

History of the Crusades. Episode 314. The Baltic Crusades. The Lithuanian Conflict Part XIX. The Council of Constance, Part 3.

Hello again. Last week we continued our look at a very important Church Council currently taking place on our timeline, the Council of Constance. We had already seen the Council resolve the Papal schism by binning the three Popes who were sitting at the time the Council began its deliberations, and replacing them with a single new Pope, Pope Martin V. Then we saw the Council order the execution of the dissident Bohemian Church reformer Jan Hus, an event which will have major ramifications for the Church further down the track.

Finally, last week we turned to the business which concerns us at the Council, the submissions made by the Teutonic Order. We saw the Order commence its presentation to the Council only to be interrupted when Emperor Sigismund declared that he needed to leave and head to Spain to deal with some Imperial business. Archbishop Johannes Wallenrode of Riga offered to accompany the Emperor on his journey, and the Order decided to keep Teutonic and Baltic matters at the forefront of the Council's minds by requesting a ruling on two trivial matters which it wanted resolved. However, the Order's strategy was blown out of the water when the delegates from the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania launched a couple of bomb-shell declarations into the Council's proceedings, with Lithuania declaring that it had managed to convert the feared and savage Tartars to Christianity, and Poland putting its hand up and stating that it had a plan to unite the Orthodox and Latin Christian Churches.

Suddenly, everyone on the Council, and all the powerful men who were in Constance for the meeting, were focused squarely on matters Baltic, but to the horror of the Teutonic Order, the limelight was being occupied not by Prussia but by Poland and Lithuania.

Now this was just the start of a lengthy, complex set of arguments, submissions and attempts at diplomatic one-up-man-ship by the Order and the delegates from Poland and Lithuania. The arguments were complex, legalistic, and very important, and I could easily spend the next two or three episodes outlining them. Many of you may be relieved to hear that I won't be spending two or three episodes on the arguments. I will instead attempt to summarize them by the end of this episode. For those of you who are now stomping around in a rage, feeling deprived of the experience of a thorough deep-dive into the submissions made at the Council, you can discover them for yourselves. In his book "The Northern Crusades", Eric Christiansen discusses the arguments in detail in a chapter entitled "The Withering of the Crusade", and William Urban also outlines the submissions in much more detail than I will be doing here, in his book "The Last Years of the Teutonic Knights".

In essence, the submissions made by both the Teutonic Order and the Polish and Lithuanian delegates can be summarized as follows.

The Teutonic Order emphasized the achievements it had made over the years on behalf of the Latin Christian Church, and you would have to admit that those achievements were seriously impressive. It had taken the pagan Baltic region and systematically conquered and converted it, until now the new seat of the Teutonic Order, Prussia, was a mighty Christian powerhouse which attracted noblemen and knights from across Europe to its shores. Livonia and Estonia had also been established as Christian countries, and the

Kingdom of Poland had been saved from the savage pagan Lithuanians, who had likewise been converted and become part of Christendom.

However, the ungrateful Kingdom of Poland was now set upon destroying the very organization which had saved it, and had gone so far as to join with the Lithuanians, and some dodgy pagan and Russian allies, to threaten the very existence of both Prussia and the Teutonic Order, so the Order was calling upon the might of the Christian Church to support the Order in its time of need, and defend it against Polish aggression.

In contrast, the submissions made by Poland and Lithuania came from two angles. The first line of argument was the most obvious, and it basically boiled down to telling the Council that the Baltic Crusades were over and the Baltic region was now Christianized. So really, there was no need for the further existence of the Teutonic Order, a military organization which, we should remember, had been established in Prussia to forcibly convert the Baltic pagans. The Polish and Lithuanian delegates were effectively arguing here that the Teutonic Order had had its day, completed its mission, and could now be safely relegated to the dustbin of history.

Their second argument, though, was less obvious, and from a legal standpoint at least, much more interesting. One of the delegates from the Kingdom of Poland was a canon lawyer from the University of Krakow called Pavel Wlodkowic, and Pavel Wlodkowic launched an impressive attack on the legality of the Baltic Crusades and on the validity of the continued existence of the Teutonic Order.

The first part of the Polish lawyer's submissions were related to the first argument put by the Polish and Lithuanian delegates, which I've already outlined. However, Pavel Wlodkowic submitted his arguments in a more legalistic way. He argued that the only sort of war authorized to be waged by the Church was a so called "just war", as outlined by St Augustine and St Bernard. However, the lawyer submitted that the war currently being waged by the Teutonic Order didn't meet the conditions of a "just war", predominantly because it was not being waged to protect Christians or to advance the Latin Christian religion. Instead, its focus was a land grab by Prussia. All of the people in the regions now being targeted by the Teutonic Order, which of course was mainly the Kingdom of Poland, were Christianized, and the war could no longer be characterized as focusing on the conversion of pagans. Therefore, the aggression being carried out by the Teutonic Order was not a "just war". The only war a Christian warrior could participate in was a "just war". Therefore, the Teutonic Order should not be waging war against Poland or its neighbors, and should not be assisted in doing so by the Church, the Holy Roman Empire, or any other Christian entity.

The final part of Pavel Wlodkowic's argument was even more interesting. He declared that the original grounds upon which the Order was established were in fact legally invalid. Therefore the Order itself should never have been allowed to exist. His argument here was that the Latin Christian Church could only exercise jurisdiction over Latin Christians. If a person was a pagan, or anything other than a Latin Christian, then they weren't bound to submit themselves to the authority of a religion they didn't believe in. If the Pope had no authority to interfere with the lives of pagans, then the Pope clearly could not confer any authority on the Teutonic Order to interfere in the lives of pagans, such as waging war over them or converting them to Christianity. The Polish lawyer wisely outlined an exception to this rule, by stating that the Holy Land was a special case. Since Christ himself had lived in the Holy Land, then the Church did have the jurisdiction to protect the Holy Land against

infidels or other threats. But as for the pagans of the Baltic region, well, they were none of the Church's business, and the Teutonic Order should never have been given the misguided impression that the Church had the authority to order them to go and forcibly convert any non-Christians living there.

Now clearly, if this argument was going to succeed, it would act as a major limit on the powers of the Church, and would also mean that the Teutonic Order had been operating outside its powers, and outside of the jurisdiction of the Church, for the whole time it had been operating in the Baltic region. This, of course, would have massive ramifications when considering the legality of the conquests the Order had made in the Baltic region, so the chances of the Council accepting this argument were pretty slim. The Polish lawyer's submissions about the "just war" were on more solid ground, but he did himself no favors when he argued that the appropriate way forward, if the Council accepted his submissions, would be to declare the members of the Teutonic Order to be heretics, on the basis that they had been conducting a series of illegal wars in the Baltic region. Then, he argued, the next logical step would be to confiscate all of the land the Teutonic Order had conquered during its illegal wars, and restore those lands to the people it had been taken from, with Prussia rightfully being handed over to Poland.

Now these arguments, while they are a little complex, seem like they could have been brought before the Council, if not over the course of one day or one afternoon, then maybe over a few days, or perhaps a week. Not so. The arguments which I have relayed above took years to submit. The Teutonic Order first opened its submissions in mid-1415. The arguments were still coming thick and strong, with both Poland and the Order appearing repeatedly before the Council, in the year 1418, and it wasn't until the year 1420 that the Council of Constance handed down its decision on the question of the Teutonic Order.

Why the delay, you might ask? Well, in addition to the fact that important personages such as Emperor Sigismund kept having to leave Constance to attend to other business, and the fact that the delegates continually needed to consult with their leaders back in Prussia, Poland, or Lithuania for instructions on issues as they arose, it was actually in everyone's interests for the final determination to be delayed. The main players, the Teutonic Order, King Jogaila, and Grand Duke Vytautas, were all concerned that the Council may rule against them, so they used any chance they could to seek time to gather extra evidence or to extend their arguments to improve their position. At one stage, Poland and Lithuania arranged for a group of converted Samogitians to address the Council in support of their position that the pagan issue in the Baltics had been resolved, and that the Crusades had ended.

And for the members of the Council, they were being asked to rule on a matter of great import here. Not only was the validity and the future of the Baltic Crusades at stake, but their decision could affect all Crusades well into the future, so they wanted to take as long as they needed to make the correct decision.

Also, there were diversions. Each country represented at the Council took turns to host a feast on special occasions, and of course each country tried to outdo the others with the lavishness and generosity of their gathering.

A further delay was caused by a parallel issue which arose before the Council, the trial of a Dominican theologian called John of Falkenberg, who had been teaching at Krakow University. Falkenberg had published a number of papers calling for the Pope to reign

supreme over the secular kings of Europe, and had also written a tract called "Satire", in which he called King Jogaila an enemy of the Church and an agent of Satan. Not surprisingly, Falkenberg was exiled from Poland for his views and ended up in Prussia, where his anti-Polish and anti-pagan stances were temporarily embraced by the Teutonic Order. The Council was, however, asked to rule whether Falkenberg's views were heretical, and as the arguments submitted for and against Falkenberg mirrored the arguments being presented about the Baltic Crusades and the Teutonic Order, Falkenberg's matter was delayed, and delayed, and delayed, until finally in April of the year 1418, after John of Falkenberg had waited for years inside a prison cell for the Council to make a finding, the Council did make a finding.

It determined that, while the statements made by John of Falkenberg were dangerous and libelous, the statements did not reflect badly on the Teutonic Order, which had ended up ordering Falkenberg to leave Prussia. Neither did it reflect badly on the Dominicans, who had also punished Falkenberg, therefore, any wrongdoing was Falkenberg's alone, and Falkenberg had already spent ages in prison. So bang! Case dismissed. The Polish delegates were furious about this decision.

The Polish delegates were also furious when the Council's decision on the Teutonic Order / Baltic Crusades was handed down in January in the year 1420. In a mirror reflection of its decision regarding John of Falkenberg, the Council dismissed the arguments submitted by the Kingdom of Poland and ruled in favor of the Teutonic Order, effectively preserving the status quo. So the Teutonic Order could live to fight another day; its Crusades weren't invalid; and the territory it had conquered during the Crusades could remain in its possession.

As a footnote here, you might like to note that the Council took so long to make its decision that by the time the decision was finally handed down, Archbishop Johannes Wallenrode had died, as had King Wenceslas of Bohemia, and so had one of the lawyers, the Order's man Peter Wormditt.

Join me next week as we catch up on matters which have been taking place in the Baltic region during the many years in which the Council of Constance has been in session. Until next week, bye for now.

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