

**Michiel Decaluwe, Thomas M. Izbicki and Gerald Christianson (eds.), *A Companion to the Council of Basel*, Brill, Leiden, 2016, 556 p.**

The Council of Basel (1431 – 1449) met to defend the faith and reform the Church. Its efforts to deal with Hussite heresy and reform the Roman Curia led to conflict with Pope Eugenius IV (1431 – 1447). The council divided over the site of a council of union with the Eastern churches. Some left to attend Eugenius' Council of Florence (1438 – 1443). While that council was negotiating reunion with Eastern churches, in 1439 Basel was acting to claim supremacy and depose Eugenius. The ensuing struggle went on for a decade before Basel and its pope, Felix V (Amadeus VIII of Savoy), gave up under pressure from the princes. These essays address multiple aspects of the Council of Basel, including its reforming efforts and bureaucracy.

*A Companion to the Council of Basel* is the first volume of essays to treat the Council of Basel as a whole and not as part of a larger history of councils or as part of the Council of Florence. With the possible exception of the volume published by Johannes Helmrath (*Das Basel Konzil*, 1987, 656 p.) – an extensive overview of existing scholarship and a monumental bibliography, making it an outstanding tool for research – no history of the Council of Basel exists that can compare with Humbert Jedin on Trent, Joseph Gill on Ferrara – Florence or Walter Brandmüller on Constance and Pavia – Siena.

The purpose of this *Companion* is to fill the gap and at the same time become an indispensable aid to the Basel studies for the next generation. Yet, this volume is not a traditional single – dimensional story of the conflict between the Council and the pope or between the pope and the Council. Its aim is to present the history of Basel (to use the shorthand term for the Council) as the history of a gathering where people interact, and where ideas and convictions collide.

Michiel Decaluwe, *A Companion to the Council of Basel*

To fulfill this purpose, the book brings together older and younger scholars from several countries and different backgrounds with a mix of methodologies and a wide range of disciplines, including institutional history, diplomatics, prosopography, canon law, theology and liturgical studies. In addition, the essays provide a panoply of citations to the sources and both older and more recent interpretive studies. Taken together, these will create a comprehensive portrait of a rich and complex assembly.

To assist the reader in bringing together the various themes treated in the individual chapters that follow, editors begin with a *Historical Survey* (Michiel Decaluwe and Gerald Christianson, p. 8 – 41), which follows the story of the Council through its key phases from its beginning in 1431 until its close in 1449, and which is followed by a time – line.

*Part 1* serves as background with discussion of the sources, manuscripts and print publication of the official records of the Council (Thomas M. Izbicki, p. 41 – 50) and the changing image of the Council in the treatments by previous historians (Jesse D. Mann, p. 50 – 75).

*Part 2* takes us into the heart of the conflict between the Council and the papacy, beginning with a general treatment of conciliarism that provided the framework for much of the Council's resistance (Gerald Christianson, p. 75 – 112) and the politics involved in the pope's desire to close or, if need be, cooperate with the assembly (Michiel Decaluwe, p. 112 – 137). Following closely the next essay treats the papal revival after it had suffered some serious setbacks (Thomas M. Izbicki, p. 137 – 167).

*Part 3* is the longest sections and treats specific issues within the Council: its bureaucracy (Hans – Jörg Gilomen, p. 167 – 229), lawyers and legal proceedings (Emilie Rosenblieh, p. 229 – 254), debates with the Hussites (Thomas Fudge, p. 254 – 282), reform (Brigit Studt, p. 282 – 310), negotiations toward union with the Greek Church (Ivan Mariano, p. 310 – 340) and Conciliar Liturgy (Alberto Cadili, p. 340 – 377).

*Part 4* considers the interweaving of the ecclesiastical and the secular spheres. It investigates the important relationships between the Council and the lay powers such as France (Heribert Müller, p. 377 – 410) and the Empire (Johannes Helmraath, p. 410 – 443) and includes a treatment of the "Council's pope", Felix V (Ursula Giessmann, p. 443 – 471).

*Part 5* concludes the story with an estimation of the Council's legacy (Alberto Cadili, p. 471 – 503).

Michiel Decaluwe, *A Companion to the Council of Basel*

The *Bibliography* contains only a selection of the vast amount of publications on the Council. The titles retained are mainly those to which the authors of this volume refer (p. 503 – 534).

By this work, editors “hope to combine the contributions of recent scholarship to present the Council as a gathering of people and ideas, with a succession of expectations and frustrations that are, in the past and in our days, among the emotions that are evoked by the concept of *change*” (p. 4). Also, the editors “hope to examine the key contexts in which Basel conciliarists and reformers, as well as their opponents, navigated the challenges around them, above all the three areas the saw as their divinely – mandated tasks: to promote unity in Church and society, defend the faith against heresy and guarantee continuing reform”.

By means of all these, this volume will situate the central issues of the Council in such a way as to gain a better understanding of how it was impacted by various interests and powers (especially France and the Empire) in the century before the Reformation and how the Council itself impacted the course of European history.

In the end, the editors hope “to allow the reader to consider how the legacy of reform and conciliarism may be applied to today’s contexts of challenge and change, while identifying issues for further study that will illumine our understanding of the late Middle Ages, and the paths ahead at the dawn of the third millennium” (p. 4).

**Rev. Traian Nojea**