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The Unionist Synod of Ferrara-Florence (1438-1439): Byzantine Reactions

Abstract

The idea of a unifying synod between the Easterners and the Westerners was born in the light of the numerous contacts between the two Churches in the medieval era, contacts leading to the attempt to establish a dialogue through which to record the end of the schism. Hopefully, the doctrinal issues that separated the two Churches could be resolved peacefully. The end was supposed to lead to a unanimously accepted union in a synod, which seemed unattainable in the political context of the time. However, the manner of development and the tension of the discussions highlighted that the sense of responsibility and the synodal consciousness had diminished, considering the tragedy of the separation of the Christians.

The Florentine Synod was the first more organised action, after the Great Schism of 1054, to discuss the



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problems of the separation of the two Churches in a synodal framework. This can be considered the end of a long period of attempts at the union between East and West, attempts that took place between the 11th and 15th centuries, which began immediately after the Great Schism. Both Churches agreed to consider a unifying initiative through an Ecumenical Synod as opportune and possible instead of an agreement through another negotiation.

Undoubtedly, Ferrara-Florence left behind misunderstandings and resentments. It is also true that it constituted the opportunity for the awareness of one's identity. Starting from the stated premises, we can say that few moments in the history of the Church had a more unfortunate outcome than the result of the attempt at union in Ferrara-Florence, which instead of uniting divided, and made the fault between the two worlds, the East and the West, to deepen.

Keywords

Unionist Synod, Ferrara-Florence, Byzantine Empire, Schism, Ecumenical Dialogue

Introduction

The Synod of Ferrara-Florence (1438-1439) occurred when the Turks were already well established in the Byzantine territories, between the Churches of the East and the West, after the Great Schism of 1054. Although the delegates at the synod believed that they had achieved the union of the Churches, they could not apply his decisions in the East. What constituted a decisive obstacle to the success of this synod was its hostile reception among the population of Constantinople. It is an interesting fact

of Byzantine history that has been talked about a lot but never enough¹.

The premises of this important synod lie at the very moment of the separation of the Church into two distinct parts, one western and one eastern, a fact that formally took place in 1054. The separation did not occur then, even after the Fourth Crusade (1202-

¹ Joseph Gill's *The Council of Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959) is the complete account of the proceedings of the Florentine council. The last chapter refers to the reception or, rather, the rejection of the union by the Orthodox population of the capital of the Empire. The author deals with this subject also in other works, such as *Personalities of the Council of Florence and other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964) and *Byzantium and the Papacy* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1979). Unfortunately, as far as the present subject is concerned, neither a complete analysis of the sources nor an adequate assessment of their quality was carried out.

A series of newer historians who describe the fall of Constantinople mention the lack of religious unity in Byzantium after the Unionist Synod of Florence without providing much detail: Deno J. Geanakoplos, *Byzantine East and Latin West: Two Worlds of Christendom in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (New York, Barnes and Noble, 1966); John M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople-1453* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), translation, notes, afterword and scientific care of the Romanian edition by Alexandru Elian (Bucharest: Scientific Publishing House, 1971); second edition (Bucharest: Encyclopedic Publishing House, 1991); translation from English, notes, preface and scientific care by Alexandru Elian (Bucharest: Nemira Publishing House, f. a.); John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology. Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (Crestwood: New York, Fordham University Press, 1974), translated from English by Alexandru I. Stan (Bucharest: Publishing House of the Biblical and Missionary Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 1996), 2-nd edition, revised, translation from English and foreword by Alexandru I. Stan (Bucharest: Nemira Publishing House, f. a.); Donald M. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium 1261-1453. The End of the Byzantine Empire* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1979); Aristeides Papadakis, *The Christian East and the Rise of the Papacy: The Church 1071-1453* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994).

1204) or at another precise historical moment. The schism was a long process, started early and developed gradually, through successive accumulations, always accentuated, especially in the 13-th and 14-th centuries. Nevertheless, there have been constant attempts to bring the two parts of Christendom together, both from the West and the East. The division of Christians appeared theologically unnatural and was increasingly harmful from the point of view of historical development².

A fact that demonstrated once more the schism's harmfulness was the Ottoman Turks' attacks on Europe. In 1354, they set foot in Europe for the first time, conquering the fortress of Gallipoli in the Dardanelles. Then, in a few decades, until 1396, almost the entire Balkans area came under Ottoman rule. The Serbs tried a fierce but unsuccessful resistance at Kossovopolje (Mierlei Plain, 1389), and Western and Eastern Christians alike supported, also without success, a crusade at Nicopole (1396). Only the Romanian countries, located north of the Danube, and the Hungarians and the Poles managed to resist. The Ottoman rule had the Danube as its northern border and risked advancing northward, into the Carpathian area and toward the centre of Europe. Only a few strips of land remained from the Byzantine Empire, including the capital Constantinople.

1 Aspirations towards a new Christian unity

The Byzantine Empire was in the most challenging situation. Emperor Manuel II Palaeologus (1391-1425) ascended the throne

² Vasile Alexandru Barbolovici, *Conciliul de la Ferrara-Florența (1438-1439). Istoria și ecleziologia unirilor*, foreword by Liviu Petru Zăpârțan and Virgil Bercea, introduction by Cesare Alzati, translated from Italian by Monica Omilescu (Romanian Academy: The Centre of Transylvanian Studies, 2019), p. 62.

at the moment of an Ottoman siege of Constantinople and had to make a trip to Western Europe, Venice, Paris and London, trying to mobilise the Western monarchies against the Ottoman danger. However, unfortunately, he obtained only promises. If the Turks did not occupy Byzantium, then it was due to the defeat they suffered at the hands of the Mongols led by Timur Lenk in the battle of Ankara (1402), which cut them off for a while enthusiasm³.

The Turkish threat and the belief in the need to achieve Christian unity determined the preservation of a weak unionist current within the Byzantine Empire, which determined the initiation of several proposals to discuss the problem of union within an ecumenical synod, which had never happened before⁴.

The problematic situation in which the Byzantine Empire found itself was considered in the West an excellent opportunity to eliminate the division between the two Churches and achieve the union. Thus, the cardinals invited Emperor Manuel II Palaeologus to send delegates to the Synod of Pisa (1409), which has yet to happen. Later, the Romano-German Emperor Sigismund of Luxemburg (1410-1437) informed his Byzantine counterpart of the intentions of the Council of Konstanz (1414-1418) to seek remedies against pagan infidels, mainly Turks, in order to defend Constantinople and unite the churches. In February 1418, a delegation of 19 Eastern metropolitans also arrived in Konstanz, among which was Grigorie Țamblac, Romanian by origin and who would be elected metropolitan of Kyiv in 1415. From the numerous delegation sent by the Ecumenical Patriarchate to this, lay delegates of the two independent Romanian states, Wallachia and Moldova, took part in the synod, considering that the

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 62-63.

⁴ At the Synod of Lyon (1274), the *fait accompli* tactic was applied and only approved within a synod, cf. Joseph Gill, *The Council of Florence*, pp. 20-21.

issue of the union of the Church of the East and the Church of the West was also of interest to them, as Orthodox countries. The synod had enough problems to solve but did not have a leader to start union talks with the Greeks. That is why it is more than likely that Grigorie Țamblac left Konstanz before the synod's closing, returning to the East without any positive result.

However, new Byzantine imperial delegates soon arrived in the West, bringing a 36-article document detailing the Byzantine position on the union of the Churches. The new Pope, Martin V (1417-1431), confident, even accepted the request of the Greeks to send a delegation to the synod of union that Emperor Manuel I intended to open in the imperial capital. In the end, the church assembly was no longer held on time due to the lack of the necessary sums of money for the delegation of the Western Church. When Pope Martin V later managed to find the necessary funds, Constantinople was again under Ottoman siege (1422), which delayed the union synod. However, after the siege was lifted, the Pope sent his representative to Constantinople to resume the union plan.

Nevertheless, he could see that the Byzantine position was far from Rome's intentions. Freed for a time from Ottoman pressure, the Basil no longer recognised what its delegates sent to the Konstanz synod had affirmed. So he proposed a new synod in which all controversial issues would be analysed in detail⁵.

Later, the idea of the union of the Churches was resumed at the Basel Synod (1431-1437). However, the ecclesiastical situation in the West was not such that this could be accomplished. First, the relations between some of the bishops gathered in Basel and Pope Eugene IV were strained and even divergent. The sovereign pontiff faced a strong reforming current, whose followers were

⁵ Vasile Alexandru Barbolovici, *Conciliul de la Ferrara-Florența (1438-1439). Istoria și ecleziologia unirilor*, p. 64.

the majority in the synod. In this context, responding to invitations from both camps, a Byzantine delegation of the highest level prepared to leave for Italy. After serious preparations, a long journey, and tricky negotiations, most Byzantine delegations were willing to accept the union, first in Ferrara and then in Florence.

However, it was possible to find, both during the development of the works and at their end, a rejection by the population of the decisions decreed in Florence on July 6, 1439. Four elements were identified that led to this vehement protest on the part of the capital's inhabitants: his "heterodoxy", the success of the anti-unionist polemic led by the monastic dinner, the ineffectiveness of the leadership of the unionist party and, finally, a solid anti-Latin sentiment prevalent at that time among the citizens of the capital.

While the theological discussions at the Florence synod focused at one point on the four doctrinal points distinguishing between the two Churches (papal primacy, Filioque addition, purgatory and the use of leavened bread at Holy Communion), political interests reached finally in the foreground. Between the years 1054-1437, there were several attempts at reunification which, however, did not reach their goal due to political and religious obstacles and, not most minor, due to the adversity created between the Churches following the Fourth Crusade⁶. However,

⁶ Like the others on the Pope's initiative, this military expedition started to seal the hostility between the Greeks and the Latins. See Michael Angold, *Greeks and Latins after 1204: The Perspective of Exile*, in *Latins and Greeks in the Eastern Mediterranean after 1204*, edited by Benjamin Arbel, Bernard Hamilton and David Jacoby (London: Frank Cass, 1989), (63-86); Aristeides Papadakis, *The Christian East and the Rise of the Papacy: The Church 1071-1453*, (199-238); Charles M. Brand, *The Fourth Crusade. Some Recent Interpretations*, in *Medievalia et Humanistica*, XII

starting in 1437, the survival of the Byzantine Empire became the main problem. Emperor John VIII Paleologus (1425-1448) initiated this synod with the support of Pope Eugene IV (1431-1447) to unite the two Churches and obtain military aid in the face of the impetuous advance of the Turks towards the walls of Constantinople. It was not the first time that a Byzantine emperor sought the help of the Pope, and it was also not the first time that discussions of religious reunification coincided with the need for military aid for the Byzantines. During the last centuries of the Byzantine Empire, it became common in the policy of the Paleologian emperors to promise the subordination of the Eastern Church to the Western one in exchange for military aid for the political survival of the state. In this sense, the episode that took place at the Synod of Lyon in 1274 is known⁷.

(1984), (33-45); D. E. Queller, *Fourth Crusade*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978).

⁷ In 1274, Emperor Michael VIII Paleologus (1259-1282) sent a delegation of laypeople to the Synod of Lyon, where, as in Florence, an agreement was reached regarding the union of the two Churches. However, after its pronouncement in the East, the clergy of Constantinople rejected the authority of this synod and its decisions which were not applied at all in the Empire. See Donald M. Nicol, *The Byzantine Reaction to the Second Council of Lyon, 1274*, in *Studies in Church History*, edited by Geoffrey J. Cuming and D. Baker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), (113-146); Aristides Papadakis, *The Christian East and the Rise of the Papacy: The Church 1071-1453*, (221-228) and (379-382); B. Rodberg, *Die Union zwischen der griechischen und der lateinischen Kirche auf dem II Konzil von Lyon (1274)*, (Bonn, 1964).

In the same vein, in 1357, the emperor John V Paleologus promised the subordination of the Eastern Church to the Latins in return for military aid. Moreover, he even travelled to Rome in 1369 and read a confession of faith in St. Peter's Basilica. Nevertheless, as before, the Byzantine promise did not materialise due to the adverse reaction of the population of the Byzantine capital.

Unfortunately, the Eastern delegation attending the Synod of Ferrara-Florence got two things completely wrong: they overestimated the Pope's ability to raise troops to defend the Byzantine Empire, and they underestimated the deep-rooted religious and ethnic sensitivities of the population of Constantinople, especially after Fourth Crusade (1202-1204)⁸.

Despite his opposition to the Paleologi dynasty, the Byzantine chronicler Ducas (ca. 1400-1462) was an active unionist who had a strong attitude towards anti-unionists, considering them to be part of what he called the "Orthodox National Party"⁹. He mentions several examples of the population's opposition to the union with the Latins, starting with the return of the delegates from the synod of Florence in February 1440: "As soon as the bishops got off the triremes, the inhabitants of Constantinople gave them the usual reception and asked them 'How are we doing? How did the synod come out? Have you gained the victory?' But they answered: 'We have sold our faith, exchanged the good law for the bad, betrayed the pure sacrifice and made ourselves foolish.' This and other more ugly and dirty words!..."¹⁰

⁸ Pope Eugenius IV and his successor, Nicholas V, could not raise a significant army to defend Byzantium from the Ottoman threat despite the Florence agreement. The detachment of 200 archers that Pope Nicholas V managed to send to Constantinople in 1453 represented nothing in front of the mighty Turkish army that besieged the capital. See Georgios Sphrantzes, *Memorii. 1401-1477 (Chronicon Minus)*, critical edition by Vasile Grecu, in coll. "Scriptores Byzantini V", (Bucharest, The Publishing House of the Academy of the Socialist Republic of Romania, 1966), ch. XXXVI, 6, (103).

⁹ Ducas saw the union with the Western Church as a political step for the preservation of the Byzantine state and retaliated with arrogance against the attitude of the population of Constantinople, which categorically rejected it. As a result, it is said that his grandfather went into exile and worked for the Turks, after which he stayed, probably in Genoa.

¹⁰ Ducas [Mihail], *Istoria turco-bizantină 1341-1462*, critical edition by Vasile Grecu, in coll. "Scriptores Byzantini I", (Bucharest, The Publishing

The Turkish threat became stronger in 1451, and the new emperor Constantine XI Dragases (1449-1453) appealed to Pope Nicholas V (1447-1459) to receive military help in the face of the Turkish threat and ecclesiastical councillors to help him impose the union of the Churches¹¹. Instead, Constantine XI promised that he and his subjects would accept the union decree issued in Florence (1439), and the Pope's name would be mentioned at the Holy Liturgy in the Great Church. The unionist patriarch Gregory III Mammas (1443-1450) will be able to return to his seat¹². In addition to the detachment of archers¹³, Pope Nicholas V sent to

House of the Academy of the Popular Republic of Romania, 1958), ch. XXXI, 9, (269-270). "Azimites" were called the Latins, who, contrary to Orthodox practice, used unleavened bread (azima) at Holy Communion. This term acquired pejorative connotations throughout the late Byzantine period, referring to Latin or Latinized.

- ¹¹ Emperor John VIII Paleologus died in October 1448, leaving no descendants. He had three brothers, of whom Teodor, the oldest, died in June of the same year. Another brother, Demetrius, tried to seize the throne in the summer of 1442 with the help of the Turks and probably the anti-unionists. Although Demetrius's coup failed and he probably retained his former position, John chose his third brother, Constantine, as his successor. See Donald M. Nicol, *The Byzantine Reaction to the Second Council of Lyon, 1274*, (360-369). Regarding the correspondence between Constantine XI and Pope Nicholas V, see Rodolphe Guiland, *Les appels de Constantin XI Paleologue à Rome et à Venise pour sauver Constantinople (1452-1453)*, *Byzantinoslavica* XIV, (1953), (226-244).
- ¹² Ducas [Mihail], *Istoria turco-bizantină 1341-1462*, XXXVI, 1, (314). As for the patriarchal seat, Joseph II died at the synod of Florence in 1439. Mitrofan of Cyzic, a unionist, succeeded him in May 1440 under the name of Mitrofan II but died in 1443. The patriarchal seat remained vacant for several months until Gregory III Mammas was elected in the same year. However, he was also a unionist and was expelled from the seat in 1450, choosing the path of exile in Rome without returning.
- ¹³ According to Georgios Sphrantzes, who, by order of the emperor, made a count of those able to bear arms, 4,700 locals and approximately 200 foreigners were found, probably that detachment of archers sent to help Constantinople. According to the chronicler Ducas, *Istoria turco-bizantină 1341-1462*, XXXIX, 14, (360), all armed men did not exceed

Constantinople Cardinal Isidor, the former Metropolitan of Kyiv and Russia, to appease Byzantine anti-unionist feelings. The chronicler Ducas recorded the difficulties encountered by Isidore while on a mission in Constantinople:

“And after the emperor received him well and honored him as he deserved, the question of union came up. And the cardinal found the emperor approving these and many of the church faces, but the greater part of the dinner priests and monks, abbots and archimandrites, nuns - what do the greater part say? Because the nuns urged me to say it and write it: None of them all! And the emperor himself in disguise said yes. But those who showed the opinion of the union came to the Great Church, and priests and deacons from the clergy and the emperor with the council of the country, and they wanted to serve God together with public understanding and to make the promises with an unfeigned conscience”¹⁴.

In this text, Ducas is convinced that most Orthodox clerics were against the union. Out of political interest, even the emperor only feigned his adherence to the unification decree.

In the next chapter, Ducas makes known his contempt for the opponents of the union, clerics and laypeople. Referring to them as schismatics, he presents the work of Gennadius Scholarios exhorting the inhabitants of Constantinople to repent of their sins, especially the sin of “trusting in the power of the devils” more than in that of God¹⁵. Next, Ducas presents the image of some monks and nuns, priests and laymen running through the city and proclaiming the anathema on the decree of union:

8,000. After Leonard of Chios, there were 6,000 Greek and 3,000 Latin fighters (PG 159, col. 933 D și 934 A).

¹⁴ Ducas, *Istoria turco-bizantină 1341-1462*, XXXVI, 2, (314).

¹⁵ Ducas refers to Ghenadie's two manifestos published in 1452.

“Then the nuns who thought they were pure and servants of God in the right faith, following their opinion and their teacher Ghenadie, together with the abbots and clergymen and the other priests and laymen, pronounced the imprecation with a loud voice and condemned the decision of the synod and all those who embraced it, are embracing it or are about to embrace it. And the people from below and the crowd from the street came out of the courtyard of the monastery and through the taverns holding goblets of pure wine, they cursed the united and drank to the intervention of the icon of the Mother of God and prayed to her to be their defender and helper of the city as before against Chosroes and the Khan and the Arabs, so now against Mohammed. ‘For we need neither help nor the union of the Latins! Far from us be the liturgy of the absent-minded!’”¹⁶

Like most Byzantine chroniclers, Ducas did not have an excellent opinion of the popular masses. His contempt for the “fiery mob” of monks and the lower clergy is even greater. They were responsible, in his opinion, for inciting the popular masses against the unionist clergy.

“... and the Christians who came to confess their sins, were asked by those, some, if they shared with those who did not share and if it happened that they ever listened to the Liturgy from a united priest; on top of that there was also a harsh canon and heavy punishment; and after completing the canon according to custom, the one worthy of the Body and Blood of the Lord should not go to Communion with the priests of the union under heavy condemnation...”¹⁷

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, XXXVI, 4, (316).

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, XXXVII, 5, (322).

In favour of the declaration of union that was pronounced, in a solemn manner, in the Saint Sophia cathedral on December 12, 1452, Ducas notes the fact that:

“However, the inhabitants of Constantinople, from that day when the faces of the union in the Great Church were made, avoided it as of a synagogue of the Jews, and there was neither sacrifice, nor burnt offering, nor incense in it. If it happened that one of the priests celebrated liturgy on a big day, the people who had come to pray stayed until the hour of Proskomidia and then they all left: both men and women and monks and nuns. What should I say next? Moreover, they considered the Church as a pagan altar and the sacrifice as being offered to Apollo...”¹⁸

For Ducas, the zealous Orthodox were thus responsible for this unnecessary religious separation that endangered the state’s interests. He provides essential evidence showing widespread opposition to the Florence synod, but his testimony can be questioned. This is because he is not an eyewitness to all the events he recorded, and many dialogues he relates are from his imagination. Moreover, his hostility towards the lower layer of the population and the anti-unionist monastic clergy raises some question marks. That is why we need other testimonies in this regard.

Although, from a political point of view, he was in opposition to Ducas, Georgios Sphrantzes (1401-1477), in his work “Chronicon Minus”, confirms the events related by Ducas concerning the opposition of the population of Constantinople to the unionist Synod of Florence¹⁹. Georgios Sphrantzes opposed the union, not

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, XXXVII, 5, (326-327).

¹⁹ While Ducas was a staunch opponent of the Paleologi dynasty, Georgios Sphrantzes spent his childhood with Constantine XI, the last Byzantine emperor. Georgios’ father was related to the Paleologi family, and his

for theological reasons, but because it would have represented a severe diplomatic and even strategic error. He claims that Mohammed II (1451-1481) was afraid of a possible alliance between the Byzantines and the Latins and the union decree issued in December 1452 in Constantinople urged him to attack the capital²⁰.

Georgios Sphrantzes personally urged the emperor to appoint Cardinal Isidore of Kyiv as patriarch in November 1452 instead of Gregory III Mammas, who had fled to Rome two years before. The emperor opposed this suggestion, saying that "...disorder and war would occur between him and those who would oppose the election of Isidore - what a misfortune it was to have war in the city as well"²¹. Instead, Constantine XI decided only to ask for the mention of the Pope's name at the Holy Liturgy in the Cathedral of Saint Sophia²². The Chronicle of Sphrantzes provides little evidence of widespread organised opposition against the union with the Latins. However, it confirms the existence of a limited but firm resistance to the intentions of the papacy. It dramatises, at the same time, the precarious position of the emperor Constantine IX.

son received a good education at the Imperial Court. Then Georgios Sphrantzes became an imperial diplomat, being entrusted with some of the most important negotiating missions outside the borders of the Empire. Much of his work "Chronicon Minus" is an autobiographical account of his diplomatic efforts.

²⁰ Georgios Sphrantzes, *Memorii. 1401-1477 (Chronicon Minus)*, XXIII, 4, (59): "Therefore, it was not because of this that I uttered the words ,as it should not', for I would have wished that I had not lost one of my eyes, but I uttered them for that reason, because this preoccupation with the synod was one and the same first and great reason for the pagans to attack Constantinople and then the siege and enslavement and our boundless misery."

²¹ *Ibidem*, XXXVI, 6, (101-103).

²² *Ibidem*.

Nicolò Barbaro, a Venetian doctor who witnessed the siege of the capital in 1453, provides some additional details²³. His account is permeated by a robust Venetian patriotism, manifested in the form of an ethnic contempt for the Greeks and Genoese²⁴. The fear of the imminent attack, the memory of the Latin occupation of the city and the fact that the defence of Constantinople was left in the hands of the Italians and not the Greeks all led to the escalation of inter-ethnic tension. A series of earlier testimonies highlight the contempt of the Greeks for the Latins²⁵. In addition, Nicolò Barbaro notes Isidore's mission to "achieve the union" and proclaim it in Saint Sophia on December 12, 1452. Interestingly, he claims that "the entire population of Constantinople" was present in promulgating the "union". This also confirms the testimony of Ducas. However, Ducas adds that, after the proclamation of the "union" in the Great Church, not a single person received the Holy Communion, and even more they refused the anaphora (αντιδορον), considering it defiled²⁶.

²³ After his return to Italy, he composed a diary of the siege. More details on this subject can be found in the work of J. R. Jones, *Nicolò Barbaro: Diary of the Siege of Constantinople 1453* (New York: Exposition Press, 1969).

²⁴ For example, in connection with the defence of one of the portions of the wall of Constantinople, he writes: "At one of the gates, which was badly damaged, three hundred soldiers were sent fully equipped for its defence, all foreigners, not a single Greek among them, because the Greeks were cowards" cf. Idem, *The Siege of Constantinople 1453: Seven Contemporary Accounts* (Amsterdam: A.M. Hakkert, 1972), (68).

²⁵ See Ana Comnena, *Alexiada*, translated by Marina Marinescu-Himu, preface, chronology and notes by Nicolae-Șerban Tanașoca (Bucharest: Minerva Publishing House, 1977).

²⁶ Ducas [Mihail], *Istoria turco-bizantină 1341-1462*, XXXVI, 5 (316-317). Antidoron (in Greek, αντιδορον) represents consecrated bread special to the Holy Communion, which is given at the end of the Holy Liturgy to all those present. If Ducas' statement is correct, then this general refusal highlights the unprecedented courage of a community of believers.

Two other historical testimonies of contemporaries confirm the struggle between unionists and anti-unionists in Constantinople. The first testimony belongs to Mihail Critobulos, known as Critobul of Imbros († 1470) in his work “From the reign of Mohammed II, years 1451-1467”²⁷. He begins his work by noting that “internal sins” caused the demise of the Byzantine Empire, and although other authors have sought to overlook these realities, he is determined to bring the truth to light²⁸. The author notes that the East and the West were separated on the eve of the final assault on Constantinople. When Mohammed II spoke to his troops about the strength of the defenders of the Byzantine capital, he told them not to fear a possible alliance with the Latins: “They [the Greeks and the Latins] fight among themselves in connection with their different religious beliefs and the cooperation between them is broken and disturbed for this reason”²⁹. Moreover, Mohammed II was very well aware of the problems and theological disputes between the East and the West even after the “union” in Florence. The Critobul continues this fact from

²⁷ The work appeared in coll. “Scriptores Byzantini IV”, in an edition edited by Vasile Grecu (Bucharest: The Publishing House of the Academy of the Socialist Republic of Romania, 1971). Critobul of Imbros was a noble family member that ruled the island of Imbros. Rather than risk the conquest and destruction of the island, he willingly surrendered it to Sultan Mohammed II. Instead, he appointed Critobul governor of the island in 1456. He remained in office until 1467. Either the death of Critobul or Mohammed II’s dissatisfaction with the first volume of the work prevented the appearance of the second. Nevertheless, it is clear from the text of the work that the author sought to write a second volume. For more details on his life, see Vasile Grecu, Kritobulos aus Imbros, *Byzantine Studies* XVIII, (1957), (1-17).

²⁸ Critobul of Imbros, *From the reign of Mohammed II, years 1451-1467*, edited by Vasile Grecu, in coll. “Scriptores Byzantini IV” (Bucharest: The Publishing House of the Academy of the Socialist Republic of Romania, 1971), I, 9, (48-50). The irony made him tell us much less detail than the other authors.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, I, 18, (76-78).

Imbros and the eyewitnesses of the following events. All attributed this separation to the theological differences and disputes between the two branches of Christianity.

Laonic Chalcocondil (1423-1490) in his work “Historical expositions. The rise of Turkish power. The fall of the Byzantine Empire and other stories about various countries and peoples”³⁰, confirms the purpose of Cardinal Isidore’s presence in Constantinople between 1452-1453³¹. In addition to this, almost the entire sixth book recounts the events that took place at the Unionist Synod of Ferrara-Florence. Here, Laonic Chalcocondil notes the presence of Archbishop Mark of Ephesus as an ardent partisan of the Orthodox tradition and a convinced anti-unionist. In this context, Laonic Chalcocondil describes the “tyranny” and “revolt” of the Latins and the emperor against the anti-union party³². This also led to the spread of a partisan expression, “the deception of the Latins”, which circulated among Greek authors more frequently after the events of 1453.

³⁰ The work appeared in coll. “Scriptores Byzantini II”, in an edition edited by Vasile Grecu (Bucharest: The Publishing House of the Academy of the Romanian People’s Republic, 1958).

³¹ Laonic Chalcocondil states that Isidor was sent to the Byzantine capital to convene “a synod to effect the reconciliation of the Greeks with the archbishop of Rome.”

³² Laonic Chalcocondil, *Historical expositions. The rise of Turkish power. The fall of the Byzantine Empire and other stories about various countries and peoples*, edited by Vasile Grecu, in coll. “Scriptores Byzantini II” (Bucharest: The Publishing House of the Academy of the Romanian People’s Republic, 1958), book VI, (173-177). The author has used a well-informed source about the Florence synod. He mentions the desire of the emperor John VII Paleologus to sign an agreement with the Latins, describes the journey of the Byzantine delegation to Italy, the list of the members of the two delegations and devotes several pages to the theological discussions that took place. It is possible that Laonic Chalcocondil had access to the “Memoirs” of the great ecclesiarch of the cathedral of Saint Sophia in Constantinople.

2 The aftermath of the unionist synod

Shortly after the Florence synod, Archbishop Mark of Ephesus, the only Eastern bishop who refused to sign the decree of union, began to preach and write against the “heretical” decisions of the synod. Although he died in 1444, his partisans and opponents continued to wage a heated polemic until 1453. For the most part, the literary creations that accompanied that polemic remained little used by researchers of the phenomenon³³. Historians must exercise great caution when reconstructing events that have sparked heated polemics. However, these works provide evidence of an active campaign from both sides, which sought to attract supporters between 1440-1453.

Above all the figures who engaged in this dispute, Mark of Ephesus was regarded as a defender of the faith³⁴. Even the chronicler Ducas, who constantly discredited the anti-unionists, showed great respect for the consistency of the Archbishop of Ephesus³⁵. After a short detention on the island of Lemnos, Mark returned to Constantinople in 1442, the same year in which the brother of the Byzantine emperor John VIII, Demetrius Paleologus, supported by anti-unionists and the Turks, launched an unsuccessful attack on the imperial capital³⁶. Two treatises of Mark of

³³ In this sense, we will only note the attention given to Gheorghe-Ghenadie Scholarios, whose work was published in its entirety at the beginning of the last century, together with his biography. See Mgr. Louis Petit, X. A. Siderides, Martin Jugie, *Oeuvres complètes de Gennade Scholarios*, t. I-VIII, (Paris, 1928-1936).

³⁴ See *The Pillars of Orthodoxy: Sts. Photius the Great, Gregory Palamas and Mark of Ephesus* translated and compiled by Holy Apostles Convent (Buena Vista: Dormition Skete, 1990) and N. Basileiade, *Saint Mark of Ephesus and the Union of the Churches* (Athens, 1983).

³⁵ Ducas [Mihail], *Istoria turco-bizantină 1341-1462*, XXXI, 3, (266).

³⁶ The information about the detention of Archbishop Mark of Ephesus appears in his letter to the monk Theophanus of Eubeeia. See Joseph Gill,

Ephesus, "Dialogue with the Latins concerning the procession of the Spirit in the Creed"³⁷ and "Exposition on the mission of the Church"³⁸ use theological arguments and proof texts to demonstrate his position. Everywhere, Mark of Ephesus forces his auditors to reject the union of Florence. Although these treaties do not describe how the population of Constantinople received the union, they highlight the efforts of the anti-unionists to gain the adhesion of the masses.

Like Mark of Ephesus, Sylvester Syropoulos was also an anti-unionist. He was a deacon at Saint Sophia when he co-opted in the Byzantine delegation that went to the synod in 1438. He composed his "Memoirs" in 1444 to recount the events that took place at the synod and to explain his change of Creed³⁹. He describes memorable scenes after his return to Constantinople in February 1440. Emperor John VIII Paleologus learned that his wife had died, the clergy of Saint Sophia were against the union, the bishops who had not attended the synod rejected his authority, the people had begun to reject the Mysteries perpetrated by

The Council of Florence, (355, note 1). Concerning the coup attempt undertaken by Demetrios Paleologos, Ghenadios Scholarios gives us complete testimony on the help offered by the anti-unionists. In the "Letter to Demetrios Paleologos", written in 1450, Ghenadios reports that the despot Demetrios was the hope of all Christendom. See Mgr. Louis Petit, X. A. Siderides, Martin Jugie, *Oeuvres complètes de Gennade Scholarios*, t. III (Paris, 1930), (119-121); Georgios Sphrantzes, *Memorii. 1401-1477 (Chronicon Minus)*, XXV, 3, (65) and Laonic Chalcocondil, *Historical expositions. The rise of Turkish power. The fall of the Byzantine Empire and other stories about various countries and peoples*, book VII, (218). The latter mentions the coup attempt of Dimetrios Paleologus but says nothing about the anti-unionists' help.

³⁷ PG 160, (1100-1104).

³⁸ PG 160, (1164-1193).

³⁹ Vitalien Laurent, *Les „Memories“ du grand ecclésiastique de l'Eglise de Constantinople Sylvestre Syropoulos sur le concile de Florence (1438-1439)*, VII-e section (Paris, 1971), (322-346).

the anti-unionists, and there was complete confusion about the election of the new patriarch⁴⁰. Sylvester Syropoulos, in particular, expresses his regret about participating in the synod and claims that it has no authority over the Church of the East. Although he enjoyed the fact that the population was hostile to the union, unlike Ducas, Sylvester Syropoulos does not support his exaggerations which stated that all the capital inhabitants were against the Florence synod.

Ghenadie Scholarios was probably the most interesting person in this context⁴¹. Although he had been an ardent supporter of the union in Florence, especially for political reasons, Ghenadie later became the leader of the anti-unionist party after the death of Archbishop Mark of Ephesus in 1444. The transition from loyal support of the union to fierce opposition to it was gradual, and Gennade wrote to Mark of Ephesus at least once, saying that he did not want to be drawn into an open confrontation over such a delicate theological and political issue⁴². In the autumn of 1445 he led the Orthodox in a series of fifteen debates on union against Bartolomeo Lapacci, bishop of Corona⁴³. Soon after, Ghenadie wrote the most important anti-union works⁴⁴. Although they do not create a picture of widespread anti-unionist

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, XI, 23-XII, 18, (513-529).

⁴¹ Ghenadios admired Thomistic thought and tried to introduce scholasticism to the University of Constantinople. He attended the synod of Florence as a layman and, thanks to his erudition, was entrusted with an unprecedented degree of authority in the Byzantine delegation. Although he was initially favourable to the union, he did not sign the union decree of July 6, 1439, from Florence. Then, like many others, he changed his position shortly after returning from the synod. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Ghenadios became the first Ecumenical Patriarch under the Turks.

⁴² *Oeuvres complètes de Gennade Scholarios*, t. IV (Paris, 1935), (445-449).

⁴³ C. J. G. Turner, *The Career of George-Gennadius Scholarios, Byzantion*, XXXIX (1969), (431).

⁴⁴ *Oeuvres complètes de Gennade Scholarios*, t. II (Paris, 1929), (1-268).

reactions after the Florence synod, they attest to this state of affairs. In reality, Ghenadie was the only one who supported the idea that the siege started by Demetrius Palaeologus against the Byzantine capital and his brother was supported by the anti-unionists in the city. He further states that Demetrius' partisans expected him to restore the "orthodox" Empire, freed from any Unionist influence⁴⁵. In addition, he complains that he received so many visitors in his cell at the Podromul monastery after the arrival of Cardinal Isidor in 1452 that he finally locked himself in his cell, refusing to see anyone else⁴⁶.

On the part of the union supporters, we mention two cases. First, we mention Gregory III Mammas (1443-1450), the second Ecuemencal Patriarch elected after the Florentine synod. He waged an extended polemic against anti-unionists before his election⁴⁷. His work "Apologia contra Ephesii confessionem" is an elaborate argument against Mark of Ephesus. Gregory presents short fragments of the teaching of Mark of Ephesus, to which he responds systematically. He also introduces some quotations from the Holy Fathers, but his work lacks the clarity of the exposition of his addressee, and, therefore, it remained unnoticed⁴⁸. Also worth noting is the letter of Pope Nicholas V (1447-1455) to Constantine XI Dragasses (1449-1453) from the fall of 1452, which

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, t. III (Paris, 1930), (119-121).

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, t. I (Paris, 1928), (288). During this time, Ghenadios circulated in the city two manifestos in which he urged the population of Constantinople to reject the union with the Latins, cf. *Ibidem*, t. III (171-174). This caused him to receive more visitors in his cell at the Prodrumul monastery. Finally, on December 25, 1452, he sent a letter to the despot Dimetrios Paleologus, condemning the proclamation of the union in the Saint Sophia Cathedral on December 12, 1452.

⁴⁷ *Apology against Ephesii confessionem*, PG 160, (11-204).

⁴⁸ Joseph Gill, *The Council of Florence* (356-357).

presents the situation in Constantinople⁴⁹. The city desperately needed soldiers and supplies, and the emperor had asked the Pope for help, promising a union with the Church of Rome. The Pope responded warmly and was sympathetic to the emperor's offer to support the union of Florence. The sovereign pontiff promised to send Isidore, newly promoted to a cardinal, to help enact the union. Attached to the Pope's short letter was a sermon praising the doctrinal principles formulated in Florence. Although the two testimonies tell us little about the specifics of the anti-unionist movement, they nevertheless suggest a tense situation in Constantinople at that time.

Probably the most conclusive and surprising confirmation of widespread anti-unionist opposition comes from a letter from Catholic Archbishop Leonard of Chios to Pope Nicholas V, dated August 16, 1453⁵⁰. Leonard accompanied Cardinal Isidore from Kyiv to Constantinople in November 1452, being part of the Latin delegation, which would promulgate the union from Florence to the capital of the Empire. He was one of the few who managed to escape from Constantinople after its conquest by the Turks, and his letter describes in detail the city's devastation. Leonard being a partisan of the union, the reconstruction of the events frequently degenerates into attacks on the anti-unionists in the city. Among other things, he attributes the city's fall to the punishment sent by God on its inhabitants, who did not want to accept the "union" from Florence. "The fact that the 'unification' was not achieved, but only simulated, brought about the inevitable destruction of the city; how do we know that the divine wrath has

⁴⁹ *Ad Constantinum Romaeorum Imperator. Epistola de unione ecclesiarum*, PG 160, (1201-1212).

⁵⁰ Leonardi Chiensis, *Historia Cpolitanae urbis a Mahumete II Capta, per modum epistolae die 15 augusti anno 1453 ad Nicolaeum V, Rom. Pont.*, PG 159, (923-943).

been fulfilled and has come upon us in these days”⁵¹. Then he adds, “See, most blessed Father, how just and how fair this judgment was; the Greeks praised the union in words but denied it in their actions”⁵².

However, Leonard provides enough evidence to show that the anti-unionists argued precisely the opposite. “Even now that they are in captivity and driven out of their city, from their churches, dispossessed of their riches and their families, they accuse the Latins of their fate, saying, ‘Because we made the ungodly union and honored him on the pontiff from Rome, we deserve to suffer the humiliation given by God’”⁵³.

In his letter, he reproaches the population of Constantinople for refusing to receive the Holy Mysteries administered by the Unionists

“Oh, wretched and too miserable Greeks, you stopped the Latins from receiving the Eucharist and from serving with you at the altar; now you have given the same altars to the profane. You who were contemptuous of the unity of the faith, as a punishment for your sin, are yourselves now dispersed and cannot gather together again”⁵⁴.

Opposition to the union with Rome was, according to Leonard, almost unanimous:

“It was clear that, with the exception of the brilliant Argyropoulos, Theophilus Palaeologus, and a small number of monks and laymen, almost all the Greeks were overcome with pride; and that there was no one who could be moved by their

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, (927).

⁵² *Ibidem*, (929).

⁵³ *Ibidem*, (926).

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, (943).

impressive zeal for the faith, or concern for safety, to be the first to express contempt for their dangerous opinions”⁵⁵. It seems that the Catholic archbishop is not exaggerating anything. His account of widespread hostility to union with Rome is trustworthy because it obeys the “criterion of dissimilarity” a principle of historical reconstruction that holds that a source cannot produce evidence of itself. In other words, there is no reason to believe that Leonard makes his own mistakes. On the contrary, he provides the most convincing testimony that there was widespread solid opposition to the union before the fall of Constantinople and even afterwards. Also, another criterion of historical reconstruction, independent attestation, is found in many of the sources I have already mentioned. Starting from the spring of 1453, the opposition to the union with the Latins grew significantly⁵⁶. Pope Nicholas V’s decision to send Archbishop Leonard of Chios and Cardinal Isidor of Kyiv to Constantinople shows that a serious problem had arisen here. There are testimonies in which the laity avoided entering Saint Sophia and refused to receive the Holy Mysteries administered by the unionist clergy. At the time of the final assault on Constantinople, the Christian community in the city was divided. However, it would be an exaggeration to think that the entire city was divided because of this. Furthermore, we cannot say that all its inhabitants took the theological issues as seriously as those fanatical monks who always held faith. However, they were not the only ones who opposed the union with the Latins. As I have already mentioned, at least four factors have been identified that explain this widespread opposition. First of all, the

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, (925).

⁵⁶ Although it is impossible to give an even approximate figure of those who opposed the union in Florence, we must note the many testimonies and documents that attest to this fact.

anti-unionists considered the synod's decisions as heretical. In Florence, the Byzantine delegation was forced to yield on four doctrinal "innovations"; Filioque, purgatory, papal primacy and unleavened bread in Holy Communion. To what extent the population of Constantinople understood these problems is difficult to assess. However, the formula that was found for at least two of them (the introduction of the Filioque addition to the Creed and the mention of the Pope's name at the Holy Liturgy) would have led to changes in the Holy Liturgy - which laymen would have noticed without the help of the "mass agitators". It is also entirely possible that many of the laity accepted the views of their spiritual guides (e.g. monks) on religious matters.

Secondly, the anti-unionists sought to win over to their cause those actual "vessels" of divine wisdom, generally more accessible to the people - the spiritual leaders of the monastic communities. Beginning with the 5-th century, monasticism is known to have played a decisive role in all areas of life in Constantinople⁵⁷. The most consistent help for Mark of Ephesus came from the monks. Their influence was decisive mainly due to the intransigence and consistency with which they supported their point of view, also managing to impose it among the population.

Thirdly, the inability of emperors John VIII and Constantine XI and the patriarchs Mitrofan II (1440-1443) and Gregory III Mammas (1443-1450) to implement the union deeply affected the unionist cause. Sylvester Syropoulos, Pope Nicholas V, and Georgios Sphrantzes reveal that the last two Palaeologian emperors were unable to impose "union" with Rome and Ducas effectively, and Leonard of Chios argues that these two emperors were

⁵⁷ Usually, the candidates for episcopal seats were chosen from the monasteries. However, married people often withdrew, isolating themselves in monasteries. Even members of the imperial family used to wear monastic robes towards the end of their lives.

never really engaged in obtaining it⁵⁸. Besides them, the patriarchs Mitrofan II and Gregory III Mammas could have been more effective. It is possible that they lost the support of their clergy, and even worse, they were even eclipsed by the Mark of Ephesus and Gennady Scholarios. On the one hand, lacking will and on the other unable, the prominent supporters of the union failed to convince the capital's inhabitants to accept the decisions of the Florence synod.

Fourthly, the inhabitants of Constantinople rejected the union because of a form of ethnic solidarity that put them in opposition to the Frankish "barbarians". In 1339, more than a hundred years before the fall of Constantinople, the monk Varlaam from Calabria informed the papal court that "what separates the Greeks from you is not so much a difference of dogma as the hatred of the Greeks towards the Latins caused by the injustices they suffered"⁵⁹. This statement offers an exciting perspective on the late Byzantine era. Moreover, the description of the fall of Constantinople made by the Italian merchants betrays a cultural contempt for the Greeks. Thus, the ethnic contempt was mutual, and the union of 1439 was never accepted.

Conclusions

A union synod like the Florentine one had to have an authentic experience and will of communion. It should have been an opportunity to celebrate unity as an aspect of "ut unum sint", and to overcome the old doctrinal misunderstandings towards an

⁵⁸ John VIII and Constantine XI Paleologus had other priorities during their reigns (brothers revolted against them, repelling Turkish attacks, exaggerated claims of the Italian Maritime Republics, etc.).

⁵⁹ Barlaami Oratio, *Pro Unione. Avenione habita coram Benedicto XII Pontifice Maximo*, PG 151, (1332).

honest and disinterested union. Unfortunately, “Florence” did not reach its goal, which means an honest and responsible solution to the problem of Church unity. The spirit of the discussions clearly showed that the sense of responsibility and the conciliar conscience had shrunk, considering the tragedy of the separation of the Christians. The East has permanently preserved a traditional model of Church unity, the sobornic and apostolic, a legacy of the first Christian centuries. Sobornicity quickly led to a dualistic respect for both powers, each with its domain, hence their interdependence: neither one without the other, neither above the other, and neither decides in favour of the other. The two institutions controlled, regulated and helped each other. This was the ideal of Byzantine Christianity, for the Church to coexist with the Empire and vice versa. As different powers, the Church and the State were served by two distinguished men, the emperor and the patriarch. The Byzantine eagle was bicephalic, being only reality, living, and inseparable, just as the soul and the body need each other to live. In the West, however, the Church lived according to the other model of unity, a monarchical one, built according to the principle: “the Pope is the head of the Church throughout the world and whoever is not united with this head is not part of its body”, so, one man, the Pope, combined both powers and fought on two fronts. He was unique and indispensable in the world, a unique judge and teacher, above all Christians, above all kings and emperors, whom he could appoint or depose as he pleased, but above all other bishops, whom he could judge and submit unilaterally. Even to the synod, in the Pope’s vision, it was much inferior to receiving a decorative role.

After the Florentine synod, all the energy of the Roman Curia was channeled so that, both in Constantinople and throughout the Orthodox space, the decisions from Florence were accepted and assimilated as quickly as possible. Nevertheless, it would be un-

fair to ignore the fact that the refusal of the Florentine union, especially on the part of the Greek Christian community, highlights a much more complicated problem, which transcends the institutional aspect of the necessary bond of harmony between believers and Church leaders. It is essential to understand that, in the circumstances of the Florentine union, the main reason for the refusal was the decree's content and, implicitly, its theological validity. Throughout the Orthodox East, from the end of the Council of Ferrara-Florence to the fall of Constantinople and beyond, there was doubt among the hierarchs and believers about what happened in Florence with the Great Church. Orthodox hierarchs fought to prevent the papacy from establishing itself in the East and sought to prevent the imposition of Florentine definitions here by any means.

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