

History of the Crusades. Episode 313. The Baltic Crusades. The Lithuanian Conflict Part XVIII. The Council of Constance, Part 2.

Hello again. Last week we began our examination of the Council of Constance, a Church Council which was convened by Pope John XXIII with the support of Emperor Sigismund. The primary aim of Pope John in holding this council was to resolve the Papal schism, by reducing the current number of three Popes down to the much more manageable number of just one, with the single remaining Pope being, of course, Pope John himself. However this scheme backfired spectacularly, and Pope John attempted to run away from Constance when allegations of corruption and mismanagement began to be leveled against him. The fleeing Pope John was eventually captured and imprisoned. The remaining two Popes were forced to abdicate and a fresh new Pope, Pope Martin V was elected, ending the forty year long Papal schism.

With Pope John now out of the scene, the Council of Constance kept springing surprises for Emperor Sigismund. Sigismund was keen to use the Council to resolve the unrest caused by the crackdown on the followers of Jan Hus in Bohemia. Emperor Sigismund was, after all, heir to the Bohemian crown, and he hoped that if he convinced Jan Hus to travel to Constance in the Kingdom of Germany to present his arguments for Church reform to the Council, then perhaps the whole Jan Hus controversy inside the Kingdom of Bohemia could be resolved once and for all. Emperor Sigismund invited Jan Hus to address the conference, and Jan Hus accepted, on the condition that the Emperor grant him a promise of safe conduct to Constance, and back to the Kingdom of Bohemia after he had presented his case.

Jan Hus then traveled to the Kingdom of Germany to attend the conference but, as William Urban notes in his book "The Last Years of the Teutonic Knights", and I quote "nothing went as anticipated by either Hus or Sigismund" end quote. To start with, Jan Hus wasn't allowed to present his arguments for reform before the Council. Instead, he remained in the lodgings he had been allocated inside the town, while the Council deliberated without him about his position and his actions. In the end, the Council only called upon Jan Hus at the end of their meeting, and they only allowed him to answer one question. What was that question? The Council asked whether Jan Hus would submit himself to the judgment of the Papacy and the Council. Jan Hus pondered over his answer, then stated that he couldn't act contrary to his conscience or the teachings of Christ.

This was the wrong answer, according to the members of the Council, and calls were made to arrest Jan Hus and place him on trial. Emperor Sigismund attempted to make good on his promise to allow Jan Hus safe passage back to Bohemia, but when a bunch of clergymen threatened to pack up and go home themselves if this were allowed to happen, a move which would bring the Council of Constance to a premature end, Emperor Sigismund was forced to relent.

Jan Hus was arrested and placed in the custody of the Archbishop of Riga while awaiting his trial. The end result was Jan Hus was found guilty at the trial, and was subsequently burned alive.

You probably won't be surprised to learn that the act of the Church in executing Jan Hus likely did more to raise his profile and popularity than the preaching of Jan Hus himself during his lifetime. The legacy of Jan Hus lived on, in the form of his followers, the Hussites, who will have a significant role to play in the Protestant Reformation, which will

kick off in the 16th century. More immediately, the execution of Jan Hus and the outrage which that event sparked amongst his supporters and across the wider population of Bohemia, will be causing Sigismund some major headaches. Anti-German, anti-Church, and especially anti-Emperor Sigismund feelings exploded across the Kingdom of Bohemia following Jan Hus' execution. In fact, when King Wenceslas of Bohemia passes away in a few years time, in the year 1419, Emperor Sigismund will struggle to assert his authority over the Kingdom of Bohemia due to the outrage still boiling over the Jan Hus incident.

Actually, things will totally boil over the following year, in 1420, when Pope Martin V will call a Crusade against the supporters of Jan Hus, an event which will spark the Hussite Wars, which, spoiler alert, the Hussites won, defeating the Crusaders and forcing the Latin Christian Church to allow the Kingdom of Bohemia to practice its own, Hussitish, form of Christianity.

Now that leads us to the inevitable question: will I be covering the Hussite Wars? Well, maybe. Realistically, I will most probably be covering them in the Patreon subscription feed, and not in the free feed. Why, I hear you ask. Well, it's because I have encountered a problem. The problem is this. iTunes (or Apple podcasts) limits its directory to show only the most recent 300 episodes of a podcast. That means, at this point in time, the first 13 episodes in the History of the Crusades podcast don't actually appear on the iTunes directory. They appear if you have subscribed, but for new listeners, who clearly need to start by listening to Episode One and taking it from there, this is a problem. And of course, I'm aware that each episode I subsequently release means that yet another earlier episode falls off the directory.

Now, I do intend to continue the History of the Crusades Podcast, with a series on the rise of Andalusia in Spain and the Reconquista. I'm terrible at guessing how long series will be, but I'm guessing that this one will be rather lengthy, so I've come to the conclusion that the rise of Andalusia and the Reconquista will need to have its own feed, and not be attached to the current History of the Crusades Podcast, as it may well end up being more than 200 episodes long, which would wipe out just about all of the early episodes on the Apple podcast directory if I kept it on the current feed. So I will be starting from scratch with a new free podcast series on the Reconquista, after I finish the Baltic Crusades.

Where does that leave the later Crusades and other random Crusades such as the Hussites War? Well, I'm not sure. I could maybe tack them on to the end of the Reconquista podcast if it ends up being less than 300 episodes long, but that seems a little messy. So to summarize, I'm not sure that I will be able to do the Hussite Crusade in the free feed; I will be starting a fresh new podcast after I finished the Baltic Crusades on the rise of Andalusia and the Reconquista; and for all those people who are cranky that the early episodes are vanishing from the Apple Podcast directory, I wish I could do something about that, but I can't. You will either need to subscribe to get access to them or stream them from a different platform.

Right, okay, where were we? Ah, yes. The Council of Constance.

The remaining item of interest we need to discuss arising from the Council of Constance is the submission made by the Teutonic Order. Now this extended series of debates and diplomatic wrangling predominantly took place between the Polish delegates and the Procurator General of the Teutonic Order, a man called Peter of Wormditt. Due to the extended length of the conference, the power-brokers who attended could only do so for

limited periods of time, before they had to race back to their homelands to deal with business there. As such, much of the negotiation and debate around the important topics raised before the Council will not be personally attended to by the Grand Master, the King of Poland, or the Grand Duke of Lithuania. Instead, the skill of their delegates will be tested.

The Teutonic Order pushed for their matters to be heard before the Council shortly after the execution of Jan Hus. Emperor Sigismund was rumored to be leaving Constance temporarily to attend to some business in Spain, and the Teutonic Order was eager for the Emperor to adjudicate over the Order's issues prior to his departure. So the Council created a special subcommittee to convene to hear the Order's submissions. Emperor Sigismund attended as well, but he totally threw a spanner into the works before the Order had even completed its submission.

How did Sigismund manage to throw a spanner into the works and bring the Teutonic Order's business before the Council to a grinding halt? Well, he asked the Teutonic Order's representative Peter Wormditt, and the Polish delegates, whether they would both pledge to submit unconditionally to any final ruling made by the Church, the Emperor and the Council. This was the same question which had caused Jan Hus to become unstuck and subsequently killed, so it required careful consideration. Peter Wormditt, the Procurator General of the Teutonic Order, made the pledge, but the Polish delegates were seriously reluctant to commit themselves.

The issue was that King Jogaila hadn't authorized them to make any such binding promises. If they followed the lead of the Teutonic Order and made the commitment, they would effectively be placing the Kingdom of Poland under not only the authority of the Church, but under the authority of the Holy Roman Empire, something which they were pretty sure King Jogaila wouldn't want them to do. But they also didn't want to do a Jan Hus, and throw the Kingdom of Poland under a bus by stating that they wouldn't submit to a final ruling.

With the Polish delegates increasingly coming to the realization that they couldn't make a determination one way or the other without first consulting King Jogaila, and with Emperor Sigismund impatient to hit the road for his lengthy journey to Spain, all of the parties ended up agreeing that a truce should be put in place to prevent any aggression between Prussia, Poland and Lithuania, and that the matter should then be adjourned until Emperor Sigismund returned from Spain.

If you think that this means that the Teutonic Order and the Polish and Lithuanian delegates can go and take a short break while they await Emperor Sigismund's return, you would be totally wrong. The stakes were clearly high for everyone, so no-one sat back and took time off to relax. In fact, everyone seemed to use all of their diplomatic and human relations skills in an attempt to gain some leverage while Emperor Sigismund was out of town.

Cleverly, the Teutonic Order made the first move, by declaring that Johannes Wallenrode, the Archbishop of Riga, would accompany Emperor Sigismund on his journey. While the Archbishop no doubt informed everyone that the Emperor needed the strong hand of the Archbishop beside him on his journey, for both protection and spiritual advice, it's clear that the Order's position would be greatly enhanced if the Archbishop could keep the

Order's concerns at the forefront of the Emperor's mind during the journey, and perhaps even do a little subtle lobbying on the Order's behalf.

This meant that the sole representative for the Teutonic Order left behind in Constance was Peter Wormditt, and he immediately petitioned the Council to hear two minor issues of concern to the Order: one regarding the misdeeds of some nuns at a cloister in Danzig, who were not following the recommendations made by the Brothers of the Teutonic Order about the way in which their convent ought to be administered; and one being a jurisdictional dispute arising out of a Council conflict in the town of Braunsberg. Now, the strategy here by the Procurator General in bringing these minor matters before the Council was probably similar to that of the Archbishop of Riga when he decided to accompany the Emperor. If the Council is forced to sit and listen to a bunch of dry, trivial, and lengthy arguments, at least the Teutonic Order is getting itself before the Council and its name isn't falling off the agenda.

However, this strategy was blown out of the water by the Polish and Lithuanian delegates, who took full advantage of the absence of the Archbishop of Riga to make a couple of earth-shattering announcements, announcements which swung the spotlight firmly over to Polish and Lithuanian affairs, and had the Council members instantly forgetting about the trivial issues raised by the Teutonic Order. What were these pieces of "now we must interrupt your broadcast for these pieces of breaking news" items? Well, The Lithuanian delegates announced to the Council that they had managed to convert the bloodthirsty Tartar pagans to Christianity, and the Polish delegates announced that King Jogaila wished the Council to be made aware of the fact that he had come up with a workable plan to unite the Orthodox and Latin Christian Churches.

Oh dear, poor Peter Wormditt. Join me next week as the delegates from the Teutonic Order, Poland, and Lithuania clash repeatedly, as they attempt to secure favorable outcomes, in our final episode on the Council of Constance. Until next week, bye for now.

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