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, *De Gestis Concilii Basiliensis Commentariorum Libri II*, ed. and translation D. Hay and W. K. Smith, Oxford, 1967, Index s.v. *Sacrosancta*.

this decree, and proposes a middle ground between opposing views on which the claims made in the decree can be accepted by moderate opinion. Contemporaries recognized that *Hæc Sancta* set the relations of pope and council on a more precisely defined basis than had been done earlier, and differed about the novelty of the relation so defined. The fathers at Basle used it as the theoretical basis on which to advance exaggerated claims for the superiority of councils over popes. The discussions about Vatican II repeatedly return to the decree in the attempt to prescribe the relation of the papal monarch to his spiritual subjects. Its prominence makes it worth further examination.

Tierney argues that conciliar decrees in all ages must be interpreted in their historical setting. By itself theological understanding is prone to introduce distortions from a later time. *Hæc Sancta* must be seen as contemporaries saw it, in the light of the emergency which was caused by the flight from Constance of the Pope who had convened the Council and, beyond that, in the light of the prevailing uncertainty from the start of the Great Schism about who was the true pope. He then makes a statement which shows that there are the two ways of looking at an historical event which I have instanced in my digression. "The historical event which broke the deadlock of the Great Schism and made possible the restoration of a legitimate papacy," he writes, "was the enactment of *Hæc Sancta*." "Moreover," he continues, "the historian can reasonably assert that the schism could not have been ended in any other way than by the enactment of a decree asserting authority over the legitimate pope, whoever he might be."¹⁰

It is a distortion of its author's intention to place too much weight on this statement in isolation. It was not intended to present the theme for what I have to say! But it illustrates my proposition concisely and conveniently. Tierney, the historian, is illustrating the contribution which his discipline makes to theological interpretation; and the event to which he points for illustration is not a political action but the triumph of an idea: the authority which a council might exercise over a pope in certain circumstances. He is aware that the idea triumphed in a particular context, but he is not concerned so much with that context, or with the political developments that were necessary to enforce the ideological victory, as with the victory itself. Certainly, the establishment of the autonomy of the council's authority was a necessary step to overcome the Schism. *Hæc Sancta* achieved this; but *Hæc Sancta* did not restore "a legitimate papacy." It only "made possible the restoration of a legitimate papacy," as Tierney claims, breaking "the deadlock of the Great Schism." The Schism was only ended, a legitimate papacy was only restored, two and a half years later. It took that time to marshal the political forces which were necessary to impose the Council's authority on three rival popes and to persuade the conflicting interests represented at Constance to agree upon, the election of a replacement. There were two parts to this as to every familiar action conception and execution, the idea and its political enforcement; but the second is no less important than the first.

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, pp. 361-2.

Moreover, *Hæc Sancta* was not a statement made out of the blue, and it is worth looking closely at its antecedents to see the circumstances which shaped it in the form in which it was decreed. It has its authority because it was passed in the fifth general session of the Council on 6 April 1415.¹¹ It was needed because, on 20 March, John XXIII had stealthily fled from Constance in an attempt to break up the Council. His flight was itself the result of political calculations. John counted on the initial protection of Duke Frederick of Austria, and his objective may have been a refuge with the Duke of Burgundy. The Pope relied on Frederick's hostility to Sigismund, King of the Romans and of Hungary, and on Burgundy's ties to the French court; for Sigismund was Protector of the Council and the principal rallying point for John's own critics, and the royal envoys from France were bound to be another focus of influence. They were not so inveterately hostile as Sigismund and they had not been at Constance long, but they had just veered towards the antipapal camp shortly before John fled.¹²

The reaction to John's flight in Constance neatly illustrates the council fathers' need both for firm political direction and for ideological conviction. Two actions frustrated the papal plan for undermining the Council. On the morning after the discovery that John had fled, Sigismund rode round the city with an escort and trumpeters, proclaiming the Pope's defection and urging everyone to stay in the city since "all shall be secure in life and property and better protected than before."¹³ This served initially to prevent panic: only his immediate associates

¹¹ H. von der Hardt, *Magnum Œcumenicum Concilium Constantiense*, IV, Frankfurt, Leipzig, 1699, 98-99 (cited hereafter as Hardt), J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima Collectio*, XXVII, Venice, 1784, 590-91, *Conciliorum Œcumenicorum Decreta*, ed. Centro di Documentazione Istituto per le Scienze Religiose, Bologna, Basle, Barcelona, Freiburg, Rome, Vienna, 1962, pp. 385-6.

¹² Cardinal Fillastre in his first hand account of the Council of Constance notes John XXIII's "fail-safe" arrangements with Frederick of Austria, H. Finke, *Acta Concilii Constantiensis*, II, Munster, 1923, p. 15, Loomis, p. 203. Cf. Hardt, II, 146, at second use, for the text validating the cardinal's suspicions. John of Nassau, archbishop of Mainz, was also suspected of being party to this cabal, Hardt, IV, 60, repeating a passage from Nauclerus, usually reliable. The evidence for the Pope's association with Burgundy is less precise (*adhuc remotius* von der Hardt calls it, *op. cit.*, IV, p. 60), but there is contemporary evidence that it was also suspected to exist, F. Palacky, *Documenta Magistri Johannis Hus Vitam ... illustrantia*, Prague, 1869, p. 546, Bourgeois de Chasteney, *Nouvelle Histoire du Concile de Constance*, Paris, 1718, pp. 342 seqq., and cf. Vrie's report, Hardt, I, 180, expecting France as well as Italy to rally to John XXIII. The fullest discussion of John XXIII's flight is H. G. Peter, *Die Informationen Papst Johann XXIII and dess. Flucht von Konstanz nach Schaffhausen*, Freiburg, 1926.

¹³ Richenthal, *Chronik des Konstanzer Concils*, ed. Buck, p. 63, Loomis, p. 118.

followed the Pope. The other mainstay was John Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris and delegate of the French king. Gerson carried more prestige than any other of the many academic figures assembled for the Council. A day or so later he occupied the cathedral pulpit and delivered a resounding battle-cry for the Council's superiority over the Pope, in terms more extreme than was later claimed in *Hæc Sancta*.¹⁴ Without these two neutralizing measures, one on the ideological plane, the other on the political, there might have been no *Hæc Sancta*, nor any further decrees from the Council of Constance.

The formulation of the very terms of *Hæc Sancta* was the product of political pressures. To abbreviate a complicated story, Sigismund had succeeded in tempering the terminology of the more radical groups in the Council so as to obtain a wording which the cardinals would accept; but no sooner was the accommodation made, than the news that John XXIII had fled further down the Rhine so aggravated all parties that everyone accepted the formulation of 6 April, endorsing a firmer expression of the Council's jurisdiction.¹⁵

In this respect Pope John played into the hands of the more radical elements, who were probably in a minority. They had been able to prevail in the discussions before and after John's flight because the Council of Constance had adopted the novel practice of voting by nations in order to offset the preponderance of Italians. Delegates who had a rough and ready political coherence, more often traditional than actual, debated together and decided the policy of their nation. Four nations were represented in the early months at Constance, the Italians, French, Germans and English, and when the four were agreed, the policy of the Council on that matter was settled. When a similar division had been adopted earlier for consultation or for some other reason, the English had normally been counted as part of the German, or northern nation. It was a political measure, again, that had introduced the division by nations into the procedure of the assembly at Constance; and it was political objectives which had levered the comparative

¹⁴ The usual date given for the sermon is 23 March 1415, Hardt, II, 265-274, C. J. Hefele, *Histoire des Conciles*, translation H. Leclerq, VII, i, Paris, 1916, p. 199, N. Valois, *La France et le Grand Schisme d'Occident*, IV, Paris, 1902, p. 290. An anonymous correspondent gives 29 March as the date, Finke, *Acta Concilii Constanciensis*, III, 239. Cf. J. B. Morrall, *Gerson and the Great Schism*, Manchester, 1960, pp. 95-7, de Vooght, *Les Pouvoirs du Concile*, pp. 41-2. Finke, *op. cit.*, III, p. 217, establishes Gerson's position as a representative of Charles VI.

¹⁵ Recent summary accounts will be found in Delaruelle, Labande, Ourliac, *op. cit.*, pp. 177-9. J. Gill, *Constance et Bâle-Florence*, Paris, 1965, pp. 47-51 (*Histoire des Conciles (Ecuméniques)*, 9). The documentation is mainly accessible in Hardt, IV, 70 seqq., and the most convenient contemporary account is Cardinal Fillastre's, Finke, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 25-8, Loomis, pp. 222-9.

handful of English representatives into this position of influence.¹⁶

This last point about the ambitions of the English I must leave as an unsubstantiated opinion, if there is to be space to demonstrate that Constance was not the only one of the councils of the fifteenth century to be submitted to political pressures.

In discussing *Hæc Sancta*, the most celebrated decree passed by the Council of Constance, my aim has been to show that the idea enshrined in the decree, however important, did not alone bring an end to the Great Schism. The decree was the product of political forces and it needed to be enforced in order to be effective, and enforcement meant political action. Tracing backwards the line of thought which I have just introduced, I propose now to illustrate the same point about the necessary place of politics in the councils of the fifteenth century by probing the uncertain way in which English policy moved towards support of a conciliar solution of the Schism.

It required a decided change to place England behind the Council of Pisa, which had been agreed upon by the combined Colleges of cardinals at the end of June 1408.¹⁷ Traditional English policy in the Schism had been that the pope at

¹⁶ The introduction of voting by nations at Constance does not seem to me to have been thoroughly probed so as to indicate the *de facto* influence of the Germans and English acting together. I have sought to establish the background for this co-operation in "Henry V, Sigismund and the Council of Constance, a Re-examination," in *Historical Studies*, IV, ed. G. Hayes McCoy, London, 1964, pp. 98-102. Hefele, *Histoire des Conciles*, translation Leclercq, VII, i, pp. 185-7, is a guide to the available evidence. There is, of course, no statistical evidence about attendance at the Council in precise terms, but contemporaries seem agreed that the Italians alone formed a majority in the early months, and they mostly followed the Pope's lead. For discussion of the nation as a feature of the Council of Constance, see H. Finke, "Die Nation in der spätmittelalterlichen allgemeinen Konzilien," *Historisches Jahrbuch*, LVII, 1937, pp. 323-338, and L. R. Loomis, "Nationality at the Council of Constance," *American Historical Review*, XLIV, 1939, pp. 508-527, reprinted S. L. Thrupp, *Change in Medieval Society, Europe North of the Alps, 1050-1500*, New York, 1964, pp. 279-296.

¹⁷ The St. Alban's chronicler, introducing Cardinal Ugucione's mission to France, England and Scotland in the Fall of 1408, notes appropriately that he was sent *a collegio concardinalium*. *The St. Alban's Chronicle, 1406-1420*, ed. V. H. Galbraith, Oxford, 1937, p. 31. M. Creighton, *A History of the Papacy from the Great Schism to the Sack of Rome*, I, London, 1897, p. 223, reports the cardinals' summons of a council. The best accounts of England's policy in the Schism are E. Perroy, *L'Angleterre et le Grand Schisme d'Occident*, Paris, 1933, W. Ullmann, *The Origins of the Great Schism*, London, 1948, chapter VII; and chapters III and IV in E. F. Jacob, *Essays in the Conciliar Epoch*, Manchester, 1953. See also Ruth Weber (Sister Christina Maria), *The English Bishops, 1399-1413; their political role in the reign of Henry IV*, chapter IV (unpubl. Ph.D.

Avignon, identified with “the adversary of France,” must submit to the pope of Rome, the true pope who had had England’s unwavering support since the election of Urban VI. The uncertainty surrounding the change of policy is nicely exemplified in two letters which are side by side in a formulary prepared by John Prophet, who was appointed Keeper of the Privy Seal in October 1406 and was consequently chief executive of the diplomacy of Henry IV and his royal Council just at the time that English policy in the Schism was loosening up.¹⁸ The letters in the formulary are not dated, but they can be placed with assurance between late July and mid-October 1408.¹⁹ Both letters are addressed to Rupert, king of the Romans. The second in order in the formulary is marked *Non emanavit*: it was not sent. It proposes to tell King Rupert the news of current moves by the rival obediences, brought back by Henry’s ambassadors who had newly returned from the court of Gregory XII. These moves included the summons of a council by Gregory for the coming Pentecost (of 1409) in pursuance of his aim of ending the Schism by the agreed withdrawal of both rivals, *per viam cessionis*. Henry IV then states his intention of sending his representatives to this council and urges Rupert to do the same, holding out the bait of Gregory’s declared readiness to consecrate Rupert Emperor. Until Gregory has had the chance to prove his good intentions in his council, Henry will turn a deaf ear to the cardinals’ request that the Pope should be abandoned by a concerted withdrawal of obedience.²⁰ The other letter, which immediately precedes this one in the formulary, and which I believe to have been sent, though I cannot prove it, is much more reserved. Gregory’s election promise to abdicate, if this would contribute to the ending of

Thesis, University of Toronto).

¹⁸ Prophet’s formulary is London, British Museum, Harleian MS 431. In addition to the two letters on f 16-16 verso which are discussed here, the MS contains a great deal of material on the antecedents to the Council of Pisa. References to the collection and its author will be found in C. M. D. Crowder, “Correspondence between England and the Council of Constance, 1414-18,” *Studies in British Church History*, I (London), 1964, p. 192 n. 3.

¹⁹ Internal evidence establishes the date. Gregory XII summoned the council which occasions the letters, and which met eventually at Cividale, on 2 July 1408, Delaruelle, Labande, Ourliac, *L’Eglise au temps de Grand Schisme*, p. 148. The meeting of the clergy of Canterbury which is referred to on f 16 fits the Convocation of Canterbury which opened on 23 July 1408, D. Wilkins, *Concilia Magnæ Britanniae et Hiberniae*, III, London, 1737, pp. 306-310. The terminal date would appear to be fixed by the absence of any reference to the mission of Cardinal Ugucione, which is referred to in n. 17 above. The cardinal addressed the assembled estates on 28 and 29 October 1408, *The St. Alban’s Chronicle*, ed. Galbraith, p. 136.

²⁰ Harleian MS 431, f 16 verso. The reference to the cardinals could be an indication of Cardinal Ugucione’s mission; but my understanding is that this made a sufficient impression to have been referred to more directly.

the Schism, had given the English authorities great joy; but nothing has come of that, and having heard of Gregory's projected general council, Henry proposes that Rupert communicate his own intentions.²¹ The purpose of this letter is left implicit, but it must have been to coordinate the policies of the two kingdoms. Thus the alternatives proposed in these two draft letters are quite different. The one which was not sent proposed what had been the traditional English policy of adherence to the Roman obedience. The one which I suppose to have been sent made no such proposal. It represented a policy of wait and see.

These two draft letters betray the difficulty of reaching a decision to change a well-established policy. The difficulty had been overcome by Christmas 1408 when Henry IV commissioned his representatives to attend the Council of Pisa, the council summoned by the cardinals.²² One prominent influence in favour of supporting the *via concilii* at Pisa had undoubtedly been the long address by Cardinal Uguccone before the King and the three estates of the realm in the Palace of Westminster at the end of October 1408. The cardinal spoke for the two Colleges which had jointly summoned a general council to Pisa for the spring of 1409, and he was not short of theoretical justification for their unprecedented action. At the same time it is notable what emphasis he gave to identifying Gregory XII, England's pope and his own, as the chief prevaricator who had brought to nothing attempts to arrange joint abdication of both rivals for the papacy, the *via cessionis*.²³ Uguccone was striking on a warm iron. In July 1408 the Convocation of Canterbury had already recommended that revenues due to Gregory XII's Camera from England be impounded, so that their continued payment should not enable him to evade his promises to resign.²⁴ For at least two years before this one can detect the intricate play of the political forces which had to be reconciled with a reappraisal of England's familiar ecclesiastical policy: forces which included policy over the suspended war with France, the preservation of an existing *entente* with Germany, the strength of traditional attitudes to the Schism among the clergy,²⁵ as well as the new situation presented

²¹ Harleian MS 431, f 16.

²² They were named on 24 December 1408, T. Rymer, *Fœdera, Conventiones, Litertæ...*, The Hague, 1740, IV, i, pp. 146-7. The Province of Canterbury followed by naming its representatives in January 1409, Wilkins, *Concilia*, III, pp. 312, 313.

²³ The cardinal, who was archbishop of Bordeaux and a subject of Henry IV, spoke for two days. There are two full reports of what he said, as the account in the St. Alban's Chronicle is supplemented by one in Archbishop Arundel's register. Both are printed, *St. Alban's Chronicle*, ed. Galbraith, pp. 31-9, 136-152.

²⁴ Wilkins, *Concilia*, III, pp. 306-310. Henry IV had anticipated this decision by mandates of 14 June and 19 July 1408, Rymer, *op. cit.*, IV, i, pp. 136-7.

²⁵ The letter ascribed to Richard Young, bishop of Rochester, is an example, Jacob, *Essays in the Conciliar Epoch*, pp. 71-2. The author's proposal was that Gregory XII should call a council in which the rival obedience should be con-

by the independent initiative taken by the cardinals at Pisa in the summer of 1408.

Significantly the drafts of both letters in Prophet's formulary were concerned to keep English and German policy in line. From the time that he had seized the throne Henry IV had established a cordial relationship with another usurper, Rupert of the Palatinate, king of the Romans. The understanding was cemented in 1402 by the marriage of Henry's elder daughter, Blanche, to Rupert's heir, Lewis, and it endured till Blanche's death. Accounts appear to differ whether that occurred in 1406 or in 1409.²⁶ The likelier date seems to be May 1409, in which case this personal buttress of the Anglo-imperial *entente* was removed just at the time that the English were committing their support to the Council in Pisa and just after Rupert's representatives had repudiated the Council.²⁷ It is certain that

demned, and that this would open the way for the English to spoil France in the name of a Crusade.

²⁶ There is general agreement that Blanche bore Lewis a son in May 1406, and that her death took place in May as a result of childbirth, although the infant survived. The problem in the sources presently available to me is to know whether all this took place at the birth of a son in May 1406, or whether Blanche died in May 1409 as a result of a second pregnancy. The following authorities support the date in 1409: W. K. Prinz von Isenberg, *Stammtafeln zur Geschichte der Europäischen Staaten*, ed. F. Baron Freytag von Loringhoven, II, Marburg, 1965, Table 61, H. J. Cohn, *The Government of the Rhine Palatinate in the Fifteenth Century*, London, 1965, p. 7. *A Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library deposited in the British Museum*, London, 1802, p. 429 (Vitellius E. X.). Other normally good authorities go for 1406: H. Ellis, *Original Letters illustrative of English History*, 3rd Series, I, London, 1846, p. 67, J. H. Wylie, *History of England under Henry IV*, I, London, 1884, p. 255, *Official Correspondence of Thomas Bekynton*, ed. G. Williams, Rolls Series, London, 1872, I, p. cxiii, E. F. Jacob, *The Fifteenth Century, 1399-1485*, Oxford, 1961, p. 68 (The Oxford History of England, 6). The printed letters reporting Blanche's death are, of course, undated; although in contrast to his Introduction, Williams editorially assigns them to 1409 in his Chronological Table, *op. cit.*, ed. Williams, I, pp. cci-ii, and in the margin to the printed text, *op. cit.*, ed. Williams, II, pp. 367-72. In a dated letter of May 1407 to Henry IV, Lewis speaks of his sweetest consort as if alive (*et ego cum dulcissima consorte mea corporum debita fruimur harmonia*), E. Martène and U. Durand, *Thesaurus Novus Anecdotorum*, I, Paris, 1717, 1721-2. This can only refer to Blanche, since Lewis did not marry again until November 1417, Prinz von Isenberg, *op. cit.*, I, Table 31. This is why I have assumed in the text that 1409 is the correct date.

²⁷ The German ambassadors declared their opposition to the Council in the middle of April, 1409, Creighton, *History of the Papacy*, I, p. 242. Henry IV's envoys made a mark as supporters of the Council in May, Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum ... Collectio*, XXVI, 1139-40, *The Register of Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1414-43*, ed. E. F. Jacob, I, Oxford, 1943, xxx, Wylie,

as late as 1407 there was frequent correspondence between the two rulers. Most of it arose from Henry's difficulty in meeting the instalments on his daughter's dowry;²⁸ but in May 1407 King Rupert expressed regret in a letter to Henry that he was unable to provide the military assistance for which Henry had asked as a result of an English decision to reopen the war in France.²⁹

About the same time another and conflicting strand of policy can be detected in Henry IV's counsels. On 18 July 1406 he appointed two proctors at the papal court with the purpose, it has been supposed, of coaxing Pope Innocent VII to reach some accommodation with his rival and end the Schism. The proctors were prevented from leaving for Rome before the autumn of 1406, at which time they were also commissioned as part of an embassy to settle the French war by a marriage alliance. Consequently these envoys only arrived to discharge their mission in Rome after Innocent VII had died and Gregory XII had been elected in his place. They were too late to have any immediate effect in ameliorating the Schism.³⁰ Marriage overtures to France were a perennial gambit in Anglo-French negotiations; but when they are coupled with the intended moves in Rome, futile though these were, it looks as though Henry IV and his advisers may have planned such a coordination of policy with France toward ending the Schism as had long been sought from Paris with no success. On the other hand, the correspondence with the king of the Romans which comes to the surface in May 1407 makes it seem as if this mode of reconciliation had soon been abandoned.³¹

England under Henry IV, III, pp. 376-7, Jacob, *The Fifteenth Century*, pp. 92-4. Jacob and Wylie propose that the English took a useful initiative in confirming the Council's resolution, but Labande suggests that England's support for it continued to be reserved, Delaruelle, Labande, Ourliac, *op. cit.*, pp. 151, 156, 163, n. 4.

²⁸ Martène and Durand, *Thesaurus*, I, 1682 seqq., from an unidentified MS.

²⁹ Martène and Durand, *Thesaurus*, I, 1719-21. A letter from Rupert's son, Lewis, in the same terms and of similar date has already been cited in n. 26 above. Cf. Wylie, *op. cit.*, III, p. 64.

³⁰ *Register of Henry Chichele*, ed. Jacob, I, pp. xxvi-vii, Rymer, *Fœdera*, IV, i, pp. 100, 102.3. Chichele was one of these proctors. Without reference to the Issue Rolls or the Particulars of Account in the Public Record Office, London, it is only possible to speculate that these were the envoys whose return prompted the letters to King Rupert in Prophet's formulary, British Museum, Harleian MS 431, f. 16 verso; but Jacob's account of Chichele's movements supports the suggestion, *op. cit.*, I, p. xxviii. Cf. Jacob, *The Fifteenth Century*, p. 91, 93.

³¹ It is evident that the contradictions in national policy were paralleled at a less official level. A letter of February 1407 in which Archbishop Arundel praises Gregory XII for the promise made after his election to find a way out of the Schism, even at the cost of his own abdication, may be set against the "hawkish" attitude of his suffragan, Bishop Young, in the same year, Wilkins, *Concilia*, III, 302-3 and see n. 25 above.

There is not space in this short paper, nor have I had the opportunity in preparing it for access to the necessary materials, to recover all the issues and explain all the problems of Henry IV's move to support the Council of Pisa as completely as scholarship requires. But if I have only indicated the play of political considerations on the fine balance of the question as it is represented in the two letters which I have singled out, I have done what I set out to do. If the English, instead of supporting the Council of Pisa had held aloof with Rupert's representatives, or alternatively if the king of the Romans had been persuaded to abandon Gregory XII as his English *confrère* had done, or if a reconciliation with France had been achieved in 1406 on the basis of a dynastic alliance or otherwise, both the ecclesiastical and the political outcome in 1409 and afterwards would have been different from what took place.

My illustrations on the theme of political influences on the councils of the fifteenth century have been restricted to a crisis during the Council of Constance and to decisions on English ecclesiastical policy on the eve of the Council of Pisa. These are the topics on which I can be most authoritative; and elsewhere I have given my reasons for believing that the ecclesiastical policy of the Lancastrian dynasty was the handmaid of its secular aims.³² This continued to be so under the direction of both the minority council and of Henry VI. The Council of Basle abandoned the novelty of voting by nations and so made political control over delegates much harder to achieve. This was a contributory, but still a substantial reason for the English government's refusal to identify itself with this Council in the same way as it had identified itself with Pisa or Constance, despite its anxiety to rehabilitate the reputation of the English by imposing a settlement on the heretic Hussites, and despite its expectation that Basle would be a centre of international diplomacy concerning the war with France, just as Constance had been earlier.³³ Nor can it be claimed that English ecclesiastical policy was more heavily influenced by erastian influences than either French or Imperial ecclesiastical policy or that of any other fifteenth century government. It might seem that a Constance Sigismund placed the interests of the Church before his own interests to an imprudent degree, when he battled for the priority of reform in head

³² See the article in *Historical Studies*, IV, 1964, cited in n. 16 above.

³³ The most recent and closest examination of the English attitude to the Council of Basle is contained in a sequence of articles by A. N. E. D. Schofield, "The first English Delegation to the Council of Basel," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, XII, 1961, pp. 167-196, "The second English Delegation to the Council of Basel," *ibid.*, XVII, 1966, pp. 29-64, and "England, the Pope and the Council of Basel, 1435-1449," *Church History*, XXXIII, 1964, pp. 248-278. See also, Jacob, *Essays in the Conciliar Epoch*, pp. 55-6 and E. F. Jacob, *Essays in Later Medieval History*, Manchester, 1968, p. 137, J. G. Dickinson, *The Congress of Arras, 1435, a Study in Medieval Diplomacy*, Oxford, 1955, pp. viii, 86 seqq. Once the Council had finally broken with Eugenius IV there were additional reasons for the English reserve towards it.

and members over the election of a new pope for the first nine months of 1417. But it should not be forgotten that Sigismund expected to be served better by a pope chosen after the imposition of reforms than by a candidate likely to be chosen before agreement on necessary changes in the Church's central agencies.³⁴ At Basle, also, Sigismund's interest in supporting the conciliar party, even at the price of opposition to the Pope from whom he hoped for imperial coronation, was directly related to calculations about the council fathers' ability to reconcile the Hussites in Bohemia, and so to allow Sigismund into parts of his accumulation of territories to which he had never had peaceful access.³⁵

Political preoccupations were not the preserve of major governments only. The archbishop of Mainz, the leading ecclesiastical electoral prince of the Empire, had sought to humble Sigismund by promoting the failure of the Council of Constance.³⁶ The last session at Constance was soured by an appeal laid on behalf of the king of Poland and the Duke of Lithuania to a succeeding council. On the surface the appeal concerned a matter of heresy, which the Popes alleged against a Dominican friar; in substance it concerned their watchful rivalry with the Teutonic Knights in Lithuania.³⁷

The Latin kingdoms were no freer of political considerations than their northern neighbours. The history of early attempts to end the Schism is the history of the varying fortunes of the factions in Charles VI's court.³⁸ The interest of Cosimo de Medici, *Pater Patrice*, in the transfer of the council of union with the Greeks from Ferrara to Florence in 1439 (to include a bare mention of this prominent council before I end), was not due to his absorbing interest in theological debate.³⁹

³⁴ Creighton, *A History of the Papacy*, II, p. 83 seqq., Delaruelle, Labande and Ourliac, *L'Eglise au temps du Grand Schisme*, pp. 194-7, Gill, *Constance et Bâle-Florence*, pp. 60-64.

³⁵ Creighton, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 213-5.

³⁶ See n. 12 above.

³⁷ Creighton, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 115-6. The calendar of the Teutonic Order's correspondence in E. Joachim and W. Hubatsch, *Regesta historico-diplomatica Ordinis S. Mario Theutonicorum, 1198-1525*, Part 1, volume 1, Goettingen, 1948, and H. Koeppen, *Peter von Wormditt, 1403-19*, Goettingen, 1960 (Die Berichte der Generalprokuratoren des deutschen Ordens an der Kurie, II), establish the close attention which the High Master of the Order and his advisers paid to events at Constance.

³⁸ N. Valois, *La France et le Grand Schisme d'Occident*, 4 vols., Paris, 1896-1902, *passim*, V. Martin, *Les Origines de Gallicanisme*, I, Paris, 1939, 243-357, Morrall, *Gerson and the Great Schism*, pp. 30-75.

³⁹ Gill, *The Council of Florence*, pp. 176-7, Creighton, *op. cit.*, II, 340. Cosimo's investment had its reward inasmuch as his great grandson, Giovanni, was chosen pope (Leo X) in 1513.

The list might be extended to emphasize the point, but its force should already be clear. The councils where political influence was unimportant or intermittent, Rome, Siena,⁴⁰ Basle after 1438, do not have the same significance as the major ones which have been instanced.⁴¹ It is not necessary to elaborate further. At the same time I wish to repeat my earlier caution and the lesson of some of my earlier examples. I do not want to claim that ideas were not important in these councils: such a claim would be ridiculous in view of the attendance of Zabarella, d' Ailly, Gerson, Hus, Cesarini, d' Allemand, Cusanus, Giovanni da Montenero, Bessarion, Mark Eugenicus. My point has been a more modest one: that political factors have not had due emphasis, especially in much of the recent literature.⁴² Partly this is a consequence of Vatican II, for the organized Church has become so anaesthetized that this possibly was a council innocent of secular political pressures. Partly it is a consequence, I have suggested, of the prevailing bias in American historiography to the history of ideas, which is possibly all the more morally welcome to Americans in an age when their country controls such a massive share of political power. My attempt has been, therefore, to redress the balance by exemplifying and justifying an emphasis on politics in the councils of the fifteenth century.

⁴⁰ At the time of writing this paper I have not had the opportunity to read W. Brandmüller, *Das Konzil von Pavia-Siena, 1423-4*, I, Münster, 1968 (Vorreformationsgeschichtliche Forschungen, 16).

⁴¹ De Vooght's *Les Pouvoirs du Concile et L'Autorité du Pape au Concile de Constance* is intended more as a contribution to the ecclesiological debates of Vatican II than as a history of the Council of Constance. It is concerned with ideas rather than with events; but in his conclusion he recognizes political influences in these words – "La politique avait souvent son mot à dire et c'est à des choix politiques qu'obéissaient souvent 'papalistes' et 'conciliaristes'," *op. cit.*, pp. 195-6.

⁴² J. N. Figgie, the Cambridge historian, was a significant contributor to the revival of interest in the fifteenth century councils which followed Vatican I. He read a paper to the Royal Historical Society in London with the title "Politics at the Council of Constance," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, New Series, XIII, 1899, pp. 103-115. However, it deals with the contribution of these councils to the development of political thought, a subject which Figgie made his own with the delivery of the Birkbeck lectures in the following year, published as *Studies of Political Thought from Gerson to Grotius, 1414-1625*, Cambridge, 1907, and not with politics as I have employed the term.