The Council of Florence: A Historiographic Analysis of Mark Eugenicus and John VIII Palaeologus

by

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The study of Christian history has long been a difficult and trying task for many who undertake it. When one enters into an investigation of Church events, one is often met with numerous contradictions, as well as accusations and vitriolic debate among historians and theologians all trying to espouse the validity of one doctrine over another. When one enters into the study of the schismatic Catholic and Orthodox Churches, the trend toward polemical debate becomes even more profound. Overtly biased interpretations pervade Christian history depending on the religious background of the historians themselves, and this can make the study frustrating for those who choose to undertake it.

One event in which these biased viewpoints become starkly apparent is the meeting between Western and Eastern Christianity, the Council of Florence. This Council, which took place between April 9th, 1438 and July 5th, 1439, was the final attempt at reconciliation between the Eastern and Western Churches before the fall of the Byzantine Empire.[1] The Council is vital to the study of Church history as it attempted to reunite the two churches by addressing the issues that plagued the schismatic churches since the excommunication of Patriarch Michael Cerularious in 1054.[2] These issues such as primacy, the use of unleavened bread in the Eucharist, purgatory and the infamous filioque form the chief reasons the Eastern Greek Church and Western Latin Church stood separated for nearly 400 years. This union

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[1] Exact dates given for the official opening of the Council and the final signing of the decree. Edward Siecienski, *The Filioque* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 152 & 169.

[2] Edward Siecienski, *The Papacy and the Orthodox* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 149-250.

was ultimately a catastrophic failure and the two churches have remained separated ever since.

Despite the importance of the Council on Catholic and Orthodox relations, the study of its events has been relatively limited. In fact, most scholastic texts discussing the council were written over fifty years ago, and the subject has remained largely untouched since that time. Assumingly, since the issues discussed in the Council had already been in continuous debate, this failed attempt at addressing them seems of little importance. However, the histories written about this Council illustrate the deeply preconceived notions of its historians based on ethnic and religious background.

Within Church history, the centuries old battle between East and West still lives on despite attempts made to approach the material with an objective viewpoint. Whether it is a Catholic historian using the Council to advocate the primacy of the Pope, or Orthodox explaining the rejection of the Filioque, there exists a tendency towards displaying the events and figures involved in the Council of Florence in specific ways to enforce a specific agenda. This tendency exists on both the Eastern and Western side, and serves to make a true understanding of the events a nearly impossible task.

While the many aspects of the Council could be investigated in this way, two of the key figures that attended the Council are of notable interest. Those are the Byzantine Emperor John VIII Palaeologus and Mark Eugenicus, Bishop of Ephesus. As we will see, the treatment of these two figures will display the prevalence of

biased historical interpretation that leads to a potentially misleading understanding of why the Council was ultimately a failure.

Within the Council these two figures raise the most questions about what occurred on the Greek side and spark the most debate. Mark Eugenicus is widely agreed to be the main reason that the union failed in Constantinople, but his actions at the Council, his personality, and his policy toward or against union are widely debated. Many western historians blame Mark singlehandedly for the failure of the union, while eastern scholars view him as the voice of the Byzantine people and defender of the church.

Emperor John VIII Palaeologus has similarly disagreeing depictions from east to west. The easterners have long held John to blame for the failed union under the belief that the bishops should never have agreed to it in the first place. The largest accusation is that the votes toward unification had been bought, and that the bishops at the council were forced by the Emperor to comply with the Latin conditions for unification despite their personal reservations. Western historians tend to defend the validity of the Council and that the union was legitimate. They place the blame not with John, but with the Greek bishops, lead by Mark, who recanted their signatures upon their return home.

This is what makes a deeper study of Mark and John essential to the history of the Council. On one side we have the western understanding that Mark Eugenicus was to blame as an opponent to union from the very start, and John was unable to stop him. On the east we are told that John forced the hands of the bishops in attendance and brought about the union by nefarious means, and Mark's opposition

was right and just. Both sides offer clear and understandable interpretations to suit their own purpose.

Unfortunately, neither the eastern or western argument seems to fully explain what really took place in Florence. No matter how clear and concise these histories are, they are so easily contradicted and reshaped. Even more frustrating is the fact that these contradictions are pulled from the exact same sources. No new documents have appeared that shed light on a misunderstood section. Instead, the prominence of continual selective reading allows Mark and John to be made into either heroes or villains.

The Council of Florence Past Historiography

Despite the importance of the Council of Florence to the arguments for or against unity within the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, there has been relatively little analysis of it. When historians approach the history of the schismatic churches or the Filioque, the Council is given relatively short passages or footnotes. This is true on both the Catholic and Orthodox sides of the argument. In fact, it would appear that there is one singular author and one primary work that does an in depth analysis of the events of the council, Joseph Gill in his *Council of Florence.*[3]

As a Jesuit priest and church historian with the Pontifical Institute if Oriental Study, Joseph Gill is one of the most prolific historians in regard to the Council, and approaches the text through a clearly Catholic viewpoint. The *Council of Florence*, serves as the basis for most histories about the Council, and has remained the

[3] Joseph Gill, *The Council of Florence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959)

primary source for western scholasticism since its composition in 1959. As with other analyses of the Council of Florence, Gill utilized three main sources in the creation of his work. These are the *Acta Graeca, Acta Latina,* and the *Memoirs* of Sylvester Syropoulos.[4]

The *Acta Graeca* is a collection of the official accounts of the Greek representatives at the council. Otherwise known as the *Practica,* the Greek Acts detail the events of the Greek delegation from the time they arrived in Venice to when they departed for Constantinople in 1439.[5] Gill and the Pontifical Institute compiled its most recent collection in 1953, prior to his writing the *Council*.[6] After extensive review of the existing documentation, Gill has established that the *Acta Graeca* is the account of two unknown Greek bishops who attended the council and recorded the events that transpired during the public general sessions.

Although the text of the *Acta* has in the past been thought as a completed official account provided by a singular author, Gill has separated the two authors and given their works the monikers *Discourses and Descriptions.* The *Discourses* as Gill has named them make up the bulk of the *Acta,* and contain the discussions made in the public sessions of the council. These are fairly straightforward accounts of events as they transpired with little editorial commentary.[7] By the tone and eloquence of it's writing the *Discourses* have been established as the most authoritative source for council history.

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[4] Gill, *Council of Florence,* vii-xvi.
[5] Gill, *Council of Florence*, ix.
[6] Milton Anastos, "Reviewed Work: *Acta Graeca Concilii Florentini Cum Versione Latina* by Joseph Gill" *Speculum* 34, 2(Apr., 1959): 270-273.
[7] Gill, *Council of Florence*, ix.

The *Descriptions* are a slightly different matter. The existing record of these are a copy of an original document that the copyist notes as being part of a larger work. It appears to be a personal account of a Greek Bishop at the council that Gill suggests may have been Dorotheus of Mylene, though Gill offers no real reasoning for that assumption.[8] This personal account that interweaves with the *Discourses* offer personal notes and impressions of the various personalities of the Council. It is however significantly short in detail making up less than half of the full *Acta*, and as such does not provide a full background or context for the activities of the Council.[9]

Further, Gill has established that the *Descriptions* and the *Discourses* were woven together by an unnamed copyist to detail a specifically pro-unionist attitude, and as such, the historical veracity of the account should be taken into account when one reviews the records.[10] If we were to take this account alone at face value, it would seem that all assembled were of a singular mind and focus towards unification with the Latin Church.

The *Acta Latina* is less complete, and is not an official Latin interpretation, but the personal account of Andrew de la Santa Croce, who attended the council under the Pope. Like the documents compiled in the *Acta Graeca,* it is written during the time of the Council's general sessions, and by style appears to be the personal notes of Santa Croce as opposed to an official account. This account is incomplete and only includes speeches from a portion of the council, but those accounts it does give are so close to the account in the *Acta Graeca* and the *Memoirs*. Gill has largely

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[8] Gill, *Council of Florence,* x.
[9] Joseph Gill, *Personalities of the Council of Florence and Other Essays* (New York: Barnes and Noble Inc., 1964), 145.
[10] Gill, *Personalities, 145-146.*

used this text for the purpose of establishing the veracity of Sylvester Syropoulous' *Memoirs*.[11]

The *Memoirs* are a different matter and appear to cause the most disagreement. Sylvester Syropoulos, a lesser clergyman from Constantinople, attended the conference in the entourage of Patriarch Joseph II of Constantinople. His *Memoirs* are not an official church account of the Council but a reflection that he wrote later in 1444, five years after the return to Constantinople.[12] They are important to the history, as they are the only existing account of the actions of the Greek delegates outside of the official meetings and speeches.

It is about the personal nature of the *Memoirs* that scholars appear to disagree. After his thorough analysis of the texts, Gill claims that the *Memoirs* serve as an "*apologia"*, owing to their being written after the close of the Council when numerous clergymen were recanting their actions in Florence. Gill simultaneously cites from the *Memoirs*, while advising caution to the reader as to the validity of the claims of Syropoulos, owing to his apologist agenda. Gill's concern is that Syropoulos' retelling of the events of the council paints the Emperor as forcing union at all costs to reinforce that the bishops were forced into accepting the union.[13] In contrast Gill has used the *Memoirs* to establish the character and political leanings of Mark Eugenicus and John VII very specifically. It would seem that despite

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[11] Gill, *Council of Florence, x.*
[12] Constantine N. Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus and the Council of Florence: A Historical Re-evaluation of His Personality* (New York: Byzantine Texts and Studies, 1986), 32-33.
[13] Gill, *Council of Florence,* XII

Gill's knowledge that the *Memoirs* are a questionable source, he was more than happy to utilize them towards the story he wished to tell.

In his *Council of Florence*, Gill has provided the largest and most complete retelling of the Council history and it still stands as the definitive work on the subject. With an extensive introduction of the events leading up to the council, and an adequate discussion of the events after the Council, this text does a remarkable job of detailing the complicated series of events that led to the Greeks signing the decree of union. As we shall see however, there is a strong Catholic stance apparent in Gill's writing that makes the reader question his interpretation of specifics moments.

In 1964, *s*oon after publishing his definitive *Council,* Gill published his follow-up work *Personalities of the Council of Florence and Other Essays.*[14] In this volume Gill strived to further explain his position through an analysis of the main players of the Council such as the Pope, the Emperor, Mark Eugenicus, Cardinal Cesarini, Isidore, Bessarion and others. He also provides further essays into his analysis of the *Memoirs* and the *Acta Graeca* as he and the Pontifical Institute had compiled them. Within the *Personalities* Gills strong Catholic stance as to the validity of the Council, and blame for its failure resting on Mark and the Greeks becomes starkly apparent. His section on Mark Eugenicus takes on a very aggressive tone and with little reference to where his claims come from the essay reads more as an impassioned rant than a historical account.[15] His treatment of John is a completely separate

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[14] Joseph Gill, *Personalities of the Council of Florence and Other Essays* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1964).
[15] Gill, *Personalities,* 55-64.

matter where his earlier warnings to be skeptical of Syropoulous are set aside. Instead Gill utilizes Syropoulous extensively to display John as a weak ruler in over his head, but not effecting pressures on his bishops.[16]

It does appear through the tone of his writings that a large degree of criticism of his views appeared after his publishing of the *Council,* and in *Personalities,* Gill appears to have become increasingly more defensive of his previous work. His more moderate and seemingly objective language gives way to more aggressive speech. As such, reviewing the *Personalities* is vital to the understanding of the softer and more oblique claims Gill provided in the *Council.*

Professor Gill, who has unarguably made the largest contribution to the study of the Council, is as mentioned before writing from a strong Western Catholic bias. As a Catholic Jesuit Priest writing for the Pontifical Institute, his purpose seems to be first and foremost to explain how the union was true, valid and made without coercion at the time of the signing. Thus, in the case of the two personalities reviewed here, he shows Mark Eugenicus as the staunch opponent, and John as a weak ruler unable to enact the reforms agreed upon in the council. His *Council of Florence* stands as the basis for the western perspective on Council history and created a standard for views on the Council, the personalities involved and the reasons it failed.

Within the eastern scholastic community, the *Memoirs* are utilized more actively. As the Orthodox perspective of the council is that the failure of the union is a positive outcome, Syropoulous' anti-unionist rhetoric is more easily adaptable

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[16] Gill, *Personalities, 104-124.*

towards proving the council as invalid to begin with and therefore they utilize the text to reinforce the claims that the Emperor forced the union, and that only Mark stood firm in the Orthodox defense of the east.

Constantine Tsirpanlis, in his 1979 thesis *Mark Eugenicus and the Council of Florence: A Historical Re-Evaluation of his Personality,* writes extensively in defense of Mark as protector of the faith as he is viewed as a saint in the Eastern Church.[17] As his text is predominantly a character study focused on Mark, it is limited in depth as to the other figures involved in the council, but his criticism of the scholastic views on Mark show his attitudes lean toward the eastern perspective that Mark was defending the position of the Greek populace against the Emperors political agenda.[18]

His usage of Syropoulous to support his claims on Marks character is extensive and transparent. However, Tsirpanlis does also call into question some of Gills accusations of Mark based on additional texts composed outside of the Council that were not included in Gills analysis. These additional texts that Tsirpanlis adds to discussion include the writings of; the Emperor John VII, John Eugenicus, Marks brother, George Scholarios, Metropolitan and student of Mark Eugenicus, and other notable Byzantines both unionist and anti-unionist who speak to Mark's character.[19] It is however very clear that the goal of Tsirpanlis' writing is a clear defense of the claims that Gill made in his *Council of Florence* and *Personalities.* For this reason, this text has similar Orthodox agenda based problems to Gill's *Council.*

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[17] Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus,* 21-29.
[18] Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus, 95-103.*
[19] Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus, 31-34.*

Another author who espouses the eastern argument of coercion by the Emperor is Deno Geanakolplos, a contemporary of Gill and professor of Byzantine and Renaissance History at Yale University. While his professional life did not include formal seminary training as Gill's did, he was named an Archon of the Greek Orthodox Church in 1975.[20] His collected essays in *Byzantine East Meets Latin West*, compiled in 1976, revolve primarily on western scholasticisms misunderstanding of the Byzantine Church. His writing on the Council holds to the eastern scholastic arguments that Emperor pressured union for political gain.[21] Further, he argues that the primary reason that the council failed was not weak implementation by the Emperor as we see with Gill. Instead he offers that the overriding fear of Latinization was inherent in the Greeks and deeply held by the Bishops and laity at home in Constantinople. It is this fear of Latinization, not Mark's obstinacy or the Emperor's weakness that made unity with the Latin Church impossible regardless of the council's outcome and the Emperors wishes.[22]

Mark Eugenicus, Metropolitan of Ephesus as a Historiographical Problem

The clearest case for the polarizing interpretations of the Council's history comes in the form of one of its primary players, Mark Eugenicus. As the primary spokesman for the Greek delegation to the council, he was also one of the strongest

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[20] Yale Daily News, "Former Prof. Dies at 91," Accessed Nov. 20, 2019. https://yaledailynews.com/blog/2007/10/11/former-prof-dies-at-91/

[21] Deno J. Geanakoplos, *Byzantine East and Latin West: Two Worlds of Christendom in Middle Ages and Renaissance: Studies in Ecclesiastical and Cultural History,* (Hamden Conn. ,Archon Books, 1976).

[22] Deno Geanokoplos, "The Council of Florence (1438-1439) and the Problem of Union Between Greek and Latin Churches," *Church History* 24, no. 4 (Dec. 1955): 324-346 here 332.

opponents to the union. The analysis of his actions, and scholastic debate as to his motivations and personality, show the stark contrast between the western and eastern scholastic communities.

The early life of Mark is supplied through the *Synaxarion* or "Life" as written by his brother John Eugenicus. John Eugenicus wrote this description as a part of a liturgical service performed in honor of Mark, and it was composed shortly after his death.[23] The "Life" provides the only real record we have for Mark's actions prior to the council. As for Mark's actions at the council, the primary sources are to be found within the *Acta Graeca* and the *Memoirs.*

Mark's own personal writings, while not offering much in the way of biographical information, speak mainly on theological matters regarding Palamite doctrinal issues and other liturgical works, as for Mark's views on the union and relations with the Latin church, little exists until the time of the council and the anti-unionist writings supplied after he returned to Constantinople. His later anti-unionist writings had been collected and published in 1927 by Louis Petit, who also provides us with the French language translation of Syropoulous' *Memoirs* that most Council historians rely upon.

Contemporaries of Mark also serve to shed a glimpse as to Marks character and actions at the council. This includes writings from his co-delegates at the council as well as his brother John and the Emperor. These are also predominantly written

[23] Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus,* 31.

after the return to Constantinople, and were not heavily utilized by Joseph Gill, but are more heavily reviewed by Constantine Tsirpanlis.[24]

Mark Eugenicus, born Manuel, was born in 1392 in Constantinople.[25] His parents were George and Maria Loucas, who according to the "Life", were "endowed with nobility, moderate wealth and worldly excellence, as well as piety and virtue."[26] His father was a deacon of the church and his mother the daughter of a doctor. In his early years, his father instructed him until he was orphaned at 13. From then his studies were in the hands of notable scholars such as John Chortasmenus and George Gemistus, and under their tutelage earned much respect as both student and teacher, ultimately taking over his father's school as his own.[27]

However as the *Synaxarion* continues, despite the acclaim he is purported to have amassed, Mark longed for the solitude and peace of the monastery and at the age of 26 he gave away his worldly possessions and made way to the island of Antigone, now known as Burgazada, near Constantinople to become a humble monk. His time in Antigone would be short lived however, as he was forced to flee the island under threat of Turkish invasion. Mark returned to the protection of the city of Constantinople, and took refuge at the monastery of the Mangani. It was here that his renown as a theologian and philosopher became known. After being ordained as a priest and hieromonk, a celibate priest, by Patriarch Euthimius, his scholastic and

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[24] Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus*, 31-37.
[25] Encyclopedia Brittanica. "Markos Eugenikos." Accessed September 2, 2019. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Markos-Eugenikos
[26] From *Le Synaxaire de Marc d'Éphèse, by* S. Pétridès as quoted by Gill, Joseph. *Personalities of the Council of Florence and Other Essays.* New York: Barnes and Noble, 1964. Here 55.
[27] Gill, *Personalities,* 56.

literary work continued. During his time at the monastery, Mark composed a wealth of literature including hymns, poems, liturgical texts, theological treatises and other works.[28]

In 1437, as planning for the Greek delegation to the council was underway, the Emperor and Patriarch of Constantinople appointed Mark as procurator for the Patriarch of Alexandria. He would speak on behalf of that see since the Patriarch was unable to attend the council himself due to Turkish travel restrictions. The emperor relied on Mark to help prepare the doctrinal arguments for their delegation. Mark was later changed to be procurator for the Patriarch of Jerusalem, and then once more changed to being the procurator for Antioch, which is the place he held on the eve of the Greek Delegations departure for Italy.[29]

Here it is worth noting that the divided viewpoints toward Mark already start to appear. In discussing the rapid organizational changes from being a spokesperson for Alexandria, then Jerusalem and finally Antioch, Tsirpanlis speaks of Mark as being "indifferent towards all these distinctions and honors."[30] When this same exchange of titles is being discussed by Gill, we hear instead that "to his chagrin, he became instead procurator of the lesser See of Jerusalem; in the end owing to another change made … acted for Antioch."[31] Tsirpanlis takes his glowing statement on Mark's humility straight from Syropoulous' *Memoirs*, which would easily have a favorable opinion of Mark. Gill however, does not provide us with a

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[28] Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus,* 40.
[29] Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus,* 41.
[30] Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus,* 41.
[31] Gill, *Personalities,* 60.

source for why he thinks Mark was chagrined. However, we can already see how the attitudes towards Mark are diverging into a supportive or antagonistic view.

Further divergence shows itself when we now get to the actual events of the council. The divergence comes in the vast differences in interpretation of the two main sources of his actions at the council. The question of the differences between the *Acta Graeca,* and the *Memoirs* comes into clear effect in how each have been utilized by western and eastern scholars to this point. Gill pointed out this difficulty in his *Personalities*. As the *Acta Graeca* is easily defined as being conciliatory and pro-union and the *Memoirs* as anti-union, the problem of predisposition to either cause can skew the perspective of any potential researcher toward or against union, and subsequently toward or against the personalities involved. In the case of Joseph Gill's work, in defense of his Catholic position, we see a heavy slant against Mark and the anti-unionist side.

This becomes the clear when we look at the actions and motivations attributed to Mark at the Council. Mark was groomed by John VIII to speak for the Greeks, and in order to have equal standing with the other collected bishops was raised to Metropolitan of Ephesus on the eve of the council in 1437.[32] There, he acted as representative of the Greek delegation. Mark and another Metropolitan Bessarion of Nicaea we both named to be the Greek delegation's primary spokesmen at the council. In fact, Mark and Bessarion were the only bishops with the imperial privilege of debating with the Papal delegation. [33]

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[32] Gill, *Council of Florence,* 229.
[33] Gill, *Council of Florence,* 130.

In the early days of the council at Ferrara, little public action was taken as the Emperor delayed proceedings in order to await the arrival of the representatives for the Western princes.[34] During this period of inaction, when all the clergy assembled wished to proceed with deliberations, we see the early attitudes of Mark displayed.

Gill has claimed that Mark was a staunch anti-unionist from the very beginning of the council. He quite clearly states that Mark was, "from the very start of the Council … the greatest impediment to union."[35] Here we come to the perspective difficulties in understanding Mark. Prior to the commencement of the formal meetings of the council, we have an early essay written by Mark to Pope Eugenicus at the request of Cardinal Cesarini, the leading Latin representative. Cesarini had requested that Mark should write a conciliatory letter to the Pope to congratulate him for his work on the union and display desire towards that end. After complying with Cesarini's request, we have a letter from Mark, which can have two vastly different interpretations.

As Gill uses it, this letter appears to be a flat ultimatum to the pope that without removal of the filioque, union will be impossible.[36] However, while the firm tone of the letter is undeniable, it should not be misconstrued as anti-union. In fact, as Tsirpanlis points out, the tone and content should be view as pro-unionist. Mark addresses the Pope as "first among [Christ's] priests," and calls for the pope to restore the ancient harmony of the church.[37] It just so happens that his views were that the best way to achieve unity was for the Latin Church to adopt the Orthodox

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[34] Gill, *Council of Florence, 106.*
[35] Gill, *Council of Florence*, 405.
[36] Gill, *Council of Florence,* 114*.*
[37] Tsirpanlis, *Mark of Ephesus.* 50.

principles. He implores of the Pope in regards to the filioque, "to remove it would cost you nothing: indeed it would be of the greatest profit, for it would bind together all Christians … in the exercise of mercy, remove it again so that you may receive to your bosoms brethren torn apart who value fraternal love so highly."[38] It would appear that Mark's fervent hope was the unity they were all working towards.

As the council bore on, it is clear that Mark did indeed become more immovable in his views against the filioque, and more importantly, the Popes right to make changes in the creed absent a general counsel. Mark frequently fell back to the ruling of the Council of Ephesus, which claimed that no part of the creed should be altered in any way as proof of his argument, and would hear no argument against this.[39] Mark remained in opposition both in the public sessions and closed meetings and ultimately refused to sign the agreement. However, one question that Gill never asks is why such an "intractable" and "rough monk" would have been chosen as the spokesperson to begin with?[40]

Gill's analysis fails to acknowledge a massive factor in the Greek motivation for the council. Mark was included as the voice of the eastern orthodoxy. Unlike Bessarion and Isidore, who were both active unionists who would accept the Latin doctrine easily, Mark's views were closer to the temperament of the laity which was highly afraid of the threat of Latinization should the unification succeed. His arguments spoke soundly of the orthodox perspective and his inclusion in the

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[38] From the *Acta Graeca,* as quoted in Siecienski, Edward. *The Filioque,* 153.
[39] Gill, *Personalities,* 61
[40] Gill makes numerous aggressive terms to describe Mark throughout his writings. First from *Personalities,* 262. Second *Council,* 115.

deliberations was specifically to assure that if he agreed with the doctrine, the people would follow.

It seems as though the primary motivation of Gill, was proving that aside from Eugenicus, the Greek delegation entered into the union freely and wholeheartedly. This becomes strikingly apparent in the *Personalities*, in which Gill repeats the argument quite starkly: "The Greek Prelates in Florence were free and freely accepted the doctrine of the filioque and other doctrines, and freely united with the Latins."[41] However, his assertion that Mark stood alone in dissent is both erroneous and misleading. Mark was not the only Greek delegate that did not sign the agreement as Isaias of Stauropolis had previously left the city.[42] Interestingly, Gill leaves this fact as an offhand comment, but plays up Marks defiance to make him seem the sole voice of opposition.

Additionally, from this interpretation, it would seem as though the anti-unionist concept was merely a creation after the council. Despite numerous meetings and disagreements among the Greek prelates as described by Syropoulos, Gill gives us the impression every other Greek was pressing for union, and Mark staunchly rejected it on the grounds of the filioque. While there may not have been a formal anti-unionist group, the sentiment was clearly present among the assembled bishops.

Anthony of Heraclea, another bishop in the Greek delegation, was also exceedingly skeptical of the union, and according to Syropoulus, was absent the last general sessions of the council with Mark at the Emperors instruction in order to

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[41] Gill, *Personalities,* 14.
[42] Gill, *Council of Florence*, 292.

remove their dissent from the proceedings.[43] Furthermore, Dositheus of Monembasia as another Greek bishop who stood against the union is quoted in the *Acta Graeca* stating that he would rather die than Latinize.[44]

For this reason, Mark needed to become the villain and "greatest obstacle to union".[45] For Gill's argument that the Greeks accepted the union freely, all who signed would need to have done so without reservation and due to the validity of the Latin doctrine. To allow that dissent and other motivations to enter into the reasoning would invalidate his claims that there was no coercion or pressure from the Pope or Emperor. This leads us to the second problematic figure of John VIII Palaeologus.

John VIII Palaeologus as a Historiographical Problem

Born December 17/18 1392[46], John was the penultimate Emperor to rule over the Byzantine Empire. John served as one of the last members of the Palaeologus Dynasty, which had begun in 1261 under Michael VIII Palaeologus and ended with Constantine XI in 1453.[47] As the penultimate ruler, John was destined to have a very difficult reign over a highly weakened empire that retained little of its former glories. As the son of Manuel II Palaiologos, he inherited a kingdom that was under constant threat from the Ottoman Turks, and inherited the requirement to

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[43] Gill, *Council of Florence*, 213.
[44] Siecienski, *Filioque,* 162.
[45] Gill, *Council, 356.*
[46] Encyclopedia Brittanica. "John VIII Palaeologus." Accessed September 2, 2019. https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-VIII-Palaeologus
[47] Encyclopedia Brittanica. "Palaeologus Family." Accessed November 18, 2019. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Palaeologus-family

pay tribute to the Sultanate for protection.[48] Being on the continually losing side of the Ottoman conquests, John's political career heavily focused on the reunification of the schismatic Latin and Greek Churches in an attempt to garner aid from the western principalities for the defense of his weakened empire.

This tactic of unification was similarly an inheritance from his father Manuel II, who in an agreement with Pope Martin V, arranged a marriage between John and a Latin princess Sophia Monteferrata in 1421 in an attempt towards unity.[49] This was John's second marriage after the death of his first wife Anne, a Russian princess who died of the plague in 1414.[50] In terms of political alliances, the marriage served as a promise to the western church and principalities of intent, but it proved to be a loveless marriage. In 1426, after the death of Manuel II, Sophia fled Constantinople and the divorce was finalized within the year. After which, John personally chose and married his third and final wife, Maria Comnene, daughter of the king of Trebizond and from the Eastern Church.

Manuel's unification tactic was not all that the Latin Church would have hoped for. He had advised John to always keep the idea of Christian unity open, but to delay and never attempt to actively resolve the schism, having once said, "By wishing to achieve the union, you will only strengthen the schism."[51] Manuel's purpose was to use the Latin Church as a means to garner the aid of the western principalities to aid in the defense of Constantinople and the Eastern Empire.

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[48] Jonathan Harris, *The Lost World of Byzantium.* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2016), 237.
[49] Gill, *Council of Florence,* 24.
[50] Gill, *Personalities*, 106.
[51] Gill, *Council of Florence,* 12.

Unfortunately, it does not seem as though John held the political savvy of his predecessor. Manuel himself questioned John's ability to lead having once said,

"My son, the Emperor, seems himself to be a suitable emperor – but not for present day. For he has large views and ideas and such as the times demanded in the heyday of the prosperity of his ancestors. … I am afraid that the decline of this house may come from his poems and arguments … I have seen also the results of his doctrines, to what danger they have brought us."[52]

The tactic of leading the Latin Church on with promises of unity would end with John and his attempt at true unity through the Council of Florence. Many questions enter the debate about what the true motivations of John were. Was he purely seeking western military aid against the Turks, and therefore was purely unionist at all costs, or did he genuinely believe the churches could solve their differences, and seek the best outcome for both the church and his empire?

Historians put forth two primary arguments towards John's involvement in the council. One, most commonly found among eastern historians such as Deno Geanakoplos, taken largely from the *Memoirs* of Syropoulous is that John entered into the council with a purely politically based unionist agenda in which his need for western political aid outweighed his role as head of the Eastern Church.[53] The second favored by western Catholics and espoused by Gill, is that the failure of the council was not owing to the bishops being forced by imperial pressure, but due to

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[52] From Phrantzes, G. *Chronicon*, ed. I.B. Papadopoulos, vol. 1 as quoted by Gill J. in *Personalities,* 105.
[53] Geanokoplos, "The Council of Florence and Problem of Union," 324-346.

John's weakness in implementing the reforms after their return to Constantinople.[54] Regardless of which argument you are looking at, both the eastern and western scholastic communities find fault in John's actions at the council in some way.

The eastern accusation appears to be supported by the account of Syropoulus, who in his *Memoirs* does much to discredit the Emperor. This as, Gill points out, is likely owing to Syropoulus's attempts to defend his actions at the council, and thus needs to be analyzed quite critically.[55] However, there is a dilemma in interpreting John that is inherent here and also displayed in Gill's work. In terms of John's actions, Syropoulus is the primary source of information that we have for what the Greeks did outside of the general sessions of the council, in which only the appointed spokesmen for the Greeks, Eugenicus and Bessarion spoke. This leaves much of the history of John widely open to interpretation.

As previously mentioned, Syropoulus was writing an explanation for why he signed the union after the return to Constantinople and after seeing the negative response the union caused. As such in his defense of himself, he needed to shift blame to someone, and John was an easy target for this. Outside of the *Memoirs,* the reception to the Union was so unpopular that the people wanted to know why it had happened, and the answer was the Emperor. A common theme in the anti-unionist literature following the council was that the union had been bought, referring to financial and political pressures passed down from the Pope and the Emperor. It

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[54] Gill, *Council*, 349.
[55] Gill, *Personalities,* 115.

was recorded by the chronicler Ducas, that upon their return from Florence the hierarchs disembarked from the ships claiming, "We have sold our faith"[56]

But why is this important when discussing John? Whether John was a politician hell-bent on the union to gain Latin aid in the defense of Constantinople, or a bumbling statesman, in over his head and unable to enact the reforms is vital to the validity of the council's findings. As mentioned earlier Gill assures us that the Greeks all "agreed freely and with the intellectual conviction that the Latin doctrine was sound"[57] The fact that the council was recanted later needs to stay just that, an afterthought or change of heart. For the freely chosen union there could be no coercion or bribery. Edward Siecienski, also a Catholic historian, supports this view and argues that it was pressures from the unionist bishops and the Pope that forced the Emperor to press the remaining dissident Greeks into union, not his own aims for political aid.[58]

However, John's actions at the council tell a different story that adheres to neither argument. At the start of the council, John defies the criticism of weakness in a dispute with the Pope over the placement of thrones in the Cathedral. Pope Eugenicus wished to be placed in a place of prominence as arbiter of the Council. This original arrangement would have placed him at the center with the Latins and Greeks on either side. John contested this and insisted on the Byzantine tradition of the Emperor as the one who convenes ecumenical councils. A conciliatory

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[56] From Ducas, *Historia Byzantina,* ed. Bekker (Bonn, 1834): 216. In Gill, *Council,* 349.
[57] Gill, *Council,* 410.
[58] Siecienski, *The Papacy and the Orthodox,* 331.

agreement was made that ultimately placed the Pope and Emperor as equals.[59] This would go against the arguments of a weak ruler. John understood his place in society and more importantly his place as head of the Eastern Church. It also displays John as determined to meet the Pope on a strong footing, and unlikely to blindly accept union.

In contrast to this, there is the matter of the four-month delay imposed by the Emperor upon the Greeks arrival. It is well established that this delay was to allow time for the representatives of the western princes to arrive at the Council.[60] These delays persisted despite the complaints of both the Pope and even the Greek Hierarchs who would have preferred to address the theological issues immediately. This delay could suggest that John's primary focus was for the princes to see a Christian unity and supply aid in its defense, more than just unity for the good of the church.

Next we come to John's appointment of Mark Eugenicus and Bessarion as the chief orators for the Greek delegation, and the only given permission to directly debate with the Latins. Here we further see that the motivations of John may not be so clear-cut. As we have previously discussed, Mark stood heavily in opposition to the union unless the Latins acquiesced to the Orthodox doctrine of the Filioque. His appointment as spokesmen for the Greek delegation shows an interesting contradiction to John as solely pro-union. Given John's knowledge of Mark's views, it

[59] Geanakoplos, "The Council of Florence and Problem of Union," 330.
[60] Gill, *Council,* 111-112.

has been suggested by Jacob Van Sickle that this shows an effort by John to maintain Orthodoxy and achieve union while leaving the Eastern Church in tact.[61]

Later toward the end of the formal sessions of the council, a stalemate was forming between the Latin and Greek arguments. Neither side would accept the other's arguments. Syropoulus supplies us with a speech the Emperor addressed to the Greek delegation in which he states;

"Time is going by and we have achieved nothing worth while, and if that goes on, what will be the fate of our race? A persecution greater than that of Diocletian and Maximian. So we must give up discussions and find some other means toward union."[62]

Whether his proposed change of tactic was owing to fatigue and a desire to return home, or if the Emperor was seeing the rising frustrations and discordant theories as more harmful to the union than beneficial, from this point on the Greeks would have no further formal discussion with the Latins in general session. All that remained were the final arguments by the Latin representative Fr. Montenero. Here again, we must question Gill's usage of John as he quickly glosses over the fact that according to Syropoulus, Mark Eugenicus and Antony of Heraclea were commanded not to attend these final meetings and thus prevented Mark from refuting the arguments of Montenero.[63] At this point the public sessions of the council ended,

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[61] Jacob N. Van Sickle, "Re-Evaluating the Role of Emperor John VIII in the Failed Union of Florence," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History,* 68, no.1 (Jan. 2017): 40-58. Here, 42-44.
[62] From Syropoulus, *Memoirs*, as quoted in Gill, *Council*, 212.
[63] Gill, *Council,* 213.

and we see how John's actions toward the Greek bishops had a more direct influence on the council's outcome.

While John was largely silent on the public proceedings, behind the scenes his influence was undeniable. During this period from April to July of 1439, in which the divided Greek delegation was internally split as to whether they accepted the Latin arguments on the Filioque, the Emperor started to increase pressure on the bishops to come to a decision. By this point the Greeks had been away from their homes for nearly two years, and many including the Emperor were anxious to resolve the matter either for or against and go home. [64] To further the disquiet, the financial situation was extremely poor with the Pope being months behind on his maintenance payments forcing the Greeks to pawn off their goods in order to obtain food.[65]

As such, increasing pressure was placed upon the bishops to come to a resolution. Further in one of the private meetings the emperor made it clear that he viewed his role as guardian of the faith and as such saw it as his duty to censure any who did not submit to majority decision. In the same address The Emperor made it clear his wish was that the bishops must make concerted effort specifically toward unity.[66] Not to come to a consensus, but to work toward union. When Mark Eugenicus and Antony of Heraclea protested this, the Emperor is said to have become irate and berated Antony saying, "Do you not know your own limitations and the extent of your knowledge? But because you are uneducated a rustic you put

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[64] Gill, *Council,* 232.
[65] Gill, *Council, 238.*
[66] Gill, *Council, 237.*

yourself forward to say such things… Because you are ignorant and vulgar and a rustic and don't know or realize what you are saying."[67] Interestingly, Gill uses this exchange to support a claim that the Greek delegates did not have a strong theological background, and not as an example of imperial pressure.

On the other side, John was receiving pressure from the Latins to accept their doctrine or there would be no further movement. Here is where John is faced with a difficulty of trying to achieve a union on Latin terms that the Eastern Church would accept. As such, the process of the informal meetings was one of trying to find an explanation for the Latin doctrine that the Greeks found to be acceptable. A number of different iterations, that the spirit proceeds from the father "through" the son, that the spirit "gushes forth" from the son and others were put forth and rejected by both the Latins and the Greeks. No clear agreement could be met.[68]

The Pope and the Emperor met the continual disagreement of the Greek delegation with increasing frustration. Conversation turned to a more temporal tactic since theological agreement seemed unlikely, namely, the Western military defense of Constantinople. The Emperor reminded the delegation of the peril in Constantinople and that his desire for union was prompted by the possibility of western aid going so far as to threaten the dissenting bishops that those who worked against union would be viewed as traitors on the level of Judas. He also limited the whole argument of unity around one aspect, are the Latin proofs from the early fathers genuine texts or forged.[69] Even with the simplified arguments, the

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[67] Syropoulus as quoted by Gill, *Council.* 228.
[68] Gill*, Council,* 227-255.
[69] Gill, *Council*, 255-256.

Emperor was unable to achieve his goals as the vote on accepting the Latin doctrine stood at ten for and seventeen against.[70]

What then followed was a series of campaigning by the Emperor, Patriarch and Isidore, a leading unionist bishop. Together they worked in private to win over the votes of those in opposition. Gill even notes that Isidore's and the Emperor's tactics included hearty meals, a rarity with the financially desperate conditions.[71] These campaigns bore fruit for the unionists as suddenly, on the next vote taking place in late May or early June, showed a general consensus approving the Latin doctrine with only four bishops, Ephesus, Heraclea, Stauropolis and Anchialus, remaining in opposition.[72]

Gill however gives this period of canvassing extremely short attention despite the momentous achievement of converting the votes of thirteen delegates from anti-union to pro-union. As the source of such information was solely from Syropoulus's account, it is understandable that there may not be further information than that. This does however cause a difficulty in trying to ascertain the reality of the tactics used in gaining the majority support. Regardless, with this massive achievement completed, John then reminded the delegates that any who acted against the ruling of the council would be met with severe punishments.[73]

After the pronouncement that the Greeks would accept the Latin doctrine of the Filioque, the Latin Church demanded that agreement must also be met with the

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[70] Gill, *Council,* 257.
[71] Gill, *Council,* 257.
[72] Gill, *Council, 262.*
[73] Gill, *Council, 263.*

other doctrinal issues of Primacy of the Holy See, the Eucharist and Purgatory.[74] With the hardest issue of the Filioque having been resolved, these further matters were handled relatively quickly in the grand scheme and on July 5th, the Greeks signed the decree that gave in to all the Latin demands in order to produce unity.[75]

At the signing of the decree of union, we again see an interesting move from John that questions his weakness, or possibly reinforces it. Here once again, Pope Eugenius claimed superiority over John and demanded to take precedence in the decree. John once again raised complaint and demanded prominence for his role as Emperor. In this instance, unlike the seating arrangements before, John was forced to acquiesce to the Papal pressures for fear of losing all that they had accomplished.[76]

Further, when dealing with Mark towards the end of the council, despite multiple requests by Pope Eugenius to have Mark censured, the Emperor extended his protection over Mark.[77] Even going so far as to escort Mark under imperial protection back to Constantinople to avoid any violence to be done for his intransigence.[78]

From John's actions, it would be easy to see the eastern view of John as having exerted pressures over the bishops to accept unity even if unwillingly. Even if we are to take the statements of Syropoulus as questionable, the very fact that fifteen months of discord and disagreement among the Greek hierarchs could be

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[74] Gill, *Council, 265.*
[75] Gill, Counci, 291-292.
[76] Geanakoplos, *Problem of Union*, 334.
[77] Siecienski, *The Papacy and the Orthodox, 336*
[78] Van Sickle, "Re-Evaluating John," 50.

resolved in a few days of warm meals, speaks to the imperial weight being put behind the decision for unity. Further, John's reminder that any who go against the decisions of the council would be penalized would not be necessary if all accepted freely. The coercion seemingly becomes apparent in John's very need to preemptively put consequences in place. Free and clear acceptance has no need for threat of reprisals and clearly more was going on than the Greeks being swayed by the Latin argument alone.

However, another set of his actions confounds things. His election and protection of Mark despite him being contrary to Union makes the eastern scholastic argument similarly questionable, as why would he allow this much dissention among his ranks if union above all was his goal. In truth John's contradictions in action at the council make him a much more difficult figure to explain than either the western or eastern argument would allow. One thing that is certain however is that John was not the weak ruler that Gill portrays him to be.

Modern Opinions on the Council:

As we have seen with the descriptions of Mark and John, contradicting interpretations of the existing documents pervade their history. This seems to be mostly owing to the perspectives of the historians analyzing this event. Whether taking an Eastern Orthodox or a Western Catholic perspective, every author is coming into this study with certain agendas and things to prove. The problem is endemic to historical study of the divided Western and Eastern Churches, and is

compounded by the fact that the historians who have thus far taken on this task are primarily religious historians with a strong allegiance to their specific church.

The polemic arguments of east and west in the scholasticism surrounding the Council seem to mirror those of the participants and make a true understanding of what actually transpired very difficult. Was John a tyrannical politician or "Defender of the Faith"? Was Mark completely against union or holding true to the Orthodox tenants of his church? Until the division amongst the scholastic communities can be bridged, the story of the Council of Florence remains incomplete.

Luckily, some headway has been made in more recent years. While the matter of the Council seemingly fell silent for decades after historians such as Gill, Tsirpanlis and Geanakoplos, some modern scholars are opening cracks, and softening the polemical dialogue in the previously agreed upon narratives of east versus west.

Edward Siecienski of Stockton University who has written two of the most thorough texts on the schismatic Churches in modern times, *The Filioque* in 2010 and *The Papacy and the Orthodox* in 2019*.* Siecienski is also writing from the Catholic perspective having received his Masters of Divinity at St. Mary's Seminary, a Roman Catholic institution, prior to his professorship at Stockton University.[79] Siecienski appears to rely heavily on the foundations set by Joseph Gill in his writings and makes many similar arguments as to the reasons the Council was a failure. However, in his treatment of Mark and John, Siecienski's condensed retelling

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[79] Stockton University, "Hellenic Studies: About Us: Byzantine Civilization and Religion: A. Edward Siecienski, Ph.D.," Accessed Nov. 20, 1029. https://stockton.edu/hellenic-studies/about-us.html

of the Council refrains from the leading language of his predecessors and offers a more objective telling of this history.

For Mark especially, who was heavily vilified by Gill, and enthusiastically endorsed by Tsirpanlis, Siecienski takes a very middle road to his descriptions. He refrains from the accusative language of Gill, as compiled by Tsirpanlis, calling him "the only serious threat to the union, the indomitable Mark, stubborn, illogical, intractable…" and more.[80] Instead Siecienski merely tells us of what Mark did with little editorial commentary. In fact Siecienski even credits Mark with coming to the Council with an intention towards union and questions the western perspective that was established by Gill that Mark approached the Council with a staunch anti-unionist mindset.[81]

Unfortunately there is a downside to Siecienski's approach. His history of the Council is exceptionally short in comparison to Gill. *The Filioque* devotes 20 pages, and *The Papacy and the Orthodox* only 8, whereas Gill's *Council* stands at 415 pages with *Personalities* adding an additional 292.[82] This brevity in the account cannot allow for a thorough explanation of the actions of its participants and much of the motivations and deliberations are removed from the discussion in lieu of dates and events. Similarly, this brevity leaves much to the interpretation of the reader. In the case of John for example, the contradictions of his actions are detailed, but not explained in any meaningful way.

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[80] Tsirpanlis, *Mark of Ephesus,* 96.
[81] Siecienski, *The Filioque*, 153.
[82] Siecienski, *The Filioque,* 151-170. Siecienski, *The Papacy and the Orthodox,* 329-336.: Gill, *Council of Florence*, 1-415. Gill, *Personalities*, 1-292.

On the other side of the scholastic debate, Jacob Van Sickle, an Orthodox Priest and professor of comparative religion at Cleveland State University has provided us with an intriguing analysis of the actions of John in his article "Re-Evaluating the Role of Emperor John VIII in the Failed Union of Florence."[83] He argues that the issues that arise around John's contradicting actions at the council as displayed earlier draw questions on the narratives previously supplied. Despite his Eastern Orthodox background, he defies eastern blaming of John of coercion, and similarly the western perspective of a weak ruler.

This fresh and innovative approach looks deeper at the role of the Emperor as head of the Eastern Church, and shows John as actually acting correctly within his scope as Emperor and defender of the faith. Van Sickle largely uses the relationship between Mark and John as proof that, despite the political needs of the empire, John understood that his position in the Council was first and foremost as the protector of Orthodoxy, and genuinely believed that the Council could bring about a true union for the good of the Church and Empire at the same time.[84]

He cites as an example John's appointment of Mark in such a prominent position in the Council. According to Van Sickle, John shows that he was aware of the importance of Mark as a representative of the traditional orthodox beliefs and philosophy that is shared by much of the laity in Constantinople at the time. As such Mark is not just a good spokesman, but vital to the Council's discussions in order to

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[83] Professional information on Van Sickle taken from: Academia, "Jacob N. Van Sickle: Curriculum Vitae," accessed Nov. 23, 2019. His article : Van Sickle, "Re-Evaluating The Role of John VIII," 40-58.
[84] Van Sickle, "Re-Evaluating the Role of John VIII," 57.

assure that the final ruling would be accepted by the bishops and laity at home.[85] If John had been blindly pursuing the union as Syropoulus claimed, silencing or removing Mark would have been easier. However, John knew that if he did not allow Mark his voice, the union would not be accepted by the people. It was only at the end, when Mark stood alone in opposition that John quieted him in favor of the more numerous unionist bishops.[86]

These two examples of modern scholastic approach to Council history give hope that we are moving toward a more open discourse that can better navigate the religious tensions that surround this event. Siecienski's fair appraisal of the Greeks, and Van Sickle's contradiction of the entrenched eastern arguments, show promise that a more objective historical retelling of the Council is possible and potentially forthcoming.

Conclusion:

As we have seen, the history of Council of Florence and its prominent figures of Mark Eugenicus and John VII Palaeologus is a complicated one. The existing documents can tell a number of different stories or be used to prove specific points depending on the point of view of the historian. The clearest issue surrounding the Council's history is the religious views of the historians themselves. Given that priests and church historians are the predominant group researching this history, every researcher has been approaching the text from their specific points of view and true objectivity is impossible.

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[85] Van Sickle, "Re-Evaluating the Role of John VIII," 51-52.
[86] Van Sickle, "Re-Evaluation the Role of John VIII," 58.

With just the analysis of two figures within the Council, we can see a wide array of different historical interpretations, and none of which fully tell the story of what happened. While writing a complete and unbiased history of the Council may be impossible, the accounts we do have are problematic at best. Ultimately, the only undeniable truth we have about the Council is that it failed in achieving its goal of a unified church. How and why it failed is still a subject of open disagreement.

Unfortunately, given the relative obscurity of this event in Christianity's history, little attention has been paid to it thus far. Unlike the larger events of the excommunications in 1054 and the fourth crusade, this council and its status as a failure has received less attention and is likely to remain little more than a curiosity to those who seek out the minutia of Catholic and Orthodox interrelations. As such the likelihood that historians will continue approach this history from biased perspectives is highly likely.

One then has to question, is it important to know why the Council failed? Christianity at the time of the Council was already split in two for almost 400 years, and the dawn of the Reformation was soon to follow. The Byzantine Empire was conquered soon after regardless of Papal assistance, and the churches have remained separated to present day. What then is the importance of finding an objective interpretation of why this Council was unsuccessful?

The issue of the disparity of historical interpretation is the very reason further attention needs to be paid to events such as this. The fact that the Council's history has been largely un-researched since the publishing of Gill's works in the 1960's speaks to a complacency within the rhetoric surrounding the history of

Christianity. Relations between the Orthodox and Catholics has become so deeply ingrained in the culture that many don't know the reason that they are separated to begin with. The east still blames the west and the west still blames the east, and that is the deepest that most go into the history.

Unfortunately, when the rare instance arises where a person does want to know more of the history, they are met with the split viewpoints of the Catholic or Orthodox historians, and can easily become frustrated trying to figure out what went wrong. If the scholastic community continues to address church history from these polarized biased viewpoints, no true understanding can be reached and relations between the two churches will continue to be antagonistic.

The fact that the most definitive works on the Council are more than fifty years old is another point of concern. While the more recent writings of Van Sickle and Siecienski are a cause for hope in the current state of council history, the modern interest into the study leaves much to be desired. As previously mentioned, Siecienski's approach to the council is too brief to be of real use, and Van Sickle is only discussing John VII. Anyone who approaches the history of the Council is still lead first to Gill's work. This further illustrates the complacency towards Christian history, and the view of a complete understanding that is far from agreed upon.

What is needed then is revitalization within the scholastic community into the study of these events, and not propagation of the same biases that pervade the discussion between east and west. Vitriolic language and preconceived notions of who was right and who was wrong need to be left aside in order to find a valid and true retelling of the events as they were and the rest can be left to the theologians.

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