

How Did the Union of Florence Influence the Union of Brest?

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Introduction

The Union of Brest in 1596 ought not to be viewed as an innovation, but rather as a local reactivation of the Council of Florence.¹ This affirmation, by I. Moncak, may be a little too bold for modern historiography, but it is certainly true that the Union of Florence fundamentally influenced the Ruthenian bishops in their negotiations with the Roman See at the end of the sixteenth century. In a certain sense, one can speak of “*Florence avant Florence*” in the territory of the Kyivan Metropolitanate. I will re-examine the impact of the Council of Florence in the Ruthenian lands, illustrating the direct involvement of the Florentine tradition in the Union of Brest.

Achievements of the Union of Florence

The first ecumenical councils formulated the theological dogmas which were to be accepted by all Christians. After the first millennium, however, there developed different theological terms, interpretations, and methods for the expression of belief. In the East, under the influence of Palamitic theories and hesychast practices, a mystical attitude toward theology became more pronounced.² At the same time, the West, with

¹I. Moncak, *Florentine Ecumenism in the Kyivan Church* (Rome: Universitas St. Clementis, 1987), 282-308.

²J. Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (New York: St. Vladimir's Press, 1974), 75-146.

the renewal of Aristotelian philosophy, adopted a semi-rationalist scholasticism.³ At the Council of Florence, both sides had to explain their method of reasoning. These long explications created something of a spirit of reconciliation, which was supported by the difficult position in which both the Byzantine emperor and the papacy found themselves. The emperor was anxious to gain Western aid against the Turks,⁴ and the Pope, by achieving the Union, hoped to gain the support of the prelates and rulers of the Council of Basel, who were in opposition to his rule.⁵

With the exception of a small group of Eastern prelates, everyone was ready to reconcile and compromise. They tried to tolerate and allow each others' ideas, customs, and interpretations. The proclamation of the Union used only concessions, not unilateral formulas. The Easterners allowed the Westerners to use the *filioque* (after proclaiming that the procession from the Father and the Son is as from one source), conceded to the Westerners the use of unleavened bread in the Eucharist, and acknowledged Latin beliefs about the punitive fire of Purgatory. The Westerners allowed the Easterners the use of leavened bread and of the epiclesis in the anaphora.⁶ The only new formula involved the Roman primacy; the Greeks had to make the concession of acknowledging "papal primacy of honour and (implicit) jurisdiction."⁷

The most important achievement of the Council of Florence was the implicit agreement, on both sides, that theological diversity is tolerable within a single apostolic tradition. It meant that the Union could be accepted with no changes in either Eastern or Western tradition, law, and liturgy.⁸

³J. Pelikan, *The Growth of Medieval Theology* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 255–307.

⁴G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1969), 561–63.

⁵J. Gill, *The Council of Florence* (Cambridge: University Press, 1959), 46–130.

⁶*Ibid.*, 180–304.

⁷J. Meyendorff, "Was there an Encounter between East and West at Florence?" in *Christian Unity: The Council of Ferrara-Florence*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo (Leuven: University Press, 1991), 169.

⁸*Ibid.*

Byzantine Response to the Union of Florence

After the acceptance of the Union in Florence, Isidore, Metropolitan of Kyiv, was named apostolic legate and sent to the Ruthenian lands and to Muscovy to promote the union among the Eastern Slavs. In Poland and Lithuania, he met with considerable success; in Lviv, Volodymyr, Turov, Pinsk, Polots'k, and especially in Kyiv, he proclaimed the Union between the Western and Eastern Churches.⁹ In Moscow, however, he encountered a different response. The Muscovite Grand Duke, Basil II, ordered Isidore's arrest, though he was allowed to escape a few months later, returning to Poland and Lithuania, and from there to Rome, leaving his Metropolitanate for good.¹⁰ On his journey to Rome, he stopped for a few days in the Hungarian capital, Buda, where he met again with the Polish king, Ladislaus III. Lobbying with the king, he obtained a very important document for his Church: the "Buda Charter" of 1443.¹¹ In this document, the king recognized all the rights, privileges, and prerogatives of the Ruthenian Church and made them equal to the Latin Church. In time, the "Buda Charter" became an important part of the Polish Constitution, and was reconfirmed several times (1504, 1543) by the successors of Ladislaus III.¹²

Given the decisions of the Council of Florence and the Buda Charter, the Ruthenian Church could only gain from the introduction of the Union. However, the situation was not so favourable in the other Orthodox countries of the East. Despite the growing anti-Union forces in Constantinople, the Florentine Union was officially proclaimed by Isidore himself in December of 1452, and only five months later, the Turks

⁹O. Halecki, *From Florence to Brest (1439-1596)* (Hamden: Arcon Books, 1968), 57-61; B. Bucynsky, "Studii z istorii tserkovnoi unii," *Zapysky NTS* 85-86 (Lviv, 1908): 28-33.

¹⁰Halecki, *From Florence to Brest*, 62-63.

¹¹M. Harasiewicz, *Annales Ecclesiae Ruthenae* (Leopoli: Typis Instituti Rutheni Stauropeigiani, 1862), 78-80. Cf. Bucynsky, "Studii z istorii," 42; Halecki, *From Florence to Brest*, 123-24.

¹²*Ibid.*, 78-80.