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The Conciliar Movement - Part II

Lead: With the Church split into factions, with three popes claiming the obedience of Roman Catholics the leaders of Christian Europe met in the Swiss village of Constance to clean up the mess.

Intro.: "A Moment in Time" with Dan Roberts.

Content: In 1409 at the Council of Pisa, the leaders of the church met to bring some kind of order out of the chaos that grew from having rival popes one in Rome the other in Avignon in the south of France. They

were also trying to come up with way of governing the Church that broadened its leadership base. Many in the church led by Pierre D'Ailly of Bishop of Cambrai in France advocated a change in Church government that would retain the office of Pope but place him under a General Council of Bishops which would be the ultimate authority in the Church. At Pisa the Council deposed the rival popes and appointed one of their own. He soon died and his successor took the name John XXIII. The other popes refused to go, that meant there were three.

John was one of the most interesting men ever to fill the papal office. He was a wild and adventurous

young man who at one point led a group of naval pirates before being called to the priesthood. From his behavior as a churchman one gets the impression that he left few of his worldly habits behind when he took the cloth. John never really stopped being a pirate. Though he took a doctorate in church law his progress upward in the ranks was due as much to blackmailing his fellow bishops as it was to talent or spiritual sensitivity. He was a great leader of men and eventually became the commander of the papal army. When he came to the office of Pope, his loose living cause great distress in the church. His moral excesses in part led to the calling of the Council of Constance which met from 1414 to 1418.

The now Cardinal D'Ailly dominated the proceedings. Authorities arrested John XXIII, threw him into prison, deposed all three rival popes and then had to decide whether to change Church government or appoint a new Pope. It chose to delay reform and appointed Martin V. Martin and he ignored the calls for future Councils rightly seeing them as threat to his own power.

The Conciliar Movement healed the Great Schism, brought the papacy back to Rome but failed to reform the way the Church was governed. This failure to spread the authority around, in part, led a century later to the most

serious modern breach of Christian unity, the Protestant Reformation.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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