

**CARDINAL BESSARION, MYSTICAL THEOLOGY
AND SPIRITUAL UNION BETWEEN EAST AND WEST**

By

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University
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To My Family

Faith, in fact, is what gives fullness to our reasoning

Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 29

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ABSTRACT

Cardinal Bessarion is best known as the apostle of union between the two historic Churches and the advocate of cultural reintegration of East and West. Much historical investigation has been concerned with his motives when, as a representative of the Eastern Church, he accepted the short-lived Church Union achieved at the Council of Florence in 1438/9 and subsequently immersed himself in western culture. In the latter case, considerably more attention has been given to his humanist endeavours and philosophical interests than to his theological views.

The present study examines Bessarion's writings in correlation with the challenges faced and the steps taken from his early life in the East through his subsequent western career, which led him to find in his own Byzantine heritage a solution to the religious differences between East and West. In his synthesis of mystical theology and Neoplatonic philosophy, Bessarion offered an apophatic understanding of God which rose above dogmatic disputation to provide what he considered to be a means for achieving a true and lasting spiritual union.

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>CSHB</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae</i>
<i>DBI</i>	<i>Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani</i>
<i>DHGE</i>	<i>Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique</i>
<i>DOP</i>	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
<i>DTC</i>	<i>Dictionnaire de théologie catholique</i>
<i>ICP</i>	<i>In calumniam Platonis</i>
<i>NH</i>	<i>Νέος Ἑλληνομνήμων</i>
<i>OCA</i>	<i>Orientalia Christiana Analecta</i>
<i>OCP</i>	<i>Orientalia Christiana Periodica</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus. Series latina.</i>
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus. Series graeco-latina.</i>
<i>PP</i>	<i>Ραλαιολόγια καὶ Πελοποννησιακά</i>
<i>REB</i>	<i>Revue des études byzantines</i>
<i>RSCI</i>	<i>Rivista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia</i>
<i>RSBN</i>	<i>Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici</i>

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Cardinal Bessarion (ca. 1403/08-1472) is best known as the apostle of union between the two historic churches and the advocate of cultural reintegration of East and West. He attended the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-39) as the Metropolitan of Nicaea, a leader amongst the Eastern delegates, who became convinced during the course of the proceedings that Latin claims on doctrine and authority were legitimate. Thereafter he never wavered in his conviction that the short union achieved was theologically sound nor in his belief that only western intervention could save the beleaguered remnants of the Byzantine Empire and Western Europe from the relentless onslaught of the Ottoman Turks. His views seem highly romantic given the long estrangement that had existed between East and West. Orthodox and Catholic, Greek and Latin, but a certain ecumenical spirit prevailed during the course of the council. Pope Eugenius IV immediately set in motion plans to provide military assistance to the East.

Bessarion's hopes for a ready acceptance in the East of decisions taken by an oecumenical council were not to be realized. When he and the other Eastern delegates returned to Constantinople on 1 February 1440, the union immediately faced opposition from the majority of the monks and common people which, in turn, spawned the formation of a small intransigent anti-unionist party. Bessarion had been created Cardinal by Pope

Eugenius IV in December 1439; in late 1440 he returned to Italy, never to see his homeland again. As the champion of a united Christendom, he tried by all means at his disposal to promote the union by polemics in favour of the Latin doctrine of the *filioque* and efforts to bring material aid to the East in the form of crusades to push back the encroaching Turks.

Attempts to understand Bessarion's motives in accepting the church union and subsequently immersing himself in Latin culture have largely determined the direction of historical research and, at times, religious affiliation has coloured scholarly interpretations. Catholic historians tend to embrace Bessarion as an ecumenically-minded moderate who worked valiantly for a legitimately united Church.¹ Orthodox historians have on occasion taken a much harder line against him. Some believe that he betrayed his faith out of ambition or for profit or that he put patriotism or his humanist endeavours before spiritual truth.²

However, Bessarion's decision in favour of union was only one point in a long process that began in Byzantium. His cultural formation as a scholar-monk greatly influenced his understanding of Trinitarian theology, the nature of God and the relationship between theology and philosophy in the synthesis of faith and reason. His encounter with western culture and theology at the Council of Florence was certainly a major turning point in his life, which stimulated within him an already present tendency to harmonize different

¹See Joseph Gill, "The Sincerity of Bessarion the Unionist," *Journal of Theological Studies* 26 (1975) : 378.

²See John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: 1974), 113; N. Tomadakis, "Oriente e Occidente all'epoca del Bessarione," *RSBN* 15 (1968) : 33; See also discussion, Gill, "Sincerity of Bessarion," 378-80.

disciplines and synthesize divergent points of view.³ Nonetheless, he retained much of his own Byzantine perspective and made extensive use of the Byzantine hermeneutical tradition in the Latin portion of his career.⁴ The present study examines Bessarion's writings in correlation with the challenges faced and the steps taken from his early life in the East through his subsequent western career. His experience led him to find in his own Byzantine heritage a solution to the religious differences between East and West. In his synthesis of mystical theology and Neoplatonic philosophy, Bessarion offered an apophatic understanding of God which rose above dogmatic disputation to provide what he considered to be a means for achieving a true and lasting spiritual union.

Primary Sources

The chief primary sources are, of course, Bessarion's own works of theology, philosophy, philology and a wide range of rhetorical pieces such as orations, *encomiums*, *consolationes* and letters, as well as autograph *marginalia* in manuscripts he owned.⁵ There

³See C. M. Woodhouse, *George Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes* (Oxford: 1986), 33.

⁴See James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols. Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition, vol. 17 (Leiden and New York: 1990), 1 : 249-63 (hereafter Hankins, 1 and 2).

⁵The vast majority of Bessarion's works have been printed in collections of sources or separately in journal articles. See *PG*, 161, 2-746: Bessarion Nicaenus, *Oratio dogmatica de unione*, ed. E. Candal (Rome, 1958); Bessarion Nicaenus, *De Spiritus Sancti processione ad Alexium Lascarum Philanthropinum*, ed. E. Candal (Rome 1961); Ludwig Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion als Theologe, Humanist und Staatsmann*, 3 vols. (Paderborn, 1923-1942; reprint, Paderborn, 1967), vol. 2, *Bessarionis In Calumniatorem Platonis Libri IV: Textum Graecum Addita Vetere Versione Latina*, (hereafter Mohler, 2), vol. 3, *Aus Bessarions Gelehrtenkreis, Abhandlungen, Reden, Briefe von Bessarion, Theodoros Gazes, Michael Apostolios, Andronikos Kallistos, Georgios Trapezuntios, Niccolò Perotti, Niccolò*

are also added to these the works of specific individuals within Bessarion's changing cultural milieu, who participated in the theological and philosophical debates of the period.⁶

Other extant documents of the Council of Florence⁷ supplement the written contributions of Bessarion, Mark of Ephesus and George Scholarius to these proceedings, theological debates and outcomes.⁸ Important information on the Cardinal's life is derived

Capranica. (hereafter Mohler, 3). Individual works and *marginalia* printed in journal articles will be identified where relevant in the historiographical discussion or the body of the study.

⁶Mark Eugenicus. "Documents relatifs au Concile de Florence. I: La questions du Purgatoire à Ferrare. II. Oeuvres anticonciliaires de Marc d' Ephèse." ed. L. Petit, in *Patrologia Orientalis*, XV (1920), 1-168; XVII (1923), 309-524; reprint, *Marci Eugenici, Metropolitanæ Ephesi, Opera Anti-Unionistica*, ed. L. Petit and G. Hofmann, (Rome, 1977); Gennadius Scholarios, *Oeuvres complètes de Gennade Scholarios*, ed. L. Petit, M. Jugie, X. A. Sidéridès, 8 vols. (Paris, 1928-36); *Orationes Georgii Scholarii in Concilio Florentino habitæ*, ed. J. Gill (Rome, 1964). *Collectanea Trapezuntiana: Texts, Documents and Bibliographies of George of Trebizond*, ed. John Monfasani. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, vol. 25 (Binghamton, 1984).

⁷*Concilium Florentinum, Documenta et Scriptores: Epistolæ pontificiæ ad Concilium Florentinum spectantes*, ed. G. Hofmann (Rome, 1940-6); *Acta camerae apostolicæ et civitatum Venetiarum, Ferrariæ, Florentiæ, Ianuæ, de Concilio Florentino*, ed. G. Hofmann (Rome, 1950); *Fragmenta protocolli, diara privata, sermones*, ed. G. Hofmann (Rome, 1951); *Orientalium documenta minora*, ed. G. Hofmann, T. O'Shaughnessy and J. Simon (Rome, 1953); *De purgatorio disputationes in Concilio Florentino habitæ*, ed. L. Petit and G. Hofmann (Rome, 1969); Ioannes de Torquemada, O.P., *Apparatus super decretum Florentinum unionis Graecorum*, ed. E. Candal (Rome, 1942); Fantius Vallaresso, *Libellus de ordine generalium conciliorum et union Florentina*, ed. Bernard Schultz (Rome, 1944); Andreas de Escobar, *Tractus polemico-theologicus de Graecis errantibus*, ed. E. Candal (Rome, 1952); *Quæ supersunt actorum graecorum Concilii Florentini*, ed. J. Gill (Rome, 1953); Ioannes de Torquemada, O.P., *Oratio synodica de primatu*, ed. E. Candal (Rome, 1954); Andreas de Santacroce, advocatus consistorialis, *Acta latina Concilii Florentini*, ed. G. Hofmann (Rome, 1955); *Les "Memoires" du Grand Ecclesiarque du l'Eglise de Constantinople Sylvestre Syropoulos sur le concile de Florence (1438-1439)*, ed. V. Laurent (Paris and Rome, 1971); *Sermones inter Concilium Florentinum conscripti*, ed. G. Hofmann and E. Candal (Rome 1971).

⁸For these individuals' works see ns. 5 and 6 above.

from other contemporary sources: Platina's panegyric,⁹ the funeral orations by Capranica¹⁰ and Apostolis,¹¹ as well as profiles of Bessarion by Ransano¹² and Vespasiano.¹³ Pertinent information can sometimes be derived from the Byzantine histories of the period.¹⁴

Secondary Sources

Biographies, all of which are now quite dated, represent the first scholarly approach to the study of Bessarion and his activities. Bandini's eighteenth century profile of the

⁹Baptistae Platina. *Panegyricus in laudem amplissimi patris domini Bessarionis, episcopi Sabini, cardinalis Nicaeni et patriarchae Constantinopolitani*, PG. 161, ciii-cxvi, composed ca. 1469, a short time after Bessarion's publication of the *ICP* in 1469.

¹⁰Niccolò Capranica. *Acta in funere Nicaeni per Nicolaum Episcopum Firmanum*. Mohler, 3, 404-14, which was the actual eulogy delivered at Bessarion's funeral, 4 December 1472.

¹¹Michaelis Apostolii Byzantini. *Oratio funebris lamentabile habens prooemium in divinissimum Bessarionem reverendissimum cardinalem Sanctae Sabiniae et sanctissimum patriarcham Constantinopolitanum*, PG. 161, cxxvii-cxxxix.

¹²Pietro Ransano. *Annales omnium temporum*, ed. A. Barilaro, O.P.. "Pietro Ranzano, vescovo di Lucera, umanista domenicano in Palermo." *Memorie Domenicane*. N.S., VIII-IX, (1977-8) 169-71.

¹³Vespasiano da Bisticci. *Vite di uomini illustri del secolo XV*, trans. William George and Emily Waters. *Renaissance Princes, Popes and Prelates. The Vespasiano Memoirs: Lives of Illustrious Men of the XVth Century* (New York, 1926; reprint, 1963).

¹⁴Laonikos Chalkokondyles. *Historiarum demonstrationes*, ed. E. Darkó (Budapest, 1922-7); Georgius Phrantzes, *Chronicon Minus*, PG 156, 1025-80, trans. Marios Philippides. *The Fall of the Byzantine Empire: A Chronicle by George Sphrantzes 1401-1477* (Amherst, 1980); Kritoboulos, *Critobuli Imbrotae Historiae*, ed. D. R. Reinsch (Berlin and New York, 1883), trans. C. T. Riggs, *History of Mehmed the Conqueror by Kritovoulos* (Princeton, 1954); Doukas, *Historia Turco-Byzantina (1341-1462)*, ed. I. Bekker, *CSHB* (Bonn, 1834), trans. Harry J. Magoulias, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium to the Ottoman Turks by Doukas* (Detroit, 1975).

Cardinal's Latin life is generally now considered a highly romantic account, but it can be useful if approached with some caution.¹⁵

Henry Vast (1878) produced the first complete study of Bessarion's life. To Vast, Bessarion was a unique blend of the eastern and western cultures, one who was *Latinorum graecissimus, Graecorum latinissimus*, an epigram that has from that time been continually copied as the quintessential descriptive motif. Vast considered Bessarion both a scholastic in the western sense and a confirmed unionist, part of a small cultured élite convinced of the legitimacy of Catholic doctrine and papal supremacy, who endeavoured to persuade the schismatic Greeks to confess their error and return to the Roman fold.¹⁶

Ludwig Mohler (1923) undertook an extended study of Bessarion, preliminary to the publication of many of his writings. Mohler concurred with Vast's analysis of Bessarion as an admirable blend of the two cultures, one who was not only a unionist but also a *Latinophrone*. Mohler contended that Bessarion had accepted the Latin doctrine on the Procession of the Holy Spirit before his participation at the Council of Florence.¹⁷

Emmanuel Candal (1938) established Bessarion as part of the anti-Palamite tradition in Byzantium. Candal found evidence in a letter to Bessarion from the Greek convert to the Latin Church, Andrew Chrysoberges, that Bessarion, prior to the Council of Florence, had rejected the orthodox Palamite doctrine on the division between the divine essence and

¹⁵Aloysii Bandini, *De vita et rebus gestis Bessarionis cardinalis Nicaeni. Commentarius* (Rome, 1777), prefixed to Bessarion's works in PG 161, iii-lxii.

¹⁶Henri Vast, *Le Cardinal Bessarion (1403-1472): Étude sur la chrétienté et la Renaissance vers le milieu du XV^e siècle* (Paris, 1878).

¹⁷Mohler, *Kardinal Bessarion*, vol. 1, *Darstellung* (hereafter Mohler, 1).

energies, which had led him to question his own Church's orthodoxy and authority. Candal also concluded that, contrary to Vast's opinion, Bessarion had no sophisticated understanding of western scholasticism.¹⁸ Further to this, Candal (1940) challenged Mohler's thesis that Bessarion had accepted the Latin doctrine of the *filioque* prior to the Council of Florence. To Candal, this made nonsense of Bessarion's early speeches at Ferrara where he consistently defended the orthodox position on the Procession of the Holy Spirit.¹⁹

Joseph Gill's history of the Council (1959) provided a better understanding of the evolution of events and the course of the proceedings. Gill confirmed that Bessarion was genuinely convinced of the legitimacy of the Latin position during the course of the deliberations at Ferrara and Florence: he also established that Bessarion considered that the union was achieved by the judgement of an oecumenical council.²⁰ Gill continued to investigate the proceedings of the Council and the contribution of its leading participants.²¹ Subsequent to this he addressed Bessarion's pre-conference attitudes, which to Gill clearly showed Bessarion's rejection of Palamite theology and established that he was neither a unionist nor a conciliarist before he attended the Council of Florence. Rather, Bessarion's

¹⁸E. Candal, "Andreae Rhodiensis, O.P., Inedita ad Bessarionem Epistula (De divina essentia et operatione)," *OCP* 4 (1938): 329-71.

¹⁹Emmanuel Candal, "Bessarion Nicaenus in Concilio Florentino," *OCP* 6 (1940): 417-66.

²⁰Joseph Gill, *The Council of Florence* (Cambridge, 1959).

²¹See Joseph Gill, *Personalities of the Council of Florence and other Essays* (Oxford, 1964).

attitude gradually changed toward acceptance of the *filioque* and union during the course of the Council itself.²²

More recently Bessarion's pre-council anti-Palamite conviction has been contested. André de Halleux (1989) rejects the evidence upon which Candal and Gill formerly based their conclusion. De Halleux contends that the portion of Andrew Chrysoberges' letter, alleged to contain Bessarion's rejection of the Palamite doctrine and questioning of his own Church's legitimacy, actually expresses the views of Chrysoberges' himself on the two matters. De Halleux concludes that Bessarion attended the Council in full agreement with his own Church's Palamite theology.²³

Bessarion's manuscript collection, including his own published works, housed in the Marciana Library in Venice has been another avenue historians have pursued in attempts to establish key elements in Bessarion's life and the development of his views and attitudes. Scholars have studied particular autograph manuscripts as well as *marginalia* contained in manuscripts Bessarion owned. Of immense importance in this regard has been the study of Codex Marcianus Graecus 533.²⁴

²²See Gill, "Sincerity of Bessarion"; idem, "Was Bessarion a Conciliarist or a Unionist?" *OCA* 204 (1977): 201-19.

²³André de Halleux, "Bessarion et le palamisme au concile de Florence," *Irenikon* 62 (1989): 307-32.

²⁴This manuscript, as one of the major sources for Bessarion's life in Byzantium, his participation in the Council of Florence and his early life in Italy, has undergone extensive study and most of the pieces have been published, either separately or in groups. The manuscript contains a prologue by Bessarion, followed by a list of 35 pieces, the first, an *Encomium* of his namesake, composed in 1423 when he became a monk and the last, a letter to the Despot Constantine, written in Italy in 1444. The date of publication is thus narrowed to between 1444 and 5 April 1449, since Bessarion styles himself Cardinal of the Twelve

From his study of this manuscript, R. Loenertz (1944) was able to provide additional biographical information on Bessarion's early life including his monastic career, literary formation and cultural milieu.²⁵ Pierre Joannou (1947) published Bessarion's *Encomium of St. Bessarion* and uncovered a great deal of the humanist in the young Bessarion. Although this work is based upon an early synaxarion of the ascetic saint's life, Bessarion downplayed the most bizzare aspects of his namesake's life and provided rational explanations for many of his actions.²⁶ Storman (1980) provided invaluable information about Bessarion's religious, literary and philosophical formation and some of the public

Apostles, a title he held until the latter date. For Greek text of the prologue see Mohler, I, 51, n. 2; with French translation and list of the entries, see H. D. Saffrey, "Recherches sur quelques autographes du Cardinal Bessarion et leur caractère autobiographique," *Mélanges Eugene Tisserant*, vol. 3, (Vatican City, 1964), 283-4; for English translation see E. J. Storman, "Bessarion before the Council of Florence: A survey of his early writings (1423-1437)," *Byzantina Australiensia* I (1980) : 130-1. See R. Loenertz, "Pour la biographie du Cardinal Bessarion," *OCP* 10 (1944) : 117-49; Saffrey, "Recherches Cardinal Bessarion," 263-97, for discussion of works; Storman, "Bessarion Before Council," 128-56, for an extensive overview. These studies indicate that the pieces were arranged in chronological order until the year 1436, at which point some dislocation seemed to occur. See now, John Monfasani, "Platina, Capranica and Perotti: Bessarion's Latin Eulogists and his Date of Birth," in *Bartolomea Sacchi il Platina (Piadena 1421-Rome 1481)*, Atti del convegno internazionale di Studi per il V Centenario (Padova, 1986) in Monfasani, *Byzantine Scholars in Renaissance Italy: Cardinal Bessarion and other Emigrés* (London: Variorum, 1991), 118, n. 81. Monfasani has shown that Bessarion did place the pieces in chronological order, but he divided them in two groups, i.e., all those written in Byzantium (items 1-31) followed by those in Italy (items 32-5). Saffrey, "Recherches Cardinal Bessarion," 292, indicates that Cod. Marc. gr. 527, which contains six letters to Michael Apostolis, and Cod. Marc. gr. 333, an autograph of letters to Plethon and to Nicolas Secundinus, are a chronological continuation of Marc. gr. 533. Saffrey considers that Bessarion intended to see all of these works eventually published and had many translated into Latin for the same purpose.

²⁵Loenertz, "Biographie du Bessarion," 121-49.

²⁶Pierre Joannou, "Un opuscule inédit du Cardinal Bessarion: Le Panégyrique de Saint Bessarion Anchorète Égyptien," *Analecta Bollandina* 65 (1947) : 105-33, for Greek text, commentary and summaries.

affairs in which he took part. Storman identified Bessarion as part of the scholar-monk tradition in Byzantium, confirmed his aversion to hesychast mysticism and Palamite theology and concluded that, although the young monk was open to the West on cultural grounds, he was not a scholastic and had a very limited understanding of Thomist theology.²⁷ A. G. Keller (1953-5) examined Bessarion's letter to the Despot Constantine, pointing out Bessarion's keen interest in western technological advancements and the suggestions he put forward for the economic revival of the Morea and technical training of Byzantine youth in Italy.²⁸

The considerable research of H. D. Saffrey and Elpidio Mioni has contributed to the biographical profile of Bessarion, widening our understanding of his theological and philosophical views as a Christian Platonist and his extensive knowledge of the Neoplatonic hermeneutical tradition, especially the works of Proclus. Further, knowledge of Bessarion's scholarship has been enhanced, showing him to be an avid bibliophile and philologist, who constantly reedited texts and made collections of excerpts from the classics.²⁹ Mioni (1968) and C. Bianca (1980) also provided valuable insights into the provenience of Bessarion's

²⁷Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 144-5.

²⁸A. G. Keller, "A Byzantine Admirer of 'Western' Progress: Cardinal Bessarion," *Cambridge Historical Journal* 11 (1953-55) : 343-8; Letter to the Despot Constantine Palaeologos, ed. S. P. Lambros, *NH* III (1906). See n. 24 above.

²⁹See H. D. Saffrey, "Aristotle, Proclus, Bessarion: A propos de l'un transcendantal," in *Atti del XII Congresso Internazionale di Filosofia*, vol. 12, *Storia della filosofia antica e medievale* (Firenze, 1960), 153-8; idem, "Recherches Cardinal Bessarion"; idem, "Notes autographes du cardinal Bessarion dans un manuscrit de Munich," *Byzantion* XXV (1965) : 536-63. See Elpidio Mioni, "Bessarione bibliofilo e filologo," *RSBN* XV (1968) : 61-83; idem, "Bessarione scriba e alcuni suoi collaboratori," *Miscellanea Marciana di Studi Bessarionei, Medioevo e Umanesimo* 24 (Padua, 1976) : 263-318.

library.³⁰ Labowsky (1979) edited six early inventories of the library. She indicated the wide range of the collection, the losses it sustained before being finally properly housed and the interests of Bessarion himself, which centred upon works of history, philosophy, geography, mathematics and the writings of the Eastern Fathers.³¹

The question has sometimes arisen of the extent of Bessarion's facility in Latin. Mioni (1968) found a Latin translation of Peter Lombard's *Sentences* bound up with exercises from Bessarion's youth which would seem to indicate that he had some knowledge of the language before he arrived in the West, but both Gill (1977) and Storman (1980) reject this suggestion.³² Monfasani (1981, 1983) also questions Bessarion's command of the language since examination of the manuscript tradition of Bessarion's *In caluminatorem Platonis* indicates collaboration between Bessarion and the members of his academy in its production. Moreover, it was Bessarion's secretary, Perotti, who actually produced the final Latin version printed in 1469.³³

Monfasani (1986) also contributed to Bessarion's biographical profile and unravelled the complicated interdependence of Bessarion's eulogists. The *panegyric* of Platina (ca.

³⁰Mioni, "Bessarione bibliofilo;" C. Bianca, "La formazione della biblioteca latina del Bessarione" in *Scrittura, biblioteche e stampa a Roma nel Quattrocento: Aspetti e Problemi*, ed. C. Bianca, et al. (Vatican City, 1980), 103-65.

³¹Lotte Labowsky, *Bessarion's Library and the Biblioteca Marciana: Six Early Inventories* (Rome, 1979), 5-18.

³²See Mioni, "Bessarione bibliofilo," 65; idem, "Bessarione scriba," 270. See also Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 155-6, n. 107; Gill, "Was Bessarion a Conciliarist," 211-16, particularly 213.

³³John Monfasani, "Bessarion Latinus," *Rinascimento* 21 (1981):165-209; idem, "Still More on 'Bessarion Latinus,'" *Rinascimento* 23 (1983): 217-35.

1469/70) and the funeral oration of Capranica (1472) are a type of work which naturally tends towards exaggeration. Loenertz (1944) recognized Platina as one of Capranica's sources, but contended that the latter also seemed to have evidence from an independent source. Monfassani has shown that this apparently independent information actually came to Capranica second-hand, through notes or remembrances provided to him by Platina from information the latter had acquired from Bessarion's long time secretary, Perotti. Capranica, having been assigned the task of delivering the eulogy by Pope Sixtus IV and having no special affection for Bessarion, carelessly transmitted this information in his funeral oration. Monfassani has shown that Ransano had access to the same information from Perotti which he used much more accurately. Therefore, where Capranica is independent of the other three sources, his information must be considered suspect.³⁴

M. D. Feld (1986) studied Bessarion's involvement with the first printing enterprise in Rome. Feld identified a systematic program for study of the Greek and Roman classical and patristic texts provided through the successive publications of the printers, which showed the value of Neoplatonic study as well as the wide use of Neoplatonic writings by the Eastern and Western Church Fathers. Feld also pointed out Bessarion's ready grasp of the power of the press for propaganda.³⁵ Feld's contention that Bessarion transferred his library to the

³⁴Loenertz, "Biographie du Bessarion," 143; Monfasani, "Bessarion's Latin Eulogists," 97-136.

³⁵M. D. Feld, "Sweynheym and Pannartz, Cardinal Bessarion, Neoplatonism: Renaissance Humanism and Two Early Printers' Choice of Texts," *Harvard Library Bulletin* (1982): 282-335.

protection of the City of Venice to avoid papal confiscation of his classical collection has since been questioned.³⁶

Several cultural and intellectual historians have examined the use Renaissance and Early Modern scholars made of classical and patristic texts in various philosophical and theological combinations embracing mysticism, astrology, magic and eschatology. The transformation and diffusion of mystical, theurgical and magical elements of Platonism, Neoplatonism and Hermeticism in fifteenth and sixteenth century writers emerge in a plethora of investigations.³⁷

Deno John Geanakoplos (1989) identifies Byzantine influence in many of these developments since émigre scholars who taught in humanist centres interpreted the classical literature, published their own influential treatises and edited Greek manuscripts for the press. Some tried to append the full Byzantine curriculum of study, which included philosophy and mathematics, to the rhetorical pursuits undertaken by the western humanists.³⁸

³⁶Hankins. I. 214. n. 126.

³⁷See Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, rev. ed. (N. Haven, 1968); D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Camponella* (London, 1958; reprint, 1969); Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruni and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago, 1964); John W. O'Malley, *Giles of Viterbo on church and reform: A Study of Renaissance Thought* (Leiden, 1968); Pauline Moffitt Watts, *Nicolaus Cusanus: A Fifteenth Century Vision of Man* (London, 1982); Patrick Curry, *Astrology in Early Modern England* (Princeton, 1989); Hankins, I (1990); Laura Ackerman Smoller, *History, Prophecy and the Stars in the Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly, 1350-1420* (Princeton, 1994).

³⁸See the five articles on this subject by Deno John Geanakoplos, *Constantinople and the West: Essays on the Late Byzantine (Palaeologan) and Italian Renaissances and the Byzantine and Roman Churches*, Part I, *The Byzantine Palaeologan "Renaissance" and Italian Renaissance Humanism* (Madison, Wisc., 1989), 3-129.

Bessarion was one of the leading humanists in Italy for more than thirty years (1440-1472). He was well-known by his contemporaries as a Christian Platonist ; he was a leading participant in the so-called Plato-Aristotle Controversy,³⁹ his own *ICP* being one of the major texts. Nonetheless, he is often neglected or passed over quickly by modern scholars as having little influence on the developments which led to the synthesis of Christianity and Platonism found in the mystical theology of Marsilio Ficino..⁴⁰ despite the fact that D. P. Walker (1972) indicated the influence he exerted on French mystics well into the late sixteenth century.⁴¹

James Hankins (1990), in his study of the evolving interpretations of Plato in the Renaissance, draws attention to the larger role Bessarion played as the conduit for Christian

³⁹This controversy has a long history which has not yet been addressed with complete satisfaction. Publication of critical editions of all the relevant texts needed to do so is still in progress. The main authority, although mistaken on some details, is still Mohler, I, 346-98. But see also the more recent overviews by Paul Oskar Kristeller, "Byzantine and Western Platonism in the Fifteenth Century" in idem, *Renaissance Concepts of Man and Other Essays* (New York, 1972), 96-103; John Monfasani, *George of Trebizond: A Biography and a Study of his Rhetoric and Logic*, Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition, vol. 1 (Leiden, 1976), 201-29; Hankins, I, 193-263. For recent studies of two participants in the debate, who were at different times part of Bessarion's cultural milieu, see Monfasani, *George of Trebizond* (1976) and Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon* (1986). George of Trebizond was Bessarion's protagonist in the late stages of the debate in Rome (1456-1472); Plethon, the originator of the debate while attending the Council of Florence (1439), was Bessarion's mentor in Byzantium and introduced the young monk to Neoplatonic philosophy.

⁴⁰See for example, Pauline Moffitt Watts, "Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and Three Renaissance Neoplatonists: Cusanus, Ficino, and Pico on Mind and Cosmos," in *Supplementum Festivum: Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. J. Hankins, J. Monfasani and F. Purnell, Jr. (Binghamton, 1987), 279-98.

⁴¹D. P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1972).

Platonism in the Italian Renaissance. Hankins has added considerably to understanding much of Bessarion's motivation, rationale and methodology. He points out Bessarion's reliance on the Byzantine hermeneutical tradition in the theological debates at the Council of Florence and in his own major work, the *ICP*, where Bessarion's understanding of Plato relies heavily upon Proclus' interpretation. Hankins notes that Bessarion, much like Nicholas of Cusa, tried to rise above the doctrinal differences separating the historic Churches; both tended to see in Proclus' and Pseudo Dionysius' versions of Platonism a means to construct a theology of concord. Hankins drew out Bessarion's aversion to scholasticism as a prime factor in his attempt in the *ICP* to turn the West towards a synthesis of Christianity and Platonism, but he does not consider the possibility that Bessarion was also trying to find a solution in the *ICP* for the larger division between the Eastern and Western Churches. Moreover, Hankins identifies Bessarion as a fifteenth century heir to the anti-Palamite tradition in Byzantium, a designation which has now been questioned.⁴² Bessarion's use of the nexus between Proclus and Pseudo-Dionysius, the importance and place of these two Neoplatonic works in Byzantine history and Bessarion's reliance upon the traditional Byzantine understanding of faith and reason, would seem to indicate an attempt in the *ICP* to come to grips with the larger question of spiritual reunion between East and West which dominated his whole western career.

⁴²See Hankins, I, 193-263; de Halleux, "Bessarion et le palamisme," discussed above, 8.

The Present Study

This study will look upon the *ICP* as the culmination of a life's work devoted to bringing spiritual and cultural reintegration to East and West. Bessarion's career as a humanist and churchman will be evaluated by integrating his literary production into the social and cultural circumstances of which he was a part. This will clearly identify changes in his views, attitudes, and perceptions, which influenced critical decisions made.

Bessarion's introduction to Neoplatonic philosophy in his youth greatly influenced his understanding of the correlation between theology and philosophy in the connections he made between the Greek patristic tradition and the Neoplatonism of Proclus. Subsequent developments in his life greatly influenced his thinking, first with regard to hesychast mysticism, and then, after his partial integration into western society, towards humanism and scholasticism. The *ICP* is certainly an attempt to do with Plato what Aquinas had done with Aristotle. But it is more. Bessarion's analysis of Platonic theology in the *ICP* is in reality the traditional synthesis of mystical theology and rationalism which existed in the East. This use of an apophatic (negative) understanding of God is Bessarion's attempt to provide the means whereby the whole of Christendom could rise above divisive disputation to achieve the spiritual union which, then and now, has proved so elusive.

The second chapter will establish the historical context for Bessarion's life and thought. The political, ideological, theological and cultural divergence that contributed to the long-standing divisions between the Churches and the estrangement between the two parts of Christendom will be discussed. Important interchanges between East and West in

the context of developing theological and cultural events in the last centuries of Byzantium will also be addressed.

The third chapter will focus upon Bessarion's Byzantine formation. In examining his cultural milieu, one can see how his life as a scholar-monk was instrumental in establishing his reputation and expertise as a orator, an advantage which was beneficial in advancing his career amongst the Byzantine élite and introducing him to the seats of power in both church and state. His education was crucial in determining his evolving understanding with regard to theology, philosophy, relations between East and West and the approaching union council.

The fourth chapter will concentrate on Bessarion's first encounter with western culture at the Council of Florence in 1438-39. The progress of the debates and private deliberations of the Greek delegation were important elements in his changing attitude towards the western doctrine. Bessarion's attempt to convince his fellow delegates will be shown to be rooted in the apophatic tradition of his church. Other factors will also be addressed which were instrumental in his evolving view: the expertise of the Latins, the intellectual decadence of the Greeks and his interaction with key individuals.

The fifth chapter deals with Bessarion's attempts in the latter half of his life to bring material and spiritual substance to the union declared at Florence in 1439 in the face of the rapid extinction of the remnants of the Byzantine Empire before the relentless advance of the Turks. He met bitter disappointment in personal relationships and political events. It will be demonstrated that the apophatic theology of the East is very much present in his attempts to convince his protagonists of the validity of the Latin doctrine. The correlation between

his failed attempts to provide relief, the rapidly deteriorating eastern situation and his own evolving attitude towards the Byzantine Church will also be addressed.

The sixth chapter addresses the challenges Bessarion faced in the West and the steps he took in attempts to realize his plans for rescue of the East and to further cultural and spiritual unity. Bessarion's relationship with George of Trebizond and the latter's campaign against Plato in the course of the Plato-Aristotle debate had major implications for Bessarion's plans which went far beyond a debate about the relative value of the two philosopher's views. He experienced serious obstacles and challenges on many fronts, including personal attacks on his own morality and orthodoxy in his struggle with George.

The seventh chapter provides an examination of Bessarion's *ICP*, focussing on this, his major work, as the culmination of a life's mission. George of Trebizond's attack threatened Bessarion's whole life's work of reconciliation and reintegration of the cultures of East and West. In his answer to his adversary's damning treatise against Plato, it will be determined that Bessarion provided much more than a point-by-point refutation of all of George's charges. His exposition in the *ICP* embodied the culmination of his own understanding of the traditional Byzantine view of the correlation between faith and reason. In the nexus of his sources (the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius and Proclus) the Cardinal relied upon a synthesis of orthodox theology and Neoplatonic philosophy similar to what had existed in the patristic age. He provided a defence of his own reputation for orthodoxy by offering a mystical understanding of theological problems which could resolve the spiritual differences between East and West in rising above contentious disputation to an apophatic understanding that supercedes it.

CHAPTER II

THE DEVELOPMENT OF DIVERGENT WORLD VIEWS

Bessarion's desire to see the spiritual and cultural reunification of Christendom presented a formidable challenge. By the early fifteenth century political, cultural and social developments had established two very divergent world views in East and West, which coloured all attempts at reunion negotiations. These factors largely explain why the deep-seated church schism resisted resolution. The estrangement between East and West manifested itself in religious terms in which the papacy was the major player in the West, while imperial, ecclesiastical and popular concerns were intertwined in the East.¹

¹Several standard works on Byzantine history are now quite dated. See Louis Bréhier, *Le Monde Byzantin*, vol 1, *Vie et mort de Byzance* (Paris, 1946); A. A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire 324-1453* (Madison and London, 1952); George Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State*, 2d. ed., trans. Joan Hussey (Oxford, 1968). See also Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500-1453* (New York, 1971); C. Mango, *Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome* (London, 1980); Robert Browning, *The Byzantine Empire* (London, 1980) and the more recent, Warren Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford, 1997). For a broad study of cultural relations, see Deno J. Geanakoplos, *Interaction of the "Sibling" Byzantine and Western Cultures in the Middle Ages and Italian Renaissance (330-1660)* (New Haven and London, 1976). For the later Byzantine period, see Donald M. Nicol, *The Last Centuries of Byzantium 1261-1453* (London, 1972); idem, *Church and society in the last centuries of Byzantium* (Cambridge, London, New York and Melbourne, 1979). For a good overview of church relations, see J. M. Hussey, *The Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire* (Oxford, 1986; reprint, Oxford, 1990). On western developments, see R. W. Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (New Haven and London, 1953); idem, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Middlesex and Baltimore, 1970). For the early period see also Roger Collins, *Early Medieval Europe 300-1000* (London, 1991); for the later period, Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and*

Ideological, Cultural and Social Estrangement

The gradual development of two competing cosmologies produced considerable tension in relations between the two churches. The Eastern Eusebian ideology established the Emperor as the Vicegerent of God, who ruled the *Basileia*, the earthly reflection of the heavenly kingdom. Although imperial inability to protect vested interests against barbarian incursions saw a slow but steady relinquishment of imperial holdings in the West culminating in the Norman conquest of Byzantine Italy in 1071, convenient fictions maintained the imperial theory until the Empire's final demise. Territorial losses were viewed as temporary setbacks to be restored in God's good time: conquering barbarian chieftains were designated as representatives of the Byzantine government or, in the case of the Franks, as spiritual brothers. In practice accommodations were made to developing situations as the imperial boundaries shrank.²

The Roman Empire so declined that by the early fifteenth century two emperors had personally wandered the West seeking aid; humiliating accommodations were made with the Turks whereby in 1372 the Emperor John V Palaeologos even became a vassal of the Sultan Murad I (1362-89). By the time the Council of Florence briefly restored union to the Latin and Greek Churches in 1439, the Empire consisted of little more than the immediate environs of Constantinople and appanages held by members of the imperial family in the Peloponnese. The Emperor John VIII's hopes for victory over the Turks by a united Christendom in the

Reformation Europe (New Haven, 1980).

²See Donald M. Nicol, "The Byzantine View of Western Europe," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* VIII (1967) in idem, *Byzantium: its ecclesiastical history and relations with the western world* (London: Variorum, 1972), 315-25.

wake of the Council were disappointed by the defeat of the Crusade of Varna in 1444. Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453.³

Early on the western experience showed the poverty of the eastern political theory. Disintegration of imperial authority in the seventh and eighth centuries left the Roman Church as the only surviving institution capable of retaining a vestige of unity and order. The weak, fractured state of secular rule inclined Christian rulers to view the pope as the leader of western Christendom. The papacy arrived at a *modus vivendi* with the Franks in the face of imperial inability to provide assistance against barbarian incursions in the eighth century, resulting in the creation of the Papal States and the establishment of the so-called 'western empire.' However, challenges to papal authority arose with the development of feudal institutions since rulers sought to control ecclesiastical affairs through the appointment of local bishops. From the beginning of the tenth to the middle of the eleventh century even papal nominations were dominated by the agendas of competing secular powers in the German lands or ambitious Roman families in the Papal States. The rise of the Gregorian Reform Movement led to the Investiture Conflict whereby the popes regained control of ecclesiastical affairs leading to the establishment of the papal monarchy.⁴

Two differing ecclesiologies thus developed in East and West which, in a sense, left Rome and Constantinople as competing rivals. In the East, church and state continued to co-exist within the confines of the imperial political ideology, the Emperor holding

³Ibid., 326-30.

⁴See Collins, *Early Medieval Europe*, 337-55; Southern, *Western Society and Church*, 23-6, 58-60.

responsibility for the material and spiritual welfare of his subjects and delegating the supervision of their spiritual well being to the Church. The Church gladly accepted the Emperor as its protector, the guardian of the True Faith, the convenor of church councils and the promulgator of laws decided by such councils. The Church nevertheless resisted secular interference in doctrinal and moral issues. Emperors certainly did control the Church through amenable appointments but a strong conservative element in the monastic community, usually carrying with it the mass of popular opinion, increasingly resisted accommodation with the state. Decisions taken at oecumenical councils were directed against heretical factions and their doctrines. Imperial attempts to arrive at compromise solutions on doctrine in the Arian and later Christological controversies or to impose unilaterally the imperial will, as in the case of Iconoclasm or church reunion, met with resolute resistance.⁵

The papal monarchy which developed in the Roman Church contravened both imperial ideology and the eastern model for church government. Rome's autocratic constitution, ideologically based on the 'Petrine clauses', considered that the popes, having inherited Peter's position as first of the apostles and as the sole possessor of the keys to Heaven with the power to bind and loose, possessed authority over the whole church and its doctrine. A valid oecumenical council would endorse and promulgate papal

⁵Joan Mervyn Hussey, *Church and Learning in the Byzantine Empire 867-1185* (Cambridge, 1939), 134; George Every, *The Byzantine Patriarchate 451-1204*, 2^d ed. (London, 1962), 106; Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 48, 57.

pronouncements; the authority to enforce them would then be delegated to the secular power.⁶

In the East, the theory of Pentarchy prevailed despite the fact that the Arab conquest of the areas of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem left those patriarchates devoid of any real power in the ecclesiastical arena.⁷ Primacy of honour was always accorded Rome and a right of appeal to Rome was often recognized in disputes, but the expanding claim of Rome to universal jurisdiction over the whole of Christendom was firmly resisted. The Byzantine understanding of Rome's primacy was based on her senior status and as the "old" imperial capital just as Constantinople's secondary standing in the Pentarchy rested on her status as the "new" Rome. Moreover, the consensus of all the bishops of Christendom, meeting in oecumenical council, was required to legislate on doctrine. Rome could not alter or develop doctrine on her own.⁸

However, an 'addition' to the creed gained gradual acceptance in the West. To combat Arian claims that Christ was a deified creature (not of the same essence as the Father and, therefore, inferior and subordinate) the Church in Spain in the sixth century inserted the celebrated *filioque* formula into the Creed to safeguard Christ's position as consubstantial

⁶Runciman, *The Eastern Schism: A Study of the Papacy and the Eastern Churches during the XIth and XIIth Centuries* (Oxford, 1955; reprint, 1963), 4-10; Nicol, *Last Centuries*, 242. See also John Meyendorff, *The Byzantine Legacy in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, 1982), 18, who sees the Petrine theory regarding primacy firmly in place at Rome by the fifth century.

⁷See Runciman, *Eastern Schism*, 12-14; Hussey, *Orthodox Church*, 167-8.

⁸For in-depth study of the primacy question as it evolved between East and West see especially Francis Dvornik, *Byzantium and the Roman Primacy* (New York, 1966). See also Runciman, *Eastern Schism*, 14-15; Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 90-100.

with the Father. The addition was accepted in the late eighth century at the Carolingian Court, gained gradual acceptance in the German lands and was officially embraced by the papacy early in the eleventh century. This unilateral addition eventually evolved into a major doctrinal disagreement between the two churches.⁹

The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed composed by the Church at the first two Ecumenical Councils, which states that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, was held to be inviolate in the East. The Eastern Church Fathers¹⁰ defined orthodox teaching in defence of true doctrine against the heresies of Arianism and the other Christological controversies of the fourth to seventh centuries, which were considered to have confused the true meaning of the Trinity or of the Incarnation. The Eastern Church was reluctant to make

⁹See Deno J. Geanakoplos, *Byzantine East and Latin West: Two Worlds of Christendom in Middle Ages and Renaissance* (New York and Evanston, 1966), 102. For an extensive evaluation of the theological nature of the schism, with particular reference to the *filioque* issue see Philip Sherrard, *The Greek East and the Latin West*. (London, 1959). See also Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 2, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)* (Chicago and London, 1974), 146-98.

¹⁰Of the voluminous literature on the Eastern Fathers see particularly Johannes Quasten, *Patrology*, 3 vols. (Westminster, Maryland, 1946-60); Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven and London, 1993); idem, *Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago and London, 1971); Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition: Studies in Justin, Clement, and Origen* (Oxford, 1966); idem, "Philo and the Beginnings of Christian Thought" in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge, 1967), 133-92; I. P. Sheldon-Williams, "The Greek Christian Platonist Tradition from the Cappadocians to Maximus and Eriugena," in *Cambridge History*, ed. Armstrong, 421-533; Anthony Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, (Crestwood, 1995).

clear dogmatic statements beyond those worked out by the seven Ecumenical Councils.¹¹ Eastern theology remained apophatic in nature, preferring to focus on the ignorance of man when faced with the Divine. Since mystical theology and dogmatic theology were not distinguished, no systematic presentation of theology developed.¹²

In the West, mystical and dogmatic theology suffered separation. The apophatic tradition, of which Augustine in the fifth century was a clear advocate, was gradually replaced by a desire to turn theology into a systematized philosophy exemplified by the great *summas* of the scholastic tradition. The Roman Church preserved to some extent Roman traditions and Roman law. Learning, education and the administration of government became the concern of the Church. The tastes of trained lawyers and clerks in the developing papal chancery inclined the Roman Church towards a legal outlook which relished precise definition.¹³ The Latin language, ill suited to convey the subtle and flexible nuances of Greek for abstract thought, was ideally suited for clear, rigid, legal ecclesiastical pronouncements.¹⁴

¹¹Steven Runciman, *The Great Church in Captivity: A Study of the Patriarchate of Constantinople from the Eve of the Turkish Conquest to the Greek War of Independence* (Cambridge, 1968), 4-5, 117-18; Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 5; idem, *Byzantine Legacy*, 31.

¹²Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge and London, 1957, reprint, 1963), 14.

¹³Runciman, *Great Church*, 6-7; Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 9; R. Southern, "The divisions of Christendom" in *Western Society and Church*, 53-67.

¹⁴Runciman, *Eastern Schism*, 18-19. See also Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 5.

The educated laity was never extinguished in the East and a classical secular education was continuous throughout the entire Byzantine period. Theology did not become the exclusive preserve of the Church as it did in the West. Laymen as well as clerics engaged in theological study and discussion; many emperors were themselves noted theologians. Philosophy served as the handmaid of theology. Philosophical deduction was widely used in expounding revealed truths, combatting heresy and interpreting doctrine. Nonetheless, the Eastern Church, true to its apophatic attitude, had an aversion to definite pronouncements on many questions of belief and practised 'economy' towards unessential divergencies.¹⁵

Despite a rigid monastic tradition suspicious of classical learning, overall in Eastern theology, a synthesis of mysticism and of rationalism existed, with the latter taking the secondary place. The early Eastern Fathers, as products of contemporary Hellenistic culture, employed the philosophical methods of their own day in formulating their Christian theology. They were Christian Platonists, who adopted the mystical theocentric world view of Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism which was concerned with the soul's search for immediacy with God. The Neoplatonists and Eastern Fathers gave Plato's idea of 'ascent to God' as true knowledge a religious connotation, interpreting it as the *via negativa*. This understanding entered the Eastern patristic tradition through the Jewish writer, Philo of Alexandria and was adapted by the Early Fathers and then Origen and the Cappadocians.

¹⁵The principle of economy was long practiced by the Eastern Church as a means of accommodating, in a spirit of charity, liturgical and cultural differences which did not encompass real dogmatic issues. It did not necessarily imply a means to circumvent canon law, although it was at times used for these purposes. See Runciman, *Eastern Schism*, 5, 102. See also Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 88-90.

Its fullest development occurred in the mystical writings of the sixth century Pseudo-Dionysius as a synthesis of the mystical theology of the Cappadocians and the mystical philosophy of the Neoplatonist, Proclus.¹⁶

There is much to suggest that Neoplatonism and Christianity were rivals for religious adherents since Neoplatonism assumed more and more a religious rather than philosophical direction. The Later Neoplatonists adopted the doctrine that faith was superior to rational cognition and led to union with the Good.¹⁷ In Proclus, faith transcending knowledge can be understood as the mystical silence before the Incomprehensible and Ineffable in much the same way as in its western medieval counterpart, *docta ignorantia* (learned ignorance).¹⁸

In the East, in the sixth century, the interests of church and state coincided to reorientate the direction of theological and philosophical developments. In support of Christianity the Emperor Justinian I closed the Athenian academy in 529, bringing further development of Neoplatonism there to a close. After an initial period of suspicion in the

¹⁶See J. M. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: 80 BC to AD 220* (London and Ithaca, N.Y., 1977); R. T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism* (London, 1972); Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford, 1981). On Pseudo-Dionysius, particularly, see R. Roques, *L'Univers dionysien* (Paris, 1954); Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London and Wilton, Conn., 1989); Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York and Oxford, 1993). For the wide range and various forms Christian Platonism takes because of its attempt to deal with the tension between Platonic philosophy and revealed religion, see A. H. Armstrong, ed., introduction to *Cambridge History*, 8. See also Sheldon-Williams, "Greek Christian Platonist Tradition," 426; Louth, *Origins Christian Mystical Tradition*, xiii.18-35; Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 1, *Greece and Rome*, (London, 1946; reprint, 1956), 160-2; Chadwick, "Philo and Christian Thought, 137-57; Dominic J. O'Meara, ed., introduction to *Neoplatonism and Christian Thought*, (Albany, 1982), xvii.

¹⁷Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, 154-5.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 155. See also Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, 1: 481.

East in the first half of the sixth century, the church accepted the Neoplatonic-Christian synthesis achieved through Pseudo-Dionysius' writings, but directed philosophical study toward Aristotelianism as a better complement to revealed religion. Study of Platonism continued, in a more limited fashion, and was only really challenged when the bounds of the synthesis established were exceeded--when the claims of philosophy were given credence independent of theology.¹⁹

Attempts by theologians to integrate Pseudo-Dionysian mystical theology into the Patristic tradition led to what has been called by some a "Christocentric corrective." Beginning with Maximus the Confessor (580-662) and his own concerns with aspects of Christology, this was further developed by John of Damascus (d. ca. 749) and Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022) to culminate in the Palamite synthesis (1341), where the totally transcendent divine "essence" remained unknowable but God was "experienced" and "seen" as an uncreated and real Presence in his "energies" bestowed by deifying grace, which stressed the incarnation of Christ and the deification of man (*theosis*) as a means toward union with God.²⁰ Mystical theology was the heart and soul of hesychasm, the Eastern monastic life of hermitism, contemplation and pure prayer. Hesychasts were considered the masters of the 'inner learning' who sought the true knowledge of God as a direct and personal experience that could not be described in human terms; their goal was deification

¹⁹See Meyendorff, *Byzantine Legacy*, 32-4; idem, *Byzantine Theology*, 111; Sheldon-Williams, "Greek Christian Platonist Tradition," 477-90.

²⁰See Vladimir Lossky, *The Vision of God*, 2^d ed. (London, 1973), 136-7; John Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 2^d ed., trans. George Lawrence, (London, 1974), 44 sq.; idem, *Byzantine Legacy*, 174-6; Hussey, *Orthodox Church*, 257-8.

through apprehension of the divine light. By the fourteenth century the hesychast tradition, which combined elements of Neoplatonic intellectualism and Christocentric sacramentalism, evolved into a quest for the vision of light through contemplation assisted by breathing techniques.²¹

Yet one must not stress the legalistic attitude prevalent in the western church too heavily, for the mystical tradition was never completely extinguished: it gained fresh impetus through John Scotus Eriugena in the ninth century. His translations of works by Gregory of Nyssa, Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor introduced the Byzantine mystical tradition to the West, where its influence can be seen in the speculative mysticism of the twelfth century, in the mystical aspects in Aquinas' thought and in western mystical theologians down to Nicholas of Cusa in the fifteenth century.²² Neoplatonism also influenced the western mystical tradition. Aquinas integrated Aristotle and Proclus by the

²¹See Runciman, *Great Church*, 132-8; Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 200-12; Meyendorff, *Gregory Palamas*, 135-40; idem, *Byzantine Legacy*, 168-9. Nicol, *Church and society*, 36-8.

²²See Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, vol. 2, *Medieval Philosophy, Augustine to Scotus* (London, 1950, reprint, 1959), 302-11; vol. 3, *Okham to Suarez* (London, 1953; reprint, 1968), 181-3; Sheldon-Williams, "Greek Christian Platonist Tradition," 521-533, esp. 531-3; Bernard McGinn, "Love, Knowledge, and Mystical Union in Western Christianity: Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries," *Church History* 56 (1987): 7-14.

correctives of Pseudo Dionysius.²³ Nicholas of Cusa developed a synthesis of scholastic, neoplatonic and mystical elements.²⁴

Yet the mystical traditions in East and West developed in separate ways even when using the same Byzantine sources. Little interchange between individuals occurred in the formative period of the eastern and western traditions.²⁵ In the West, the vision of God developed as a vision of the divine essence itself; in the East, mysticism was seen as participation in the Trinity, deification by grace (*energeia*).²⁶

Different ideological, ecclesiological and theological developments so evident between East and West produced by differing political, cultural and social realities, influenced

²³On the Platonic and Neoplatonic influences in Aquinas which can be traced back to Eriugena see A. Little, *The Platonic Heritage of Thomism* (Dublin, 1950); R. J. Henle, *St. Thomas Aquinas and Platonism* (The Hague, 1956); Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, 168; R. Baine Harris, "A Brief Description of Neoplatonism" in *The Significance of Neoplatonism*, ed. R. Baine Harris (Norfolk, 1976), 1-20, esp. 17.

²⁴For a comprehensive study of Nicholas of Cusa, stressing the eclectic nature of his thought, see Watts, *Nicolaus Cusanus: a fifteenth century vision of man*. For a recent investigation of Nicholas' thought see Gerald Christianson and Thomas M. Izbicki, eds., *Nicholas of Cusa in Search of God and Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Morimichi Watanabe by the American Cusanus Society*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought, vol. 15 (Leiden, New York, Copenhagen and Cologne, 1991) which provides an extensive list of the scholarly literature on Nicholas.

²⁵See Marilyn Dunn, "Eastern Influence on Western Monasticism in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 13 (1988): 245-59.

²⁶See Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 64-5, who considers that the western attitude tends to reflect Neoplatonic influences that put the nature of God before the persons, an impersonal apophaticism of the divine nothingness prior to the Trinity. In the West, the vision of God became understood as the intuitive vision of the divine essence (the beatific vision). Although only established as doctrine by Pope Benedict XII (1341) it is clearly evident in the works of Aquinas. See also Lossky, *Vision of God*, 10-12, where he provides a concise explanation of the differences between the eastern and western understandings.

the evolution of attitudes to theology in general and approaches to the Trinity in particular. Both churches agreed on the fundamental question of the identity of substance in three persons. However, the Greek tradition emphasized the person of the Father as the one principle or source in the Godhead. The Latin position, on the other hand, focused on the unitary nature of the three persons in one Godhead. One side viewed the Trinity as 'three in one', the other, 'one in three'. To the Latins, the Greek stress on the 'monarchy' of the Father tended to subordinate the Son to the Father. To the Greeks, the Latins, by placing the source of the Holy Spirit in the common nature of the Father and the Son, were introducing two first principles into the Trinity.²⁷

Despite the differences manifested in the evolution of divergent mystical traditions and disagreements over the Procession of the Holy Spirit, a spirit of good will might have been able to rise above such difficulties but for the experience of the Crusades.²⁸ Two cultures which had for several centuries experienced only sporadic contact below the diplomatic level came together again with disastrous results which poisoned all subsequent relations and attempts to achieve accommodation.

²⁷See Geanakoplos, *Byzantine East*, 99-100. For more detailed examination of the issue see also Runciman, *Great Church*, 95-9; Sherrard, *Greek East and Latin West*, 61-72; Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 91-4; Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 44-66.

²⁸On the crusading movement see Steven Runciman, *History of the Crusades*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 1951-54); Hans Eberhard Meyer, *The Crusades*, trans. John Gillingham, (Oxford, 1972; reprint, Oxford, 1985); Kenneth M. Setton, ed., *A History of the Crusades*, 6 vols., 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, 1969-89). On the cultural aspects see V. D. Goss, ed., *The Meeting of Two Worlds: Cultural Exchanges Between East and West during the Period of the Crusades* (Kalamazoo, 1986).

Schism and Reunion

The year 1054 was once considered the date at which a definite schism arose between the Greek and Latin Churches. However, the mutual excommunications pronounced by Humbard, the papal legate, and Michael Cerullarius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, are now generally regarded as merely symptomatic of the degree of cultural and religious estrangement that had already occurred.²⁹ At that time the encounter remained on the polemical plane amongst the ecclesiastical élite as exchanges on the questions of doctrinal, liturgical and disciplinary differences.³⁰ The experience of the Crusades, on the other hand, brought the debate down to the popular level. Suspicion and animosity quickly gave way to condemnation and hatred. Increasingly, westerners viewed the Byzantines as schismatics and heretics who must be forced to return to Rome's fold. Byzantines wondered if the exploits and behaviour of the crusaders had any relation to Christianity at all.³¹

The nadir of East-West relations occurred with the Fourth Crusade in the establishment of the Latin Kingdom and the attempted Latinization of the Orthodox

²⁹See Runciman, *Eastern Schism*, 67-77; Donald M. Nicol, "Byzantium and the Papacy in the Eleventh Century," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 13 (1962), 1-20; idem, "Byzantine View," 326-7. Aristeides Papadakis, *The Christian East and the Rise of the Papacy: the Church 1071-1453 A.D.*, with the collaboration of John Meyendorff (Crestwood, 1994), 152-3; Hussey, *Orthodox Church*, 127-36.

³⁰See Runciman, *Eastern Schism*, 67-77; Nicol, "Byzantium and Papacy," 1-20; idem, "Byzantine View," 326-7; Papadakis, *Christian East*; Hussey, *Orthodox Church*, 127-36.

³¹See D. M. Nicol, "Popular Religious Roots of the Byzantine Reaction to the Second Council of Lyons," in *The Religious Roles of the Papacy: Ideals and Realities, 1150-1300*, ed. Christopher Ryan (Toronto, 1989), 321-3.

Church.³² The conquest almost destroyed the Byzantine state; the empire restored by Michael VIII Palaeologus in 1269 was no more than one of several competing minor powers. Commerce and finance were in the hands of Venetian and Genoese merchants and Florentine bankers. Disintegration continued from within through a series of civil wars during the fourteenth century; territorial losses to the Turks proceeded almost unabated.

In the Late Empire the imperial government sought *rapprochement* with the papacy as a means of maintaining the Empire's material well being but the conquest of Constantinople had created a popular mentality that was fanatically anti-Latin. For church and people, papal demands for the subjection of the Greeks and recognition of Roman supremacy were bitter pills to swallow. Support for the secular government's endeavours was generally lacking amongst a church dominated by monastic interests and a populace who both revered the monastic profession and had experienced papal monarchy first hand during the Latin occupation.³³ Even amongst the influential in court circles, opinions on *rapprochement* with the West were varied. Some realistically sought accommodation to

³²On the Fourth Crusade, see Donald E. Queller, *The Fourth Crusade: The Conquest of Constantinople, 1201-1204* (Philadelphia, 1977); idem, *Medieval Diplomacy and the Fourth Crusade*, Part II, *The Fourth Crusade* (London, 1980); idem, *The Latin Conquest of Constantinople* (New York, 1971); John Godfrey, *1204, The Unholy Crusade* (Oxford and New York, 1980); Edgar H. McNeal and Robert Lee Wolff, "The Fourth Crusade" in Setton, ed., *History of Crusades*, vol. 2, *The Later Crusades 1189-1311*, by Robert Lee Wolff and Harry W. Hazard (Madison and London, 1969), 153-85. On the Latin Empire see Kenneth Meyer Setton, *The Papacy and the Levant 1204-1571*, vol. 1, *The Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society, no. 114 (Philadelphia, 1976); Robert Lee Wolff, "The Latin Empire of Constantinople, 1204-1261" in Setton, ed., *History of the Crusades*, 2: 187-233.

³³Nicol, "Popular Roots," 324-39; idem, "The Papal Scandal" in *The Orthodox Churches and the West*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford, 1976), 148-9; Geanakoplos, *Interaction Sibling*, 156-70.

preserve the state from the Turkish advance: others advised a balance-of-power policy and arriving at a *modus vivendi* with Islam.³⁴

The deterioration in the power and prestige of the Emperor contrasted sharply with the dramatic increase in power, authority and prestige of the Patriarch of Constantinople. The patriarchate continued to be the fount of spiritual authority to the faithful in the former Byzantine possessions in the Balkans and in the East. Experience had shown the Church that Orthodoxy could continue to exist in Islamic-held territories and did not risk Latinization as it would in the case of *rapprochement* with the Roman Church. Moreover, much of the wealth of the Empire was in the hands of the Church and the monastic community dominated the office of Patriarch.³⁵

To fend off Norman aggression, representatives of the Emperor Michael VIII Palaeologos accepted reunion on papal terms at the Council of Lyons in 1274.³⁶ The massive rejection of this attempt to legislate on doctrine by church and people showed the weakness of imperial authority and a hardening of attitudes between the Churches. The

³⁴See Ihor Ševčenko, "Intellectual Repercussions of the Council of Florence," *Church History* 24 (1959) in idem, *Ideology, Letters and Culture in the Byzantine World* (London: Variorum, 1982), 5-6, 9-10.

³⁵See John Meyendorff, "Society and Culture in the Fourteenth Century: Religious Problems," *XIVe Congrès International des Etudes Byzantines, Rapports I* (Bucharest, 1971), 51-65; Frances Kianka, "Demetrius Kydones and the Italians," *DOP* 49 : 79-110; Nicol, "Papal Scandal," 166-7.

³⁶See Joseph Gill, *Byzantium and the Papacy 1198-1400* (New Brunswick, 1979); idem, "The Church Union of the Council of Lyons (1274) portrayed in Greek documents," *OCP*, 40 (1974) : 5-45; Deno John Geanakoplos, *Emperor Michael Palaeologus and the West 1258-1282: A study in Byzantine-Latin Relations* (Hamden, 1959; reprint, 1973); Steven Runciman, *The Sicilian Vespers: A History of the Mediterranean World in the Late Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1958); Nicol, "Papal Scandal", 157-60.

major point of difficulty to this point had been the overbearing pretensions of Rome to supremacy over the whole of Christendom. The popes had never really understood the relationship between church and state in Byzantium. They always tended to negotiate directly with the emperor in the belief that he controlled the church and could bend it to his will which, indeed, had been the case at times in the past. Military assistance to the East in its time of need would have done much towards overcoming eastern skepticism of western designs, but popes demanded compliance with the terms of union before aid was forthcoming.³⁷ In an effort to quell opposition to the Union of Lyons, the Patriarch John Beccus (1275-82), himself convinced of the orthodoxy of the *filioque*, attempted to find a resolution to the crisis by explaining the validity of the doctrine to the Orthodox communion.³⁸

The Latin doctrine had been first questioned in the East by the Patriarch Photius in the ninth century in the context of the "Photian Schism", when the two churches were vying for ecclesiastical jurisdiction over much of the Balkans. The issue did not create a definite rift and the Byzantines were inclined to exercise the principle of "economy" seeing, much as Gregory of Nazianzus had seen in the fourth century, that the Latin tongue was deficient to produce the subtlety of definition for which Greek naturally suited. The game had changed, of course, by the late thirteenth century, when "economy" became impossible in the

³⁷Donald M. Nicol. "The Greeks and the Union of the Churches: The Preliminaries to the Second Council of Lyons, 1261-1274", in *Medieval Studies presented to Aubrey Gwynn, S.J.*, (Dublin, 1961), eds. J. A. Watt, J. B. Morrall, F. X. Martin, reprinted in Nicol, *Byzantium*, 459-64; idem. *Last Centuries*, 269-70.

³⁸See Joseph Gill. "John Beccus, Patriarch of Constantinople 1275-1282," *Byzantina* 7 (1975): 253-66.

contemporary atmosphere of animosity and the emergence in the West of an intellectual tradition that rivaled the well-established Byzantine mode of thought.³⁹

Beccus' intervention brought the *filioque* to the fore as the symbol of all that the East found repugnant in the West and this provoked an abundance of eastern tracts against the doctrine.⁴⁰ Thereafter, emperors made no further attempt to foist an unpopular union upon the populace. In 1363 John V made a personal submission to the Pope in hopes of attaining western aid against the Turks but, thereafter, throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, in ongoing negotiations with the papacy the need for an oecumenical council was stressed so that the doctrinal issues separating the two Churches could be openly debated and resolved.⁴¹

Western developments converged to make the papacy more amenable to open discussion of the issues involved in the schism. Papal claims to authority over religious and temporal affairs were severely challenged by the western political structure the popes had helped to create. The bitter feud between the papacy and the Holy Roman Emperors brought other European states into the quarrel in support of ecclesiastical or secular claims. The papacy suffered economic and territorial losses as well as considerable decline of prestige

³⁹See Runciman, *Eastern Schism*, 31-2, 167-70; Gregory of Nazianzus Or. 21.35, PG 35, 1124-5, quoted in Pelikan *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 243.

⁴⁰Gill, "Union of Lyons," 42-5.

⁴¹Nicol, *Last Centuries*, 278-9; John Meyendorff, "Projets de Concile oecumenique en 1367: un dialogue inédit entre Jean Cantacuzene et le legat Paul," *DOP* 14 (1960), 149-77; idem, "Society and Culture," 58-9.

and political power. Competing Italian city-states⁴² harassed the papal estates; the emerging nation-states of Europe produced secular claims to many areas over which the church claimed jurisdiction. The Roman Church endured the Avignon captivity, rival popes and the rise of the Conciliar Movement calling for reform in head and members. The healing of the schism within the Latin Church at the Council of Constance (1414-18) also inspired a deeper ecumenical spirit which deplored the greater division between the two parts of Christendom and began to favour the holding of a general council to resolve the differences.⁴³

Lengthy negotiations throughout the period between successive popes and emperors culminated in the Council of Florence, where the two segments of Christendom debated the issues of division and a short-lived union was in fact proclaimed. However, internal developments in the Late Empire and issues never formally discussed at the Council also had considerable bearing on the whole unity question and the course of relations between East and West.

⁴²There is a voluminous literature on the development of the Italian city states. See Lauro Martines, *Power and Imagination: City States in Renaissance Italy* (New York, 1979). Considerable research involves Florence. See Gene Brucker, *The Civic World of Early Renaissance Florence* (Princeton, 1977); Marvin Becker, *Florence in Transition*. 2 vols. (Baltimore, 1967-8); Richard Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1980); Richard A. Goldthwaite, *The Building of Renaissance Florence: An Economic and Social History* (Baltimore and London, 1980); Samuel Kline Cohn, Jr., *The Labouring Classes in Renaissance Florence* (London, 1980).

⁴³See Gill, *Council of Florence*, 12-19; idem, *Personalities of Council*, 3-4; C.M.C. Crowder, *Unity, Heresy and Reform 1378-1460: The Conciliar Response to the Great Schism* (London, 1977); Anthony Black, *Council and Commune: The Conciliar Movement and the Fifteenth Century Heritage* (London, 1979); Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 109.

Cultural Interchange Between East and West in the Late Empire

In the fourteenth century, the Hesychast Controversy,⁴⁴ surfacing as it did contemporaneously with the revival of Hellenic learning associated with the so-called Palaeologan Renaissance,⁴⁵ encompassed religious doctrine but also brought competing social and cultural attitudes to the surface to complicate further relations between the two churches.

The issues of mysticism, the Procession of the Holy Spirit and the relationship between theology and philosophy are all intertwined in the Hesychast Controversy. Intellectual exchanges between Barlaam the Calabrian⁴⁶ and Gregory Palamas⁴⁷ in 1337 on

⁴⁴On the Hesychast Controversy see Meyendorff, *Gregory Palamas*, 75 sq.; idem, *Byzantine Heyschasm: historical, theological and social problems* (London: Variorum, 1974); idem, *Byzantine Theology*, 76-8; and the more recent evaluations of Robert E. Sinkewicz, "A New Interpretation for the First Episode in the Controversy Between Barlaam the Calabrian and Gregory Palamas," *Journal of Theological Studies*, XXXI (1980) : 489-500; idem, "The Solutions Addressed to George Lapithes by Barlaam the Calabrian and their Philosophical Content," *Medieval Studies* 43 (1981) : 151-217; idem, "The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God in the Early Writings of Barlaam the Calabrian," *Medieval Studies* 44 (1982) : 181-242; idem, "Christian Theology and the Renewal of Philosophical and Scientific Studies in the Early Fourteenth Century: The *Capita 150* of Gregory Palamas," *Medieval Studies* 48 (1986) : 334-51. Meyendorff's later works take some of Sinkewicz's findings into account. See Meyendorff, *Byzantine Legacy*, 167-94. See also D. Stiernon, "Bulletin sur le palamisme," *REB* 30 (1972) : 231-336, for extensive bibliography of different views on the issue; J. Romanides, "Notes on the Palamite Controversy and Related Topics," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 6 (1960-61) : 186-205; Papadakis, *Christian East*, 275-319.

⁴⁵On the Palaeologan Renaissance see Steven Runciman, *The Last Byzantine Renaissance*, (Cambridge, 1970); Ihor Ševčenko, "The Palaeologan Renaissance," in *Renaissances Before the Renaissance: Cultural Revivals of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, ed. Warren Treadgold (Stanford, 1974), 144-71; N. G. Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium* (London and Baltimore, 1983), 265-75.

⁴⁶Barlaam (ca. 1290-1348), a south Italian monk of the Greek rite, who settled for a time in Constantinople during the 1330s to study Aristotle in the original Greek, was acknowledged as an expert on the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius and welcomed in imperial

the Latin addition of the *filioque* to the creed evolved into a discussion on the knowledge of God and then escalated into the challenge of hesychast mysticism.⁴⁸ In defending the Orthodox view of the *filioque* Barlaam insisted that the Latins could not prove their case by human reasoning as God was unknowable in his essence; Palamas replied that theological truths could be demonstrated, not by means of philosophical categories but, rather, by recourse to the scriptures.⁴⁹ What began as a polemical debate on theological method ended with the endorsement of Palamas' doctrine on the divine energies as orthodox by the Synod of Constantinople in 1341.

circles. He acted as imperial emissary to the papal court re reunion negotiations (1339) and wrote anti-Latin treatises against the *filioque* which were extensively used by later polemicists. Barlaam and all his works were condemned at a council in St. Sophia in 1341. Some time after his return to the West, he went over to the Latin Church. See Meyendorff, "Humanisme nominaliste et mystique chrétienne à Byzance aux XIVe siècle." *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 79, No. 9 (Louvain, 1957) in Meyendorff, *Byzantine Hesychasm*, 905-14, esp. 909-10; idem, "Un mauvais théologien de l'unité au XIVe siècle: Barlaam le Calabrais," in *1054-1954: L'Eglise et les Eglises*, II, (Chévetogne, 1954) in Meyendorff, *Byzantine Hesychasm*, 47-64. See also Sinkewicz, "Doctrine of Knowledge," 238-40.

⁴⁷Palamas received an extensive secular education, including the study of Aristotle's philosophy, before becoming a monk. As Barlaam's chief protagonist in the Hesychast Controversy, he became the champion of the Athonite monks, defending their method of prayer in his celebrated *Triads for the Defense of the Holy Hesychasts*. His cause gained the support of Emperor John Cantacuzenus. Palamas later became Bishop of Thessalonica. See Grégoire Palamas, *Défense des saints hésychastes*, 2^d ed., ed. John Meyendorff, (Louvain, 1973) and English anthology of Palamas' teaching, *Gregory Palamas: The Triads*, ed. with an introduction by John Meyendorff and preface by Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. Nicholas Gendle, (New York, 1983).

⁴⁸Barlaam denounced the Hesychast method of prayer practised by the monks on Mt. Athos, which he saw as a form of Messalian heresy whereby the body, as well as the mind, could be transfigured by divine light and contribute to the knowledge of God. See Meyendorff, *Byzantine Legacy*, 174.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 180-81; Sinkewicz, "Doctrine of Knowledge," 188-222.

The debate between the protagonists brought to the surface the age old relationship between philosophy and theology. In some ways Barlaam represents the intellectualist strain in apophatic theology, relying heavily upon the writings of the Greek Fathers, particularly the Pseudo-Dionysius. In stressing the limitations of the human mind, Barlaam supposed that knowledge of God could be only symbolic or relative. Against this attitude, Palamas opposed the experiential tradition in Hesychast mysticism, whereby deification (*theosis*) became possible through the Incarnation.⁵⁰

Although, in the initial stages of the controversy, Barlaam clearly represented the traditional Byzantine position on the nature of God, as the debate progressed he pressed the claims of Greek philosophy too far by designating ancient philosophy as an essential criterion of Christian thought. Palamas was not systematically opposed to secular knowledge; he himself had received extensive training in Aristotelian logic. However, Barlaam's attacks upon ignorant monks led Palamas to conclude that secular knowledge was not a necessary element in obtaining the knowledge of God, since the scriptures clearly established the folly of the world's wisdom.⁵¹ Moreover, he stressed that secular knowledge was unnecessary and might even be dangerous for one who had embraced the monastic vocation. Palamas particularly attacked Platonic philosophy as the means whereby heretical doctrines had

⁵⁰Meyendorff, *Byzantine Legacy*, 182-3, 191.

⁵¹Ibid., 179-81. Palamas relies heavily upon Romans 1 and 1 Corinthians 1-2 to establish that the knowledge of this world has been put to shame and Matthew 11.25 to conclude that God has revealed to babes what he has withheld from the wise and prudent.

entered the Christian tradition.⁵² The ready acceptance of Palamas' doctrine by the majority of churchmen was symptomatic of Byzantine reaction to western challenges to a time-honoured cultural heritage and religious tradition. Barlaam was seen as a "western" upstart who dared to call into question the truth of traditional, orthodox theology.

However, a small anti-Palamite party also quickly formed in Byzantium which challenged the Palamite doctrine on the grounds that Palamas was an innovator, one who had not built upon the established tradition of the Church Fathers. Indeed, Palamas' doctrine was justified as a development of the Sixth Ecumenical Council's decrees concerning the two wills or "energies" of Christ.⁵³ Moreover, some of the intellectual élite, for example Nicephorus Gregoras, considered that the notion of uncreated energies implied more than one God.⁵⁴ Palamas' doctrine has always been seen as an heretical innovation by the West for it could not be reconciled with the Thomist conception of God as a simple essence nor with the western understanding of the beatific vision.⁵⁵

⁵²See John Meyendorff, "Les débuts de la controverse hésychaste." *Byzantion* XIII (1953) in idem, *Byzantine Hesychasm*, 87-120. See also Palamas, *Défense des saints hésychastes*, Triad I, 1-69, Triad II, 225-317, ed. Meyendorff, where Palamas profusely attacks using profane philosophy in seeking the knowledge of God. Palamas condemned Platonic philosophy and Hellenic wisdom as the work of Satan. See Meyendorff's discussion, *Gregory Palamas*, 129-31.

⁵³Ibid., 173.

⁵⁴Hussey, *Orthodox Church*, 259.

⁵⁵See Runciman, *Great Church*, 144-5; Geanakoplos, *Interaction Sibling*, 21; Apostolos D. Karpozilos, "Thomas Aquinas and the Byzantine East (De essentia et operatione)," *Ekklesiastikos Pharos* III (1970) : 129-47.

In the wake of the Hesychast controversy, the East began to acquire some limited knowledge of western theological developments. During the fourteenth century, translations were made of some of the works of Augustine, Anselm and Aquinas (sometimes under imperial patronage) in order to provide the Byzantines with the means of defeating the hated Latin doctrine of the *filioque*.⁵⁶ The discussion cut both ways, however. Some of those opposed to the Palamite doctrine (a prime example being Demetrius Kydones) found intellectual stimulation in western scholasticism and converted to the western church.⁵⁷ The lines of demarcation are nonetheless unclear. Many anti-Palamites remained anti-Latin as well. Nicephorus Gregoras, for example, although a passionate opponent of Palamite theology, was equally opposed to Barlaam's point of view.⁵⁸

These developments show the influence to a certain extent of the renewed interest in the Hellenic inheritance generally referred to as the Palaeologan Renaissance, stimulated, some think, by the Latin conquest.⁵⁹ Although it is often hailed as a true "renaissance".

⁵⁶Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 104, and 107, where he distinguishes Nilus Cabasilas as the first Greek, knowing Latin theology, to write for Palamism against the *filioque* in an attempt to solve the Palamism/Thomism dilemma.

⁵⁷Kydones is the subject of ongoing investigation by Frances Kianka. See Frances Kianka, "Demetrius Cydones and Thomas Aquinas," *Byzantion* 52 (1982): 164-86; idem, "The Letters of Demetrius Kydones to Empress Helena Kantakouzne Palaiologina," *DOP* 46 (1992): 157-64; idem, "Demetrius Kydones and Italy," 99-110.

⁵⁸Runciman, *Great Church*, 153; Nicol, *The Reluctant Emperor: a biography of John Cantacuzene, Byzantine Emperor and monk, c. 1295-1383* (Cambridge, 1996), 112; idem, *Church and society*, 52; idem, *Last Centuries*, 219-20.

⁵⁹Geanakoplos, *Interaction Sibling*, 17-18; Runciman, *Last Byzantine Renaissance*, 1-23.

encompassing many of the same elements developing in the early Italian Renaissance,⁶⁰ many scholars advise caution before arriving at such a conclusion. Learning in the East tended to enjoy a certain 'renaissance' after a decline associated with periods of political and social instability. The Byzantine rhetorical tradition which so exemplified the Palaeologan revival was a constant educational feature throughout the entire Byzantine period, even during the so-called 'Dark Age' of the seventh and eighth centuries. As was the case then, during the Palaeologan period, the economically depleted Empire could support very few scholars and scholarship rapidly declined in the fifteenth century. Throughout the entire Palaeologan period, scholarship was limited in scope and nature, lacking innovation. A revived interest in philology and textual criticism certainly occurred but secular values were not asserted nor were religious values challenged.⁶¹

In the West in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the new attitude of the early Renaissance towards culture and learning associated with the development of humanism in Italian centres awakened the desire for the authoritative voices of the past. Humanists rejected the universal precepts of established scholasticism with its adherence to dialectic and syllogism. In the first half of the fifteenth century, a subjective approach to scholarship

⁶⁰See, for example, Runciman, *Last Byzantine Renaissance*, 99-103; Deno John Geanakoplos, "Italian Renaissance Thought and Learning and the Role of the Byzantine Emigré Scholars in Florence, Rome, and Venice: A Reassessment," *Rivista di studi bizantini e slavi*, 3 (1984), 129-57, revised in Geanakoplos, *Constantinople and West*, 3-37; idem, "A Reevaluation of the Influences of Byzantine Scholars on the Development of the *Studia Humanitatis*, Metaphysics, Patristics, and Science in the Italian Renaissance (1361-c. 1531)" *Proceedings of the Patristic, Medieval and Renaissance Conference 3* (Villanova, 1978): 1-25, in Geanakoplos, *Constantinople and West*, 38-67.

⁶¹See Nicol, *Church and society*, 33-4; Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, 65-75; Ševčenko, "The Palaeologan Renaissance," 145, 161.

utilized the Latin and Greek classical models of antiquity, both secular and religious, to inspire and to educate men to morality and to responsibility in government. Historically conscious textual exegesis and criticism dominated moral philosophy, history and biography in the classical mode. Dependent in large measure on patronage, humanist scholarship was placed at the service of secular and ecclesiastical authority. Local political needs greatly influenced the development of various humanist cultural centres. In the latter half of the century, the rhetorical emphasis shifted to philosophical interests centred on Aristotelian, Platonic and Neoplatonic models.⁶²

⁶²There is a voluminous literature on the development and components of Renaissance Humanism. See Walter Ullman, *Medieval Foundations of Renaissance Humanism* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1977); Albert Rabil, Jr., ed., *Renaissance Humanism: Foundation, Forms and Legacy*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia, 1988); Charles Trinkaus, *The Scope of Renaissance Humanism* (Ann Arbor, 1983); Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought I: The Classic, Scholastic and Humanist Strains* (New York, 1961); idem, *Renaissance Thought II: Papers on Humanism and the Arts* (New York, 1965); idem, *Renaissance Concepts of Man* (1972); Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny* (Princeton, 1966); Margaret L. King, *Renaissance Humanism in an Age of Patrician Dominance* (Princeton, 1986); Donald E. Queller, *The Venetian Patriciate: Reality versus Myth* (Urbana and Chicago, 1986); John F. D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism in Papal Rome, Humanists and Churchmen on the Eve of the Reformation* (Baltimore and London, 1983); Charles L. Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1985); Jerry Bentley, *Politics and Culture in Renaissance Naples* (Princeton, 1987). The religious and rhetorical nature of early Renaissance Humanism has been well established by Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols. (Chicago, 1970); Charles L. Stinger, *Humanism and the Church Fathers: Ambrogio Travesari (1386-1439) and Christian Antiquity in the Italian Renaissance* (Albany, 1977); On religion, rhetoric and philosophy see Arthur Field, *The Origins of the Platonic Academy of Florence*, (Princeton, 1988); Jerrold E. Siegel, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism: the union of eloquence and wisdom: Petrarch to Valla* (Princeton, 1968). On humanist scholarship see Nancy S. Struever, *The Language of History in the Rhetoric and Historical Consciousness in Florentine Humanism* (Princeton, 1970); Jerry H. Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ: New Testament Scholarship in the Renaissance* (Princeton, 1983); John F. D'Amico, *Theory and Practice in Renaissance Textual Criticism: Beatus Rhenanus between Conjecture and History* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1988).

The hunger for learning also looked East in admiration of the accumulated Hellenic wisdom of the Byzantine Empire. The western visits of the Emperors John V (1369) and Manuel II (1400-03) were greeted with enthusiasm, if little material benefit accrued from them. Manuel's demeanor and erudition were particularly applauded. Cultural connections were also made between members of their delegations with individuals at western courts. Several learned Byzantines, on diplomatic missions in the West connected with church union or western aid, also made contact with western scholars. A few Byzantines obtained positions in the Italian cities to teach young men the treasures of Greek rhetoric and philosophy. Manuel Chrysoloras obtained a chair in Greek at Florence in 1397. A small number of western students learned Greek, some ventured to Constantinople to further their studies and sit at the feet of noted teachers for direct instruction.⁶³

One could conclude, therefore, that, although long-standing divisions and animosities militated against achieving understanding between East and West, some interaction between the two cultures during the last years of the Empire, as well as the converging needs of the papacy and imperial government, did provide openings for *rapprochement*. It was into this state of affairs that Bessarion came, a man who was first part of the monastic community, the world of diminished scholarship and of the court circles of fifteenth century Byzantium and who subsequently became partially integrated into western culture through the humanist community and ecclesiastical circles associated with the papacy of the early Italian Renaissance.

⁶³See Geanakoplos, *Interaction Sibling*, 13-18; Nicol, *Church and society*, 66-96; idem, "Byzantine View," 334-8; Kianka, "Demetrius Kydones and Italy," 99-110.

Bessarion: A Biographical Profile

Bessarion (ca. 1403-8) was born in Trebizond,⁶⁴ perhaps of humble parents,⁶⁵ but considerable debate still surrounds his date of birth and baptismal name.⁶⁶ At a young age

⁶⁴On Trebizond, see William Miller, *Trebizond, the last Greek Empire* (London, 1926). It became an independent kingdom after the Latin Conquest of Constantinople in 1204 ruled by descendants of the Comneni. Numerous marriages occurred between daughters of the ruling house and members of the imperial family in Constantinople.

⁶⁵Apostolis, *PG* 161, cxxxix.

⁶⁶Monfasani, "Bessarion's Latin Eulogists," (1986), 114-24, who establishes the date of birth as 1408, provides an overview of earlier speculation. Most scholars have previously opted for January 2, 1403, the date first proposed by Vast, *Cardinal Bessarion*, 2, although his evidence has never been entirely accepted, since it consists of a note preceding an edition of Capranica's funeral oration in B. Malvasia, *Compendio historic della basilica dei sant XII Apostoli* (Rome, 1665) which could be the scribe's interpolation. See the discussion of Monfasani for the unreliability of Capranica (as discussed above, 11-12) and the more reliable testimony of Perotti, Ambrogio Travesari and Ransano, which support Bessarion's references to his youth in his prologue to Marc. gr. 533 (discussed above, 8 and n.24) and his *Encyclica ad Graecos*, *PG* 161, 486D-487A. Gianfrancesco Lusini, "Recenti Studi sul Concilio di Firenze e il Cardinale Bessarione," *Studi Storici* 2 (1996) : 684, accepts Monfasani's dating, which also seems the most probable to the present writer.

Bessarion's baptismal name is often cited as "John", based upon an inaccurate reading of one of Bessarion's marginal notes in a manuscript of Plutarch, by A. Bandini, *De vita et rebus gestis Bessarionis* (1777). Loenertz, "Biographie du Bessarion", 123, has examined the manuscript and explained the error. He also cites a letter from George Amiroutzes to Bessarion, where the latter's baptismal name is stated as "Basil." (*PG* 161, 726 C). This would seem the more logical choice. As Loenertz remarks, in the Eastern monastic tradition, the monk's name began with the first initial of his own baptismal name. For concurrence with Loenertz' findings, see Mioni, "Bessarione scriba." See also Lotte Labowsky, "Bessarione, Giovanni Basilio." *DBI* 9 (Rome, 1967), 696-8; C. Bianca, "Una nuova testimonianza sul nome di battesimo del Bessarione." *RSCI* 38 (1984) : 428-36. Examples of this monastic practice abound for this period. Manuel Eugenicus became the monk, Mark; George Scholarius, Gennadius; John Chortasmenus, Ignatius; George Phrantzes, Gregory. One might also wonder why an individual with such cultured tastes as Bessarion would choose for his namesake an ascetic anchorite known for his scorn of learning, if he could have chosen "Basil", the name of one of the most revered and cultured Fathers of the Church.

he enjoyed the patronage of Dositheus, sometime Metropolitan of Trebizond,⁶⁷ who sponsored the promising youth's education at the schools of John Chortasmenus and George Chrysokokkes for the study of rhetoric, mathematics and Aristotelian philosophy.⁶⁸ Bessarion entered the monastic order in 1424, was ordained deacon in 1425 and priest in 1430.⁶⁹ He was also active within court circles at Constantinople, accompanying an imperial delegation to the Court at Trebizond (ca. 1424-7),⁷⁰ where he delivered an address to the Emperor Alexius IV.⁷¹

⁶⁷On Dositheus see Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 129-30; V. Laurent, "La succession épiscopale de Trébizonde," *Archeion Pontou* 21 (1956): 92-4; Archbishop Chrysanthos, "Ἡ Ἐκκλησία Τραπεζούντος," *Archeion Pontou* 4-5 (1933), 259 ff.

⁶⁸Apostolis, *PG*, 161, cxxxiii; Platina, *PG*, 161, cv; Capranica, Mohler, 3, 406, for Bessarion's progressive education under the Bishop of Selymbria (Chortasmenus) and Chrysokokkes. For identification of Chortasmenus see H. Hunger, *Johannes Chortasmenos (ca. 1370-ca. 1436/37): Briefe, Gedichte und Kleine Schriften* (Vienna, 1969). See also discussion of Loenertz, "Biographie du Bessarion," 127-30; Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 129-30; Nicol, *Church and society*, 117-20; Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, 271. On Chrysokokkes see Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, 271-1. On Dositheus' patronage see Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 129 and ns. 8-9; Monfasani, "Bessarion's Latin Eulogists," 120; Laurent, *DHGE*, 14, 700-1; Labowsky, *DBI*, 696-8.

⁶⁹Bessarion himself documents and dates his ecclesiastical advancements in a *Horologian* in Cod. Marc. gr. 14, reproduced by Saffrey, "Recherches Cardinal Bessarion," 270-1. Saffrey, 273, indicates that, in order to conform to Byzantine canon law which required candidates for ordination as deacon and priest to be 25 and 30 years of age respectively, Bessarion would have been born in 1400. Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 148, n. 7, suggests that powerful (imperial?) pressure could have been exerted to procure dispensations in Bessarion's case, an explanation supported by Monfasani, "Bessarion's Latin Eulogists," 114-24.

⁷⁰Several missions (c. 1425-27) visited Trebizond to conclude a marriage between the Emperor John VIII and Maria, daughter of Alexius IV, Emperor of Trebizond.

⁷¹Item No. 3 in Cod. Marc. gr. 533, ed. Archbishop Chrysanthos, *Archeion Pontou* 12 (1946): 117-30. Scholars who prefer 1403 for Bessarion's date of birth consider that he made mention of this mission when, as the newly appointed Latin Patriarch of

In 1431 Bessarion followed Dositheus, who had been appointed Metropolitan of Monembasia.⁷² to the Peloponnese.⁷³ At Mistra the young monk studied astronomy, mathematics and Platonic philosophy under the famed philosopher, George Gemistus Plethon.⁷⁴ From March-June 1436, he corresponded with Theodore II, Despot of the Peloponnese.⁷⁵

Early in 1436, the Emperor John VIII recalled Bessarion from Mistra to Constantinople where he assumed a teaching position at the important Monastery of St. Basil and he might also have been appointed abbot by the Emperor.⁷⁶ In 1436 he also formed part

Constantinople in 1463, in his *Encyclica ad Graecos*, PG 161, 461D, he stated: "For my name was known to all who knew the Greek language. I was not born twenty-four years when I was exalted in honour and dignity beyond my age by the princes of our nation, by all of you, and by the very emperors themselves. For not by my ability but because of their goodness they preferred me not only to my peers but also to older men who enjoyed power and favour." See Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 133; Loenertz, "Biographie du Bessarion," 131-2. But see now, Monfasani, "Bessarion's Latin Eulogists," 120-2, who discounts this identification since Bessarion did not associate with "the princes of our nation" until his later sojourn in the Peloponnese. I use Monfasani's translation.

⁷²For Dositheus in Monembasia, see Laurent, "Succession épiscopale de Trébizonde," 93, and idem, *DHGE* 14, 700-1. See also Storman, "Bessarion Before Council," 130.

⁷³The standard work on the Peloponnese continues to be Denis A. Zakythinos, *Le Despotat grec de Morée*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1932; rev. ed. London: Variorum, 1975).

⁷⁴On Mistra see Zakythinos, vol. 2, *Vie et institutions* 321-37; Steven Runciman, *Mistra, Byzantine Capital of the Peloponnese* (London, 1980). On Plethon see F. Masai, *Pléthon et le platonisme de Mistra* (Paris, 1956), now generally superseded by Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon* (1986).

⁷⁵Items Nos. 17 and 18 in Cod. Marc. gr. 533; letters 4 and 5, Mohler 3, 425-7. See also Loenertz, "Biographie du Bessarion," 148-9; Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 138-40.

⁷⁶Capranica, Mohler, 3, 407, 6-10.

of an imperial delegation to Trebizond which sought an alliance against the Turks; he delivered an oration in the presence of the Emperor of Trebizond, John IV.⁷⁷ Upon his return to Constantinople, the Emperor then appointed him to the titular see of Nicaea (1437).⁷⁸ just prior to his participation in the Council of Florence (1438-9) as a member of the Byzantine delegation.

At the Council Bessarion was one of six orators selected to represent the Orthodox party at the Council. At first he staunchly defended the orthodox position. During the debates and lengthy negotiations, he was gradually convinced that the Latin faith was valid and that a formula could be found which could harmonize the Latin and Greek positions on the double Procession of the Holy Spirit. Hence, he became a vocal spokesman for union between the two Churches and was afforded the honour of proclaiming the Greek version of the Tome of Union on 6 July 1439 at the official ceremony of union.⁷⁹

Pope Eugenius IV granted him an annual pension of 300 florins for his unionist efforts (600 if he chose to reside in the Roman Curia). However, he preferred to return to the East and in October 1439 he sailed from Venice with part of the Byzantine delegation.

⁷⁷*Encomium of Trebizond*, ed. Lambros, *NH* 13 (1916): 145-204 (Item No. 27 in Cod. Marc. gr. 533). For dating see O. Lampsides, "Die Datierung des Ἐγκώμιον εις Τραπεζουντα von Kardinal Bessarion," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, XLVIII (1995), 291-2. The mission sought an alliance against the Turks and possibly also investigated the strength of support for holding a council to settle the doctrinal differences between the eastern and western churches.

See also discussion Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 133, 140-2; Loenertz, "Biographie du Bessarion," 131-2; Monfasani, "Bessarion's Latin Eulogists," 118 and n. 81.

⁷⁸Apostolis, *PG* 161, cxxxi; Platina, *PG* 161, cvi.

⁷⁹For a succinct account of Bessarion's participation in the Council, see Gill, *Personalities of Council*, 46-50.

While he was on his homeward journey, Pope Eugenius IV made him a cardinal at a papal consistory on 18 December 1439. In the face of opposition to the union after his return to Constantinople, in late 1440 Bessarion departed for Italy; in Florence on 10 December 1440 he received the insignia of the cardinalate with the title of Church of the Holy Apostles. Subsequently he became Bishop of Tuscany (1449), Uniate Patriarch of Constantinople (1463) and Bishop of Sabina (1468). He was also a serious candidate for pope in two conclaves (1455 and 1471).⁸⁰

Bessarion was much involved with papal efforts for monastic reform, especially of abbeys under the "Basilian" rule. At a General Chapter in Rome (1446) he introduced reforms and composed an epitome of the "Rule of St. Basil" for the superiors he had summoned. Subsequently in 1460 he was appointed visitor to all Greek monasteries in Italy.⁸¹

Bessarion also served on various missions as papal legate, which were often concerned with reconciling differences between the western powers, rectifying disagreements with the papacy and promoting crusades. In 1449 he undertook to reconcile Venice with Milan. From 1450-5 he governed the City of Bologna, during which time he supported restoration of the university. He was most active in crusade endeavours under Pope Pius II (1458-63). He enthusiastically worked for the success of the Congress of Mantua (1459) to which the Pope had called the Italian States and the western princes to organize a crusade.

⁸⁰Platina, *PG* 161, cviii-cvxi; Apostolis, *PG* 161, cxxxv-cxl; Capranica, Mohler, 3, 408-14; Ransano, *Annales omnium temporum*, 170-1. Also see the profile of Bessarion's western career in Gill, *Personalities of Council*, 50-4, and Labowsky, *DBI*, 696-8.

⁸¹See Gill, *Personalities of Council*, 50; Labowsky, *DBI*, 696-8.

Despite the poor response, Bessarion then ventured to Germany in answer to the appeals of the German envoys for a papal legate to settle their ecclesiastical and political differences and organize levies for the crusade. He was able to effect reconciliation in Austria and Hungary but he was unable to consolidate efforts for the crusade. As papal legate to Venice in 1463 he was instrumental in securing a declaration of war from Venice against the Turks: he accompanied the Venetian fleet to Ancona, which arrived just prior to the death of Pius II (14 August 1464) which ended the planned crusade. In 1469, during the pontificate of Paul II (1464-71), when the Emperor Frederick III came to Rome, Bessarion urged him to action against the Turks. In 1470 a commission of cardinals appointed to organize a response to the Ottoman threat met in his residence in Rome. These plans evaporated upon the death of Paul II (26 July 1471) but his successor, Sixtus IV, appointed Bessarion as legate to France in December 1471 in the hope of bringing France, Burgundy and England together in a crusade effort. In early 1472 the mission changed into securing a preliminary settlement of differences between the papacy and France. Even this limited goal was not achieved and Bessarion died on the return journey at Ravenna on 18 November 1472.³²

Bessarion also played an important part in humanist activities throughout his lengthy western career. He supervised the translating of Greek manuscripts into Latin commissioned by Pope Eugenius (d. 1447) and Pope Nicholas V (1447-55). The cardinal also financed an invaluable program for preservation of his Byzantine heritage in manuscript collecting, copying and translating; much of the work was undertaken by scribes and translators

³²Platina, *PG* 161, cviii-cvxi; Apostolis, *PG* 161, cxxxv-cxl; Capranica, Mohler, 3, 408-14; Ransano, *Annales omnium temporum*, 170-1. See also Gill, *Personalities of Council*, 50-4; Labowsky, *DBI*, 696-8.

employed in his residence in Rome. He eventually built up an immense library of the Eastern and Western patristic and classical heritage, which he bequeathed to the City of Venice (1468). He promoted philological, theological and philosophical discussion amongst a devoted group of humanist scholars who formed part of his household or were members of an informal group which met at his home. His involvement in the western segment of the so-called Plato-Aristotle debate (c. 1453-69) led to his confrontation with George of Trebizond. During the course of his struggle with George, the Cardinal also became involved in the activities of the first Roman printing press (1468-9) which culminated in the publication of his own major work, *In calumniatorem Platonis* (1469).

Thus Bessarion was one of the few Byzantine intellectuals able to cross the gulf which divided Latins and Greeks in the dying days of the Byzantine Empire. Critical to understanding his attitudes, hopes and aspirations on the eve of his encounter with western culture at the Council of Florence are the elements which shaped his early formation in the Byzantine East.

CHAPTER III

THE BYZANTINE FORMATION

Some historians have remarked that Bessarion was ‘Greek’ and that he remained so all his life.¹ Indeed, before his pivotal encounter with western culture at the Council of Florence (1438-39), Bessarion belonged exclusively to the Byzantine world, which formed his character, attitudes and outlook. Hence, the experiences that shaped his ideas during this early formation were important factors that influenced the subsequent direction of his life.

In the ever worsening conditions of the Byzantine Empire in the fifteenth century, a traditional classical education had become difficult, but not impossible, to attain. The imperial schools had entirely collapsed but private instructors still flourished.² This decline in educational opportunity coupled with the Palamite victory of the previous century had considerable influence upon the entire monastic community. Bessarion had little in common with the majority of professed monks in his day for they were Hesychasts, devoted to the ‘inner learning’ advocated by Gregory Palamas and, moreover, preoccupied with

¹See, for example, Monfasani, “Bessarion Latinus,” 165, 181-1; Storman, “Bessarion before Council,” 146; Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 113. One might think, nonetheless, that ‘Byzantine’ would be a more apt description.

²Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 22. On the general state of education in the East in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, see also Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, 265-75; Geanakoplos, “Italian Renaissance and Role of Byzantine,” 6-8; Runciman, *Last Byzantine Renaissance*, 49-84; Ševčenko, “The Palaeologan Renaissance.”

preservation of what was perceived to be the inherited truths of Orthodox theology, which manifested itself as support of Hesychasm and condemnation of Latin doctrine.³ Such monks were often suspicious and ignorant of the ‘outer learning’ of the Byzantine classical tradition.⁴ Bessarion belonged to a much smaller contingent of scholar-monks whose ideals, given the economic restraints and religious predilections, were increasingly hard to maintain. They could be described as Christian Humanists, devoted both to the Hellenic wisdom and to Christian principles and practices.⁵ The advanced education Bessarion received amidst this milieu led to his development as an outstanding rhetorician and Christian Platonist and made him part of the small cultured élite surrounding the imperial courts at both Constantinople and Mistra.

The Repertoire of a Young Scholar Monk

Many of the pieces in Bessarion’s collection of his own writings in a well-known manuscript,⁶ put together in his early years in Italy, date from his time in Byzantium. One

³See Nicol, *Church and society*, 64, who notes that Joseph Bryennius, the teacher of Mark Eugenikos, had Hellenic books in his library, but his entire literary output consisted of tracts supporting Hesychasm and attacking Latin doctrine.

⁴Ibid., 64-5. One should note, however, as discussed above, 39-40, that, although Palamas himself was certainly suspicious of Platonic philosophy, as part of the fourteenth century revival of learning, he was not unilaterally averse to the use of natural reasoning, provided that its limitations were clearly realized. See Sinkewicz, “Christian Theology and Renewal,” 334-51.

⁵Nicol, *Church and society*, 33-6; Runciman, *Last Byzantine Renaissance*, 28-35; Storman, “Bessarion before Council,” 128-9.

⁶On Marc. gr. 533, see discussion above, p. 8, n. 24. For Bessarion’s early formation see particularly Storman, “Bessarion before Council,” 131 and n. 24, who, by examining the works in chronological order to establish the circumstances and contents of each, contributed

needs but a quick perusal of these samples to identify him as an outstanding representative of the Palaeologan Renaissance, well in command of the rhetorical devices of a young humanist.

Bessarion's earliest extant composition, his *Encomium of St. Bessarion* (1423)⁷ written on the occasion of his own profession as a monk, bears the clear imprint of the scholar-monk tradition. First, it identifies him as a precocious youth (for he was probably not more than fifteen years of age)⁸ who displays himself as an accomplished rhetorician comfortable with stylistic devices in the Byzantine classical tradition. An initial *apologia* to appeal to the goodwill of his readers is followed by a rhetorical eulogy on Egypt and a stylized description of its desert and mountains.⁹ Scriptural and stoic expressions flow side by side. The young monk states that St. Bessarion glorified his Heavenly Father by his good works, which allowed him to 'acquire virtue and contentment of soul.'¹⁰

Secondly, it indicates Bessarion's familiarity with a new form of hagiography begun by Michael Psellus, the celebrated Christian Platonist of the eleventh century. Psellus was

immensely to our understanding of Bessarion's training, personal tastes, tendencies and the direction his ideas seemed to be taking.

⁷*Encomium of St. Bessarion* (Item No. 1 in Marc. gr. 533), ed. Joannou, "Opusculum inédit," 116-38, with commentary and summaries, 107-16.

⁸I follow Monfasani, "Bessarion's Latin Eulogists," 270-1, and Lusini, "Recenti Studi Concilio e Bessarione," 684, in considering Bessarion's date of birth to have been 2 January 1408. See discussion above, 45 and n. 66.

⁹*Encomium*, Pars. 1, 2, 7, ed. Joannou. See also discussion of Joannou, "Opusculum inédit," 108, 114; Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 132.

¹⁰*Encomium*, Par. 14, ed. Joannou. See discussion, Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 132.

appalled by the chronicling of fantastic deeds and miracles that predominated in traditional hagiography and he sought to elevate the genre for the more educated segment of society by downplaying the most bizarre exploits and exaggerated ascetic practices in the biographies of the saints.¹¹ Although his account of his namesake's life is based on a *synaxarion* used in contemporary liturgical books, Bessarion likewise provides rational explanations for many of the exploits of the saint. Asceticism is not an end in itself; rather, it makes a man self-sufficient with regard to virtues and happiness and able to lead many other souls into the ways of holiness.¹² This juxtaposition of Christian and philosophical motifs, which is not the usual fare in traditional hagiography, is a common feature of his early writings and continues in his later works in Italy.¹³

Monodies composed for several members of the imperial family present the same common features of Classical and Byzantine literature. In his *Epitaph in Iambic Verse for Theodora Palaeologina*.¹⁴ Christian and Classical expressions flow side by side. Theodora

¹¹See Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 2: 243. Joannou, "Opusculé inédit," 114-15, seemed to be unaware of Psellus' views for he was quite amazed by Bessarion's approach. See also Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 131-2. Psellus' efforts were probably given impetus by the work of Symeon Metaphrastes (flourished ca. latter half of tenth century). Psellus acknowledges that Metaphrastes was generally praised for his endeavours to elevate the prose style in the lives of the saints but had not, in his opinion, been able to attain the pure style of the classical writers. See *Encomium of Symeon Metaphrastes*, ed., E. Kurtz and F. Drexler, *Michaelis Pselli scripta minora I* (Milan, 1936), 94-107, the key passages being 101.10-23, 105.16-27, 106.7-18, quoted by Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, 167.

¹²*Encomium*, Pars 14, ed. Joannou. See commentary by Joannou, "Opusculé inédit," 114-15. See also Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 131-2.

¹³*Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁴*Epitaph in Iambic Verse for Theodora Palaeologina*, (Item No. 15 in Marc. gr. 533) ed., Lambros, *PP*, IV, 994-5. See Storman's discussion, "Bessarion before Council," 137-8.

(d. 1429) is transferred to the heavenly mansions (John 14.2) where she finds endless joy on Olympus, always seeking and always finding a garland that never withers.¹⁵ The monody exemplifies the customary composition of a set piece, which allowed material to be transferred with minimum alteration from person to person or occasion to occasion.¹⁶

Bessarion's command of the Byzantine epistolary genre is also evident in several letters to friends. Corresponding with George Scholarius¹⁷ from the Peloponnese (1431-6), he engages in the customary alternation of complements and word-play.¹⁸ He consoles George, who has been maligned at the imperial court in Constantinople, displaying the typical combination of philosophic and religious motifs. Moveable fortune could bring about

¹⁵*Epitaph Theodora Palaeologina*, ed. Lambros, *PP* 14, 494-5.

¹⁶Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 137, indicates that passages from this lament are taken from three previous monodies written for the Empress Theodora of Trebizond (d. 1426) (Items Nos. 5-7 in Marc. gr.533) and reappear in the unedited *Epitaph in Iambic Verse for Princess Cleopê Malatesta* (d. 1433) (Item No. 14 in Marc. gr. 533), where only about 20 lines are new.

¹⁷On George Scholarius (ca. 1403-c. 1472) see M. Jugie, *DTC*, 14B (1941), 1521-70; C.J.G. Turner, "George Gennadius Scholarius and the Union of Florence," *Journal of Theological Studies* 18 (1967), 83-103; idem, "The Career of George-Gennadius Scholarius," *Byzantion* 39 (1969), 420-55; Gill, *Personalities of Council*, 79-94. For George's works see p. 4, n. 6 above. On the origins of the name "Scholarius", a title originally designating a profession, which by the fifteenth century may have become a normal surname, see Turner, "Career of Scholarius," 421. George actively supported the Union at Florence, but subsequently rejected it, eventually becoming the first Patriarch of Constantinople (1453-56) under Islamic rule after the fall of Constantinople. He served two further brief terms as Patriarch (1463; 1464-5).

¹⁸Letter 2 to George Scholarios (Item No. 12 in Marc. gr. 533), ed. Mohler, 3, 418-22. Loenertz, "Biographie du Bessarion," 138-40, provides a summary and establishes the name of the addressee, deliberately erased in the manuscript (doubtless by Bessarion himself) since the friendship with George did not survive their much later controversy over the Union achieved at Florence. See also overview of Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 136.

a change for the better. but, above all, God would not fail to come to his aid and, if need be, crown his perseverance.¹⁹

Bessarion's literary production thus presents ample evidence of the progressive development of an individual immersed in both the secular and monastic culture of his day. An examination of the specific milieu in which his ideas and attitudes were formed offers additional insights into his maturation as a Christian humanist.

The Formation of a Christian Humanist

The greatest influences upon Bessarion's views and attitudes during his formative period naturally came from his teachers, friends and associates; some were members of the monastic community, others were part of the wider secular world. Bessarion's benefactor, Dositheus, was himself a scholar-monk, well known for his moral character and erudition. Bessarion's parents, recognizing the advantages of placing their son under Dositheus' tutelage, encouraged his profession as a monk, a common practice for those without privilege to obtain the education necessary for pursuing a career within the ecclesiastical hierarchy.²⁰ Dositheus also supported Bessarion's monastic profession and sponsored his education in

¹⁹Letter 2, Mohler, 3, 421-2. See also Loenertz, "Biographie du Bessarion," 141.

²⁰Apostolis, *PG* 161, cxxxiii, 2-3. Cf., Platina, *PG* 161, ciii, and Capranica, Mohler 3, 406, who credit his parents with the decision to go to Constantinople, where Bessarion himself chose the monastic life. See discussion of Loenertz, "Biographie du Bessarion," 126 and ns. 1-3.

the private schools in Constantinople directed by John Chortasmenus and George Chrysokokkes.²¹

Chortasmenus, in particular, exerted considerable influence upon the young Bessarion for he directed several monastic centres which encouraged the combined study of Hellenic learning and revealed theology.²² His extensive library included ancient classical texts in all the disciplines and the more recent works on mathematics and astronomy written by Michael Psellus, George Akropolites, Demetrius Kydones and Theodore Metochites. Under Chortasmenus' direction Bessarion's own interests as a bibliophile, philologist and manuscript collector and copier were developed.²³ Late in life (1468) Bessarion recalled that from his early youth he collected books in all the disciplines and always continued to acquire as many as he could, both by copying out manuscripts himself and by spending

²¹See Apostolis, *PG*, 161, cxxxiii; Platina, *PG*, 161, cv; Capranica, Mohler, 3, 406 for Bessarion's progressive education under Dositheus, the Bishop of Selymbria (Chortasmenus) and Chrysokokkes. See also discussion of Loenertz, "Biographie du Bessarion," 127-30; Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 129-30; Nicol, *Church and society*, 117-20; Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, 271. On Dositheus and his patronage see Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 129 and ns. 8-9; Monfasani, "Bessarion's Latin Eulogists," 120, and Laurent, *DHGE*, 14, 700-1.

²²See Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 139, who considers that Chortasmenus was the founder of a monastic tradition that more than any other monastic centres, encompassed "impressive religious devotion combined with literary and philosophic culture."

²³On the early development of Bessarion along these lines see discussion, Chapter I, 10-11, above. See also Labowsky, *Bessarion's Library*, 5-6, where she discusses his letter to Cristoforo Moro, which is the *Act of Donation* of his extensive library to Venice (1468), with letter printed, 147-9. The manuscript of the *Liber memorialis*, cod. Marc. lat. 14 (4235), which contains all of the original documents concerned with the donation, is on display in a permanent exhibition in the Biblioteca Marciana.

whatever little money he had to purchase them.²⁴ Likewise, the seeds were also sown for many of his evolving views and attitudes. His mentor never questioned the validity of revealed theology and always placed the truths of scripture before the wisdom of the Hellenes. Moreover, since he wrote extensively, in the customary rhetorical style, on the attributes to be acquired by a devoted scholar-monk, he was also a natural model.²⁵

Bessarion's affection and admiration are clear in two letters of consolation that the young monk composed on the occasion of his old teacher's death (1436)²⁶ for he states:

I carry around in my soul the model of this man's moral comportment and of his bearing, venerable in itself. These were the things which, merely by being seen, caused him to be more admired than the sights of which men sing. I, too, stand in awe before the man.²⁷

Bessarion admired in Chortasmenus the same qualities that he had learned to admire in the Church Fathers: the virtues necessary to advance in the spiritual life which were, nonetheless, consistent with the study of the Hellenic inheritance.²⁸

²⁴*Act of Donation*, opening remarks, ed. Labowsky, *Bessarion's Library*, 147.

²⁵See discussion by Hunger, *Johannes Chortasmenos*, 153-63; Nicol, *Church and society*, 117-20; Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 129-30; Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, 271.

²⁶Letters to the Hieromonk Dionysius and the Hieromonks Matthew and Isidore (Items Nos. 22 and 24 in Marc. gr. 533), ed. Mohler, 3, 431-3; 435-7. See also Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 139.

²⁷Mohler, 3, 432, lines 13-15; trans. Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 139, with discussion of same.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 139, for Bessarion's admiration of Chortasmenus.

**The Marriage of Theology and Philosophy:
Gregory of Nazianzus and Proclus**

Bessarion had in his possession from his youth copies of Proclus' *Platonic Theology* and *Elements of Theology* in a single manuscript,²⁹ at the very beginning of which he prefixed a Hymn to God from the poems of Gregory Nazianzus,³⁰ so Neoplatonic in style and content that one scholar considered it to be the work of Proclus.³¹

You who are beyond the universe—how else can I sing of you?
What hymn can praise you? You are incomprehensible
Alone ineffable, you are the cause of speech:
Alone unknowable, you are the cause of mind.
All praise you, those who speak or are mute:

²⁹For research, identification and speculation on why this manuscript (Cod. Monacensis gr. 547) is now found in the Staatsbibliothek de Munich see H. D. Saffrey, "Notes autographes du Bessarion," 536-63. The manuscript was originally part of Bessarion's gift to the Marciana in Venice and is listed in that library's inventories until 1560. According to Saffrey, Bessarion owned and used this 'working manuscript' from his youth, making marginal annotations and additional notes on blank sheets. Saffrey dates the beginning of these autograph notes to the time of Bessarion's study under Plethon.

³⁰On Gregory, see Frederick W. Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning: The Five Theological Orations of Gregory Nazianzen*, introduction and commentary by Frederick W. Norris, trans. Lionel Wickham and Frederick Williams (Leiden, New York, Copenhagen and Cologne, 1991); idem, "Of Thorns and Roses: The Logic of Belief in Gregory Nazianzen," *Church History* 53 (1984) : 455-64; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gregory of Nazianzus, Rhetor and Philosopher* (Oxford, 1969). See also the overviews of Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 39-51; Sheldon-Williams, "Greek Christian Platonist Tradition," 438-47; Quasten, *Patrology*, Vol. 3, *The Golden Age of Greek Patristic Literature*, 236-55. On Gregory's poetry see especially Herbert Musurillo, "The Poetry of Gregory of Nazianzus," *Thought* 45 (1970) : 45-55; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Poemata Arcana*, ed. with textual introduction by C. Moreschini, introduction, translation and commentary by D. G. Sykes (Oxford, 1997); St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Three Poems: Concerning His Own Affairs, Concerning Himself and the Bishops, Concerning His Own Life*, trans. with introduction by Denis Molaise Meehan. The Fathers of the Church, vol. 75 (Washington, 1987.)

³¹Albert Jahn, *Eclogae e Proclo de philosophia chaldaica* (Halis Saxorum, 1891), 49-77. Jahn's findings have been severely criticized by subsequent scholars. See Saffrey, "Notes Autographe du Bessarion," 538, for discussion of same.

All hymn you, those who know or do not.
 One is the travail, one the desire for you:
 All offer supplication. The universe,
 Aware of your design, utters a hymn
 Of silence. For you it abides, for you it moves.
 You are the end of all: the One, the All,
 Yet neither—neither one nor all. O God
 Of many names, how may I address you,
 Who truly have no name? What heavenly mind
 Can pierce the veils beyond the clouds? Have pity, then:
 You are beyond the universe—how else can I sing of You?³²

This poem is but one example illustrating how all of Gregory's theological poems emphasize adoration of the transcendent Godhead and exhibit platonic influence with regard to imagery and the concept of the unknowable God. Indeed parallel expressions can be identified in the development of his doctrines on the Trinity.³³

Bessarion was naturally attracted to Gregory for he is often considered the humanist amongst the fourth century theologians in his synthesis of classical rhetoric and Christianity.³⁴ His cultivated style made his speeches the preferred model for eloquence and he became the most widely quoted of the Fathers in this regard throughout the entire

³²PG 37, 507-8, trans. Musurillo. "Poetry of Gregory." 52-3; compare Or. 27.2, PG 36, 13A-C, where Gregory indicates that sometimes worship of God should be in silence. See also Norris, introduction to *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning*, 70. See Saffrey, "Notes autographes du Bessarion", 538-9, 560, for discussion of this poem as an early example, dating to his studies under Plethon, of how Bessarion recopied extracts from the Fathers of the Church in this manuscript to emphasize the Christian value of Neoplatonic philosophy.

³³See Sykes, introduction to Gregory of Nazianzus, *Poemata Arcana*, 75-80. See also Meehan, introduction to St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Three Poems*, 1-21.

³⁴Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 7; Quasten, *Patrology* 3: 104.

Byzantine period.³⁵ The only Christian texts included as a literary model in the curriculum for school children were a selection of Gregory's sermons and addresses; a large corpus of explanatory material of the texts still exists, some of which is extremely scholarly in nature. His poems were also well read and glossaries to them produced.³⁶ Michael Psellus, an author with whom Bessarion was obviously acquainted (for, as we said, he emulated Psellus' recommended style and approach to hagiography) also considered Platonism to be a preparation for Christianity; he viewed rhetoric and philosophy as complementary and particularly praised the Cappadocian for his style.³⁷ Moreover, Gregory was also the only author besides the Apostle John in the Eastern tradition who was titled 'theologian', a designation afforded him for his exposition of the Trinity, which defended the co-equality

³⁵George A. Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors* (Princeton, 1983), 215; Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 7, 15.

³⁶See Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, 23, and 26, where he notes that although the works of many of the Fathers like John Chrysostom were often copied in monasteries few commentaries or notes on them exist, which might suggest that the majority of those that read the texts were the monks themselves. The simpler style of Chrysostom likely had more appeal to the average reader.

³⁷See Basile Tatakis, *La philosophie Byzantine* in Émile Bréhier, *Histoire de la philosophie*, Deuxième Fascicule Supplémentaire, (Paris, 1959), 285; L. D. Reynolds and N. G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*, 3d. ed (Oxford, 1991), 68; Norris, introduction to *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning*, 17. See also Geanakoplos, *Interaction Sibling*, 57, where he discusses how Gregory combined Greek philosophic ideas with the rhetorical style of the Second Sophistic (symmetry, imagery, antithesis, comparison, repetition of key words) to provide an eloquently persuasive form for his doctrines and beliefs.

in relationship of the three Persons and firmly established the divinity of the Holy Spirit.³⁸ Gregory's authority and orthodoxy recommended him to all Byzantine theologians.

Moreover, Gregory is a shining example of how, in Eastern theology (until the Palamite controversy of the fourteenth century) an easy synthesis of mysticism and of rationalism existed, with the latter taking the secondary place.³⁹ Gregory certainly valued his secular education, particularly praising the Platonists as those "who have thought best about God and are nearest to us."⁴⁰ He was critical of Christians who avoided 'pagan learning' and yet spoke vehemently against it, since by their own admission, they knew nothing about it. He claimed that nothing in the classical learning of a scholar such as his brother, Caesarius, was inconsistent with the Christian gospel and he pointed to Athanasius of Alexandria as an even greater example of a student of classical literature and philosophy.⁴¹ Gregory's measure for distinguishing the use of Hellenic learning was demonstrated in his adage: 'avoid the thorns, pluck the roses.'⁴² To Gregory, reason must be subordinated to

³⁸See Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 8; Norris, introduction to *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning*, 5; Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 44.

³⁹See Tatakis, *La philosophie Byzantine*, 265, where he discusses this situation and Nicephorus Gregoras' defense of same.

⁴⁰Or. 31.5; PG 36, 137B.

⁴¹Or. 21.6, PG 35, 1088-9; Or. 7, 7-8, PG 35, 761-4.

⁴²*Ad Seleucum* 1.61, PG 37, 1581 and *Carmen de vita sua* 1.472, PG 37, 1062. See discussion, Norris, "Of Thorns and Roses," 456-8; idem, introduction to *Faith Gives Fullness*, 45. Also see Sheldon-Williams, "Greek Christian Platonist Tradition," 425-6, for the Cappadocians as examples of controlled acceptance of pagan learning, as long as what was falsified by Christian revelation was rejected.

faith and its limits must be recognized.⁴³ Gregory's expression, 'faith gives fullness to our reasoning' really identifies the most apophatic way of knowing for it establishes that all human knowledge had enormous limitations.⁴⁴

Although all of the Cappadocians stressed revealed teaching in their doctrine of scripture, they also allowed a role for natural theology and for understanding faith as the fulfilment of reason, which is demonstrated in their philological scholarship and metaphysical context for allegorical and typological biblical exegesis. The natural theology which they used initially in their apologetics became a presupposition in their dogmatic theology.⁴⁵

Bessarion's association of Gregory and Proclus exemplifies his early formation as a Christian Platonist who, like many others in the Eastern tradition, sought to bring understanding to their faith.⁴⁶ He recognized that Gregory was drawing upon a concept with a long tradition in Greek philosophy: the only thing which could be comprehended about

⁴³On Gregory's praise, use and debt to classical culture and education see Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 3-21; Sheldon-Williams, "Greek Christian Platonist Tradition," 440; Norris, introduction to *Faith Gives Fullness*; 45. idem, "Of Thorns and Roses," 456-8.

⁴⁴Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture*, 220.

⁴⁵Ibid., 220-1. See also Copleston, *History of Philosophy* 3: 14-15, for the use of philosophy, particularly Platonism and Neoplatonism, in apologetics, with the observation that early Christian writers made no clear distinction between philosophy and theology.

⁴⁶See Norris, introduction to *Faith Gives Fullness to Reasoning*, 36, who describes Gregory of Nazianzus as a Christian Platonist with the same basic insights of Anselm and Aquinas in the West—faith seeking understanding. Pelikan, *Christian Tradition*, 2: 34, notes that although "faith seeking understanding" is generally identified with Anselm, it is also applicable to Greek theologians such as Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus.

the incomprehensible divine nature was its boundlessness, what it was not rather than what it was.⁴⁷ This apophatic theory of language considered that words were inadequate to produce an adequate analogy for God. Gregory considered that the term "God" itself had only a relative value.⁴⁸ In prefixing Gregory's poem with such a profound mystical quality to Proclus' works, Bessarion identified with the same kind of apophatic attitude towards the divine nature, totally transcendent, defying description or explanation. He celebrated the synthesis of mysticism and rationalism of the early Fathers, where philosophy was welcomed as the handmaid of theology. Gregory's use of Platonic imagery and expressions similar to Proclus worked to validate the study of Neoplatonic philosophy in Bessarion's mind.⁴⁹ Gregory's authority and orthodoxy were unquestioned, but such was not the case with the works of another Church Father the young Bessarion also studied.

Origen as a Model of Wisdom and Piety

In his youth Bessarion also possessed a copy of Origen's *Contra Celsum*⁵⁰ and his study of this text was likewise influential in his development as a Christian humanist. In this work of apologetics Origen addresses not only the possibility of knowing God but, in a fusion of Platonism and scripture (a combination of faith and knowledge), also expounds on

⁴⁷Or. 38.7; PG 36, 32.17.

⁴⁸Or. 30:18. PG 36. 137B. See Pelikan. *Christian Tradition*, 2: 45-9.

⁴⁹Saffrey. "Notes autographe du Bessarion." 538-9, states that Bessarion had just completed his Patristic studies when he began the study of Platonism (in reality, the Neoplatonic commentary tradition) under Plethon and that he placed Gregory's poem at the top of his working manuscript to demonstrate how Neoplatonic philosophy was a *praeparatio evangelica* for theology.

⁵⁰Cod. Marc. gr. 45. See Saffrey, "Recherches Cardinal Bessarion," 276.

His transcendence and changelessness.⁵¹ Moreover, Origen's allegorical method, employed here and elsewhere in his works, became the accepted form of biblical exegesis throughout the entire medieval period.⁵² It was declared legitimate by Gregory of Nazianzus and, moreover, clearly advocated in the writings of the Pseudo-Dionysius and in Maximus the Confessor's commentary on Gregory.⁵³ Bessarion would also come to use this method with great proficiency.⁵⁴

Bessarion's deep admiration for Origen is expressed in 'secret and private remarks' in the form of an *encomium* in his copy of the *Contra Celsum*.⁵⁵

You, for your part, have well fortified the Churches of Christ on the entire earth, and in the battle you never showed yourself in anything inferior to Paul, by the beauty of the wisdom which is in you, by the multitude of your writings, of which not even the most zealous could ever have seriously read even a part, and also by the purity of your life: yes, and to finish you offered yourself to death because of the desire that you had for Christ, after having prepared first your own father for this battle (martyrdom). He (Christ) will surely take care to grant you those rewards which are suitable and which He is accustomed to do, because besides yours, could He have any more pure or more holy life, since you have made of yourself a perfect model of a wise man. But me, what am I going to

⁵¹*Contra Celsum* 7.17, 4.14. On Origen see Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 2, *The Ante-Nicene Literature after Irenaeus*, 37-101; Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought*, 66-94. On Origen's *Contra Celsum* see Quasten, 54, 75-6; Chadwick, 78-92.

⁵²Chadwick, "Philo and Christian Thought" 192; Louth, *Origins Christian Mystical Tradition*, 54-64.

⁵³See Pelikan, *Christian Tradition*, 2: 12-16. For Maximus' explanation of Gregory's theology see Maximus the Confessor, *Selected Writings*, trans. with notes by George C. Berthold, introduction by Jaroslav Pelikan, preface by Irénée-Henri Dalmais, O.P., *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New York, Mahwah, Toronto, 1985).

⁵⁴See Hankins, 1, 249-63, for Bessarion's extensive use both at the Union Council and throughout his western career.

⁵⁵Such is the view of Saffrey, "Recherches Cardinal Bessarion," 276.

become, who languishes after the whole of your writings in the thought that by them I could be reunited with your soul; could I ever hope to obtain in any way those things absolutely missing here? Thank you at least for this tract against the Epicurean Celsus; because possessing it and holding it in my heart, I believe I will have a thorough knowledge of you yourself and everything which is by you and yourself embraced, pulling here as if from the contents of a well, all that it offers of advantages, and gazing as if in a faithful mirror, as much as is possible for me, the fullness of the wisdom and of the virtue which is in you. But what will I yet become. Origen. Origen. Origen?⁵⁶

Bessarion's unqualified youthful enthusiasm for the writings of Origen was not the common attitude in Byzantium. Bessarion's friend, George Scholarius, more typically relates the general feeling:

The Western writers say, 'Where Origen was good, no one is better, where he was bad, no one is worse.' Our Asian divines say on the other hand that 'Origen is the whetstone of us all,' but on the other hand, that 'he is the fount of foul doctrines'. Both are right: he splendidly defended Christianity, wonderfully expounded scripture and wrote a noble exhortation to martyrdom. But he was also the father of Arianism, and worst of all, said that hellfire would not last for ever.⁵⁷

Michael Psellus expressed similar sentiments for he stated: "the famous Origen ... was the pioneer of all our theology and laid its foundations, but on the other hand, all heresies find their origin in him."⁵⁸ Bessarion, too, was quite cognizant of Origen's 'heretical' views for during the discussion with the Latins on the subject of Purgatory during the Council of

⁵⁶Greek text, with French translation, in *Ibid.*, 277-8; commentary, 276, 278-9.

⁵⁷Paraphrase by Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought* 95, of a marginal note in cod. Vat. gr.1742, fol. 1r. The quotations are consecutively from: Cassiodorus, *Inst.* i.I.8; Gregory of Nazianzus as quoted in *Suidas*, s.v. 'Origenes'; and Justinian (paraphrased) *Edictum adv. Origenem*. PG 86, 949B. Chadwick notes that Epiphanius, *Panarion haer.* 64.4, 1-4, made Origen responsible for Arianism. See Chadwick's discussion, 95, and n. 1 for printed versions of text.

⁵⁸*Acc. Cerul.* 20, ed. Kurtz-Drexel. I: 258-9, as quoted by Pelikan, *Christian Tradition*, 2: 145.

Florence, he questioned the Latins' doctrine, pointing out the same contrary arguments which George Scholarius had emphasized as stated above.⁵⁹

One might suggest, therefore, that Bessarion's recognition of Origen as the supreme example of a "wise man" refers to his synthesis of faith and reason.⁶⁰ Bessarion would have been quite aware that certain similarities existed between Origen and Gregory of Nazianzus with regard to their spirituality and open endorsement of Platonic philosophy as the handmaid of theology. Although the Cappadocians seldom mention him in their own works, Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus collaborated to produce the *Philocalia* (358 A.D.), a collection of extracts from Origen's writings on topics such as the nature of God, free will and the interpretation of scripture recommended as useful for students to harmonize faith and philosophy.⁶¹ In a particular letter preserved therein Origen instructs a former pupil to use Greek philosophy as a preparation for the study of Christianity, always being aware of the dangers involved in the Hellenic wisdom, and above all, to study the Scriptures with great

⁵⁹See Bessarion's exposition of the Greek position on Purgatory, 14 June 1438, *Acta Graeca*, 27-30. See also Gill, *Council of Florence*, 121, and A. de Halleux, "Problèmes de méthode dans les discussions sur l'eschatologie au Concile de Ferrare et Florence" in *Christian Unity: The Council of Ferrara-Florence 1438/39-1989*, ed. G. Albergio (Louvain, 1991), 261-8.

⁶⁰On Origen as the head of a school that encouraged the reading of classical literature, particularly the philosophers, see Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, 9. According to St. Gregory Thaumaturgos, *PG* 10, 1088A, 1093A, cited by Wilson, Origen only excluded "authors who denied the existence of a deity or divine providence."

⁶¹See Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 10 and 22, for the heavy use in the *Philocalia* of Origen's *On First Principles* and *Contra Celsum* to show that being a Christian did not require the avoidance of intellectual pursuits.

care.⁶² Bessarion's own approach to understanding the scriptures and philosophy, instilled in him by Chortasmenus and reinforced by his own study of the Church Fathers (and perhaps the views of Michael Psellus) clearly marks him in the same Christian Platonist tradition.

Although Bessarion's *Encomium* certainly emanates from his student days, it is very difficult to assign a precise date for its composition. Saffrey considers that it is likely the result of a first reading of the text and that it provides a brief glimpse into the soul of the young monk as he struggles to develop within himself the attitudes and practices necessary to advance in the spiritual life.⁶³ Saffrey's connection of the *Encomium* with a significant point in Bessarion's spiritual development is no doubt correct, but the young monk's knowledge of Origen's writings seems to be quite extensive. Rather than being the result of a first reading, it is much more likely that Bessarion had spent considerable time acquiring information on Origen's other works, which would have been available to him through Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* and the Cappadocians' *Philocalia*.⁶⁴

Bessarion's attitude towards Origen's works had much in common with Gregory of Nazianzus' approach. The latter was certainly selective in his use, but he also highly valued the works and he felt no need to attack or destroy the source of the Platonic elements in

⁶²*Philocalia*, chapter 13, as cited by Quasten, *Patrology*, 3: 73.

⁶³See Saffrey, "Recherches Cardinal Bessarion," 278-9.

⁶⁴The controversies which developed around Origen after his death and which led to his eventual condemnation in the sixth century resulted in the destruction of many of his works in the original Greek. Much of the information Bessarion had on his writings came to him second-hand through the *Philocalia* or through Eusebius who, in the sixth chapter of his *Ecclesiastical History*, provided considerable biographical information on Origen and descriptions of many of his writings. See Quasten, *Patrology*, 3: 37-51.

Origen's theology.⁶⁵ Gregory's adage, 'avoid the thorns, pluck the roses' which he advocated with regard to the use of Platonic philosophy seems to have been quite appropriate with regard to Origen's works as well. Bessarion's *Encomium*, then, could easily date from the period in his life when he had already begun Platonic studies under Plethon and was realizing how much of the writings of the Church Fathers were permeated by Platonism.

Saffrey considers that Bessarion's comments, 'what am I going to become,' which appear twice in the *Encomium*, indicate that he was questioning his own destiny.⁶⁶ One might further suggest that Bessarion was experiencing a real struggle of conscience since he feels such affinity with Origen and his thought and expresses such anguish over the loss of so many of his writings. Bessarion's study of the Church Fathers, in revealing to him how much of the early Christian tradition was profoundly influenced by Platonism and in fuelling his desire to understand the Platonic elements within their works, was leading him further away from the mainstream theological thinking of his day which was often suspicious of secular knowledge and especially attacked Platonic theology. There were, of course, other channels in which such talents were more warmly welcomed.

New Contacts at Constantinople

Bessarion's familiarity with the Hellenistic inheritance did not, of course, go unnoticed and his mentor, Chortasmenus, was instrumental in bringing his considerable

⁶⁵The Cappadocians had acquired most of their Platonic philosophy second-hand through Origen's works, but he, himself, had dealt directly with the Platonic and Neoplatonic texts. See Meredith, *The Cappadocians*, 10.

⁶⁶Saffrey, "Recherches Cardinal Bessarion," 270-5.

talents to the attention of the educated élite, including the imperial court in Constantinople. The Emperor John VIII was duly impressed when shown the young monk's *Lament for the Emperor Manuel Palaeologos* (d. 1425).⁶⁷ Indeed shortly after this, Bessarion delivered his *Address to the Emperor of Trebizond, Alexios IV, the Great Comnenos*,⁶⁸ as part of an imperial delegation (c. 1425-27) arranging the marriage of Alexius' daughter, Maria, to the Emperor John VIII. Bessarion's role within this delegation was as orator, and he fulfilled his mission admirably, praising Alexius extensively for his care for his subjects, successful defence of his Empire and restoration and building of churches.

Bessarion's *Lament* provides the first indication in his extant works that he had some limited knowledge of affairs in the West. He discusses the Emperor's western expeditions to seek aid against the Turks and praises his endeavours to impede the latter's advance. He notes the impression Manuel made amongst the western élites. The Italians, now superior in the literary field, greatly admired Manuel's erudition: his death is a loss suffered by all Christendom, not just one race or city.⁶⁹ Chortasmenus' attitude towards the West might be

⁶⁷Item No. 2 in Marc. gr. 533; Greek text ed. Lambros, *PP*, III, 186-90; Latin translation by Perotti, with Bessarion's approval. *PG* 161, 615-20. At one time scholars, relying upon the inflated views of Bessarion portrayed by his eulogists, considered that this consolation was actually delivered at the time of the Emperor's death. See for example Vast, *Cardinal Bessarion*, 21-2. Given Bessarion's youth, this view is now generally discounted and the monody is seen as a rhetorical exercise. See Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 132-3, who notes that Bessarion admits near the end of the lament that "he was too young to have had personal contact, see or listen to speeches of Manuel," Lambros, *PP*, III, 289-90, 32 ff.

⁶⁸Item No. 3 in Marc. gr. 533. ed. Archbishop Chrysanthos, *Archeion Pontou* 12 (1946), 117-30; summary and discussion, Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 133-4. See also Loenertz, "Bibliographie du Bessarion," 131-2.

⁶⁹Lambros, *PP*, III, 287, 7-29. See also Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 132-3.

reflected in these statements for he did perhaps see the benefits of an economic union with the West against the Turks and he could, like many others, have considered that the divisions within Christendom were deplorable and needed rectification.⁷⁰ During private deliberations with the Byzantine delegation at the Council of Florence, Bessarion is recorded to have stated: "I saw, too, the bishop of Selymbria, who was a lettered man and one of the great teachers, and I know well that he, too, praised the union."⁷¹ Chortasmenus certainly had no sympathy with the Latin doctrine of the *filioque*. A confirmed adherent to the Orthodox position on the Trinity, he sought a clear declaration of the Orthodox faith from the Latinophrone, Manuel Chrysoloras, whom he numbered among his friends.⁷²

However, Bessarion also acquired additional understanding of western affairs through contacts he made while in attendance at Chrysokokkes' school in Constantinople. Chrysokokkes' instruction in rhetoric and expertise in manuscript copying attracted both eastern and western scholars. Bessarion became acquainted there with the Italian scholar, Francesco Filelfo, who, since he resided in Constantinople from 1421-7,⁷³ could have introduced him to the intellectual circle associated with John Chrysoloras, the nephew of

⁷⁰Ibid., 139-40.

⁷¹Syropoulos, IX, 15, 450. On this point see also Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 139-40; Gill, "Was Bessarion a Conciliarist," 209-11.

⁷²Letters to Manuel Chrysoloras and to Joseph Bryennius, ed. Hunger, nos. 29 and 11, in Hunger, *Johannes Chortasmenos*. See also Hunger, 179-80; Nicol, *Church and society*, 118; Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 139; Gill, "Was Bessarion a Conciliarist," 204-5.

⁷³See E. Legrand, ed., *Cent-dix lettres grecques de François Filelfe* (Paris, 1892) for 2 letters from Filelfo to Bessarion, No. 107 on p. 41, and No. 64, on p. 112. In both he indicates that he and Bessarion were fellow-schoolmates under Chrysokokkes.

Manuel Chrysoloras.⁷⁴ The latter certainly held pro-Latin sentiments; moreover, he had also travelled extensively in the West as an ambassador for Manuel II and had taught in Italy for many years. Through Manuel Chrysoloras, a pro-unionist tradition can be traced back through Manuel Calecas to Demetrius Kydones.⁷⁵

Bessarion's association with the eastern scholar, George Scholarius, who kept himself abreast of developments in the West, originated within the cultural milieu at Chrysokokkes' school.⁷⁶ Scholarius considered himself to be a shining example of a diminishing educated élite and he deplored the state of learning in the East.⁷⁷ He advocated restoration of the European ideological unity, based upon a common way of life and grounded in close cultural ties between Latins and Greeks.⁷⁸ This would ensure papal aid and help the whole of Christendom, including western Europe, by stopping Turkish expansion there.⁷⁹ Scholarius favoured the prospects of union in general.⁸⁰ However, after their initial association in

⁷⁴Filelfo first studied under John Chrysoloras and married his daughter. He transferred to Chrysokokkes' school after the death of his father-in-law. See Loenertz, "Biographie du Bessarion," 127-9.

⁷⁵Ibid., 127-9.

⁷⁶See letter from Filelfo to Scholarius, 1 March 1430, in Legrand, ed., *Cent-dix lettres*, No. 1.5, 9-12. See also Loenertz, "Biographie du Bessarion," 127-9, for discussion of their association in Constantinople.

⁷⁷*Oeuvres*, I, 289: VI. 4. George considered that there were no capable teachers left in the East.

⁷⁸Ibid., I, 334. Ševčenko, "Intellectual Repercussions," 8 and n. 34, indicates that this whole page is a restatement of Demetrius Kydones' plan.

⁷⁹*Oeuvres*, I, 306. 1-6.

⁸⁰See Turner, "George Scholarius and Union," 87, citing views expressed in two letters to his pupil, John. *Oeuvres* IV, 412-16; a sermon on the Annunciation, *Oeuvres*, I, 59-

Constantinople, whereas Bessarion was drawn to the study of Neoplatonic philosophy, George continued his pursuit of western scholasticism.⁸¹ He apparently taught himself to read Latin and the theology of Thomas Aquinas, whose views he considered to be identical with his own, except for the two issues of the *filioque* and the Palamite distinction.⁸² Moreover, he considered that the literary advantage had passed to the West.⁸³ What little knowledge Bessarion possessed about western affairs and Aquinas' theology could have come to him through the mediation of George Scholarius, for within a few years the latter showed himself to be very interested in literary developments in the West and the opportunities available to a layman in that environment.

While Bessarion was resident in the Peloponnese (c.1431-36), he and Scholarius continued to be fast friends and corresponded in the highly artificial style of the Byzantine élite.⁸⁴ Their letters provide considerable information about Scholarius, now judge-general, secretary and orator at the imperial court. His forays into western scholasticism and his

60; letter to Pope Eugenius IV, *Oeuvres*, IV, 432-3; letter to Ambrogio Travesari, *Oeuvres*, IV, 440.

⁸¹*Oeuvres*, VII, 2-3. Turner, "Career of Scholarius," 424-5, considers that he began to work on Aristotle from Latin texts and Averroes from 1420 onwards.

⁸²*Oeuvres*, V, 2, 12-14. See also Turner, "Career of Scholarius," 424, 427; Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 135-6.

⁸³*Oeuvres*, IV, 495-6. To George, Latin works were now the best in philosophy (logic) and theology (*Summae* of Aquinas). See Turner's discussion, "Career of Scholarius," 424-5.

⁸⁴Bessarion's letters (Items Nos. 11 and 12 in Marc. gr. 533), Mohler, 3, 414-18; Scholarius' letters, *Oeuvres*, IV, 419-22, and 431-2.

facility in Latin had brought him, at this point, under suspicion as a Latinophrone.⁸⁵ He found his position at court becoming increasingly untenable and sought to improve his lot either by acquiring the patronage of Despot Theodore II in the Peloponnese or by emigrating to the West.⁸⁶ even making inquiries to Pope Eugenius IV as to the possibilities of employment with the Curia.⁸⁷ Bessarion discouraged this latter endeavour and even promoted his friend's interests with Theodore II.⁸⁸ At this point in their lives, George seems to have been more favourably inclined towards affairs western than did Bessarion and his probable influence upon Bessarion's views and understanding of Thomist theology cannot be discounted.

However, Bessarion was also exposed to the views current at the imperial court with regards to the prospects of holding a union council. His *Encomium of Trebizond*⁸⁹ was

⁸⁵See Scholarius. *Apology Against Accusations of Latinism. Oeuvres*, I, 376-89. See also Ševčenko, "Intellectual Repercussions," 10-11; Turner, "Career of Scholarius," 427-8.

⁸⁶*Oeuvres*, IV, Letters VI and VII, 417-19, to Theodore, seeking a position at his court; Letter VIII, 432-3, to Bessarion; Letter XVII, 435, to Alexius Lascaris, indicating desire to emigrate to Italy. See discussion, Loenertz, "Biographie du Bessarion," 135-8; Ševčenko, "Intellectual Repercussions," 4 and ns. 5-6. See also letter from Filelfo to George (March 1, 1430), replying to inquiries regarding intellectual prospects in Florence, in Legrand, ed., *Cent-dix lettres*, 10, discussed by Ševčenko and Turner, "Career of Scholarius," 428 and n. 1.

⁸⁷*Oeuvres*, IV, Letter XV to Pope Eugenius, 432-3. Loenertz, "Biographie du Bessarion," 136-7, sees this letter as a 'polite' refusal of a position offered. Ševčenko, "Intellectual Repercussions," 25, n. 5, considers that Scholarius petitioned the pope.

⁸⁸Bessarion, Letter I to Scholarius, Mohler, 3, 417-18. See also Loenertz' discussion, "Biographie du Bessarion," 140.

⁸⁹*Encomium of Trebizond* (Item No. 27 in Marc. gr. 533), ed. Lambros, *NH* 13 (1916), 145-204.

delivered when he formed part of an imperial delegation to Trebizond in 1436, a mission which likely sought the Great Comnenus' support for a council with the Latins in the hope of achieving military assistance against the Turks.⁹⁰

Here, again, no hostility towards the West is evident: rather as in his earlier *consolatio* on Manuel II (1425), Bessarion praises the literary achievements in the West, accomplished through adoption of the Eastern Hellenic tradition. He also introduces his own view of Roman history, based upon the familiar dictum in Roman classical literature of Greece leading its captors captive.⁹¹ He claims that Attica, and Athens itself, having gladly submitted to the Roman rule, provided the military masters with a knowledge, a wisdom and a literature: above all, they have introduced them to a language which alone befits the very nature of man. His historical survey emphasizes the Roman admiration for the Greeks in their desire to share the latter's cultural achievements and in their consideration of them as allies rather than subjects.⁹² He ends with a sad lament on the extent of the Turkish conquests which had advanced even as far as Europe.⁹³ Bessarion was, no doubt, expressing the imperial government's need for a military alliance against the Turks, but he also certainly

⁹⁰Monfasani, "Bessarion's Latin Eulogists," 118-19 and n. 83, considers that the council was the underlying factor in the *encomium*, but see also Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 140-2, who qualifies his approval since there is no indication of the council in the piece itself, although parts do point to support for an East-West alliance.

⁹¹See Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 141, for discussion of this point.

⁹²*Encomium*, ed. Lambros, *NH*, 176. See also Lambros, *Commentary*, 199, and Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 140-1.

⁹³*Encomium*, ed. Lambros, *NH*, 182. See also Lambros, *Commentary*, 199, and Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 141-2.

implies the common good that would accrue to a united Christendom, militarily, spiritually and culturally, sentiments similar to those already expressed by Demetrius Kydones and Manuel Chrysoloras.⁹⁴ The views of George Scholarius were quite consistent with them as well. Bessarion and George, having limited knowledge of the West, focussed on all that was positive. They, like many others in their time, longed for the cultural and religious integration of a former day. Their youthful enthusiasm saw this as more than a distant possibility, a view which seemed less realistic to members of the older generation like Chortasmenus and the Platonist, Plethon, the last major influence in Bessarion's life.

Stimulating Contacts in the Peloponnese

When Bessarion, possibly at the suggestion of Chortasmenus, ventured to study neoplatonism under Plethon at Mistra (c. 1431), he became part of the leading cultural centre in the fifteenth century Greek world. The patronage provided by Despot Theodore II and his wife, Cleopè, was a magnet for Byzantine scholars. In the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Peloponnese, long accustomed to intercourse between Greek and Latin, Orthodox and Catholic, attitudes were more elastic and the flow of ideas and customs was more accepted than in the imperial city under the watchful eye of the Church.⁹⁵

George Gemistus Plethon found it prudent to establish himself in this environment, since his Platonic pursuits became suspicious to the ecclesiastical authorities in

⁹⁴This similarity has often been pointed out. See Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 140-2; Nicol, *Last Centuries*, 370-1; Runciman, *Great Church*, 118-19; Ševčenko, "Intellectual Repercussions," 8; Geanakoplos, *Interaction Sibling*, 14, 48-9, 105-6, 292-3.

⁹⁵Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 4, 83, 221. See also Runciman, *Mistra*, 70-75; Zakythinos, *Le Despotat grec de Morée*, 1:165-284; Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 135.

Constantinople.⁹⁶ At Mistra he continued to accept students, much as he had done in the imperial city: he was on intimate terms with the Despot; as a layman, he was a member of the Senate (1438); he was certainly a judge, perhaps even judge-general; he also held some other undefined administrative position.⁹⁷ He also continued his normal pursuits. He collected manuscripts in all the customary disciplines, but especially inclined towards his own interests of history, mathematics, astronomy and Neoplatonism,⁹⁸ which Bessarion, too, showed a propensity for collecting.⁹⁹ He likewise collected excerpts from Greek authors as did Plethon, although unlike his mentor (who used them for instruction), Bessarion was interested in adding pure Attic expressions to his rhetorical arsenal.¹⁰⁰

Like many others, including George Scholarius,¹⁰¹ Bessarion admired Plethon for his strength of character and his erudition. Upon Plethon's death (c. 1452), Bessarion wrote a letter of condolence to his sons, replete with philosophical allusions, but totally lacking any Christian element. This is not, as is sometimes claimed, evidence that Bessarion emulated

⁹⁶Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 28, and 40, where he indicates that Manuel II (who suggested Plethon vacate Constantinople) preferred Plato to Aristotle, often quoting the former in his letters. See also Runciman, *Mistra*, 110.

⁹⁷Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 87.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 18.

⁹⁹Labowsky, *Bessarion's Library*, 5-7.

¹⁰⁰The conclusion of John-Theophanes Papademetriou, "An unnoticed Manuscript of Thucydides in the hand of Bessarion," *Thesaurismata* 7 (1970): 278-9, who agrees with Mioni, "Bessarione bibliophile e filiologo," 65, that the excerpts contained in Marc. gr. 523 and 526 originated during Bessarion's study under Plethon.

¹⁰¹*Oeuvres*, IV, 117.3-4, 6-10. See also Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 267.

Plethon's supposed Platonism:¹⁰² rather, as a compliment to Plethon, it merely imitated the kind of *consolatio* Plethon himself (who was not a cleric) delivered on occasion for members of the imperial family, without an eyebrow ever being raised.¹⁰³ Both Plethon and Bessarion composed monodies on the death of Theodore II's wife, Cleopê (1433).¹⁰⁴ The differences are striking. Bessarion's lament exhibits the customary philosophical and *religious* motifs; Plethon's is entirely philosophical in nature.¹⁰⁵

Bessarion and Plethon display some similar attitudes with regard to affairs in the Peloponnese. Later in the West (1444) Bessarion would recommend to the Despot Constantine¹⁰⁶ political, economic and social reforms (about which more will be said later) reminiscent of Plethon's views, but they were not really original, having already been

¹⁰²The view of F. Masai, *Pléthon et le Platonisme de Mistra*, 307-14, and shared by Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 79.

¹⁰³See Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 153, n. 82, and Wind, *Pagan Mysteries*, 244-8.

¹⁰⁴See discussion of Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 137. Bessarion included one of his three extant monodies on Cleopê, *Epitaph in Iambic Verse for Princess Cleopê Malatesta*, in his autograph manuscript, Marc. gr. 533 (Item No. 14, unedited). A similar monody on her, ed. Lambros, *PP*, IV, 155-60, from Cod. Paris Ms. gr. 2540. Plethon's monody, ed. Lambros, *PP*, IV, 161-75, and *PG* 150, 940-52.

¹⁰⁵Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 137.

¹⁰⁶Letter to the Despot Constantine Palaeologus, (Item No. 35 in Marc. gr.533), ed. Lambros, *PP*, IV, 32-45 and Mohler, 3, 439-49.

suggested in the works of Demetrius Kydones and Nicephorus Gregoras.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, Plethon disliked the Roman tradition of Empire which Bessarion so admired.¹⁰⁸

Bessarion certainly acquired a thorough grounding in the Neoplatonic hermeneutic tradition, particularly the works of Proclus, from Plethon.¹⁰⁹ who was to some degree himself influenced by the Christian Platonist, Michael Psellus.¹¹⁰ It is reasonable to assume that Plethon might have been one of the channels through whom Bessarion gained access to some of Psellus' works. Indeed, Bessarion seems to emulate Psellus' Christian Platonism more than Plethon's supposed paganism.¹¹¹ A comparison of the religious views of Bessarion and his mentor indicate some striking differences. Much like Psellus, Bessarion realized that the

¹⁰⁷See Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 108, for identification with these authors, as well as with ideas consistent with the opinions of Thomas Magistrus and Nicephorus Blemmydes. See also Woodhouse, 22-3, where he identifies Demetrius Kydones, Nicephorus Gregoras and Plethon as three links in a chain of secular humanism, pointing out that through Gregoras, Plethon could have also been influenced by Theodore Metochites, and that both the latter and Gregoras were Platonists.

¹⁰⁸Runciman, *Mistra*, 110-12.

¹⁰⁹See Hankins, 1, 219.

¹¹⁰On Plethon's debt to Psellus, particularly with regard to the *Chaldean Oracles* see Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 48-50; on Bessarion's familiarity with Psellus see above, 55-6, 62.

¹¹¹Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 50, notes that whereas Psellus' interpretation of the *Oracles* is confronted with the teachings of the Church Fathers, Plethon's is not. Moreover, Woodhouse tends to the view that Plethon's commentary is not totally derivative of Psellus, but that the latter is but one link in Plethon's chain since Theodore Metochites and Nicephorus Gregoras also displayed interest in the *Oracles* in the fourteenth century. Moreover, Woodhouse, 50-1, indicates that scholars cannot ascertain the actual dates when Plethon wrote his *Commentary* and *Brief Explanation* of the *Oracles*, and that neither autograph manuscript is among those of Plethon in Bessarion's possession which he bequeathed to the Library of San Marco in Venice.

Fathers of the Church prized their secular education and that they recommended a thorough understanding of Hellenic, particularly Platonic, philosophy which they saw as a preparation for the gospel. His studies thus confirmed Platonism as an important component in the Fathers' doctrinal formulations and their apophatic understanding of the nature of God. On the other hand, Plethon, although he had a thorough grounding in Patristics, exhibited no particular reverence for the Fathers of the Church in his works¹¹² and, moreover, he showed particular distaste for apophatic theology.¹¹³ Despite the fact that Proclus looms large in Plethon's philosophical theology, his reliance is on reason, not revelation.¹¹⁴

Plethon's general attitude towards religion seemed to be based in large part on its social utility,¹¹⁵ but nonetheless he did discriminate. Although he severely criticized Orthodox theologians as 'sophists,'¹¹⁶ he considered the truths of Orthodoxy to be superior to the doctrines of the western church. He never supported the acceptance of the *filioque* on doctrinal grounds and he even wrote a treatise against it, based primarily upon logical, not

¹¹²Both Bessarion, Mohler, 3, 470, and the Patriarch Joseph, Syropoulos, VII, 17, 366-8, state that Plethon was a master in theology. He was familiar with the Greek Fathers as his many references to them, *PG* 160, 978-C-D, indicate. See discussion, Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 69-70.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 20; Runciman, *Great Church*, 124.

¹¹⁴Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 61, 75; Milton V. Anastos, "Plethon's Calendar and Liturgy," *DOP*, (1948):281-303; Runciman, *Great Church*, 124.

¹¹⁵See discussion by Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 47, 168; Hankins, 1, 197-200; Tatakis, *La philosophie Byzantine*, 285.

¹¹⁶Runciman, *Mistra*, 113-14; Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 64. See *On the Laws*, I.2, 36, ed. C. Alexandre, *Pléthon, Traité des Lois*, trans. A. Pellisser (Paris, 1858; reprint, Amsterdam, 1966) cited by Hankins, 1, 197 and n. 73, regarding 'sophists' as innovators which he considers Plethon might have aimed at adherents to the Palamite doctrine.

religious principles, which was highly praised by George Scholarius.¹¹⁷ Moreover, Plethon rejected monasticism as a sterile environment which produced no benefit for the common good.¹¹⁸ a criticism which might have been aimed particularly at illiterate hesychasts (although Hesychasm is never precisely mentioned in his extant works) since Plethon did not hold such a negative view of Bessarion.¹¹⁹ Plethon certainly did point out that the clergy were absolutely ignorant.¹²⁰

Plethon's attitude did perhaps reinforce Bessarion's own developing distaste for the illiterate ecclesiastical community for he did, later in life, expound on the general lack of erudition of the clergy in the Peloponnese,¹²¹ but George Scholarius also expressed similar views, particularly in his speeches at the Council of Florence,¹²² which might, therefore, indicate that such an opinion was current amongst many of the educated élite. Bessarion himself made a submission to the synod of Constantinople on behalf of his patron, Dositheus (c. 1436),¹²³ probably shortly after completion of his education with Plethon. Bessarion's

¹¹⁷*Oeuvres*. IV, 458.l. where he praises Plethon for his refutation of "that nonsense in support of the Latins." See also Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 35.

¹¹⁸Runciman, *Mistra*, 112.

¹¹⁹Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 69.

¹²⁰PG 160, 841.

¹²¹*Encyclica ad Graecos* (1463), PG 161, 460.

¹²²*Orationes Georgii Scholarii*, ed. Gill.

¹²³*A Legal Discourse addressed to the Synod in Constantinople as from the Person of Archbishop Dositheos of Trebizond* (Item No. 26 in Marc. gr. 533), ed. Archbishop Chrysanthos, *Archeion Pontou* 9 (1939), 3-42; summary, Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 142-3. The date of writing is disputed. Chrysanthos (1939) states ca. 1422-31, Laurent *DHGE*, 14, 700-1, places it at 1436/37. Storman, 142, prefers after 1431 and before

long and careful study of the Greek Fathers is there put to practical use, showing considerable knowledge of canon law and historical precedent.¹²⁴ He chastises the synod for disregarding the canons, Patristic tradition and civil law and for having become a law unto itself.¹²⁵ His following remarks might indicate that he concurred with Plethon's negative assessment of the hesychast monk's way of life. Bessarion states that even a bishop, like Dosethius, asking to be relieved of his position because he could please God more through the practice of eremetical silence, must be informed that his chosen road to heaven is more direct and renders practical service to God and to human life.¹²⁶ Gregory of Sinai in the previous century expressed similar sentiments to Isidore, Patriarch of Constantinople (1347-50; 1355-63), informing him that he was not called to be an anchorite, but to live in the world, albeit in a monastic community, in order to be a public example of the Christian way of life.¹²⁷ Bessarion's remark could also reflect the attitude of two well known anti-palamites

1436, since both the synod and Bessarion were preparing for the Union Council from 1436 onwards and would not have had time to deal with the case. However, see more recently Monfasani, "Bessarion's Latin Eulogists" 118, who finds Storman's reasoning insufficient and maintains that this piece would date from 1436 by following the established chronology of the works in the manuscript, a finding with which the present writer agrees. The case seeking reinstatement for Dositheus as Metropolitan of Trebizond was not successful.

¹²⁴*Legal Discourse*, ed. Chrysanthos, p. 12, for references to Canon 5 with Cyril's comments; pp 14-15, re Canon 36; and pp. 15, 32, 37 for references to Cyril's letters. For discussion of Bessarion's expertise, see Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 142-3.

¹²⁵*Legal Discourse*, ed. Chrysanthos, p. 18.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 23, lines 567-70. See Storman, "Bessarion before Council," who sees these remarks as a likely aversion to hesychast mysticism.

¹²⁷Philotheos (Kokkinos), *Life of Isidore*, ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, 'Žitija dvuch Vselenskich Patriarchov XIV v., svv. Afanasija I i Isidora I', *Zapiski istoriko-filolog. fakulteta Imperatorskago S.-Petersburgskago Universiteta*, LXXXVI (1905), p. 77, lines 21-

in the previous century. Both Theodore Metochites and Nicephorus Gregoras saw philosophy as the handmaid of theology and considered that total rejection of the wisdom of the world was a form of spiritual pride whereby sanctity was being used as an excuse for illiteracy.¹²⁸ Metochites, in particular, saw the eremitic life of a solitary monk as a sort of escapism, contrary to Christian ordinances and to nature.¹²⁹

Although his detractors could point to Plethon as the source whose heretical Platonic doctrines weakened Bessarion's Orthodoxy,¹³⁰ in reality, Plethon did not influence Bessarion's acceptance of the Latin doctrine. Moreover, in examining the views and attitudes of his two mentors, Plethon and Chortasmenus, the latter's contribution would seem to play the larger role in the connections Bessarion made between secular knowledge and revealed theology.

Plethon, in Mistra, like Chortasmenus in Constantinople, introduced Bessarion to the literary élite, which included the upper echelons of society and the imperial house in the Peloponnese. Although Bessarion moved comfortably amongst this lay élite at Mistra, he

6. as cited and discussed by Nicol, *Church and society*, 49, with Greek text printed n. 53.

¹²⁸See Nicol, *Church and society*, 52. See also idem, *Reluctant Emperor*, 184; Runciman, *Great Church*, 144-5, Tatakis, *La philosophie Byzantine*, 249-61.

¹²⁹*Essays*, ed. C. G. Müller and T. Kiessling, *Theodori Metochitae Miscellanea Philosophia et historica*, nos. 74-6, pp. 491-511, cited and discussed by Nicol, *Church and society*, 52.

¹³⁰See Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 15-16, who denotes George Scholarius and George of Trebizond in this regard.

was, nonetheless, a monk. He held a position of some sort in one of the local monasteries¹³¹ and was not part of the retinue of Theodore II when he travelled to Constantinople (March to June, 1436).¹³² Bessarion did, however, correspond with some younger members of several noble families¹³³ who did accompany the Despot and, moreover, he also wrote to Theodore II himself.¹³⁴ The flattering remarks of Capranica¹³⁵ have made Bessarion the mediator between Theodore and Constantine, assisting the accommodation that was worked out between the two brothers on the imperial succession which, in the end, fell to the latter.¹³⁶ His role was probably much smaller. Since he was on familiar terms with the Despot, he used this to advantage. Bessarion's letter to Theodore encouraged him to be content with his position as Despot in the Peloponnese.¹³⁷ His letters to members of the contingent indicate that he would like to have accompanied them but was held back by the 'tyranny of

¹³¹In his letter to George Scholarius, Mohler, 3, 417.23. Bessarion complains that the burden of his ecclesiastical commitments deprived him of any time to devote to his own intellectual pursuits.

¹³²See Loenertz, "Biographie du Bessarion," 142-9; Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 138-9.

¹³³Bessarion's letters to Paul Sophianus, Demetrius Pepagomenus and Nicephorus Cheilas (Items Nos. 19-21 in Marc. gr. 533), ed. Mohler, 3, 428-31. For identification of these individuals in Peloponnese society see especially Zakynthinos, *Despotat*, 1: for Sophianus, 88 for Pepagomenus, 150, 353; for Cheilas, 190, 304.

¹³⁴Letters to Theodore II, (Items Nos. 17 and 18 in Marc. gr. 533, ed. Mohler, 3, 425-7. See Loenertz, "Biographie du Bessarion," 148-9; Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 138-40.

¹³⁵Mohler, 3, 407, 6-10.

¹³⁶On these negotiations, see Loenertz, "Biographie du Bessarion," 142-9.

¹³⁷Letter I to Theodore, ed. Mohler, 3, 426, 17-35. See Loenertz, "Biographie du Bessarion," 145-7; Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 138.

circumstances' which might well have been his own monastic duties.¹³⁸ Moreover, he was not privy to the affairs being discussed and he was anxious to be kept informed.¹³⁹ Theodore did, however, on other occasions make use of Bessarion's rhetorical talents.¹⁴⁰

Bessarion's extensive education in Constantinople and Mistra had borne considerable fruit for the young scholar-monk. In both centres he was introduced into the small but important milieu of the Byzantine élite, including the court circles. His oratorical skills recommended him to an establishment to whom such refinements were pleasing and absolutely necessary in the conduct of official engagements. His extensive Patristic training also made him a suitable candidate for inclusion in the delegation to the union council. In 1436 Emperor John VIII recalled him to Constantinople, perhaps at the urging of Scholarius.¹⁴¹ Bessarion was given a teaching position at the important Monastery of St.

¹³⁸See the speculation on this point by Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 138-9; Loenertz, "Biographie du Bessarion," 148-9.

¹³⁹See *Ibid.*, 148-9, for discussion on this point.

¹⁴⁰Bessarion's *Iambic Verses for a Tapestry representing the Emperor Manuel II and the Empress Helen, first in Lay and then in Monastic Attire* (Item No. 16 in Marc. gr. 533) ed. Lambros, *PP.* III, 281-3, is written in the person of Theodore II, who accomplished a vow he made to honour his parents by means of the tapestry. See Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 138.

¹⁴¹See letter, *Oeuvres*, IV, 436-8, which has no heading, but Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 117, sees this as clearly addressed to Bessarion. Turner, "Scholarius and Union," 84, could not identify the addressee. He considered that Mark or John Eugenicus would have been a good candidate, except that neither was resident in Mistra at that time.

Basil in Constantinople, where he might have been made abbot in anticipation of his role in the Union Council.¹⁴²

Preparations for the Union Council

The Emperor John VIII had been making arrangements for the Union Council for quite some time.¹⁴³ In the Spring of 1436 he established a commission to formulate the Greek case.¹⁴⁴ Bessarion could have been part of these preparations in either a formal or informal manner.

Historians have been reluctant to include Bessarion as one of the participants in this commission. The only extant source on its composition, Syropoulos, does not include Bessarion as one of the members.¹⁴⁵ Those listed are the Bishop of Ephesus (Josaph. who

¹⁴²Mohler, 3, 407, 6-8. Capranica is the only reference to this promotion. Loenertz, "Biographie du Bessarion," comments upon his tendency to inflate Bessarion's role and position in the East and points out, p. 125, n. 1, that at the union council a certain Germanus, as signatory to the *Tome of Union*, held the position. Monfassani, "Bessarion's Latin Eulogists," has shown the unreliability of Capranica's testimony where it cannot be corroborated. See p. 107, no. 36, where Monfassani discusses the point in question, concluding that either Capranica has exaggerated Bessarion's position or that it was only temporary and that the latter situation could be explained by Bessarion's rapid elevation to the episcopate, at which time Germanus would have received the position of *hegumenos*. Bessarion's teaching position is confirmed by his *Homily on the text: Happy the man who has found wisdom and the mortal who understands prudence* (Proverbs 3.12), which appears to be his last composition in Marcianus Graecus 533 (Item No. 28, unedited) before leaving Constantinople for the West. See Saffrey, "Recherches Cardinal Bessarion," 290; Monfasani, "Bessarion's Latin Eulogists," 118 and n. 81; Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 130 and n. 16.

¹⁴³See Gill, *Council of Florence*, 39-88.

¹⁴⁴Syropoulos, III, 4-11, 164-72. See Gill, "Was Bessarion a Conciliarist," 207; Turner, "Scholarism and Union," 84.

¹⁴⁵Syropoulos, III, 8, 168. For exclusion of Bessarion's involvement on this evidence, see Gill, "Was Bessarion a Conciliarist," 207. However, see also Monfasani, "Bessarion's

died shortly thereafter), the Bishop of Heraclea (Antony), Gregory the Confessor, the *stavrophori* (cross-bearing), leading officials of the Great Church, and the *hieromonk*, Mark Eugenicus (who became Bishop of Ephesus upon Josaph's death). Syropoulos then adds that also present with the Emperor were the *mesazons* (imperial private secretaries), George Scholarius and Kritopoulos.¹⁴⁶ However, Syropoulos' statement does not completely negate the possibility of Bessarion's inclusion in the preparations undertaken by this committee. One might suggest that Syropoulos only listed the initial members officially appointed by John VIII, not subsequent later additions. Moreover, it would appear that Scholarius' initial association with the commission was tied to his function as personal secretary to John VIII in order to keep the Emperor abreast of developments. One could recall, moreover, that George wrote to Bessarion from Constantinople, asking him to come there to help in the task at hand and, in addition, to convince his teacher [Plethon] to accompany him,¹⁴⁷ which could indicate that Bessarion was an addition to the committee after its formal inauguration or that he functioned as an unofficial assistant to Scholarius.

One could likewise examine the chronological order of Bessarion's autograph manuscript, Marcianus Graecus 533, for the pieces dated to 1436. Bessarion's presentation to the synod on Dositheus' behalf (Item No. 26) precedes his *Encomium of Trebizond* (Item

Latin Eulogists." 117-18, who considers that Bessarion's work with the commission is confirmed by the inflated remarks of Pietro Ransano in his *Annales omnium temporum*, 169-71, where Bessarion is described as the leading theologian consulted by bishops, the emperors of Constantinople and Trebizond, and the princes.

¹⁴⁶Syropoulos, III, 8, 168, identified by Laurent, ed., p. 168, n. 3, as an elderly intellectual, associated with the milieu of Mark Eugenicus and George Scholarius.

¹⁴⁷*Oeuvres*, IV, 436-8. See discussion above n. 141.

No. 27). Storman considers that Bessarion presented a very strong case, from a very weak position, in arguing Dositheus' case.¹⁴⁸ If the synod had likewise been impressed with Bessarion's considerable expertise, the ecclesiastical élite might have considered him a worthy addition to both the commission and the Eastern delegation on this account; they could have suggested the same to the Emperor. If such was the case, having it brought to his attention that Bessarion's talents could now be exploited to the further advantage of the government, John VIII then gave him an important position in the official delegation seeking Trebizond's support for union. If, indeed, his expertise had been so recognized, especially in view of the unlettered state of the Byzantine clergy, the use of his talents by the committee preparing the Greek arguments would seem self-explanatory.

Mark of Ephesus (1391/2-1445)¹⁴⁹ was an important member of the Byzantine commission. In the early stages of the theological discussions at the union council at Ferrara, Bessarion always deferred to Mark and even hailed him as "holy and most blessed exarch the really wisest and supreme theologian", as well as his own teacher.¹⁵⁰ Would this teaching not likely have occurred during the preliminary discussions preparing for the Council? Mark and George Scholarius studied Nilus Cabasilas' tract against Aquinas,

¹⁴⁸See Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 143.

¹⁴⁹On Mark see Constantine N. Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus and the Council of Florence: A Historical Re-Evaluation of His Personality*, 2d. ed. (New York, 1979); Gill, *Personalities of Council*, 55-64. At Florence Mark was the only leading delegate who refused to sign the *Tome of Union*. He led opposition to the union in the East until his death.

¹⁵⁰Inaugural speech, *Acta Graeca*, 46. On this declaration see also Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus*, 53.

which they condensed for general distribution to the committee.¹⁵¹ The two also acted as protagonists in preparing the theological and dogmatic material.¹⁵² The research being conducted, as well as discussion of doctrines and of possible strategies to pursue in presenting the Orthodox position at the Council would have placed Mark, although a Hesychast monk, in the role of an educated theologian, with vastly more experience in such matters than Bessarion had at that point. Mark had studied under the same teachers as Bessarion: Chortasmenus, Crysokokkes and Plethon.¹⁵³ Mark had a thorough grounding in rhetoric and Aristotelian philosophy. Bessarion counted Mark's brother, John,¹⁵⁴ a cultured humanist adherent to the Palamite doctrine, amongst his friends.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, Mark might

¹⁵¹Syropoulos, III. 8-10. 168-73. See also Gill, "Sincerity of Bessarion," 365.

¹⁵²Ibid., III. 8-10.168-70. See also Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus*, 41.

¹⁵³Ibid., 41; Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 147 and n. 4.

¹⁵⁴John Eugenicus, Nomophylax of the Empire, a part-time resident in the Peloponnese, was a Christian Platonist who also celebrated the Palamite doctrine. He was an eye witness to early events at the Union Council (Ferrara) and became a staunch anti-unionist, who wrote a tract, *Antirhetikos*, a point by point refutation of the Decree of Florence, ed. Dositheos, Patriarch of Jerusalem, *Tomas Katallagês*, Jassey, 1962 : 206-73, and a *Life* of his brother, Mark, ed. L. Petit, "Acolouthie de Marc Eugénicos archevêque d'Éphèse" *RSBN* 2 (1927) : 199-235; trans. Gill, *Personalities of Council*, 55-60. John's extensive correspondence and rhetorical works, before and after the Council, also provide considerable information on his interests and activities. See Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus*, 66-75; idem, "John Eugenicus and the Council of Florence," *Byzantion* 48 (1978) : 264-74.

¹⁵⁵Bessarion wrote a letter of consolation to John on the death of one of his children (Item No. 23 in Marc. gr 533), ed. Mohler, 3, 433-5, which can be dated to 1436 since it is placed between Bessarion's two letters of consolation on the death of Chortasmenus (1436). See Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 140. John himself replied with a warm letter of friendship, ed., Lambros, *PP*, I.164-5. On this letter see Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus*, 67-8. Like Bessarion, John also counted Nicephorus Cheilas, to whom he wrote three letters, and George Scholarius, from whom he received one (*Oeuvres* IV, 449-50) among his friends. See Loenertz, "Biographie du Bessarion," 148 and n. 1.

have seemed to Bessarion to exemplify the traditional amalgam of secular knowledge and revealed theology. For his part, Bessarion had, until this point, found his rhetorical skills in more demand than his theological training.

On the other hand, Bessarion's association with the committee might have been even more informal. Since he himself desired to be well informed about these important developments,¹⁵⁶ his information might have been mediated through George Scholarius. In his position as imperial secretary, George researched, on behalf of the Emperor, possible ways for harmonizing the Greek and Latin doctrines. As part of this task he studied the works of the Latinophrone, Manuel Calecas.¹⁵⁷ Discussions with Scholarius might have spurred Bessarion to study George's epigrams on Aquinas' works, or even some of the Latinophrone treatises that Scholarius himself was using in attempts to find a solution for the Emperor.¹⁵⁸ George concluded that Thomist theology and Palamas' distinctions would be

¹⁵⁶See Scholarius, *Oeuvres*, IV, Letter 8, 419-22 (ca. 1431-3), which replies to Bessarion's query regarding the ongoing union negotiations. Scholarius states that he saw no reason to repeat the developments of which Bessarion already was aware and that he had nothing to add to what Bessarion already knew. One could surmise that Scholarius was referring to Bessarion's involvement with court circles in Constantinople (which would have included the visit of Andrew Chrysoberges, the papal envoy re the union negotiations (ca. 1426/7). Neither correspondent was privy to what was transpiring at the imperial court at the time of writing. Bessarion was residing in Mistra and George was suspected of holding Latin sympathies. See Loenertz, "Biographie du Bessarion," 135.

¹⁵⁷Turner, "Scholarius and Council," 84-8, dates this search to 1436. Calecas' views do favour the Latin position but Turner says George was not convinced.

¹⁵⁸The extent of George's access to Latin theological works, which included some of those by Augustine, Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus is discussed by Turner, "Career of Scholarius," 424-7. George read in Greek translation Augustine's *De Trinitate* (by Maximus Planoudes), Aquinas' *Summa contra Gentiles* (by Demetrius Kydones). He also cites Boethius' *De consolazione philosophiae* and Albert the Great.

hard to reconcile.¹⁵⁹ Bessarion could not be so sure, given the partial nature of his access to Aquinas' works.

Either formally, as a member of the commission, or informally, as an assistant to George Scholarius or through the latter's agency, the preparations for the union council could have influenced Bessarion's thinking to a considerable extent and provided the impetus to his own attempts to resolve the difficulties between Thomist and Palamite theology. Indeed, two letters Bessarion wrote to Andrew Chrysoberges, Latin Archbishop of Rhodes,¹⁶⁰ might have been the direct result of discussion with the other members of the Emperor's commission. Writing the second of these letters (for he indicates that he had made a previous inquiry) from Methone in December 1437, on the very eve of the Council of

¹⁵⁹On the relationships between Duns Scotus and Gregory Palamas in George's understanding of the Palamite doctrine see particularly Sebastien Guichardon, *Le problème de la simplicité divine en Orient et en Occident aux xive et en xve siècles: Grégoire Palamas, Duns Scot, Georges Scholarios*, (Lyon, 1933). George did not accept the full Palamite doctrine on the energies for he rejected Palamas' distinctions. He stated that the energies are formally finite but really infinite because they have the same existence as the essence, which is infinite. See *Oeuvres*, III, 226, 5-8. He hoped in this way to find a compromise by reconciling the Palamite doctrine with the views of Duns Scotus and thus making it acceptable to the West. See also Runciman, *Great Church*, 126; Tatakis, *La philosophie Byzantine*, 281-5; Turner, "Career of Scholarius," 427, who notes George often referred to the Scotist (Franciscan) School as having theories on the Procession of the Holy Spirit closer to the Greek point of view.

¹⁶⁰On Andrew see R. Loenertz, "Les dominicains byzantins Théodore et André Chrysobergès et les négociations pour l'union des Églises Grecque et Latine de 1415 à 1430," *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* IX (1439): 5-61; Candal, "Andreae Rhodiensis," commentary, 329-43. A pupil of Manuel Calecas, he was a convert to the Latin church who subsequently studied scholastic theology. He had an extensive career in the Latin church and represented the papacy on several occasions in the East at Constantinople and in the Peloponnese connected with union negotiations. He formed part of the Latin delegation at the Council of Florence.

Florence, Bessarion sought Andrew's assistance in comprehending Aquinas' theology on the divine essence.¹⁶¹ Bessarion states the problem thus:

The root of our difficulty is the question of divine essence and operation about which Your Reverence knows that in our Church a variety of answers have been put forward, and it was stated and decreed that the divine essence should be held to be distinct from its divine operation.¹⁶²

Bessarion then relates his understanding of Aquinas on the subject, indicating that, while on the one hand Thomas maintains the identity between the divine essence and operation, in 'all his works' he also relates a procession in God of the Son by nature and a creation of the world by his will. In addition, Aquinas makes a distinction between what God could do by his power and what he chooses to do by his will, which would admit real distinctions between the divine nature and will and between the divine power and will, but this would be inconsistent with the simplicity of God in whom nature and will are one.¹⁶³

Greek translations of Aquinas' major works had been made by Demetrius and Prochorus Kydones in the previous century. Storman concludes that, since Bessarion's understanding of Aquinas is incomplete, for some reason, he did not have access to the major

¹⁶¹Bessarion's letters themselves are not extant. However, the latter one (written from Methone where the Greek delegation on route to the union council spent Christmas 1437) is quoted entirely in Andrew's reply (Cod. Vat. gr. 706), ed. with Latin translation and commentary in E. Candal, "Andreae Rhodiensis," 329-71. See also Gill, "Sincerity of Bessarion," 381; Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 144; de Halleux, "Bessarion et le palamisme," 307-21.

¹⁶²Greek text, ed. Candal, "Andreae Rhodiensis," 346. trans. Gill. "Sincerity of Bessarion," 381.

¹⁶³Greek text, ed. Candal, "Andreae Rhodiensis, 346; commentary, 337-43. See also Karpozilos, "Aquinas and Byzantine East," 139-40; Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 144.

parts of these translations. If he had, his questions would have been answered and he would have understood that Aquinas neither undermined his own principles nor arrived at Palamas' conclusions.¹⁶⁴ Bessarion's lack of expertise in scholastic theology is not surprising since his own interests were in the field of Patristic studies and Neoplatonic philosophy. Bessarion possibly only became interested in Aquinas' theology through his involvement in the ongoing discussions in preparation of the Greek case for the union council. Under such circumstances, George Scholarius, the self-declared expert on Thomist theology, could have lent Bessarion some of his own material on Aquinas' works.¹⁶⁵

Bessarion's questions were directed to an Eastern convert to the Latin Church, whom he seems to have expected to be sympathetic towards his difficulties. Since Chrysoberges had been a papal envoy to the imperial court conducting union negotiations during 1426/7 and had visited the Peloponnese in 1430,¹⁶⁶ it is possible that Bessarion had met him in Constantinople or had heard favourable mention made of him there or at Mistra.¹⁶⁷ If such

¹⁶⁴Ibid., 144-5.

¹⁶⁵See Turner, "Career of Scholarius," 426, who notes that almost one quarter of Scholarius' extant works consist of commentaries, translations and summaries of Aquinas' works.

¹⁶⁶See Loenertz, "Dominicains byzantins," 30-4; Gill, *Council of Florence*, 40-1; Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 143-4.

¹⁶⁷See Scholarius, *Oeuvres*, IV, 419-22, where in his letter (No. 8) to Bessarion (ca. 1431-3), he replies to the latter's query re the union negotiations underway in Constantinople at that time, stating that he knows nothing more than what Bessarion himself knows from his previous experience, discussed above, p. 92 and n. 156. Since Bessarion mixed in court circles in Constantinople from 1426 to 1430, he could have met Chrysoberges in person or, at least, could have heard of his role in the negotiations.

was the case, Bessarion could, then, have acquired some limited knowledge about the western church.

However, Andrew's reply would have been cold comfort to Bessarion for the bishop next indulged in a concerted attack of the Palamite doctrine, declaring it heresy.¹⁶⁸

Moreover, with regard to the Eastern Church, he states:

Since it has once fallen from the truth, it seems that it is not the Church with which Christ promises to abide to the consummation of the world, for that abiding cannot be understood otherwise than as its being preserved by Him always on the foundation of truth. And again, since it has once erred, now it is doubtful for us whether it abides in the truth.¹⁶⁹

Andrew's following extended reply to Bessarion's question is a combination of scholastic syllogisms (many taken directly from Aquinas' *Contra Gentiles* and *Summa Theologiae*) and quotations from Fathers of the Eastern Church, particularly Gregory of Nazianzus, John of Damascus and the Pseudo-Dionysius, all arranged to combat Palamism.¹⁷⁰ Bessarion was well versed in the Eastern Patristic tradition and was accustomed to dealing with theological matters by reference to the Fathers. He was,

¹⁶⁸Greek text, ed., Candal, "Andreae Rhodiensis," 348.

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 348; trans. Gill, "Sincerity of Bessarion," 382. It is to be noted that until quite recently Bessarion has been considered the author of a large section of this letter (including the passage used here) and that the contents are thus evidence of his rejection of Palamite theology. However, the present writer concurs with the more recent identification of Andrew Chrysoberges as the author of this extended critique of Palamas' theology and, as will be discussed below, the questioning of the Greek Church's legitimacy. See de Halleux, "Bessarion et le palamisme." See discussion on de Halleux's crucial argument above, p. 8.

¹⁷⁰See Candal, "Andreae Rhodiensis", 337-43; Karpozilos, "Aquinas and Byzantine East," 139-40; Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 143-4.

however, as his query bears witness, not familiar nor comfortable with the Latin syllogism.¹⁷¹

Indeed the Eastern Church was generally suspicious of the theological use of syllogisms or dialectic. As sophisticated a scholar as Nicephorus Gregoras objected to the syllogising method of argument used by the Italians which he considered useless in the search for divine truths.¹⁷²

Any discussion of what Bessarion might have made of Chrysoberges' reply is precluded by the fact that there is no extant evidence that Bessarion ever received a reply from the Latin Bishop before his attendance at the Council of Florence. The letter provides valuable insights into the state of Bessarion's own knowledge and attitudes, but not as to whether he actually received any western input from Chrysoberges to aid him in resolving his dilemma with regard to the problems faced in attempts to harmonize Thomist and Palamite theology.

¹⁷¹Storman. "Bessarion before Council." 145. Some scholars (for example, Meyendorff. *Byzantine Theology*, 106, and Tsirpanlis. *Mark Eugenicus*, 56) have seen Bessarion as a "Latinophrone", inclined towards scholasticism and Thomist theology. Bessarion's limited knowledge of Aquinas' thought would seem, however, to disqualify the continued maintenance of this view. See Storman, 146, and Runciman, *Great Church*, 118-19, who consider that he respected Italian scholarship and would have welcomed cultural unity, but he was neither attracted to scholasticism nor to the Latin doctrine.

¹⁷²Gregoras, *History*, 1, 507-9, 512-20, ed. L. Schopen, 3 vols., *CSHB*, 1829, 1830, 1855, cited and discussed by Nicol, *Church and society*, 85.

Bessarion on the Eve of the Council of Florence

Bessarion was consecrated Archbishop of Nicaea on November 11, 1437¹⁷³ just prior to his departure with the Patriarch's party on November 24, 1437¹⁷⁴ upon a journey that would change the entire direction of his life. Within a matter of fifteen years, he had risen from obscurity to close association with the pinnacles of power in both church and state. At the time of his elevation he marvelled at the developments, remarking with a note of wonder in his *curriculum vitae*: "I was raised, I know not how, to the episcopal dignity, by the sole and unique grace of God."¹⁷⁵ At Florence he stated that God had directed his life in every way better than he could have desired.¹⁷⁶ Many years later, he reflected upon the journey thus: "Before the age of twenty-four years, I was showered with honours and dignities above my age by the first persons of our nation.... They proposed me as a model"¹⁷⁷ In truth, the circumstances of his life and important political events had combined to bring him to this point.

¹⁷³Syropoulos. III. 23. 184-5; Apostolis. *PG*. 161. cxxxiii; Platina. *PG*. 161, cvi.

¹⁷⁴*Ibid.*. IV. 1. 196-7.

¹⁷⁵Greek Text of Marc. gr. 14, with French translation, in Saffrey, "Recherches Cardinal Bessarion," 270-1. See Saffrey's discussion of this chronological diary, with Bessarion's personal comments, 272-6, and as discussed above, 46-7.

¹⁷⁶*Oratio dogmatica*, ed. Candal. 72. See Monfasani, "Bessarion's Latin Eulogists," 121, who also identifies this statement with Bessarion's amazement at his appointment.

¹⁷⁷*Encyclica ad Graecos*, *PG* 161, 461, 486, written on his elevation to Uniate Patriarch of Constantinople (1463). Apostolis. *PG*, 161, cxxxiii, also states that Bessarion was remembered in the East as an eloquent preacher.

He had been raised and educated in a monastic milieu that saw the value of Hellenic education in the age-old tradition of the scholar-monk. He studied under the most enlightened instructors available in a rapidly shrinking intellectual world, which still enjoyed enough prestige to attract the odd western student. By connections made through his mentors he was introduced into the small but élite literary circles that still received what imperial patronage could be supplied. There he found an eager welcome for the learning despised by many hesychasts within the monastic community. He numbered several of the younger members of some Byzantine noble families among his friends and his oratorical merits even recommended him to the ruling members of the imperial house.

His milieu was not hostile to the West on cultural grounds; it saw the benefits of at least an economic union with the West against Islam and the remote possibility of true reunion of the Latin and Greek Churches. The obstacles to union were also abundantly clear: western Thomism and Palamism were mutually exclusive: most of the Orthodox East was averse to *rapprochement* with the West.

Bessarion's somewhat exceptional talents suited the needs of the imperial court to display, when occasion demanded, a shining example of its now diminishing cultural heritage. The intellectual poverty within the ecclesiastical establishment also induced the Emperor to elevate him, well beyond his own expectations, to the episcopate, in hopes that these unusual talents would bolster the Eastern delegation's prestige and abilities in ceremonial functions, public debate and private deliberation.

Bessarion's views and attitudes are easily identified. He celebrated his own Church's traditional understanding of mysticism, where faith gave fullness to reason, and was highly

suspicious of many within the Hesychast monastic community who spurned the secular knowledge that he so admired. He acquired through associations in the East some idea of western developments and a little knowledge of Latin theology, but he was not a student of western scholasticism, nor did he favour the Latin doctrine on the *filioque*.

When they left Byzantium both Bessarion and George Scholarius seemed to exemplify the aspirations of an earlier generation, men like Demetrius Kydones and Manuel Chrysoloras, who longed for the cultural religious unity of Christendom in the patristic age. However, for Bessarion and George, the events at the Council of Florence set in motion circumstances that would eventually divide not only their common attitude, but also their entire futures.

CHAPTER IV

THE COUNCIL OF FLORENCE: THE GENESIS OF A SOLUTION TO THE THEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

The Council of Florence was without doubt a major turning point in Bessarion's life. He left Byzantium with the sincere hope that union was possible based upon a shared cultural and religious heritage. He was full of enthusiasm for contact with the dynamic West, yet confident of his own Church's position on the issues that divided the two historic churches. His own investigations and queries had nonetheless awakened him to the real danger of new difficulties being raised regarding the divergent views of Western Thomism and Eastern Palamism. During the course of the Council the Latin churchmen demonstrated to his satisfaction the legitimacy of their doctrines and practices while those of the East were safeguarded and challenges to the Palamite doctrine successfully by-passed. Moreover, the leading western humanists in attendance impressed him with their expertise and openness to the Greek heritage. At the end he was confident that, despite differences in explanation, expression, rites and customs, a common faith existed and a true reunion had been achieved in an oecumenical council. Hence, western aid would be forthcoming; the Eastern heritage would be preserved; the whole of Christendom would share the benefits of spiritual and cultural reintegration. He proudly stood before the united assembly of eastern and western

delegates on 6 July 1439, proclaiming the Greek version of the *Tome of Union*. In jubilation, he loudly exclaimed, "Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be glad."¹

The Council of Florence in Historical Perspective

Although the official acts of the Council have been lost, developments can be determined from several narrative accounts.² The proceedings officially opened on 9 April

¹Psalm 96.11 cited as the opening phrase. The Latin text of the papal bull, *Laetentur caeli*, is printed in Gill, *Council of Florence*, 412-15; for English translation see Crowder, *Unity, Heresy and Reform*, 169-71.

²For overview of the extant sources as discussed below see Gill, *Council of Florence*, ix-xvi; idem, *Personalities of Council*, 125-77; idem, "Sincerity of Bessarion", 386-9; Deno J. Geanakoplos, "A New Reading of the *Acta*, especially Syropoulos," in *Christian Unity*, ed. Albergio, 325-51; idem, "The Council of Florence (1438-39) and the Problems of Union Between the Byzantine and Latin Churches," *Church History* 24 (1954) in idem, *Constantinople and West*, 228-30; Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus*, 32-34; and the editor's introduction in each individual work.

Quae supersunt actorum graecorum Concilii Florentini, ed. Gill, with introduction, i-xxvii, commonly referred to as the *Greek Acts*, consist of two different sources, the *Practica*, notes taken during the actual council proceedings, and the *Description*, diary entries containing the pro-unionist views of a participant in the Council, incorrectly identified by Vast, *Cardinal Bessarion*, 51, as Bessarion, but now more likely considered to be Dorotheus of Mitylene.

Andreas de Santcroce, advocatus consistorialis: *Acta latina Concilii Florentini*, ed. Hofmann, with introduction, v-liii, commonly referred to as the *Latin Acts*, notes on speeches delivered during the council sessions, which agree reasonably well with the text of the *Practica*. Moreover, sessions omitted or condensed by one are sometimes included or elaborated more fully in the other.

Les "Memoires" du Grand Ecclesiarque dul'Eglise de Constantinople Sylvestre Syropoulos sur le concile de Florence (1438-1439), ed. Laurent, with introduction, 1-96. Syropoulos signed the decree at Florence but later recanted. His negative account (ca. 1444), which some consider a justification of his *volte-face*, provides a counter-balance to the pro-unionist views of the *Description*, and offers invaluable information on private discussions amongst the Greek delegation.

Bessarion Nicaenus, *De Spiritus Sancti processione ad Alexium Lascarum Philanthropinum*,

1438 at Ferrara but debate on the doctrinal issues was postponed since Emperor John VIII requested a four months' delay to await the arrival of representatives of the western princes. In May preliminary meetings in committee decided upon a topic for informal discussion which did not involve doctrinal disagreement between the two churches and in June 1438 committees of ten representing each side met to discuss the Latin doctrine of Purgatory. Thirteen public sessions between 8 October and 13 December examined the *filioque* as an addition to the creed. In January 1439 the Council moved to Florence. The first eight public sessions (2-24 March) addressed the Trinitarian implications of the *filioque*. The heated exchanges regarding the accuracy of the patristic texts used by each side produced a stalemate which then led to further negotiations and conversations in committee (24 March - 27 May). At length a solution was found to the impasse in accepting the axiom that the saints could not err in the faith: expressions differed but the meaning must be the same. In early June the Greek synod voted to accept the union and the validity of the *filioque*, but absolutely refused to alter its own creed. On 10 June the death of the Patriarch Joseph, who was at that point favourable to union, left the Greek synod devoid of a unifying force. The Emperor John VIII stepped into the void and pressed the synod to conclude the council's work regarding the Roman Primacy, the Eucharist and Purgatory. These issues were then dealt with in quick order, with much of the work occurring in small groups or committees, where prepared statements or *cedulae* were discussed, revised and eventually approved by

ed. Candal, with introduction, xiii-l, a short recollection (ca. 1444/5) of the proceedings (1-46), similar at many points to the *Description*, detailing his acceptance of the Union.

the designated representatives of each side. These compromise statements formed the four formal sections of the decree of union to which were added an introduction and conclusion.

Modern scholars often view the Council as either 'a success that failed' or 'a failure that nearly succeeded'.³ It is generally agreed that the doctrinal issues separating the two churches were not discussed in any meaningful way. Rather, each side presented its own form of the 'truth', which had become fossilized by centuries of controversy overlaid with mutual cultural exclusiveness and animosity. The Eastern Church rested its case upon unwavering tradition; the West justified its 'innovations' by recourse to legitimate authority. Moreover, two divergent theological methods were employed: scholastic-dialectic versus biblical-patristic. Efforts were directed towards finding a compromise in a legitimate formula that both sides could accept with regard to the points at issue.⁴

³For the first view see Gill, *Personalities of Council*, 1-14; for the latter, John H. Erickson, "Filioque and the Fathers at the Council of Florence" in idem, *The Challenge of Our Past: Studies in Orthodox Canon Law and Church History* (Crestwood, N.Y., 1991), 166.

⁴For a recent overview of scholarship on various facets of the Union Council see Alberigo, ed., *Christian Unity*, and Papadakis, *Christian East and Papacy*, 390-408. See also Gill, *Council of Florence*; idem, *Personalities of the Council*; idem, "East and West in the Time of Bessarion: Theology and Religion." *RSBN* 15 (1968), 1-27; idem, "Sincerity of Bessarion;" idem, "Was Bessarion A Conciliarist." See also Geanakoplos, "Florence and Problems of Union," 224-54; idem, "An Orthodox View of the Councils of Basel (1331-49) and Florence (1438-39) as Paradigm for the Study of Modern Ecumenical Councils," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 30 (1985) in idem, *Constantinople and West*, 255-78; Ševčenko, "Intellectual Repercussions;" Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus*; Candal, "Bessarion in Concilio;" Erickson, "Filioque and Fathers"; Kallistos Ware, "Scholasticism and Orthodoxy: Theological Method as a Factor in the Schism," *Eastern Churches Review* 5 (1973), 16-27; B. de Margerie, "Vers une relecture du concile de Florence grâce à la reconsidération de l'Écriture et des Pères grecs et latins," *Revue thomiste* 86 (1986), 31-81.

The short-lived union achieved at Florence was a major triumph for the papacy in its struggle with the Council of Basel. To western eyes the papacy regained considerable prestige since the supremacy of the pope was affirmed and the Latin Church in an oecumenical council clearly demonstrated the legitimacy of its doctrines and practices. However, scholars now qualify the supposed triumph of the papacy with regard to the Eastern Church. Major concessions were required. The formulas adopted in the Tome of Union on the main points at issue juxtaposed the views of East and West. Both positions were declared valid; subtle insertions allowed for a certain amount of plurality in interpretation. Nonetheless the agreement reached remained a hierarchical decision; the general populace in East and West was ill prepared to receive the results which had not resolved the basic theological issues and could not overcome centuries of cultural estrangement and mistrust.⁵

Bessarion's Role at the Council

Historical research has successfully unravelled much of the gradual process by which Bessarion accepted the validity of the Latin doctrines and the legitimacy of union during the course of the Council.⁶ Although six individuals were appointed as orators for the Greek delegation, only Bessarion and Mark of Ephesus actually presented the orthodox position

⁵See G. Alberigo, "The Unity of Christians: 550 Years after the Council of Ferrara-Florence; Tensions, Disappointments and Perspectives" in *Christian Unity*, ed. Alberigo, 1-19.

⁶See discussion above, Chapter I, 6-8.

during the deliberations,⁷ possibly due to the Emperor's desire to see the views of the whole of the Eastern Church expressed. Bessarion represented the tradition of learned piety, Mark, the hesychast movement.⁸ Nonetheless, Mark was considered the leading theologian in the Greek delegation. Bessarion represented the orthodox party on only four public occasions, all at Ferrara. He spoke once in the preliminary meetings (May 1438),⁹ once on Purgatory (June 1438)¹⁰ and twice at the opening sessions on the discussion of the *filioque* as an addition to the Creed. (November 1 and 4, 1438),¹¹ on all these occasions steadfastly upholding the orthodox position.¹² Indeed, one might suggest that Bessarion's rhetorical expertise influenced his selection as orator for he was put forward on one occasion to create a proper attitude and atmosphere¹³ and on another to smooth over a bad impression made by

⁷See Syropoulos, VI, 22, 318-20.

⁸Hussey, *Orthodox Church*, 283. See also Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 141, who suggests that the Emperor John VIII appointed them so that no unified position would thus exist and all decisions would revert to him.

⁹Syropoulos, V, 11, 266.

¹⁰*Responsio Graecorum ad positionem Latinorum de igne purgatorio a Bessarione Nicaeno recitata die 14 Iunii 1438*, ed. Petit and Hofmann : 13-31.

¹¹*Oratio Ferrariae habita*, PG 161, 531-42, and *Acta Graeca*, 37-46.

¹²Syropoulos, V, 11, 266, states that Bessarion presented several excellent arguments in his speech during the preliminary session, maintaining that his Church possessed "the truth." Cf., *Acta Graeca*, 20-1, 159, where during the initial debates at Ferrara he maintained the orthodox prohibition against an addition to the creed.

¹³Syropoulos V, 10-11, 264-6 states that the first speech delivered by Bessarion on Purgatory was a combination of Bessarion's exordium with Mark of Ephesus' theological arguments. Cf. *Acta Graeca*, 20-21; for speech see n. 10 above. Syropoulos, VI, 22, 320, indicates that the emperor chose Bessarion to begin the opening session of the discussion on the addition to the creed at Ferrara since his skills as an orator would help to create an amicable atmosphere and a feeling of goodwill. Text of Bessarion's speech at the opening

Mark.¹⁴ When discussions on the Latin doctrine of the Procession began in Florence, Mark represented the orthodox party in all the debates. Bessarion became more and more involved behind the scenes as he began to understand and to accept the western view on the issue and as he saw the real possibility of achieving union increase.

His extensive training and experience as a philologist facilitated his understanding of the difficulties between Greeks and Latins and his ability to find a concordance between the Latin and Greek doctrines.¹⁵ He was conscious of the distance between what was implied by faith and what was made explicit in its declaration. He had a sense of the development of language, which allowed him to see how the terms used to describe the Trinity in East and West had evolved over time and the difficulty that now existed in finding

session of the discussions on addition to the creed at Ferrara in *Acta Graeca*, 37-46; cf., Syropoulos, VI, 27, 326; *Acta Latina*, 34-41. See also Gill, *Council of Florence*, who provides a summary of the speech, 143-4; idem, *Personalities of Council*, 61; Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus*, 85.

¹⁴Cardinal Cesarini asked Mark to write a composition for the Pope applauding Eugenius' efforts for union. Mark complied by urging the pope to end the schism by using his authority over the whole western church in order to remove the *filioque* from the creed and abolish the use of unleavened bread in the Eucharist. The Emperor's anger towards Mark was assuaged by Bessarion's intervention on his behalf. For Mark's speech see "Documents relatifs," II, 340-1; for details of the incident see Syropoulos, V, 3-4, 258-60; *Acta Graeca*, 31-34. According to Syropoulos V, 7-11, 262-6, and *Acta Graeca*, 19-23, Mark first spoke for the Greeks during the initial informal discussions at Ferrara but his speech, lacking the rhetorical niceties, created a bad impression and Bessarion spoke in the next session. On these incidents see also Gill, *Council of Florence*, 114-15; idem, *Personalities of Council*, 46, 60-1; Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus*, 48-51.

¹⁵On Bessarion's philological expertise see Mioni, "Bessarione bibliofilo," 72-83; idem, "Bessarione scriba," 267-78.

an adequate word to express the same meaning in Latin and Greek.¹⁶ He was convinced that the Fathers could be reconciled once the correct text of their writings was established,¹⁷ a point that proved most difficult during the debates and private discussions and thus increased the acrimony, not only between the two delegations, but within the Greek synod itself. Bessarion, relying upon his keen philological sense, was impressed by the Greek proof texts which the Latins put forward in support of their case during the debates and then presented after each session for open inspection.¹⁸ Mark of Ephesus, on the other hand, considered the Latin proofs to be corrupt, since neither the Eastern nor Western Fathers could

¹⁶See A. Houssiau, "Réception et rejet d'un consensus conciliaire: quels facteurs ont joué pour ou contre la réception de la déclaration d'union entre Latins et Grecs à Florence?" in *Christian Unity*, ed. Alberigo, 514. See also Gill, *Council of Florence*, 191 sq., for discussions between the two sides on the doctrine of the Procession of the Holy Spirit, which at first revolved around the metaphysical terms adopted from Greek philosophy by the Church Fathers to explain the theology of the Trinity. Gill notes that the terms, having evolved during the course of the attacks upon doctrine during the Arian and other Christological controversies, now carried different meanings in the respective languages and Latin words did not provide an equivalent definition of the original Greek meaning.

¹⁷See *Oratio dogmatica*, IV.19, p. 19 and V. 24, p. 22. See also Hankins, I, 223-5, for discussion of Bessarion's employment of his philological understanding that authority resides in the original sense of the author arrived at by proper historical and philological criticism.

¹⁸See his often quoted remarks to Alexius Lascares, *De Spiritus Sancti processione*, 40-41: "The words of the Fathers by themselves alone are enough to solve every doubt and to persuade every soul. It was not the syllogisms or probabilities or the force of arguments that led me to believe this, but the plain words of the doctors. For when I saw and heard them, I immediately put aside all contention and controversy and yielded to the authority of those whose words they were, even though until then I had not been moderate in my opposition. For I judged that the Holy Fathers, speaking in the Holy Spirit, could not have departed from the truth" See Gill, *Council of Florence*, 227; Erickson, "Filioque and Fathers," 159; Ware, "Scholasticism and Orthodoxy," 21; Hankins, I, 222.

have sanctioned what he deemed to be heretical doctrines.¹⁹ Modern scholars have determined that in several key instances his intuition was quite correct for, although neither the Latins nor Bessarion were aware of the fact, some of the texts were spurious or had been interpolated,²⁰ including two crucial pieces of evidence that influenced Bessarion's acceptance of the legitimacy of an addition to the creed²¹ and of the *filioque* doctrine.²²

¹⁹*Confessio fidei*, ed. Petit, "Documents relatif." II, 438. *Relatio de rebus a se gestis*, *ibid.*, 445. Cf. Syropoulos, IX, 7, 44-2; *Acta Graeca*, 401.

²⁰See Erickson, "Filioque and Fathers," 162; M. Van Parys, "Quelques remarques à propos d'un texte controversé de Saint Basile au Concile de Florence," *Irenikon* 40 (1967): 6-14. See also Gill, *Council of Florence*, 163-5; *idem*, *Personalities of Council*, 61-2; Frances Kianka, "A Late Byzantine Defense of the Latin Church Fathers" *OCP* 49 (1983) : 419-25, who discusses the Greek charges of falsification in the fourteenth century as explained by Demetrius Kydones and the similar arguments of the Byzantine delegation, particularly Mark of Ephesus, at Florence.

²¹*De Spiritus Sancti processione*, 33-4; *Acta Graeca*, 92-5. Since both the Councils of Constantinople (381) and Ephesus (431) had made additions to the Nicene Creed (325), the Greeks based their arguments on a canon of Ephesus forbidding 'another faith' than that of Nicaea, but the Latins demonstrated that a Council could always legitimately add the truth and thus convinced Bessarion and others, particularly Scholarius, that addition was legitimate. See Scholarius, *Oeuvres*, I, 341-3; trans. Gill, *Council of Florence*, 167-8. The most compelling evidence for Bessarion was Cardinal Cesarini's production of a spurious letter of the Pseudo-Liberius to Athanasius which showed that the Council of Nicaea (325) had forbidden 'another faith' in almost the same words as the Council of Ephesus. See Gill, *Council of Florence*, 155-69; *idem*, "Sincerity of Bessarion," 383-4.

²²*De Spiritus Sancti processione*, 5-11; cf., *Acta Graeca*, 386. A key element for Bessarion was that of six Greek copies of Basil of Caesarea's *Adversus Eunomium* available at Florence, five of them, (including one obtained recently by Nicholas of Cusa in Constantinople and another very old codex owned by the Greek Metropolitan Dorotheus of Mitylene) favoured the Latin interpretation of Chapter III, 1-3, concerning the Holy Spirit as third in order and dignity, which suggested that the Holy Spirit depended upon the Son. See Gill, *Council of Florence*, 195-205, for the exchange, with translation of relevant passage at p. 199. See also pertinent discussion of Erickson, "Filioque and Fathers", 160-2.

Believing that the evidence clearly supported the validity of the Latin doctrine, Bessarion enthusiastically accepted the principle that the Greeks and Latins were presenting the same truth in separate ways; he became a vocal supporter of union and played a major role in private discussions which convinced the Greek synod to accept the legitimacy of the Latin doctrine. Moreover, he was instrumental in arriving at the compromise formulas of the *Tome of Union* during the lengthy negotiations that ensued with the Latins.²³

Addressing the Trinitarian Implications of the *Filioque* Question

During the months of April and May 1439 the two delegations strove to find a means for the East to accept the *filioque* doctrine. The Latins presented the Byzantines with a series of draft proposals for acceptance, but the latter, true to their own apophatic tradition which made them reluctant to make definitive pronouncements on doctrine, returned vaguely worded replies.²⁴ They were drawn more and more to rely upon the principle of agreement between the saints.²⁵ Bessarion's *Oratio dogmatica de unione*,²⁶ presented to the Byzantine

²³See Syropoulos, VIII, 26-X, 16, 412-498; cf., *Acta Graeca*, 397-401, 427-58; *Acta Latina*, 240-65. For Bessarion's role in the lengthy developments see also Gill, *Council of Florence*, 248-87.

²⁴See *Acta Graeca, Description*, 399-455; Syropoulos, VIII, 3-IX, 16, 392-450, and Gill's discussion, *Council of Florence*, 227-96.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 232, where he indicates that the possibility of arriving at union based on the principle was not fully investigated until nearly the end of May, at which time Bessarion and the minority convinced of the validity of the Latin doctrine exploited it in full measure.

²⁶*Oratio dogmatica*, ed. Candal.

synod in mid-April 1439, was influential in pushing the discussion further in this direction,²⁷ as were the orations of George Scholarius.²⁸

Bessarion faced a formidable task. The arguments used by the Byzantine delegation against Aquinas' theology on the Trinity were derived in large measure from the fourteenth century refutation of Aquinas by Nilus Cabasilas, *Contra Latinos de processione Spiritus Sancti*.²⁹ Objections propounded by Mark of Ephesus in the lengthy debates on the *filioque* had to be satisfactorily addressed in order to reconcile the two doctrines on the Procession. In order to do so Bessarion relied heavily upon quotations from the Greek Fathers and metaphysical arguments derived from the *Epigraphai* of the unionist Patriarch John Beccus (1274-1283).³⁰ Indeed the principle of 'agreement of the saints' adopted by the Council as a means of reconciling the Eastern and Western doctrines was implied in Beccus'

²⁷See discussion of Candal, introduction to *Oratio dogmatica*, xvii-xix; Gill, *Council of Florence*, 230-44; idem, "Sincerity of Bessarion," 384-88; idem, "Was Bessarion a Conciliarist," 208-11.

²⁸*Orationes Georgii Scholarii*, ed. Gill. See also introduction by Gill, vii-xi; and idem, *Council of Florence*, 241-4, for summary of Scholarius' first speech to the Greek synod during this same period.

²⁹ed. E. Candal, *Nilus Cabasilas et theologia S. Thomae de Processione Spiritus Sancti*, Studi e Testi, 106 (Vatican City, 1945). On Cabasilas' life and work see editor's introduction, 1-181.

³⁰John Beccus, *Epigraphai*, PG 141, 613-724. See introduction by Candal, *Oratio dogmatica*, xxiv, lviii-lxiv, and Gill, "Sincerity of Bessarion," 383-6, for Bessarion's reliance on Beccus' propositions and *florilegia* of quotations from the Greek Fathers. See also Gill, "East and West," 9-10; Erickson, "Filioque and Fathers," 163; André de Halleux, "Towards an Ecumenical Agreement on the Procession of the Holy Spirit and the Addition of the Filioque to the Creed" in *Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ: Eccumenical Reflections on the Filioque Controversy*, ed. Lukas Vischer (London and Geneva, 1981), 71, regarding the use of collections of patristic sources, which taken out of context, naturally lent themselves to manipulation and challenge.

conclusion that expressions differ but the meaning is the same.³¹ Bessarion himself states:

“The saints must mutually agree. They cannot oppose and contradict each other. for the power and illumination of the same one Spirit have brought it about that their opinion in matters pertaining to the faith is one and the same.”³² Bessarion’s efforts convinced some, but not all: chief among the dissenters was Mark of Ephesus, who steadfastly held that the passages from the Greek texts which seemed to support the Latin doctrine must have been falsified, that the *filioque* was a heresy and that the Latin saints, by consequence, must be heretics.³³

Some time after the delivery of his oration Bessarion also wrote his *Defence of John Beccus Against Gregory Palamas*,³⁴ which supported propositions for accepting the *filioque* in Beccus’ *Epigraphai* against Palamas’ *Refutation of the Epigraphai of John Beccus*.³⁵ The

³¹Beccus, *Epigraphai*, PG 141, 613B. See also introduction by Candal, *Oratio dogmatica*, lvii-lxiv; Gill, “Sincerity of Bessarion,” 384-88; idem, “Was Bessarion a Conciliarist,” 208-11; idem, “East and West,” 9-10.

³²*Oratio dogmatica*, II.12, p. 13. This axiom was accepted by the whole Greek delegation. Cf. George Scholarius, *De pace deque adiuvanda patria adhortatio*, *Orationes Georgii Scholarii*, ed. Gill, 5-20, and *Acta Graeca*, 421-31; Mark of Ephesus, *Confessio fidei*, ed. Petit, 438; Patriarch Joseph, *Acta Graeca*, 432; Isidore of Kiev, *Acta Graeca*, 400, 426 and *Sermones inter Concilium Florentinum conscripti*, ed. Hofmann and Candal, 65 ff; Dorotheus of Mitylene, *Acta Graeca*, 402-03; Metrophrases of Cyzicus (later Patriarch of Constantinople), *Orientalium documenta minora*, ed. Hofmann, 43; Gregory the Confessor (Patriarch of Constantinople after Metrophrases), *ibid.*, 44; George Amiroutzes, *ibid.*, 38-9. See also Gill’s discussion, “Sincerity of Bessarion,” 385-7.

³³*Acta Graeca*, 401; Syropoulos, IX, 10, 444. Cf. Mark Eugenicus, *Confessio fidei*, ed. Candal, 438, and Bessarion, *De Spiritus Sancti processione*, 36-41, 87.

³⁴PG 161, 244-88.

³⁵PG 150, 636-78. On Palamas’ Trinitarian theology, particularly concerning the *filioque* issue, see Meyendorff, *Gregory Palamas*, 228 sq.

dating of Bessarion's treatise rests on his own statements that he had undertaken the writing at the request of the Emperor's confessor, Gregory,³⁶ and that Palamas' treatise against Beccus had come into his hands while he was the Metropolitan of Nicaea.³⁷ He held this title from his consecration on 11 November 1437 until 18 December 1439 when he was created cardinal by Eugenius IV or, perhaps in Bessarion's understanding, until 10 December 1440 when he received the insignia of the cardinalate. Although the work was at one time considered to date from Bessarion's pre-council days,³⁸ scholars are now more inclined to view it as a product of the Council or shortly thereafter, in either case being undertaken after his oration (mid-April 1439).³⁹

³⁶*Refutatio Marci Ephesini*, PG 161, 140D. Gregory attended the Council of Florence as the Emperor's confessor, but according to Syropoulos, VII, 30, 382, the Emperor also made him Protosyncellos just prior to the transfer of the Council to Florence. He was later Patriarch of Constantinople from 1443-1450. On his role in negotiations with the representatives of the Council of Basel in Constantinople, preparations for and participation in the Council of Florence, drawn from Syropoulos' references, see Laurent, ed., Syropoulos, 485-6. Gregory has come down in history as Gregory Mammias, a derogatory appellation, but V. Laurent, "Le vrai surnom du Patriarche de Constantinople Grégoire III (d. 1459): Ἡ Μάμμη, non ὁ Μάμμας," *REB* 14 (1956): 201-5, has established that Gregory was probably a member of the noble family of Melissenos.

³⁷*De processione Spiritus Sancti contra haereticum illud impugnantem*, PG 161, 288C, in the introduction to his Latin translation of his *Defence of John Beccus* written while he was Bishop of Tuscany (1449-63).

³⁸Mohler, I, 96-7, 213-18, on his understanding of Bessarion as a Latinophile, convinced of the *filioque* doctrine prior to his attendance at the Council.

³⁹Candal, "Bessarion in Concilio," 431-3; idem, in introduction to *Oratio dogmatica*, lxi-lxii; Gill, "Was Bessarion a Conciliarist," 208-09; idem, "Sincerity of Bessarion," 384-6; idem, "East and West," 9-10, since Bessarion upheld the Greek position against the *filioque* at the Council until late March 1439, with ca. May 1439 or the latter half of 1439 assigned to it by Gill, ca. the middle of 1439 by Candal.

Bessarion never acknowledged his reliance on Beccus in his oration, but thereafter, during the crucial period when the principle of agreement between the saints was being explored as a solution, Isidore of Kiev presented Beccus' treatise to the synod. Some of the pro-unionists were aware that Beccus had been condemned by the synod of his day and they might also have been aware that Palamas had written against Beccus. Syropoulos indicates that Gregory Mammas suppressed the evidence of Beccus' condemnation.⁴⁰ Shortly thereafter he records that Isidore of Kiev⁴¹ hailed Beccus as a writer in favour of union and denounced Cabasilas as a proponent of division and schism; Methodius of Lacedaemonia⁴² then concluded that, since Cabasilas was only a bishop of the church, not a saint, they were

⁴⁰Syropoulos, IX. 9. 442-44, where he states that the grand protosyncellos (Gregory Mammas) stopped the Metropolitan of Heraclea from showing the Greek delegation the synodical tome against Beccus and the Union of Lyon, a fact known by only 3 or 4 of the pro-unionists (unnamed). Scholarius did not know of it at this time. Cf., Scholarius, *Oeuvres*, III, 85, where he states that he discovered the condemnation in 1440 after his return to Constantinople. See editor's discussion, Syropoulos, 444, n. 1-2; Gill, "John Beccus," 266, n. 32.

⁴¹Isidore was John VIII's ambassador to the Council of Basel (1433). He was selected Metropolitan of Kiev and all Russia (1436) and designated as an orator at the Council of Florence (where he composed some extant speeches, which do not appear to have been delivered, and actively supported the union). He was made papal legate and cardinal by Eugenius IV (1439) but was ousted from his metropolitan see (1441) by Vasili, the Prince of Russia (who rejected the union). He was made Latin Patriarch of Constantinople (1452) and was present as Eugenius IV's representative in Constantinople when it fell to the Turks (1453); thereafter he actively promoted crusades. On his life and role at the council see Gill, *Personalities of Council*, 65-78; Laurent, ed., Syropoulos, 686-7, based on references to him in the text.

⁴²On Methodius' role in the council, based on references by Syropoulos, see Laurent, ed., Syropoulos, 695.

not required to approve his writings.⁴³ Such would not have been the case if the entire synod had been aware that Palamas had repudiated Beccus' arguments for Palamas was indeed a saint, having been canonized for his theology of the distinction between the divine essence and energies.

Until recently scholars have considered that the Emperor's prohibition on discussion of the Palamite doctrine and the reluctance of the majority of the Greek delegates to engage the issue was indicative of a split in the ranks with regard to Palamism.⁴⁴ However, of late, scholarship tends towards the view that Palamas' theology was accepted by all⁴⁵ and that both the reluctance and the Emperor's restriction are grounded in the fear of enlarging the division between two churches.⁴⁶ One might conclude that the pro-unionists' measures to conceal 'evidence' harmful to their cause follows the same line of reasoning. Outright rejection of the Latin doctrine would have been a foregone conclusion if the entire synod had been aware of these crucial facts. Certainly Mark of Ephesus would have readily used them to provide the *coup de grâce* on the *filioque*. Palamas' views were not explored by the

⁴³Syropoulos. IX. 13, 446-448. See Laurent, ed., 447. n. 4, regarding this indirect assertion that the saints could not err, directing the reader to Gill, *Personalities of Council*, 120, for discussion of this principle accepted by both Latins and Greeks. See also Laurent's comments, 170-1, n. 4, indicating that in four references to Cabasilas, Syropoulos twice named him as a saint but that he is never so designated in other literature, iconography or the 14 references pertaining to him in Scholarius' works.

⁴⁴See Candal, "Andreae Rhodiensis," 342-3; Gill, *Council of Florence*, 205-6; Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 144-5; Geanakoplos, *Interaction Sibling*, 219-20.

⁴⁵See here especially, de Halleux, "Bessarion et le palamisme," 322-31.

⁴⁶*Acta Graeca*, 394. See also de Halleux, "Bessarion et le Palamisme", 322-31; Papadakis, *Christian East*, 395-6; de Margerie, "Vers une relecture," 75-9; John Meyendorff, "Was there an Encounter between East and West," in *Christian Unity*, ed. Albergio, 165.

Byzantine synod for two valid reasons. The delegates were reluctant to bring Palamas forward as an authority for fear of this leading to discussion of his controversial doctrine and, as Syropoulos indicates throughout his narrative, the Greek position during all the discussions on the *filioque* was based upon Cabasilas' treatise, not because of any novelty in his exposition of orthodox theology, but because of his more extensive knowledge of Aquinas' theology.⁴⁷

The assertion that Cabasilas was 'not a saint' might indeed carry major overtones and, if Bessarion's *Defence of John Beccus* was written during the council, it was likely intended to assuage the concerns of Gregory Mammas and perhaps others who, aware of Palamas' objections, were nonetheless prepared to go against the theology of one of their own declared saints and also, one would presume, in case the need arose then or in the future to defend the action. One wonders, however, whether Bessarion would not have been hard pressed to undertake the task at that time for he was sufficiently engaged as a member of the negotiating committee that perused the Latin drafts, composed replies, met with the western delegates and worked on the wording of the *Tome of Union*.⁴⁸ Such being the case there is a strong possibility that the treatise dates from the beginning of his polemical debate with the anti-

⁴⁷Syropoulos, VI, 21, 318; VII, 12, 362 (where he indicates Bessarion's observation that while Cabasilas wrote only four pages on the 'addition' he wrote a whole book on the doctrine of the Procession) and IX, 9, 442. See also the introduction by Candal to *Nilus Cabasilas*, 16-25, and Gill, "Sincerity of Bessarion," 385, who indicate that Cabasilas was at one time an ardent admirer of Aquinas and knew his works through the translations of Demetrius Kydones. Cabasilas had written a refutation of Beccus and Gill believed Bessarion was actually refuting Cabasilas, not Palamas, in his *Defence of John Beccus*, an error he corrected, idem, "Was Bessarion a Conciliarist," 203, n.30.

⁴⁸Refer to discussion of his role above, 109-10.

unionists upon his return to Constantinople (when his adversaries' own research made such a defence necessary) rather than from the time of intense deliberations by the Byzantine synod. One must look then to Bessarion's *Oratio dogmatica* for important keys to his evolving theological and cultural understanding during the course of the Council.

An Apophatic Approach to the Procession of the Holy Spirit

Bessarion's oration clearly indicates the traditional understanding of his Church when faced with the need for discussion of the Trinity. His brief introduction reminds his listeners of the loss of peace and concord in the church and entreats them to restore unity in a spirit of love.⁴⁹ He then highlights the causes of the schism between the churches, which can be healed in the traditional way of the Fathers, who in ecumenical synod protected the Trinitarian doctrine from the heresies of Arians and Macedonians, indicating further that the Acts of the Councils do not indicate any reason for continued separation from the Latins.⁵⁰

Bessarion's tactic of relating the present council's difficulties to the councils concerned with the Arian heresies is crucial to his method and understanding and he will return to the Cappadocians' struggle in this context throughout his oration. He approaches the problem of the *filioque* from the traditional Byzantine standpoint of philosophy as the handmaid of theology. He first establishes the priority of revelation and then provides a metaphysical demonstration which supports it, both by appeal to principles of apophatic theology.

⁴⁹*Oratio dogmatica, Proemium*, 1, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, I.2-5, pp. 4-8.

He states that the Greek synod did not need to succumb to Latin syllogisms nor to remain intransigent.⁵¹ Neither the Councils nor the Fathers were persuaded by human wisdom; they did not use clever words, natural reason nor syllogisms.⁵² Faith deals with divine things beyond the reach of discursive reasoning; only the intuitive power of the mind, aided by “the power and illumination of the same one spirit” (ἡ μία τοῦ πνεύματος δύναμις τε καὶ ἔλλαμψις) can grasp its doctrines.⁵³ Both the Eastern and Western Fathers of the Church were illuminated by the light of truth and the faith by which they overcame the darkness of error. They suffered and died for this Faith and have left us their writings and teachings. In the same way that we venerate and believe the Scriptures, we hold the teachings and words of the Fathers as the principles which end arguments rather than begin them.⁵⁴ We know from the faith that the Fathers cannot contradict each other. If the Fathers, therefore, say things which appear to us strictly contradictory, the fault is not with them, but with us. We have not understood their teaching or intentions.⁵⁵ The Scriptures also contain statements which seem to be contradictory, yet we know that God cannot contradict himself.⁵⁶ In order to settle the exact wording of the creeds, we should judge the more

⁵¹Ibid., I.6, p. 9.

⁵²Ibid., II.11, p. 12.

⁵³Ibid., II.12, p. 13.

⁵⁴Ibid., II.14, p. 14.

⁵⁵Ibid., III.15, p. 15.

⁵⁶Ibid., III.16, p. 16.

obscure Fathers in light of the clearer Fathers, which in this case is the Latin Fathers.⁵⁷ The patristic authorities seem to contradict one another because we are trying to express divine things in a language intended to stand for sensible objects.⁵⁸ As theologians we can settle our controversies by establishing the text of our authorities and praying for divine guidance; applying inferior discursive reasoning can only cause theological discord.⁵⁹

Hankins considers that neoplatonic principles regarding knowledge, consciousness and language in Dionysian theology allowed Bessarion to formulate a concordance between the eastern and western doctrines.⁶⁰ In *The Divine Names* Dionysius states that scriptural revelation surpasses anything derived from human discourse or intellect. The things of God are revealed to each mind according to its ability through the superlative wisdom and truth of scripture. Words or concepts do not capture the hidden divinity; the concept of unknowing is that which is beyond human knowing. Eventually a more direct contemplation through conceptions alone, without earthly sense perception, will lead to union with God.⁶¹ As Hankins notes, a large part of Bessarion's oration, as outlined above, clearly shows the imprint of the same principles.

⁵⁷Ibid., IV.18. pp. 17-18.

⁵⁸Ibid., IV.19. pp. 18-19.

⁵⁹Ibid., V.24. pp. 22-3.

⁶⁰See Hankins, I, 221-6, for his discussion of the inter-relationship of these elements in Bessarion's thought.

⁶¹*The Divine Names* I.1, PG 3, 588A-592C. trans. Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius, The Complete Works*, 49-52. The references cited hereafter are to the English translation.

Interpretation of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus, with its synthesis of Neoplatonic philosophy and Christian theology, has consumed the energies of commentators from its first appearance to the present time.⁶² Moreover, the influence of the treatises was different in the East and the West.⁶³ Some modern scholars, like Hankins, are inclined to focus on the neoplatonic elements within the treatises or the ways in which they have been interpreted in the western theological tradition.⁶⁴ On the other hand, Lossky, as an orthodox theologian, is very critical of these approaches and discusses the place which the corpus enjoyed within the orthodox apophatic tradition. He concentrates on the ways in which 'Dionysius' adapted neoplatonic elements to the already existing Christian theological interpretative tradition of the earlier Eastern Church Fathers, most particularly the Cappadocians.⁶⁵ Indeed, one can find much of the same understanding in the five theological orations of Gregory of

⁶²See, for example, Paul Rorem and John C. Lamoreaux, *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus: Annotating the Areopagite* (Oxford, 1998); Jaroslav Pelikan, "The Odyssey of Dionysian Spirituality," introduction (I) in *Pseudo-Dionysius*, trans. Luibheid, 11-24; idem, introduction to *Maximus Confessor, Selected Writings*, trans. Berthold, 1-14.

⁶³See above Chapter II, 17-30.

⁶⁴See, for example, Hankins, 1, 221-6; Meyendorff, *Gregory Palamas*, 44 sq.; idem, *Byzantine Theology*, 27-9; Jean Leclercq, "Influence and Noninfluence of Dionysius in the Western Middle Ages," introduction (II) in *Pseudo-Dionysius*, trans. Luibheid, 25-32; Karlfried Forehlich, "Pseudo-Dionysius and the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century," introduction (III) in *Pseudo-Dionysius*, trans. Luibheid, 33-46; Paul Rorem, "On the Question of Influence in the Middle Ages," in *Pseudo-Dionysius*, trans. Luibheid, 237-40.

⁶⁵See Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 29-32; idem, *Vision of God*, 99-100. See also Pelikan, introduction to *Maximus Confessor*, trans., Berthold, 6-8; Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 27-9; idem, *Gregory Palamas*, 44sq. See also discussion above, Chapter II, 26.

Nazianzus,⁶⁶ whose writings Bessarion particularly admired.⁶⁷ Hence, in a sense, to say that the neoplatonic principles in Dionysian theology allowed Bessarion to harmonize the two doctrines is merely to say that he relied upon the traditional apophatic tradition of his Church. Moreover, Dionysian influence could have come to Bessarion second-hand for his apophatic approach with regard to the priority of revelation, the illegitimate use of syllogisms in search for divine truths and the inadequacy of language to fully express divine mysteries are present in Cabasilas' refutation of the Latin doctrine.⁶⁸

It has long been recognized that much of Cabasilas' treatise relied on the polemics of Barlaam the Calabrian,⁶⁹ who was himself heavily influenced by the apophatic theology of Pseudo-Dionysius.⁷⁰ Cabasilas stressed that all the Latin doctrines were presumption since

⁶⁶Ors. 27-31, Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness*, 217-99. See Quasten, *Patrology*, 3, 242, for summary of the orations, and introduction by Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness*, 33-70, for detailed exposition on Gregory's thought, particularly 33-4 on his epistemology and theory of language and 40-58 on his Trinitarian doctrine.

⁶⁷See above, Chapter III, 60-66.

⁶⁸Cabasilas, *Contra Latinos de processione Spiritus Sancti*, Pars III, *Prooemium*, 188-244, ed. Candal.

⁶⁹See Bessarion, *Refutatio Marci Ephesini*, PG 161, 193D-196A, and introduction by Candal, *Nilus Cabasilas*, 78-9.

⁷⁰See Candal, introduction to *Nilus Cabasilas*, 56-79, for discussion of sources Cabasilas used. Cf. Sinkewicz, "Doctrine of Knowledge," 240-2, for the orthodoxy of Barlaam's theology in his initial debate with Palamas on the nature of man's knowledge of God based on Dionysius' apophatic theology. Barlaam's writings on the Procession of the Holy Spirit use the same traditional authorities as Palamas. Moreover, Barlaam's treatises differ from Cabasilas' work only by their style and by Barlaam's more extensive knowledge of the Latin position. Like Dionysius, Barlaam believed that God's oneness and triune reality are utterly unknowable and unnameable; 'one' and 'three' are mystical names, revealed in scripture, but beyond the direct apprehension of the unaided human faculties of perception and knowledge.

no one could know God's true nature.⁷¹ that the Fathers had maintained that the modes of procession and generation are entirely unknowable and had expressly forbidden the use of dialectic in statements about God, points acknowledged by both Barlaam⁷² and Palamas⁷³ in their own debate. In his lengthy *Prooemium*, Cabasilas provides numerous quotations from the Scriptures and the Eastern Fathers on the pretentiousness of worldly wisdom faced with the incomprehensibility of God, which is then followed by the critique of the use of Aristotelian logic in search for divine truths.⁷⁴ Thus, although it has been considered that, in the heated exchanges on the *filioque* amongst the Greek delegation, the pro-unionists relied entirely upon Beccus' *Epigraphai* while the anti-unionists stood firm on Cabasilas' treatise against the Latin doctrine,⁷⁵ one could suggest, as discussed above, that Bessarion

⁷¹See Cabasilas, *Contra Latinos de processione Spiritus Sancti, Prooemium*, ed. Candal, 208-12, and discussion of this point by Erickson, "Filioque and Fathers," 165. On the relationship between Barlaam and Cabasilas see also G. Schiro, "Il paradosso di Nilo Cabasila," *RSBN* 9 (1957): 362-88 and Laurent, ed., Syropoulos, IX, 11, 446, n. 3.

⁷²Barlaam, Anti-Latin 16.137r16-17, Paris gr. 1278, cited by Sinkewicz, "Doctrine of Knowledge," 195 and n. 58. See also 195-6, quoting Barlaam, Anti-Latin 16.138r20-v5: "But we worship and revere a Trinity which is ineffable, inconceivable, incomprehensible, unsearchable, and known to no being either with regard to the unity or the distinction or the modes of procession; which neither can be conceived, nor expressed, nor named; nor can it be likened to any being. By itself alone is it known, but it is incomparably transcendent and removed from all intellect, reasoning and conception."

⁷³Ep. 1 to Gregory Akindynos, 8.8-11 and 9.2-13, ed. Meyendorff, "L'origine de la controversé palamite. La première lettre de Palamas à Akindynos," *Theologia XXXV*, 602-30 (Athens, 1954), in idem, *Byzantine Hesychasm*, 21-3, cited by Sinkewicz, "Doctrine of Knowledge," 197-8.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 241.

⁷⁵For the exchanges between the pro-unionists and anti-unionists on the opposing views of Beccus and Cabasilas, see Syropoulos, IX, 13, 446-8, who certainly leans to such an interpretation. See also Gill, "Sincerity of Bessarion," 384-6.

actually found a solution to the *filioque* dilemma (which the Byzantine delegation could reasonably be expected to accept) within Cabasilas' treatise itself. Whereas Cabasilas' aim was to invalidate the Latin doctrine of the Procession, in a sense Bessarion pushed the argument to its logical conclusion. He moved the discussion from the illegitimacy of the use of syllogisms to a denunciation of all natural reason and then to an exposition on the nature of God, whereby he could exploit the apophatic attitude of the Eastern Fathers, particularly the Cappadocians who, during the course of the Arian controversies and especially their polemical debates with Eunomius, placed clear limits on the knowledge of God. All had maintained that in the final analysis the Holy Trinity was a mystery known only by revelation and all discussion must fall short of the mark.⁷⁶ Having first based his exposition on the priority of revelation, in order to establish the validity of the western doctrine of the Procession, Bessarion then turned his attention to metaphysical demonstration in the same manner as the Eastern Fathers, a methodology which, as Gill notes with regard to the debates during the Council sessions, the orators from both sides were forced to use when discussing the nature of the Trinity.⁷⁷

⁷⁶See discussion of Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Tradition*, 294, who notes that this applied to all claims about 'knowing God' even in the name of the orthodox faith of the Church, referring specifically to Basil of Caesarea, Ep. 233.1, ed. Yves Courtonne, *Saint Basile: Lettres*, Vol. 3, (Paris, 1966), 40. See also Norris, introduction to *Faith Gives Fullness*, 59-61, where he discusses Gregory of Nazianzus' denunciation of the Arians as "logic choppers" in their insistence on formal demonstration in Or. 27.2, *PG* 36, 13B; Or. 29.21, *PG* 36, 101C-104A; Or. 31.18, *PG* 36, 153A. See Norris' whole discussion, 33-65, on Gregory's limits on philosophical demonstration and language in the Eunomian debates. See also Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 33, and Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 184-5.

⁷⁷See Gill, "East and West", 7-8.

Cabasilas had argued against Aquinas' understanding of the Trinity as relations of opposites.⁷⁸ relying heavily, as did all Eastern polemicists, both on Photius' declaration that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone and on his condemnation of the *filioque* as introducing two principles of origin into the Godhead.⁷⁹ The Latin declaration that Rome also accepted the Father as the only principle of origin in the Godhead during the heated debates in mid-March 1439⁸⁰ was a necessary precursor to any breakthrough on the *filioque* dilemma, for without it, the Greeks could never have been persuaded that the western interpretation did not destroy the monarchy of the Father.⁸¹ The clarification of this crucial point allowed Bessarion to advance the Latin understanding of relations within the Trinity, which Montenaro had put forward against Mark of Ephesus.⁸²

⁷⁸Cabasilas. *Contra Latinos de processione Spiritus Sancti*, I, 99-108, citing Aquinas. *Summa Theologia*, I, q. 36.

⁷⁹*Mystagogia*, PG 102, 280-389. For clear exposition of the *filioque* crisis of the ninth century and Photius' thought see Richard Haugh, *Photius and the Carolingians* (Belmont, 1973).

⁸⁰See *Acta Graeca*, 387-97, for the *Description's* account, and *Acta Latina*, Session 6, March 17, 1439, 191-6.

⁸¹See Syropoulos IX, 7, 480-2, and Gill, *Council of Florence*, 212-13, for discussion as to this breakthrough during the last two weeks of March, citing Travesari, Ep. No. 493, dated 18 March: cf., Doukas, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium*, 180.

⁸²See *Acta Graeca*, 239-398, *Acta Latina*, 124-222, and Gill, *Council of Florence*, 194-223, for summary of the discussion. The 'property' of Father, Son and Holy Spirit was distinguished as 'to generate,' 'to be generated' and 'to proceed' respectively but, as the Byzantines considered the Father to be the prime source of all divinity, his 'primacy' was also considered his 'property' and thus excluded the co-spiration of the Holy Spirit by the Son. The Latins argued that since the Father is He who-is not from another but the other two Persons are both from another, two share the same 'property' and therefore it cannot distinguish them. Rather, since there is only one Son and one Father; 'fatherhood' is the 'property' of the Father, 'sonship' is the 'property' of the Son who receives from the Father

Bessarion states that many of the Fathers used the preposition “through” (διὰ) to signify a mediating cause, which regarding the Holy Spirit is an efficient cause, not imperfect as an instrument in time and space, but always referring back to the Father; and since there is in the Father and in the Son one sole and identical productive power, one could say that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both of them.⁸³ Quotations from Basil of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, Athanasius, Maximus the Confessor, Gregory of Nyssa, and Cyril of Alexandria follow which are put forward as examples indicating that the different expressions stating that the Spirit ‘is from the Son,’ ‘manifested through the Son,’ ‘proceeds through the Son’ or ‘proceeds from the Son,’ are all attempts to convey such a meaning.⁸⁴

Bessarion then proceeds to define the relations of origin in the orthodox apophatic sense which distinguishes the names ‘Father, Son and Holy Spirit.’⁸⁵ He first ties his

everything that is not the Father’s ‘property’, i.e., ‘fatherhood’, and so receives power to produce, with the Father, the Holy Spirit. See also Gill, “Sincerity of Bessarion,” 388, and Candal, introduction to *Oratio dogmatica*, xxxiv, who notes Bessarion’s incorporation of Montenero’s argument at *Oratio dogmatica*, VI.42, pp. 38-9.

⁸³*Oratio dogmatica*, V.20-3, pp. 19-22; cf., Beccus, *Epigraphai* II, PG 141, 633-7.

⁸⁴*Oratio dogmatica*, VI.27-39, pp. 24-36, based on *florilegia* of quotations from Beccus.

⁸⁵See Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 44-66, for discussion of this aspect of Eastern thought with regard to the Trinity, especially 54-5 where he states: “It is above all a negation, showing us that the Father is neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit; that the Son is neither the Father nor the Spirit; that the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son.... Understood apophatically, the relation of origin describes the difference but nevertheless does not indicate the manner of the divine processions.” Lossky offers both John Damascene and Gregory of Nazianzus as examples in the Eastern patristic tradition, who stressed the incomprehensibility of the modes of generation and procession. See John Damascene, *De Fide Orthodoxa*, I, 8, PG 94, 820A, 824A, and Gregory of Nazianzus, Or. 31.8, PG 36, 141B and Or. 20.11, PG 35, 1077C.

discussion to the victory of the Cappadocians who established the consubstantial nature of the three hypostases in their struggle with Arianism, relying heavily upon Gregory of Nazianzus, who identified 'manifestation' with 'mutual relationship' in discussion of the names 'Father, Son and Spirit.'⁸⁶ He further develops this approach by citing Pseudo-Dionysius' statement in *The Divine Names* that in God there are unities and distinctions (Ἐνουνται γαρ διαχεχρισμένως καὶ διαχρινονται ἡνωμένως).⁸⁷ Dionysius' passage stated that the Bible speaks of God "sometimes without, sometimes with distinctions," a practice that we must simply receive and honour. The differentiated names for God, those with distinctions, are simply Father, Son, and Spirit.⁸⁸ In discussing the Incarnation as

⁸⁶*Oratio dogmatica*, VI. 40, pp. 36-7; cf., Gregory of Nazianzus, Or. 31.9, PG 36, 141C, trans. Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness*, p. 283, where Gregory equates 'manifestation' with 'relation'. See also N. Lossky, "Climat théologique au Concile de Florence," in *Christian Unity*, ed. Albergio, 245-7, who notes that the Cappadocians had sometimes made an imprecise use of the idea of relation with regard to the Trinity, but both Augustine, *De Trinitate*, V. 14, and Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I. q. 36, a. 4, had developed this into a metaphysical argument for understanding the conception of 'persons' or 'hypostasis' as the relations within the Trinity. See also de Margerie, "Vers une relecture, 55-7, who points out that the Thomist view of relations goes back to the Cappadocians, who tied the hypostatic characteristics to the relations of origin, and the similar views of Quasten, *Patrology*, 3: 249-50.

⁸⁷See Bessarion, *Oratio dogmatica*, VI.42, 15-16, p. 38, where he cites Dionysius, referring, as identified by Candal, ed., *Oratio*, 38, to *The Divine Names*, II.2. This key passage had been used by both Mark of Ephesus and John of Montenegro in the latter stages of the public debates. To Mark it clearly demonstrated the father as the sole source of divinity and indicated that the Latins confused the distinctions and destroyed the unity in the Godhead. To Montenegro, on the other hand, it supported his understanding of relations within the Trinity and the co-spiration of the Holy Spirit by the Son. For Mark's exposition and exchange with Montenegro see *Acta Graeca*, 253-61, for Montenegro's latter exposition in the last public session (when Mark was not present) see *Acta Graeca*, 367-8, *Acta Latina*, 219. See also n. 82 above.

⁸⁸See PG 3, *The Divine Names* II.1, 636C-640C, trans. Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 58-61. See also the important discussion of Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 6 and 137-45.

differentiation Dionysius maintains that this teaching and all the scriptural instances of unity and differentiation are “a mystery beyond our mind’s ability to fathom and known only through revelation.”⁸⁹ Dionysius questioned the validity of essential terms of Trinitarian theology and maintained that everything about the Incarnation surpassed reason and explanation by transcending it.⁹⁰

Bessarion transferred Dionysius’ apophatic methodology in his discussion of the nature of Christ to the efforts of the western fathers to come to terms with heretical Arian doctrines. He emphasized that both Churches had expounded on the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. He stresses the inadequacy of both the Latin and Byzantine doctrines to explain the mystery of the Trinity.⁹¹ Bessarion’s argument as he first presents it in his *Oratio dogmatica* is wordy and poorly formed.⁹² It is much more clearly defined in his *Defence of John*

⁸⁹PG 3, 645A-645B, trans. Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 62-3.

⁹⁰Ibid., 648A-649A, trans. Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 65-6. See discussion of Rorem, *Pseudo Dionysius*, 138-42.

⁹¹*Oratio dogmatica*, VI.54-VII.55, pp. 48-50. See de Margerie, “Vers une relecture,” 52-3, who indicates Bessarion’s attempt here is to show that the procession ‘from the Father through the Son’ and ‘from the Father and from the Son’ are complementary more than identical and that neither is sufficient to express the mystery: *ek* in Greek, *ex* in Latin, refers to equality in origin, *dia* in Greek, *per* in Latin shows the relation. See also Candal, introduction to *Oratio dogmatica*, lvi-lviii.

⁹²See *ibid.*, 38, n. c, where Candal indicates the more cogent and condensed argument of the Latin translation. See also Gill, “Sincerity of Bessarion,” 388-9, who notes the developing understanding of the Latin doctrine in Bessarion’s subsequent works. Bessarion’s Latin translations of his theological works were undertaken after he had taken up residence in the West.

Beccus.⁹³ Montenaro had supported his argument with copious quotations from the Latin and Greek Fathers. Bessarion produces extensive quotations from the Greek Fathers as found in the *florilegia* of Beccus.⁹⁴ followed by a brief summary of the views of the Latin Fathers.⁹⁵

Bessarion's use of the apophatic theology of Gregory of Nazianzus and Pseudo-Dionysius was both natural and useful for his purposes in persuading the Greek delegation that the two traditions were expressing the same doctrinal truth in different ways, for here were an approach and authorities that the Eastern delegation could readily accept. He is suggesting here exactly what the Eastern Fathers had already made clear with regard to the relationship between philosophy and theology. Gregory of Nazianzus had said, "Faith gives fullness to our reasoning;" both he and Pseudo-Dionysius considered that words were insufficient to express the mystery of the Trinity.⁹⁶ Bessarion's appeal was to Holy Tradition,⁹⁷ by reference to the scriptures, the Fathers, the Ecumenical Councils and the apophatic theology which permeates all theological considerations in that tradition.

⁹³PG 161, 272-3. See Gill, "Sincerity of Bessarion," 388-9, who notes Bessarion's use of Montenero's argument against Palamas and in support of Beccus' ninth proposition.

⁹⁴*Oratio dogmatica*. VII.55-VIII.67. pp. 50-64.

⁹⁵Ibid., IX.68-70. pp. 64-6.

⁹⁶Gregory of Nazianzus. Or. 37. PG 36. 29-32; Or. 28. PG 36. 35-72 (Theological 2). *On the Nature of God*, trans. in Norris. *Faith Gives Fullness*. 224-44. See p. 212, where Norris discusses Gregory's instance that no analogies in themselves explain fully the relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

⁹⁷See discussion of Ware, "Scholasticism and Orthodoxy," 21, for Bessarion's acceptance of the *filioque* on such Eastern terms.

But is there more implied here? The concern of the Eastern Fathers with regard to Trinitarian doctrine had been with the divinity and nature of Christ and the divinity of the Holy Spirit. However, from the late ninth century onwards, with Photius' concerns with the western *filioque*, Eastern theologians were required to come to terms with the Latin doctrine. Their attempts to do so led through the polemical debate between first Beccus and Gregory of Cyprus⁹⁸ and then between Barlaam and Palamas to the explicit doctrine of the distinction between the divine essence and energies. The one and only direct reference Bessarion makes to Dionysius in his oration is to the latter's discussion of 'unities and distinctions' which was certainly most useful in establishing his understanding of the differentiation as applying only to the names of Father, Son and Spirit, but he might also have been making a veiled reference here to Palamas' controversial doctrine.

Dionysius' discussion of the various names from scripture concerning God can be understood as God's manifestation of himself in his uncreated energies and the distinction can be perceived as that between the unknowable essence and the revelatory energies by which the divine names are formed.⁹⁹ The doctrine portrays an antinomy. While the energies in their procession express an ineffable distinction, since they are not God in His

⁹⁸On this debate see especially Aristeides Papadakis, *Crisis in Byzantium. The Filioque Controversy in the Patriarchate of Gregory II of Cyprus (1283-1289)*, (New York, 1983).

⁹⁹See this view in Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 76, who maintains that the second chapter of *The Divine Names* [from which Bessarion quoted] provides the key to the entire understanding of Dionysius' theology. See also Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 140, who considers that in Dionysius the question of unity and differentiation bears two sets of meanings: remaining and procession, unity and trinity.

essence but, just the same, they are inseparable from it, they affirm the unity and the simplicity of God.¹⁰⁰ Certainly this was Mark of Ephesus' understanding.¹⁰¹

The Eastern Church had accepted Palamas' theology as a development of the differentiation in the Trinity.¹⁰² Bessarion's correlation of 'manifestation' with the Latin doctrine of 'relations' might be an attempt to highlight two different and equally controversial approaches to the understanding of the Trinity in Thomist and Palamite theology. In the apophatic understanding of the Trinity as a mystery both analogies fall short of the goal and yet according to the axiom of agreement between the saints cannot be contradictory.

Modern scholars consider that an open discussion of the Palamite doctrine might have found a solution to the Procession question.¹⁰³ Bessarion identified the Son as a mediating

¹⁰⁰Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 76.

¹⁰¹See Markos A. Orphanos, "The procession of the Holy Spirit according to certain later Greek Fathers," in *Spirit of God, Spirit of Christ*, ed. Vischer, 21-45, especially his discussion of Mark of Ephesus, 35-42, where he indicates that, although Mark was constrained from discussion of the Palamite doctrine at the Council of Florence by the Emperor's restriction, he consistently held this position, as evidenced by his later works, where he followed Gregory Palamas' reasoning.

¹⁰²See Meyendorff, *Gregory Palamas*, 220-1.

¹⁰³See pertinent discussion by Erickson, "Filioque and Fathers," 164-5, who draws attention to the discussion by modern theologians who consider that: "It addresses the legitimate Western concern about the ultimate relation of Son and Spirit without 'confusing the persons,' i.e., without making the worship of God the Trinity into an impersonal monotheism." See also Meyendorff, "Was there an Encounter Between East and West?" 153-75, particularly 162-9. See also the recent discussion of the issue in *Spirit of God*, ed. Vischer, particularly the articles by Dumitru Staniloae, "The Procession of the Holy Spirit From the Father and his Relation to the Son, as the Basis of our Deification and Adoption," 174-86, and Boris Bobrinsky, "The Filioque Yesterday and Today," 133-48, with discussion of earlier contributions to such a dialogue in the works of Lossky and Meyendorff at 137-8.

cause and clearly stated that he was not referring to the 'economic trinity' or the temporal mission of the Son, but apart from what might be a veiled inference in his quotation from Dionysius, he does not discuss the approved doctrine of his Church on the manifestation of God in his uncreated energies. If indeed he was drawing a comparison between the 'development of doctrine' in East and West¹⁰⁴ he did not carry this line of investigation further. Possibly even here in the deliberations amongst the synod, the Emperor's restriction was in place. Moreover, the Latins were aware of his attempts to demonstrate the agreement of the saints on the doctrine of the Trinity and the content of his oration was likely known to some of the Latin delegates with whom he worked in attempts to find a means of reconciling the eastern and western doctrines.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, he might have been unwilling to draw their attention to a controversial issue which, on the emperor's instructions, had been successfully skirted during the theological debates.

Convincing the Sceptics

Bessarion showed to the best of his ability how East and West tended to stress different aspects of the Trinity and thus why the Latin and Greek Fathers seemed to be contradictory when discussing the Procession of the Holy Spirit. He was able to accept the western contention that the addition to the creed had been made out of necessity in order to protect the truth of Christian doctrine from heretical attacks, a point clearly expressed in the

¹⁰⁴See Geanakoplos, "New Interpretation *Acta*," 346-7, for his view that the Byzantines feared such a comparison would be drawn.

¹⁰⁵Hankins, I, 224, n. 151.

words of the final decree.¹⁰⁶ This, of course, was the weak point in his exposition. To Byzantine minds the Latins had made an addition to the creed, sanctioned by the papacy, unilaterally and uncanonically. Although the Byzantines considered the designation of Mary as *theotokos* and Palamas' distinction between the divine essence and energies correct points of doctrine, these had not been added to the creed. Even Mark of Ephesus did not totally reject the *filioque* doctrine out of hand in the first discussions. He suggested that it could be removed from the creed and added in the form of a decree, as the Third Ecumenical Council had done with regard to the *theotokos*.¹⁰⁷

Having been convinced himself that the two halves of Christendom were expressing the same truth in separate ways and explaining the same to his fellow Eastern delegates in terms that they could understand and accept as part of their own theological heritage, at the end of his treatise, Bessarion presses the argument home. He reminds the synod that they had no legitimate reason for remaining separated from their Latin brothers: indeed they had an obligation to unite with them. He concludes by entreating them to remember their country and its need for military assistance which would be forthcoming: he assures them

¹⁰⁶ "In addition we define the explanation of those words 'and the son' (*filioque*) to have been lawfully and reasonably added to the symbol, for the sake of declaring the truth and under the compulsion of necessity." Trans. Crowder, *Unity, Heresy and Reform*, 171.

¹⁰⁷ *Acta Graeca*, 57-8; cf., Doukas, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium*, 180. See discussion by Constantine N. Tsirpanlis, *Introduction to Eastern Patristic Thought and Orthodox Theology*, Collegeville, Minn., 1991, 90-2, and n. 236; idem, *Mark Eugenius*, 87-9.

that he was sincerely convinced of all that he had expressed to them and that he would not jeopardize his own soul for material benefit.¹⁰⁸

Bessarion's argument to convince his fellow delegates was, for the most part, centered in the apophatic tradition of his own Church. Having said that, however, one must investigate the degree to which new western influences impinged on his evolving understanding.

Western Contacts and the Platonic-Christian Synthesis

Bessarion arrived in the West as a well educated humanist with considerable admiration for western scholarship and one would not be incorrect in surmising that his mind was open to persuasion.¹⁰⁹ Indeed he received positive reinforcement for his own views on the relationship between faith and reason from encounters with representatives of the western philosophical, theological and humanist currents concerned with aspects of the Union Council.

Classical, as well as theological texts, had been procured at Constantinople by the Pope's representatives arranging the transport of the Greek delegation to the Council: texts were likewise eagerly sought from the eastern delegates when they arrived in Ferrara.¹¹⁰ Such attitudes contrasted sharply with the general attitude prevalent amongst the majority of

¹⁰⁸*Oratio dogmatica*, X.71-9, pp. 67-73.

¹⁰⁹Nicol, *Last Centuries*, 370-1; Geanakoplos, *Interaction Sibling*, 14; Ševčenko, "Intellectual Repercussions," 8; Papadakis, *Christian East*, 394.

¹¹⁰For overview of western enthusiasm for Greek texts see Ševčenko, "Intellectual Repercussions," 3-4.

the Eastern clergy who were, for the most part, suspicious of the Hellenic learning. Moreover, to Bessarion, the Latin delegates at the Council seemed representative of a larger pool of well-educated clergy. He had no means of knowing that the state of education amongst the rank and file of the western clergy was little better than in the East.¹¹¹ He could only contrast the erudition of the western delegation with the lack of refinement in the majority of the eastern delegation. He himself had been elevated to the episcopate at a very young age in order that his considerable knowledge could be exploited by the Greek synod.¹¹²

Being part of the diminishing tradition of scholar-monks in the East, he accepted as admirable the combination of the love of learning and the practice of monastic piety which he saw demonstrated in the lives of several key individuals in the Latin delegation.

Cardinal Cesarini¹¹³ was one of the leading Latin orators in the prolonged theological debates, whose philological expertise greatly impressed Bessarion. Moreover, he was Cesarini's guest on one occasion during the early days of the discussions at Ferrara where the dinner conversation indulged in exploration of the tenets of Aristotelian philosophy.¹¹⁴ Bessarion might have realized during the brief exchange that the Latin interpretation of Aristotle did not conform with the Byzantine understanding. One can also note that the

¹¹¹On state of western clergy see Gill, "East and West," 19-23; for particular reference to the situation in Italy see Denys Hay, *The Church in Italy in the Fifteenth Century*, (Cambridge, London, New York and Melbourne, 1977).

¹¹²Syropoulos, III, 24, 184.

¹¹³For Cesarini's life and his ecclesiastical career as papal envoy, president of the Council of Basel and role at the Council of Florence see Gill, *Personalities of Council*, 95-103. See also contemporary portrait by Vespasiano, *Renaissance Princes*, 125-32.

¹¹⁴Syropoulos, V, 3, 258.

Cardinal's life had several points of similarity with Bessarion's. Cesarini rose from poverty and obscurity, he toiled long and hard to obtain an education which he highly valued and he supported the endeavors of other poor youth who strove to excel in letters. Cesarini's moral character and piety were above reproach. He led a simple life, generously distributed alms and concerned himself with monastic reform.

The western humanist, Nicholas of Cusa,¹¹⁵ spent some two months in Constantinople in 1437 prior to the departure of the papal vessels for Italy, during which time he indicates that he had considerable discussion with learned Byzantines residing in Constantinople. Nicholas considered that scholastic intellectualism lacked spiritual depth and a simple inward piety and turned instead to the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, whom he also admired for his recognition that Christian learning and spiritual contemplation belong together.¹¹⁶ an understanding that Bessarion, too, championed. Nicholas' enthusiasm for

¹¹⁵On Nicholas' life, works and ecclesiastical career see Watts, *Nicolaus Cusanus*; C. Sansoni, ed., *Nicolò Cusano agli inizi del mondo moderno: Atti del congresso internazionale in occasione del V centenario della morte di Nicolaò Cusano: Bressanone, 6-10 settembre 1965* (Florenz, 1970). On his role concerning the Council of Florence see also Petro B. T. Bilaniuk, "Nicholas of Cusa and the Council of Florence" in idem, *Studies in Eastern Christianity*, vol. 2 (Toronto, 1982), 113-28.

¹¹⁶See Froehlich, "Pseudo-Dionysius and Reformation," 35-6, who notes that although some saw this as a betrayal of Dionysius' radical unknowing, many humanists adopted such an intellectual use of Dionysian mysticism in their reform ideas, pointing to Johannes Trithemus, who praised both Gerson and Nicholas of Cusa in this regard. On Gerson see also S. E. Ozment, "The university and the Church Fathers: Patterns of Reform in Jean Gerson," *Medievalia et Humanistica*, 1 (1970) : 111-26. For neoplatonic critique of scholasticism in Italian Spiritualism of the sixteenth century see idem, *Mysticism and Dissent: religious ideology and social protest in the sixteenth century* (New Haven, 1972).

Proclus' writings and his hunt for classical and patristic manuscripts at that time would have given him even more in common with Bessarion.¹¹⁷

Nicholas indicated that the inspiration for *On Learned Ignorance* came to him in a dream while on board ship from Constantinople with the Eastern delegation on route to the union council.¹¹⁸ This has disposed some scholars to consider that Plethon influenced his understanding, on the evidence of Nicholas' statement, coupled with the dedication to him of an early Latin translation of Plethon's *De Fato*.¹¹⁹ One could suggest Bessarion as a more likely candidate. He and Nicholas were more the same age, churchmen and very much involved in the ecclesiastical affairs surrounding the proposed union. Nicholas' well known ecumenical spirit has often been compared to that of Bessarion. Moreover, it is unclear whether Plethon joined the Greek delegation before its departure from Constantinople or when the Emperor journeyed through the Peloponnese on route to Navarino.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷See Bilaniuk, "Nicholas of Cusa and Council," 118.

¹¹⁸The work was begun in late 1439 and completed in February 1440, at which time Nicholas added this information as a postscript to his patron, Cardinal Cesarini. See Nikolaus von Kues, *Werke*, i, ed. P. Wilpert (Berlin 1967), *De docta ignorantia*, iii.12.263, as cited by Woodhouse, *Gemistus Plethon*, 132.

¹¹⁹See P. O. Kristeller, "A Latin Translation of Gemistus Plethon's *De Fato* by Johannes Dedicated to Nicolas of Cusa," in *Niccolò Cusano*, ed. G. C. Sansoni, 213-21. See also Woodhouse, *Gemistus Plethon*, 132-3, for the possibility of such an acquaintance and the negative impact such an incomplete knowledge of Platonism would have had on Plethon at that time.

¹²⁰For discussion see Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 118, 132, who leans to his presence at Constantinople.

Fra Ambrogio Travesari(1386-1439)¹²¹ was an important member of the Latin delegation who had intimate contact with several members of the Greek delegation: he and Bessarion quickly became friends. Both worked together during the crucial late stages of the Council, when the compromise solutions were hammered out. They likely influenced the rewording of *cedula* in order to reach statements that could be accepted by both sides in the negotiations: they definitely were involved in the composition of the final draft of the union decree. Travesari admired Bessarion's erudition and the contents of his library.¹²²

Scholars have been puzzled as to how and when Bessarion became aware of Beccus' *Epigraphai*. Gill suggests that Bessarion might have done so through his study of Palamas' treatise (which he supposes came into Bessarion's hands before he wrote his *Oratio dogmatica*).¹²³ Candal considered that he could not have acquired it from the Latins since it was not known in the West at that time.¹²⁴ But, in fact, Bessarion could have procured

¹²¹Travesari, General of the Camaldulensian Order (1431), was a dedicated and exceptional Greek patristic scholar whose expertise included hagiography, the monastic tradition and the ecumenical councils. He translated many of the Greek patristic classics into Latin, advanced the Greek theological tradition in the West and advocated reunion of the churches as papal policy from the mid-1420s. The Latin delegation relied heavily upon his knowledge for translation and textual exegesis. For his life and works see Stinger, *Humanism and Church Fathers*, who discusses his role with regard to the Council, 203-22.

¹²²Ibid., 210, citing Giovanni Mercati, *Ultimi contributi alla storia deli unamisti*, Fasc. 1: *Travesariana*, Studi e Testi 90 (Vatican City, 1939), 31-3.

¹²³Gill, "Was Bessarion a Conciliarist," 211. See Candal, introduction to *Nilus Cabasilas*, 69-71, 77-78, 135-38, for Cabasilas' use of the works of both Beccus and Palamas.

¹²⁴Ibid., lix, n.3.

it from Travesari who, as Stinger¹²⁵ points out, found it in a Greek manuscript of Gregory of Nazianzus' orations which belonged to the Badia Fiorentina. He had translated parts of it¹²⁶ and the whole of Manuel Calecas' *Contra errores Graecorum de Processione Spiritus* into Latin¹²⁷ and brought these works to the attention of the papacy as a means of supporting the Latin position.¹²⁸ Excerpts from both works can be identified in the *florilegia* of quotations from the Greek Fathers compiled by Travesari for Montenaro's use in his arguments in favour of the *filioque*. These were the same arguments which so impressed Bessarion, influenced his acceptance of the Latin doctrine and were so carefully explained in his *Oratio dogmatica* to the Greek synod.¹²⁹ Travesari, then, could also have made Bessarion aware of the similarities between the works of Beccus and Calecas, or Bessarion himself might have been aware from his pre-council days that not only Calecas,¹³⁰ but Demetrius Kydones¹³¹ also held similar views. As was discussed in Chapter Three above.

¹²⁵Stinger, *Humanism and Church Fathers*, 219-21, citing Mercati, *Travesariana*, 24-6.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, 219-20.

¹²⁷*Contra errores Graecorum de processione Spiritus Sancti*, III, PG 152, 170-8. The pope's legate, Antonio da Massa, procured the Greek manuscript during his 1422-23 delegation to discuss the union of the churches and Travesari translated the work for Pope Martin V around 1424. See Stinger, *Humanism and Church Fathers*, 112, 135.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, 220.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, 220.

¹³⁰*Contra errores Graecorum*, PG 152, 170-8.

¹³¹*Apologia I*, ed. G. Mercati, *Notizie di Procoro e Demetrio Cidone, Manuele Caleca e Teodoro Meliteniota ed altri appunti per la storia della teologia e della letteratura bizantina del secolo XIV*. Studi e Testi, 56 (Vatican City, 1931), 359-99, trans. James Likoudis, *Ending the Byzantine Schism: The 14th c. APOLOGIA of Demetrios Kydones for*

an indirect connection to these individuals can be established for Bessarion while in Byzantium, and he might have previously perused the texts of Calecas, which were brought to his attention by Scholarius in attempts to resolve the Thomist/Palamist dichotomy.¹³² Bessarion's understanding of Aquinas' theology at that point was quite limited and, like Scholarius, he had rejected the views expressed. Such being the case, Bessarion might then be the source from whom Isidore of Kiev obtained Beccus' *Epigraphai* which he presented to the Greek synod shortly after Bessarion delivered his oration¹³³ for he would have recognized the value of Beccus' work for advancing specific arguments in favor of the validity of the *Jilioque* rejected by Cabasilas.¹³⁴

Travesari believed, like Bessarion, that ecumenical unity could be reestablished on the basis of the patristic antiquity of the first centuries of Christianity. Travesari's familiarity with the Greek classical tradition, his enthusiasm for the Eastern Fathers, and his own translating activities, which favoured the humanist idea of a 'faithful rendering' of the text and establishing the legitimacy of the texts used,¹³⁵ had much in common with

Unity with Rome (New Rochelle, 1983), 22-70. See also discussion of Kiianka, "Demetrius Cydones and Thomas Aquinas," 264-86.

¹³²See above, Chapter III, pp. 74, 92-93.

¹³³Syropoulos, VIII, 37, 424, which is the first indication of the work in his narrative, although Bessarion had certainly had access to it in the writing of his oration.

¹³⁴See Candal, introduction to *Nilus Cabasilas*, 36-38, 69-76, 135-38, for discussion of Cabasilas' references to Beccus in his treatise and his refutation of specific arguments in Beccus' *Epigraphai*, without identifying either the work or the author.

¹³⁵Stinger, *Humanism and Church Fathers*, 217-19.

Bessarion's own interests.¹³⁶ Moreover, Travesari held the same views as Nicholas of Cusa with regard to scholasticism and the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius.¹³⁷ Bessarion's reliance on Dionysian theology was in the traditional orthodox apophatic sense, but discussions with Nicholas and Travesari were perhaps powerful motivating factors. Moreover, Bessarion would have quickly surmised that, despite the familiarity with and enthusiasm of both for the Dionysian texts and Nicholas' interest in Neoplatonic philosophy (Proclus in particular), Latin interpretation and use in both instances did not conform with the Byzantine understanding.

Bessarion's encounters with these three influential westerners likely reinforced the negative attitude which he, as well as the entire synod, developed towards western scholasticism during the Council debates proper. Although he himself had no deep understanding of western scholastic techniques,¹³⁸ he had quickly realized during the course of the theological debates that scholastic-dialectic and biblical-patristic methodologies were incompatible. The Latin use of an abstract and speculative theology, which applied syllogisms and logical demonstrations to the texts of the Fathers rather than arguing on the bare words of the Fathers alone, shocked the entire Greek delegation who considered such techniques, at best irrelevant; at worst, a hindrance to the theological debates and totally

¹³⁶See Hankins 1, 221-6, who considers that Bessarion's criticism of the use of demonstration in theology and advocacy of intuitive wisdom over scholastic theology corresponds well with the humanist insistence on *ad sensum* translation or the ability of western theologians to find different levels of meaning or 'senses' in scripture.

¹³⁷See discussion of Froehlich, "Pseudo-Dionysius and Reformation," 35.

¹³⁸Hankins, 1, 222, points out that Bessarion could at times approximate scholastic-style arguments but never really mastered the formal syllogism.

inappropriate in the search for divine truth.¹³⁹ Orthodox theologians required proofs derived from scripture, the Fathers and the decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, in short, the evidence which Bessarion provided.¹⁴⁰

The Latins' scholastic reasoning and use of Aristotle during the course of the theological debates and in private philosophical discussions also had an enormous effect upon Bessarion's mentor, Plethon. He considered that Aristotle had been misinterpreted by the West and delivered lectures to some Latins in attendance on the differences between Aristotle and Plato and how they conformed to Christian doctrine. His exposé clearly favoured the Platonic-Christian synthesis.¹⁴¹ Scholars still debate how much influence

¹³⁹See *Acta Graeca*, 59-60, where Bessarion interrupted one of Andrew Chrysoberge's logical demonstrations and asked him thereafter to restrain himself to a short question and answer format. Isidore of Kiev, in a speech written at the Council, stated: "I say with regret that they [syllogisms] have rather deepened the schism and have made the disagreement greater and stronger." Cod. Vat. gr. 706, 121-221, quoted by Gill, *Council of Florence*, p. 227. George Scholarius, *Means to obtain Religious Peace, Orationes Georgii Scholarii*, I, p. 355, addressed the Greek synod: "I know that you, O Greeks, in matters of this sort have no confidence in proofs from reason but consider them suspect and misleading; much more then will you both keep clear of syllogising and be on your guard against others who do that." Syropoulos, IX, 28, 464, recorded the reaction of a Georgian delegate: "Aristotle, Aristotle, why all this Aristotle, when they should be quoting St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Basil, Gregory the Theologian, Chrysostom, but not Aristotle." See Charles H. Lohr, "Metaphysics," in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles B. Schmitt and Quentin Skinner, (Cambridge, 1988), 537-638, particularly p. 559, and Kallistos Ware, "Scholasticism and Orthodoxy," 16-27, for cogent analysis of the importance the differences between scholasticism and orthodox theology made at the Council. See also Gill, *Council of Florence*, 227sq; Hankins, I, 221 sq.; Erickson, "Filioque and Fathers," 158-9; Hussey, *Orthodox Church*, 277-9.

¹⁴⁰The Byzantine perspective of the limits of human philosophy in theology is clearly demonstrated at the Council of Florence in the typical orthodox appeal to Holy Tradition, to the Fathers and the Ecumenical Councils. See Ware, "Scholasticism and Orthodoxy," 16-24, who concludes, 21, that Bessarion's acceptance of the union is on such Eastern grounds.

¹⁴¹See Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 154 sq.

Plethon's lectures had on the western humanists but it is certain that the point was not lost on Bessarion, who had also experienced the confusion and frustration felt by the whole Greek synod subjected to hour upon hour of syllogistic reasoning. Preoccupied as he was with the Council's deliberations, he could hardly have been ignorant of Plethon's activities and he would have readily grasped the implications.

Bessarion's contacts with the western scholastics and humanists, coupled with Plethon's critique of Latin Aristotelianism, reinforced in his own mind the close affinity between the apophatic understanding of the nature of God prevalent in the writings of the Eastern Church Fathers and that of the Neoplatonists. He was well aware of the similarities in expression between Gregory of Nazianzus and Proclus, the apophatic understanding that underlay both and the neoplatonic elements which, having been absorbed into the orthodox tradition, had become common theological standards. Bessarion was thus being provided with an attractive alternative to scholastic reasoning and a solution to the theological problem, the genesis of which first appears in his oration delivered to the Greek synod.

The evolution in Bessarion's thought is clear. He arrived at the Council heavily steeped in both the patristic heritage of his church and the classical heritage of antiquity. He was predisposed to admire western scholarship and to be open to cultural and religious integration from encounters with certain western individuals who had visited Byzantium before the Council. He found in the orthodox apophatic tradition, with its synthesis of Platonic philosophy and Christian theology, what he considered to be the traditional way to address the spiritual differences between East and West. His understanding was stimulated in part by his own encounters with the Latin scholastics and humanists, in part by Plethon's

exposition of the erroneous Latin view of Aristotle. All of these elements together reinforced his own belief that cultural reintegration would provide the means for a reorientation of western learning and theology towards the Byzantine perspective. One could add to such an amalgam his projection of ancient history upon the contemporary situation whereby the captive takes the captor captive¹⁴² and his fervent belief that papal and western assistance would spare the beleaguered East from annihilation by the Turks. He was, no doubt, unprepared for the subsequent developments that quickly saw the union unravel and his own hopes for cultural and spiritual reintegration of the two halves of Christendom suffer serious setbacks.

¹⁴²See Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 141-2.

CHAPTER V

ADDRESSING THE EASTERN DILEMMA

When he disembarked at Constantinople on 1 February 1440 with the majority of the Byzantine delegation returning from Italy, Bessarion could have little expected the turn his life would shortly take nor that attempts to make the Union of Florence real in both a material and a spiritual sense would dominate much of his life from that date forward. He spent but a short time in the East. On 10 December 1440 he took up residence and ecclesiastical appointment with the papacy at Florence. By the time of his death on 18 November 1472, he had spent more than thirty years in the West, all the while attempting to resolve the twists and turns of the evolving eastern situation which threatened the realization of his plans for spiritual and cultural reintegration of East and West.

A Mission for Material, Spiritual and Cultural Succour

Bessarion was appalled by the rapid rejection of the Union by the general population and the majority of monks in the environs of Constantinople, but as his *Defence of John Beccus* makes clear, he was both able and willing to defend the validity of the western doctrine of the Procession of the Holy Spirit.¹ However, the Emperor John VIII was convinced that opposition to the settlement reached could best be silenced by the fulfilment

¹Refer to discussion of this treatise above, 111-16.

of papal promises for a crusade against the Turks and he was reluctant to implement fully the terms of union, which thus allowed the anti-unionists to mount a concerted campaign against it. Bessarion quickly surmised that he could best serve the Union in the West. His elevation to the rank of Cardinal in the Latin Church was clear evidence of the regard in which he was held by the papacy and the influence he might be able to exert in expediting the proposed crusade.² He likely left Constantinople enjoying the Emperor's full support as an informal representative at the papal court to seek ways and means of assisting the union and of promoting eastern interests. However, Bessarion's hopes for achieving these ends increasingly turned towards the Peloponnese. During his prolonged sojourn in the Morea he had been greatly impressed by the cultural revival promoted in court circles. He was also well aware of Plethon's views on social and political renewal in the Peloponnese and of Plethon's aversion to the reactionary ecclesiastical faction at Constantinople which had attempted to stifle his philosophical inquiries.

Bessarion's lengthy letter to Constantine Palaeologus,³ Despot of the Peloponnese (ca. August-November 1444)⁴, written against the background of the high hopes expected

²Runciman. *Great Church*. 109-10.

³On Emperor Constantine XI (1449-53), see Donald M. Nicol. *The Immortal Emperor: The life and legend of Constantine Palaiologos, last Emperor of the Romans* (Cambridge, 1992).

⁴Item No. 35 in Marc. gr. 533, ed. Lambros. *PP*. IV. 32-45, and Mohler 3. 439-49. On internal evidence, it can be determined that Bessarion had previously written two other letters from Italy to Constantine which are no longer extant. This third letter was written during Constantine's second period as Despot, after the fortifications at the Isthmus of Corinth had been rebuilt in the spring of 1444 and before the inauguration of the crusade in the autumn culminating in its defeat at Varna (10 November 1444). On this letter see also Nicol, *Immortal Emperor*, 25-8; Keller. "Byzantine Admirer," 343-8; Zakythinos, 1: 226-8;

from the crusade being organized under papal auspices, displays his own sense of mission regarding the survival of the Byzantine East and his developing hopes for the realization of cultural and spiritual reintegration of East and West.

After congratulating the Despot on the recent rebuilding of the Hexamilion, Bessarion proposes a series of reforms for improvement of defence, stimulation of the economy, stabilization of society and enhancement of intellectual life in the Morea. Plethon, in addresses to Theodore, Despot of the Morea (ca. 1407-15)⁵ and the Emperor Manuel II (ca. 1415-18),⁶ had previously proposed some of these same ideas.⁷ If implemented these measures would allow Constantine to exploit the Peloponnese by the combined efforts of the united Christian forces which had come into being with God's help as a result of the union of the churches.⁸

2. 356-8; Apostolos E. Vacalopoulos, *Origins of the Greek Nation. The Byzantine Period, 1204-1461*, trans. Ian Moles (New Brunswick, 1970), 172-8.

⁵*Advisory Address to the Despot Theodore on the Peloponnese*, PG 160, 841-66, and Lambros, *PP*, IV, 113-35.

⁶*Address to the Emperor Emmanuel on affairs in the Peloponnese*, PG 160, 821-40, and Lambros, *PP*, III, 146-65.

⁷See discussion of Nicol, *Immortal Emperor*, 25-7; idem, *Last Centuries*, 378-9; Keller, "Byzantine Admirer," 343-8; Zakythinos, 1: 226-8; 2. 356-8. These suggestions include movement of the capital from Mistra to the vicinity of the Hexamilion as a defensive strategy, a well trained and disciplined standing army, and a class division of workers and soldiers. Both Plethon and Bessarion saw that mineral resources were plentiful, systematic farming would increase produce, export of goods should be controlled, and import of luxury goods should cease. On Plethon's reforms and summary of his letter to Despot Theodore, see Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 92-8.

⁸Letter to Despot Constantine, *PP*, IV, 41.

Bessarion indicates that he knew the inhabitants of the Peloponnese well having spent a great part of his youth at Mistra and he realizes that the prevailing backward conditions in the Peloponnese, with the central government undermined by feudal practices and with trade dominated by Venetian interests (working against the establishment of Mistra as a commercial centre to rival Methone), allowed for the development of industry at only the local level.⁹ Indeed some of his information could have come to him by first-hand observation at Methone, where the Byzantine delegation had spent the Christmas season in 1437 *en route* to the Council of Florence¹⁰ and some time on the return journey to Constantinople in 1439.¹¹ Bessarion saw the Morea as a safe haven for immigrants and refugees who would provide manpower for its army, agriculture and industry,¹² an idea that had been prevalent amongst Byzantine intellectuals like Demetrius Kydones and even members of the imperial family for nearly a century.¹³ Certainly Bessarion was cognizant of such influences current in the Peloponnese, for the importance of trade and commerce are clearly expounded in his *Encomium of Trebizond* (1436) where he elaborated on the potential of that city becoming an international emporium.¹⁴

⁹Ibid., *PP*, IV, 41.

¹⁰Syropoulos, IV, 8-11, 204-8.

¹¹Ibid., XI, 14, 536.

¹²Letter to Despot Constantine, *PP*, IV, 34.

¹³See discussion by Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 83-4.

¹⁴Cf., *Encomium of Trebizond*, *PP*, IV, 176. See discussion of A. Kazhdan, "The Italian and Late Byzantine City," *DOP* 49 (1995): 4-5.

Bessarion's letter to Constantine also indicates, in view of the backward conditions obtaining in the Peloponnese, the importance he placed upon exploiting the cultural and technical expertise available in the West for he offers his own services as an educational agency and implores Constantine to restore "the practice of letters in which our nation was once supreme and from which all learning, knowledge and art are born and flower."¹⁵ He bemoans the illiteracy of those whose ancestors were "not only the founders and discoverers, but had already completed all branches of wisdom."¹⁶ Some young men should be sent to the West to receive instruction in the Humanities which would help to form them into a cultural élite. There was no shame in Greeks learning from the West since they would be reacquiring the wisdom that the Latins had acquired from the Greeks in the first place.¹⁷ Here, as above, one can draw a parallel with similar views expressed in his *Encomium of Trebizond*, where he indicated his own view of history, identified with the theme well-known in Roman literature of the captive taking the captor captive.¹⁸ However, the pragmatic side of Bessarion's personality is also clearly visible for he further suggests that a few young men should be instructed in craft-skills, the Italian language and technical knowledge related to engineering, mining, metallurgy, arms manufacture and shipbuilding.

¹⁵Letter to Despot Constantine, *PP*, IV, 42, trans. with discussion, Keller, "Byzantine Admirer," 347.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, *PP*, IV, 42.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, *PP*, IV, 42.

¹⁸*Encomium of Trebizond*, ed. Lambros, *PP*, IV, 176. See also Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 141-2.

through which means the natural resources of the Morea (timber from almost virgin forests and metal from mines) could be adequately exploited.¹⁹

A clear indication of Bessarion's sense of mission with regard to his endeavours in the West is gleaned from some of his concluding remarks for he states: "I am greatly in your debt and yet unable to be by your side ... and be your minister: nonetheless I would not remain here if useless to you."²⁰ Certainly here one sees the further development of a composite world view. Bessarion's western experience had reinforced the belief that he had previously held of Greece leading its captors captive, his acute awareness that the Byzantine future lay in the cosmopolitan atmosphere and economic potential of the Peloponnese and that western cultural and technological advancements provided the means to achieve these ends.²¹ Moreover, to Bessarion the approaching crusade was a tangible indication of God's blessing on the Union of Florence. Others in the East held a less positive view.

The Personal Cost of Accepting the Union

While to Bessarion the Union represented a spiritual and cultural reintegration of East and West, many in the East came to see their acceptance of it as the first step in a process of Latinization.²² The insensitivity of the Latin Church to the Byzantine perspective during the Council's duration came to loom large in their understanding: the Union achieved appeared

¹⁹Letter to Despot Constantine. *PP*, IV, 43-4.

²⁰*Ibid.*, *PP*, IV, 44.

²¹See Kazhdan, "Italian and Late Byzantine City," 4-5. See also Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 141-2.

²²On this aspect see Hussey, *Orthodox Church*, 285-6.

to be more and more hollow and gave the lie to the proclamation of one faith in a variety of rites and customs.²³ Hence, in retrospect, they came to see that they had betrayed their own faith because the agreement reached had been forced, made under duress and hardship, or bought with Latin gold.²⁴ The events at Florence had provided some element of truth to support such allegations.²⁵ Bessarion's continued adherence to the Union deprived him of valued friendships and earned him the chastisement of those he admired. The first casualty

²³Syropoulos relates how several incidents of Byzantine protocol were overridden during the course of the Council. The Emperor found his traditional right to convene the Council, steer its deliberations and publish its decisions had become the prerogative of the papacy (X, 4, 479). The Patriarch Joseph was horrified at the Latin expectation that he would kiss the foot of the Pope as an underling rather than exchange a brotherly kiss between equals (IV, 33, 232-4). Immediately after the union decree was proclaimed, the Pope tried to influence the election of a new Patriarch to replace Joseph II, even suggesting that the then Latin Patriarch of Constantinople could assume the office (X, 18, 502). Moreover, Syropoulos also states that Byzantine bishops did not regain immediate jurisdiction in areas in the East where a Latin bishop had been installed: Eugenius resolved that the see should revert to which of the two outlived the other (X, 21-2, 506-8). The Pope also denied a public celebration of the Eucharist in the Greek rite (X, 17, 500-2).

²⁴Syropoulos, XII, 15-17, 568-72; Doukas, *Decline and Fall*, 181-2, 203-4, 208-10, 215, 252 sq. Scholarius, in his *Second Dialogue on the Procession of the Holy Spirit*, *Oeuvres*, III, 4, states that the pro-unionists had been beguiled by ambition, and elsewhere in his writings that the signatures had been obtained by material and psychological pressure, including rewards of gold and positions. See *Oeuvres*, III, 87-8, 190-4, 145-7. See Turner, "Scholarius and Union," 91, and Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus*, 71, who notes that John Eugenicus, ed. Lambros, *PP*, I, 275-6, also identifies papal pressure and lack of funds for maintenance. See also Plethon's revelation of psychological pressure, Alexandre, ed., *Traité des Lois*, 311-2, and discussion by Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 224, 271, and Masai, *Pléthon et Platonisme*, 389-92.

²⁵This matter has been much debated. See especially Gill, *Council of Florence*, 403-11; idem, *Personalities of Council*, 12-14, 163-9, 186-203; Geanakoplos, "Council of Florence," 246-8. The pope had quite often been late with the payments promised to the Eastern delegation and had rewarded 3 key pro-unionists, Dorotheus of Mitylene, Bessarion and Isidore of Kiev, with pensions and the latter two, titles in the Roman church, in the months following the conclusion of the Council.

was his break with John Eugenicus,²⁶ the brother of Mark of Ephesus. Although John had shared many humanist pursuits with Bessarion in pre-council days, most (presumably) in the Peloponnese, he was as adamant as his brother in opposition to the Union.²⁷

While Bessarion's reputation suffered abuse from many quarters in the East, the prestige of Mark of Ephesus, the steadfast opponent of the Union, had, of course, been enhanced. He became the embodiment of anti-unionist sentiment in Byzantium, enduring exile and imprisonment, all the while entreating those who had signed to renounce their signatures.²⁸ His most important 'convert' was George Scholarius, who ca. 1443/4 became representative of those whose faith had been subverted at Florence but had come to see the error of their ways. He answered Mark's call to assume leadership of the anti-unionists²⁹ upon the latter's death (1445).³⁰

The *volte-face* of George Scholarius was likely most troubling to Bessarion. He might have been aware of his friend's doubts about having accepted the Union before the

²⁶The break in their friendship can be determined by the way John, in a collection of his letters, entitles his letter to Bessarion (1436) "Before he became a Unionist." Letter, ed. Lambros, *PP.* I, 164-5, discussed above, 92 and n. 157. See also Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus*, 67, and Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 140.

²⁷On John's opposition to the Union, see particularly Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus*, 66-75.

²⁸On this anti-unionist activity and sentiment see *Ibid.*, 67-76; Gill, *Personalities of Council*, 55-64.

²⁹On George as anti-unionist see Turner, "Scholarius and Union," 86 sq., *idem.* "Career of Scholarius," 431-8, with earlier literature: Gill, *Personalities of Council*, 79-94.

³⁰On Mark's death see J. Gill, "The Year of the Death of Mark Eugenicus," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 52 (1959): 23-31 in *idem.* *Personalities of Council*, 222-32.

latter's departure from Italy. George left the Council before the Proclamation of Union in the company of Plethon and the Emperor's brother, Demetrius, a consistent opponent of union.³¹ George's discovery (1440)³² of Beccus' condemnation by the Synod of Constantinople (1286) shocked him and, no doubt, fuelled his already existing doubts about his actions in Florence.³³ Bessarion's *Defence of John Beccus* could very well have been written at this same time during his short sojourn in Constantinople in an effort to assuage such concerns. George did himself write a defence of the *filioque* against Mark of Ephesus' objections in 1440.³⁴ at the request of the Emperor's Confessor, Gregory, where George indicated that there was some evidence to support the Latin doctrine and refuted the heretical or illogical implications which Eugenius had drawn from it.³⁵

Subsequently, after his assumption of an anti-unionist position (ca. 1443/4 during the preparations for the Crusade of Varna), George also wrote a treatise against Bessarion's

³¹Syropoulos, IX, 25, 460.

³²*Oeuvres*, III, 85.

³³The view of Turner, "Scholarius and Union," 86 sq., who sees Scholarius' assumption of a unionist role underwent a genuine gradual evolution, encompassing personal, political, psychological and theological factors. Gill, *Personalities of Council*, 91-3, and Jugie, in Scholarius, *Oeuvres*, VII, App. 44-7, lay more stress on personal vanity. Bessarion and Isidore received honours and titles in Italy; George's many talents were not recognized there but, rather, in Constantinople by Mark of Ephesus, who certainly knew the makeup of his chosen successor.

³⁴*Refutation of the Syllogisms of Mark Eugenius*, PG 161, 12-137, and *Oeuvres*, III, 476-538. Work dated and discussed by Turner, "Scholarius and Union," 93.

³⁵In this work George addressed the first 17 of Mark's 37 syllogisms.

Oratio dogmatica,³⁶ in which he acknowledges their friendship with some nostalgia and makes a telling comparison between his own life and that of his former friend. He bemoans the loss of an intelligent confidant who always rejoiced in his [Scholarius'] accomplishments. He appreciated better than everyone Bessarion's literary power: he admired him and valued him more than others. But while Bessarion now occupies a distinguished place in Italy, George, for his part, must abide with his fellow-countrymen, who are certainly good men but, except for a few, not well-educated and are lacking 'love for letters.'³⁷ He then proceeds to a criticism of Bessarion's *Oratio* on two points: its theology and its composition without George's knowledge and advice.³⁸ He acknowledges that the double procession of the Holy Spirit was taught by the Latin Fathers and, on the base of the axiom of the consensus of the Fathers, it was to be accepted.³⁹ However, if George had conveyed the impression of agreeing with them, when his intention had only been not to attack them, this was due to youthful enthusiasm.⁴⁰ It is not possible to determine

³⁶Only a fragment of this work survives. See *Contre le discours de Bessarion. Extrait, Oeuvres*, III, 100-16 (identified by Turner, "Scholarius and Union," 90, as Scholarius' earliest extant work in which he openly speaks out against the Union).

³⁷*Oeuvres*, III, 115, 1-10; trans. with discussion, by Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 136.

³⁸Turner, "Scholarius and Union," 93; Storman, "Bessarion before Council," 136.

³⁹*Oeuvres*, III, 116, 8-12.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, III, 116, 27-33.

whether Bessarion ever personally saw the contents of this treatise.⁴¹ He might only have heard of George's criticism and *volte-face* from others.

In his early years in Italy Bessarion continued to correspond on purely philosophical questions with his old mentor, Plethon.⁴² However, in 1449 Plethon, too, wrote a treatise against the Latin doctrine,⁴³ an exercise (according to his most recent biographer) in logic, political theory and theology.⁴⁴ Plethon argues on purely metaphysical grounds applicable to Hellenic philosophy (all the while emphasising in his theological exposition why such pure speculation was repugnant to the Eastern Church) that the Latin Doctrine on the Procession is erroneous.⁴⁵ At the end of the theological part of his argument he provides quotations from the Eastern Fathers much discussed in the debates at Florence which, in his mind, prove the greater consistency of the Eastern Fathers on the Procession of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁶ He then states that the Greeks were not defeated by the Latins in argument but,

⁴¹See Turner, "Scholarium and Union," 93, who states that George was reluctant to publish his views during the period leading up to his formal embrace of the anti-unionist position some time in 1444.

⁴²Bessarion's letters, Mohler, 3, 455-8, 463-5; Plethon's replies, Mohler, 3, 458-63, 465-8. See also Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 233-7.

⁴³*Reply to Treatise in Support of the Latin Doctrine*, PG 160, 976-80: summary, Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 273-7. This treatise is in response to a work by George Argyropoulos in support of the *filioque*, ed. Sp. Lambros, *Ἀργυροπούεια*, (Athens, 1910), 107-28, not as was sometimes formerly supposed a rebuttal of Bessarion's *Oratio dogmatica*. See Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 224, 271; cf., Masai, *Pléthon et platonisme*, 389-92.

⁴⁴Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 273.

⁴⁵*Reply to Treatise*, PG 160, 975A-978C.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, PG 160, 978D-979A.

rather, by agreements made for expediency, which denied faith in the divine Providence.⁴⁷

In reply to a letter from Bessarion inquiring why he had not put forward these arguments at Florence, Plethon states that he personally did not think a layman should intervene in a debate amongst priests and that, in any case, laymen had been forbidden to do so by 'you people,' including Bessarion and the present Patriarch (Gregory III). Moreover, he explains that Mark of Ephesus had quite adequately presented the anti-Latin arguments and that he had never been defeated in debate, only commanded to be silent, 'so that your party could carry out your intentions in default of an adversary'. Hence, in Plethon's opinion, all but a few of those who had signed had retracted since they had never truly been convinced.⁴⁸ Despite these biting remarks from his old mentor, upon Plethon's death (ca. 1452) Bessarion wrote letters of condolence to his two sons and to one of his friends.⁴⁹

The negative reaction against the Union and his own role in its achievement, particularly the attitude of his one-time friends, certainly affected Bessarion. Although residing in Italy, he was very much involved in the polemical debate raging in the East between the pro-unionist and anti-unionist forces. He replied to queries and composed treatises, some on his own initiative, others at the behest of the beleaguered Gregory

⁴⁷Ibid., *PG* 160, 980B-C.

⁴⁸Bessarion's letter is not extant. Plethon's reply, ed. Alexandre, *Traité des Lois*, 311-12; summary of letter in Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 277.

⁴⁹Mohler, 3, 468-70; Alexandre, 404-6; *PG* 161, 695-8, discussed above, 80.

Mammas, who occupied the Patriarchal throne at Constantinople from ca. 1443/5 to 1451,⁵⁰ the year in which, under overwhelming pressure exerted by the anti-unionist forces, he fled to the West where he died in 1459. A perusal of Bessarion's theological works composed in Italy indicate his evolving attitude towards the *filioque*, the Union and the rejection by the anti-unionists in the East.

Bessarion's Evolving View on the *Filioque*, the Union and the Eastern Church

In his *Oratio dogmatica* Bessarion had appealed to understanding and to the traditional apophatic attitude of his Church with regard to doctrinal statements. He did not abandon this approach in his later works, for as his *Defence of John Beccus* makes clear, he continually advanced the same apophatic understanding of the Trinity as a mystery in order to provide the means of accepting the Latin doctrine of relations within the Trinity.⁵¹ However, the pressure of the polemical debate forced him more and more towards a metaphysical explanation of the *filioque*, which is already apparent in his *Defence of John Beccus*. For the most part this would be the case in all his subsequent theological works dealing with the Latin doctrine.

⁵⁰Historians still debate the actual date of Gregory's election. Metrophanes II, his predecessor, died on 1 August 1443, but it is unclear exactly when Gregory was installed. For discussion see Gill, *Council of Florence*, 365 and n. 1, where Gill suggests, on the available evidence, 1445.

⁵¹*Defence of John Beccus*, PG 161, 273-6. Regarding Bessarion's use of Beccus, see discussion above, Chapter IV, 112-16 and 124-7, and Gill, "Sincerity of Bessarion," 387-8.

Bessarion's lengthy letter, *De Spiritus Sancti processione ad Alexium Lascarin Philanthropinum*.⁵² (ca. 1444/5)⁵³, is his second reply to queries from Lascaris,⁵⁴ a representative of the imperial government in the Peloponnese.⁵⁵ Bessarion describes him as competent in human and divine affairs, one who loved to investigate the truth and able to understand the authority of the Fathers celebrated at the Council, for which purpose Bessarion sends him the appropriate texts.⁵⁶

The body of Bessarion's letter is divided into two definite parts. In the first, he provides a defence for his actions at the Council of Florence and his acceptance of the Union, together with the rationale and evidence upon which he based his decision and continued to

⁵²Item No. 34 in *Marc. gr.* 533, ed. Candal. For overview and analysis of text see introduction by Candal, xi-l. See also Gill, "Sincerity of Bessarion," 388-90.

⁵³For overview of scholarship on dating of *De Spiritus Sancti processione*, see introduction by Candal, ed., xviii-xx. Candal narrows the date of writing to before the death of Mark of Ephesus in June 1445, but one could suggest, based upon its chronological place in Bessarion's autograph manuscript, that it would have been written prior to his letter to the Despot Constantine (Item No. 35), i.e., before summer 1444.

⁵⁴*De Spiritus Sancti processione, Prooemium*, 1, p. 3; the first letter is no longer extant.

⁵⁵On identification of Alexius Lascaris as a member of the distinguished imperial Lascaris family and resident in the Peloponnese, see introduction by Candal, ed., *De Spiritus Sancti processione*, xvi-xvii. As Candal notes, Sphrantzes, *Fall of the Byzantine Empire*, makes 2 references to 'Alexios Laskaris', as holding first Vostiza (1429) and then Patras (1444) as fiefs under the Despot Constantine (XVII, 3, p. 35 and XXVII, 2, p. 55) and then a reference to 'Alexios Philanthropenos Laskaris' as having been dispatched by the Despot on business to Constantinople, returning to the Morea just prior to the crowning of Constantine as emperor at Mistra (6 January 1448) (XXXIX, 4, p. 57).

⁵⁶*De Spiritus Sancti processione, Prooemium* 1, 3, pp. 3-4; *Pars Prima* 43, p. 32; 55, pp. 40-1.

hold fast to it.⁵⁷ He also relates how the Eastern delegation was unable to make a reply to the Latin arguments.⁵⁸ The second part presents, on Lascaris' request, philosophical arguments on the thorny issue of the Procession of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁹ where the apophatic approach in his earlier works, his *Oratio dogmatica* and *Defence of John Beccus*, is also clearly present.⁶⁰ As Gill has shown *De Spiritus Sancti processione* indicates a progressive elaboration and understanding of the Latin doctrine.⁶¹

Much of Bessarion's increasing expertise was due to his study of Augustine's *De Trinitate*, for he cites this work several times in *De Spiritus Sancti processione* in support of his argument, based upon the axiom adopted in the *Tome of Union* that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son as if from one principle.⁶² It was also becoming abundantly clear to Bessarion that the root of the problem lay in Photius' questioning of Augustine's theology, which had been ill-advised and in error.⁶³

⁵⁷Ibid., 20-55, pp. 18-41.

⁵⁸Ibid., 50-55, pp. 37-41. Cf. Scholarios, *Oeuvres* IV, 432-3, who also spoke out loudly and often on this point.

⁵⁹Ibid., *Pars Altera*, 56-118, pp. 41-86.

⁶⁰Ibid., 56-61, pp. 41-46.

⁶¹See Gill, "Sincerity of Bessarion," 389-90.

⁶²Candal, ed., introduction to *De Spiritus Sancti processione*, xiv, identifies two citations of Augustine to be from *De Trinitate*, Book V, 15 and 16. See *De Spiritus Sancti processione*, 99, p. 71 and 105, p. 76. A third citation refers to *De Trinitate*, Book IV, 29. See *De Spiritus Sancti processione*, 117, p. 85.

⁶³Ibid., 86, p. 61; 94, p. 67; and 97, p. 69.

Bessarion's study of Augustine's theology and of the long-standing positive and negative reactions against it in the East is confirmed by his short tract, *Refutatio Syllogismorum Maximi Planudae de Processione Spiritus Sancti Contra Latinos*⁶⁴ (ca. 1443-50).⁶⁵ Bessarion replies to the arguments against Augustine's *De Trinitate* put forward by the scholar-monk, Maximus Planoudes (ca. 1255-ca. 1305),⁶⁶ which accused the Latins of having destroyed the monarchy of the Father and of having introduced two principles into

⁶⁴PG 161. 309-17.

⁶⁵See Vast, *Cardinal Bessarion*. 149, who dates this work to ca. 1443-7, based on the latter date as the year of the death of Mark of Ephesus (which has since Vast's time has been shown to have occurred in 1445) and on the assumption that Bessarion wrote his refutation of Mark (to be discussed below) before Mark's death. On the new dating of the latter's death, see Gill, "Year of Death of Mark Eugenicus," 222-32.

⁶⁶Planoudes, a scholar and teacher at the Monastery of Chora in Constantinople, had a considerable reputation as a grammarian and a philologist. He edited, corrected and commented on texts and was an avid collector and copier of manuscripts, mostly of the Greek classics. He was a renowned mathematician, who introduced Arabic numerals, including 0 and decimals to Greek numerals (although their use did not become common until the beginning of the fifteenth century); he also composed an anthology of epigrams and wrote a historical geography. He learned Latin and translated into Greek excerpts from Ovid and Cicero and the whole of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* and Augustine's *De Trinitate*. Planoudes was involved in the politics of his time and moved in court circles. He at first looked favourably upon the union of the churches but with the accession of Andronicus II to the throne (1282) he reversed his position and wrote against the *filioque*. See Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, 230-41; Runciman, *Last Byzantine Renaissance*, 59-60; Nicol, *Church and society*, 34, 54-5, 77-8; Reynolds and Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars*, 66, 73-5, 234; Angeliki Laiou, "Some Observations on Alexios Philanthropenos and Maximus Planoudes," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 4 (1978), 89-99. See Petrus Aloisius M. Leone, ed., *Maximi Monachi Planudis Epistulae*, (Amsterdam, 1991) for the recent publication of Planoudes' letters.

the Godhead.⁶⁷ Bessarion expresses considerable admiration for Planoudes as a scholar⁶⁸ but not for his explanation of Augustine's theology. Planoudes, says Bessarion, had translated into Greek, "this work inspired by God, where the author proves that the Holy Spirit proceeds divinely from the Father and the Son."⁶⁹ Bessarion chastises Planoudes' attempt to weaken the effect of certain phrases or to give them his own interpretation.⁷⁰ Some of Bessarion's own developing understanding of Augustine's theology on the Trinity also came to him through Demetrius Kydones, for he acknowledges the latter's earlier repudiation of Planoudes.⁷¹

Bessarion's refutation cannot be dated to 1444 with certainty: his familiarity with Augustine's theology, particularly in the Latin tongue, might not have been so well advanced by that time. However, Candal suggests that Bessarion's texts from Augustine, which in *De Spiritus* he states he was sending to Lascaris, would have been from the Greek translation of *De Trinitate* by Planoudes, as indicated by his several references from this work in his letter.⁷² Moreover, it is certain that George Scholarius also used Planoudes' translation

⁶⁷*Refutatio Syllogismorum Maximi Planoudae*, PG 161, 309-12.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, PG 161, 317, where he praises Planoudes' expertise in all the disciplines and his abilities as a philosopher and knowledge of the Greek language.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, PG 161, 317.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, PG 161, 317. See Runciman, *Last Byzantine Renaissance*, 60, who notes that Planoudes was not always an accurate translator.

⁷¹*Refutatio Syllogismorum Maximi Planoudae*, PG, 161, 312.

⁷²Candal, ed., introduction to *De Spiritus Sancti processione*, xiv and n. 1.

before the Council⁷³ and, such being the case, Bessarion could have had access to it from an even earlier date. Bessarion might well have resolved prior to his letter to Lascaris that the Latin Fathers (particularly Augustine as stated in his refutation of Planoudes) had been misrepresented in the East. His *De Spiritus Sancti processione* itself makes clear that, in his mind, considerable tampering with the truth of doctrine had already occurred there.

Bessarion's oft quoted remarks in his letter to Lascaris indicate that he definitely felt the bite of the anti-unionist campaign against him. In answer to the charge being bandied about that he had succumbed to Latin syllogisms he emphatically exclaimed to Lascaris:

It was not the syllogisms nor the cogency of proofs nor the force of arguments that led me to believe this, but the plain words of the Doctors. For when I saw and heard them, at once I put aside all contention and controversy and yielded to the authority of those whose words they were, even though until then I had been not a little active in opposition. For I judged that the holy Fathers, speaking as they did in the Holy Spirit, could not have departed from the truth, and I was grieved that I had not heard their words before.⁷⁴

Bessarion's preoccupation with the 'truth' weighed heavily on all Byzantines, for in their perspective God's wrath descended upon those who departed from sound doctrine.⁷⁵ As Ševčenko notes, the difficulty was in discovering which version of the 'truth' was correct. The pro-unionists could first point (as did Bessarion in his letter to the Despot Constantine discussed above) to the benevolence of western aid as the result of God's blessing on the Union and then to the defeat of the Crusade of Varna and the fall of

⁷³*Oeuvres*, II, 229, 9. See discussion of Turner, "Career of Scholarius," 424.

⁷⁴*De Spiritus Sancti processione*, 55, pp. 40-1. See also Gill, "Was Bessarion a Conciliarist," 210-11; Erickson, "Filioque and Fathers," 159.

⁷⁵On the question of 'truth' in this regard see the penetrating analysis of Ševčenko, "Intellectual Repercussions," 8 sq.

Constantinople as the sure sign of God's displeasure with those who refused to accept sound doctrine.⁷⁶ The anti-Unionists could use the ineffectiveness of such aid as clear evidence that they had abandoned doctrinal truth and, further, that it was in turning to man's help instead of relying upon God for a miraculous deliverance from the Turk which sealed their fate.⁷⁷ The penalty to be exacted by the divine wrath for abandoning the true orthodox faith permeates the anti-unionist propaganda, including that of Mark of Ephesus,⁷⁸ of his brother, John Eugenicus,⁷⁹ of George Scholarius (upon his official conversion to the anti-unionist fold ca. 1443/4)⁸⁰ and, at length, even that of Plethon.⁸¹

Certainly the Emperor John VIII (d. 1448) felt himself on the horns of a dilemma.⁸² He knew that he could not force his will upon the Church; therefore, he allowed free and open discussion between the opposing factions during and after the Council.⁸³ He considered

⁷⁶See this explanation provided by the Pro-Unionist Byzantine historian, Doukas. *Decline and Fall of Byzantium*, XXXIX, 22, 220-9.

⁷⁷Ibid., XLV, 254-61. See also Scholarius. *Oeuvres*, I, 300, III, 97, 147-9. See Ševčenko, "Intellectual Repercussions," 8; Nicol, *Church and society*, 14-15; Nichols, *Rome and Eastern Churches*, 263.

⁷⁸"Documents relatifs," II, ed. Petit, 463.

⁷⁹See his letters ed. Lambros. *PP*, I: to Emperor Constantine XI (59-61, 123-56); Lucas Notaras (187-90); Syropoulos (191-5); George Amiroutzes (156-7); George Scholarius (319-22). See also Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus*, 67-73; idem, "John Eugenicus," 264-74.

⁸⁰*Oeuvres*, III, 96-8, 149, 157-62.

⁸¹*PG* 160, 980 A-C. See also Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 276-7.

⁸²On John VIII's attitude towards the Union at Florence and thereafter see Gill, *Personalities of the Council*, 104-24.

⁸³See Hussey, *Orthodox Church*, 285.

that union would provide the needed material support for his temporal realm, but neither the death of his wife (18 December 1439) shortly before his return to Constantinople nor the defeat of the Crusade at Varna (10 November 1444) could be viewed as propitious signs and might, on the contrary, be interpreted as clear indications of God's displeasure. Hence the vacillation on the union ascribed to him by both pro-unionist and anti-unionist forces is quite understandable.⁸⁴

Bessarion's whole defence of his own actions to Lascaris indicates that his acceptance of the Union was based upon the certitude of having found the 'truth.' In the early stages of the Council, he had been steadfast in his belief that the Byzantine Church retained the true faith inviolate for, he stated: "We do not have any other base for understanding except the truth. But since we have the truth with us, this is what we take as the base of understanding and we have no need of any other, since we could never find anything better than the truth."⁸⁵

He was subsequently convinced that the Latin faith was also valid, for in his *Oratio dogmatica* he stated that both the Eastern and Western Fathers of the Church were illuminated by the light of truth and by the faith through which they overcame the darkness of error,⁸⁶ as he exclaims to Lascaris, the Fathers could 'not depart from the truth.' Upon his return to Constantinople, he sought evidence of this 'truth'.

⁸⁴See Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 220-1; Ševčenko, "Intellectual Repercussions," 10. The unionist Patriarch Metrophanes II (d. 1443) twice resigned in protest against John's inactivity. See Gill, *Council of Florence*, 350-7.

⁸⁵Syropoulos, V, 11, 266; cf. *Acta Graeca*, 20-21. See discussion above, 106 and n. 12.

⁸⁶*Oratio dogmatica*, II, 14, p. 14. See discussion above, Chapter IV, 118.

Bessarion relates to Lascaris the details of the protracted debate at Florence with regard to the correct reading of the disputed passage of Basil's *Adversus Eunomium*.⁸⁷ As he further informs Lascaris, during his brief stay at Constantinople after the Council he had proven to his own satisfaction the correctness of the Latin interpretation of the disputed passage which spoke of the Holy Spirit as third in order and dignity (thus lending support to the *filioque*). This point had been crucial to Bessarion's own evolving acceptance of the Latin doctrine at the Council. He details to Lascaris how he found that manuscripts written after the schism had the Greek text but just as many written before the schism had the Latin text. Further, he indicates that he had found two copies of Basil's work in the monastery of Christ the Saviour Pantepoptes (one, an undated parchment, the other, on paper, dated some three hundred years earlier) which had undergone tampering, with the original wording of the Latin text having been expunged so carelessly that it was still visible. Bessarion then rails against the Byzantines for their hypocrisy in accusing the Latins of corrupting codices and points out that in the oldest manuscripts the wording of the text favoured by the Latins was written in such impeccable Greek that they could not be Latin forgeries.⁸⁸

Moreover, Bessarion now openly acknowledges his debt to the Unionist Patriarch, John Beccus,⁸⁹ which might indicate that Lascaris had inquired about the reliance on Beccus in view of the furor caused in the East upon the anti-unionists' discovery of Beccus'

⁸⁷See discussion of same above, Chapter IV, 108-9.

⁸⁸*De Spiritus Sancti processione, Pars Prima*, 9-10, pp. 8-10. See also Gill, "Sincerity of Bessarion," 388-9.

⁸⁹*De Spiritus Sancti processione, Pars Prima*, 10, pp. 9-11.

condemnation by the synod of his day. Bessarion states: "So no more can any one with any display of justice censure Beccus and those like him, since books from long before Beccus' day proclaim the truth."⁹⁰ Bessarion supports his acceptance of Beccus' views with texts from the Greek Fathers of the Church.⁹¹

In Bessarion's mind, the Eastern Church had for some considerable time departed from the 'truth.' Augustine's works had been available in Greek translation in the East since the thirteenth century. Beccus was indeed correct that the whole *filioque* question had been 'a quarrel over words.'⁹² Admonitions against such squabbles had been voiced by writers so far apart as Gregory of Nazianzus⁹³ in the fourth century and Gregory Palamas⁹⁴ in the fourteenth century. Reference to Palamas' remarks (a paraphrase of Gregory of Nazianzus' views) had even been made by Andrew Chrysoberges at the Council in an attempt to inspire a spirit of conciliation and co-operation.⁹⁵

Bessarion's letter to Lascaris has some points in common with his letter to Despot Constantine. Both were written in the critical period just prior to the Crusade of Varna.

⁹⁰Ibid., 10, pp. 9-10.

⁹¹Ibid., 11-19, pp. 11-17.

⁹²*Epigraphai*, PG 141, 613B, as discussed above, Chapter IV, 111.

⁹³Or.39.11, PG 36, 345C.

⁹⁴PG 151, 725A.

⁹⁵*Acta Graeca*, 102-3: "We must not behave in unseemly fashion, vainly quarreling about words," citing Gregory Palamas, PG 151, 725A, who paraphrases Gregory of Nazianzus, PG 36, 345C. See Erickson, "Filioque and Fathers," 166-7, and Gill, *Council of Florence*, 152.

Lascaris was resident in the Peloponnese, where the union enjoyed the most success, and where its metropolitans adhered to the signatures given, promoting the union amongst the clergy and people.⁹⁶ Bessarion was increasingly frustrated with the anti-unionists. The mass of people and the lower clergy might not possess the ability to understand, but certainly this was not the case with his learned adversaries. The anti-unionist machinations, particularly at the imperial court, reinforced an idea that Bessarion had been forming for quite some time. The Peloponnese represented the East's best hope for a political, economic, cultural and military resurgence. The metropolitans and the Despot Constantine were doing their part to promote the union there: Bessarion was doing his in Italy.⁹⁷ Moreover, in Bessarion's understanding if, as should have been the case, the validity of Beccus' acceptance of the Union of Lyons and the truth of his explanation of the Latin doctrine had been recognized two centuries earlier, the East might have been saved the whole trauma of the Turkish menace, which could be interpreted as the manifestation of God's displeasure.

⁹⁶List cited by Gill, "Sincerity of Bessarion," 387 and n. 2. Gill notes that none of the Greek Metropolitans who accepted the Union rejected it, pointing out that they were all from the outlying districts, i.e., the Peloponnese and Rhodes. For the unionist tendencies at Mistra under the Despot Constantine, 1443-8, see also Woodhouse, *Gemistos Plethon*, 220-4.

⁹⁷That this was the case is clear from the anti-unionist literature, where appeals are made to individuals in the Peloponnese to reject the Union and to others in positions of authority to take repressive measures against the pro-unionists. See the letter of John Eugenicus (1453), ed. Lambros, *PP*, I, 180-2, written from the Peloponnese to the Despot David of Trebizond, where he suggests, 181-2, that the Emperor Constantine should take measures against the four 'Latinizer' dioceses in the Peloponnese: Karyoupolis, Amyclai, Momembasia, Elos. See Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus*, 71, and Zakythinis, 2: 271-86. The Patriarch Gregory also wrote to the Emperor of Trebizond, encouraging him to support the Union. Text of letter, *PG* 160, 205-18. See also Gill, *Council of Florence*, 368.

Bessarion's subsequent treatise, *Refutatio Marci Ephesini*,⁹⁸ (ca. 1445-50)⁹⁹, is in actuality a letter, written at the Patriarch's request.¹⁰⁰ Bessarion complains about the continued debate in the East. He points to his previous works as being totally able to dispel all the arguments of his opponents.¹⁰¹ "We repeat the same things without bringing forward anything new. It is not possible in fact to find any other solutions, for the language of the truth is simple."¹⁰² Bessarion then outlines the essence of the debate as formulated in Mark's eighteenth chapter, refuting his adversary's contention that, according to the Latin doctrine, the Holy Spirit proceeds from two different principles and He is a creature.¹⁰³

⁹⁸PG 161, 137-244.

⁹⁹Dated by Mohler, I, 235, and Gill, "Sincerity of Bessarion," 390, to ca. 1450. However, Vast, *Cardinal Bessarion*, 141, opts for the earlier date, since Bessarion addresses Mark throughout as if he were still alive, a finding in which Candal, ed., introduction to *De Spiritus Sancti processione*, xix, concurs. However, this is by no means conclusive evidence, since style would influence the tone of the work. Bessarion's refutation begins where the treatise of George Scholarius against Mark left off, i.e., at syllogism 18. See discussion above, 151 and n. 35. Since Bessarion does not identify George by name, but instead refers to the efforts of *others*, this might indicate that Bessarion had only recently become aware that George was part of the anti-unionist ranks. Some support for a later date might be found in the letter from Plethon to Bessarion (1448), discussed above 155. It could have provided added incentive for Bessarion to defend his own views since Plethon soundly praised Mark, his theology and his conduct during the Council, while at the same time roundly criticizing Bessarion.

¹⁰⁰There are three extant refutations of Mark of Ephesus' anti-unionist polemics: the one under discussion by Bessarion, one by the Patriarch Gregory III, PG 160, 13-204, and one by Joseph of Methone, PG 159, 1024-1093, a contemporary of Bessarion.

¹⁰¹*Refutatio Marci Ephesini*, PG 161, 140.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 141.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 141-5.

The debate on Palamas' theology, which many modern theologians deem could have resolved the *filioque* dispute¹⁰⁴ had it occurred at Florence,¹⁰⁵ does infiltrate the polemic of Bessarion and Mark, although it is never clearly stated as such. Mark, following in the line of Gregory of Cyprus and Gregory Palamas, maintains that the Greek Fathers only refer to the Procession of the Holy Spirit 'from' the Father 'through' the Son, by which they mean His consubstantiality with the Father and the Son, not His mode of being,¹⁰⁶ and that 'through the Son' refers to His energetic manifestation.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, Mark strenuously opposes Aquinas' theory of different origin and opposite relations for distinguishing the hypostases in the Trinity, stating that these are distinguished only in their different modes of being and their different properties. He concludes that those who accept the *filioque* have confused the hypostatic or existential procession of the Holy Spirit with his mission or energetic manifestation.¹⁰⁸

Bessarion once again returns to the orthodox apophatic approach to the understanding of God, repeating at great length what he had already made clear in his *Oratio dogmatica*. Statements about the nature of the Holy Trinity must be couched in negative terms with

¹⁰⁴On development of the Trinitarian debate from Photius through Gregory of Cyprus and Gregory Palamas and then in the writings of Mark of Ephesus see Orphanos, "Procession of Holy Spirit according to later Greek Fathers," 21-45.

¹⁰⁵See discussion above, Chapter IV, 130.

¹⁰⁶*Capita Syllogistica*, 38, ed. Petit, "Documents relatifs," II, 406-7.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 20-1, 389-91.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 13, 384; 4, 373-6; 25-6, 396-7. A great deal of this part of Mark's argument was extensively covered in the earlier part of his treatise, to which George Scholarius, not Bessarion, replied.

regard to what unites and what distinguishes them. He indicates that the relations between the persons, if one focussed on their different properties, could be understood in the Latin manner.¹⁰⁹ Bessarion does not condemn Palamas' theology on the distinctions between the divine essence and energies. His aim is merely to show how this theology can incorporate the western understanding of the Trinity. He had confirmed by his own study that Augustine's works were deeply permeated with apophatic theology.¹¹⁰ Indeed it has been suggested that both Gregory Palamas and George Scholarius also sought ways in which the Latin doctrine could be reconciled with the Eastern understanding, particularly with regard to the manifestation of God in His uncreated energies.¹¹¹ However, Mark of Ephesus and many of his anti-unionist followers were not of a mind for compromise or conciliation.

Bessarion's grief and dismay at the continued intransigence of his adversaries and the futility of further debate is clear for he states: "I have spoken for you, very Holy Lord, who know these things much better than me, for you have already suffered, and voluntarily so, for the truth."¹¹² However, at Gregory's insistence¹¹³ he then proceeds to a point-by-point refutation of the age-old arguments that Mark of Ephesus had put forward to show, by

¹⁰⁹*Refutatio Marci Ephesini*, PG 161, 145-64, esp. 153-64. See also Gill, "Sincerity of Bessarion," 390-1, who notes that here Bessarion has presented a small tractate laying out his understanding of the nature of the Trinity.

¹¹⁰On apophatic elements in Augustine's *De Trinitate*, see Lossky, "Climate Théologique au Concile," 248.

¹¹¹See Meyendorff, *Gregory Palamas*, 228-2, 239-40; Erickson, "Filioque and Fathers," 163-5; Guichardan, "Problème de la simplicité," 183-212.

¹¹²*Refutatio Marci Ephesini*, PG 161, 164.

¹¹³*Ibid.*, 165.

metaphysical demonstration, how the Latin doctrine was heretical and that neither the scriptures, the Councils nor the Eastern Fathers had ever supported it.¹¹⁴ Although for the most part Bessarion's treatise is the reasoned, calm exposition of a theologian against the arguments of his opponent, he does at times indulge in invective against his adversary,¹¹⁵ as indeed, George Scholarius had also previously done.¹¹⁶ Bessarion's barbs are nonetheless usually considered mild in comparison to those of Mark. In addition to learned theologians, the latter's audience included the uncultured general populace and often ignorant monks: he thus combined clear theological exposition with an appeal to emotions, forebodings and fears.¹¹⁷

While Bessarion continued to defend the Latin *filioque* and the Union and to investigate and to study Latin Trinitarian theology, particularly the works of Augustine, he was also very much involved in further attempts to bring material succour to the beleaguered East. After the fall of Constantinople in 1453 Bessarion worked long and hard to obtain relief for the East in the form of a crusade as the last remnants of the once-great empire fell, undertaking several missions for successive popes in Germany and in Venice to negotiate or to organize efforts against the Islamic inroads.¹¹⁸ For the rest of his life he continued to

¹¹⁴Ibid., 165-243. On Mark's position see Orphanos, "Procession of Holy Spirit according to late Fathers," 35-42; Tsirpanlis, *Mark Eugenicus*, 85-94.

¹¹⁵*Refutatio Marci Ephesini*, 157.

¹¹⁶*Refutation of the Syllogisms of Mark Eugenicus*, PG 161, 12-137, discussed above, 152.

¹¹⁷See Gill, *Personalities of Council*, 64.

¹¹⁸For synopsis of these efforts see *ibid.*, 51.

support the Eastern refugees as they fled the advancing Turks.¹¹⁹ He ransomed individuals from their Islamic captors, provided pensions and offered employment to his fellow Byzantines. He recognized the claims of the Palaeologan House to the imperial throne: he secured maintenance and honours for members of the imperial family in the West and took upon himself the task of educating the orphaned children of the Despot Thomas.¹²⁰

Upon receiving news of the fall of Constantinople, Bessarion immediately set in motion a plan to rescue the cultural and spiritual inheritance of his homeland. In a letter to Michael Apostolis (ca. 1454/5), he instructed him to secure copies of all Greek theological and classical works.

for the benefit of my Greek countrymen who are left now remnants of the Hellenes and who, without these few vestiges of these excellent and divine authors which have been preserved, would differ in no way from barbarians and slaves: these must be stored in some safe place in anticipation of the day when the Hellenes will once more be a free nation.¹²¹

Examples of Byzantines distinguishing themselves as *Hellenes* can be documented in the eleventh century and the practice could have existed much earlier. They did so for two reasons: in reaction to the Latins' use of the pejorative term 'Greeks' with regard to them

¹¹⁹For these events see Steven Runciman, *The Fall of Constantinople, 1453* (Cambridge, 1965), 181-7; Nicol, *Last Centuries*, 424-5; Gill, *Personalities of Council*, 50-1.

¹²⁰See Phrantzes, *Fall of the Byzantine Empire*, XLII, 11, p. 87.

¹²¹Letter 30, Mohler, 3, 478-9.

and to affirm the superiority of Byzantine culture over the Latins, a practice that had for centuries identified the West as barbarians.¹²²

Many members of late Byzantine society harboured the belief that Byzantium would rise again. Some embraced contemporary eschatology (encompassing the legends surrounding the death of the last emperor and the rebirth of Byzantium).¹²³ others, the ideology of what became known as 'the Great Idea' (plans to rescue the East from Islam),¹²⁴ and still others considered that nothing short of the *barbarization* of the only civilized people of the world would signify the end of history.¹²⁵ Bessarion himself could easily be displaying the latter two views in his letter to Michael Apostolis.

Moreover, although he certainly recognized the eldest son of the Despot Thomas, Andrew (b. 1453), as the legitimate emperor upon his father's death (1465)¹²⁶ and sought

¹²²See Hélène Ahrweiler, *L'idéologie politique de l'empire byzantin* (Paris, 1975), 61-2; Michael Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni, 1081-1261* (Cambridge, 1995), 512. See also Geanakoplos, "Theodore Gaza, a Byzantine Scholar of the Palaeologan 'Renaissance' in the Early Italian Renaissance (c. 1400-1475)," *Hē Thessalonikē Metaxū Anatolēs kai Dyseōs* (1982), revised, idem, *Constantinople and West*, 80-1; idem, *Interaction Sibling*, 172; idem, *Greek Scholars in Venice: Studies in the Dissemination of Greek Learning from Byzantium to Western Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), 103; Vacapoulos, *Origins of the Greek Nation*, 35.

¹²³On the legends surrounding Constantine XI see Nicol, *Immortal Emperor*, 74-127.

¹²⁴On the development of the 'Great Idea' from its inception in the exile states during the Latin occupation of Constantinople (1204-61) see Ahrweiler, *L'idéologie politique*, 107-14; Vacapoulos, *Origins of Greek Nation*, 35.

¹²⁵Ahrweiler, *L'idéologie politique*, 126.

¹²⁶Phrantzes, *Fall of the Byzantine Empire*, XLII, 10, 86-7.

some time later to educate him in the style of a philosopher king.¹²⁷ in the shock and distress he felt upon receiving news of the fall of Constantinople, on 13 July 1453 Bessarion also wrote to the Doge of Venice, Francesco Foscari,¹²⁸ urging the Venetians to recapture “the City that had once been theirs and would be theirs again.”¹²⁹ One could conclude that Bessarion was indeed ready to compromise his heritage to a considerable extent in his efforts to rescue the Roman Empire from the Turks. However, his actions could also indicate a strong belief that God would never completely abandon the Empire established by Him. Venice and other Latin political entities had previously held much of the East for a short time in the form of the Crusader States and Latin Empire (1204-61) and yet God had restored many of the losses to the Empire, when the legitimate patriarch and emperor were residing in exile. The imperial city itself had been regained under the Emperor Michael VIII.¹³⁰

Clearly Bessarion considered that his people would require both aspects of their glorious heritage in preparation for the day when their homeland would be rescued from the Turks. Many modern scholars tend to stress Bessarion’s preservation of the Greek classical

¹²⁷Bessarion himself composed edifying treatises for the youth: ed. Mohler, 3, 536-8. See Michael Angold, *A Byzantine Government in Exile: Government and Society under the Lascarids of Nicaea (1204-1261)* Oxford, 1974, 45, citing E. Barker, *Social and Political Thought in Byzantium from Justinian I to the Last Palaeologus* (Oxford, 1967), 151 ff., for the great stress placed on the emperor as a philosopher king under the Lascarids in Nicaea, since nothing but the love of wisdom could equip an emperor with the wisdom necessary to perform the duties of his office.

¹²⁸Letter 29 in Mohler, 3, 475-7.

¹²⁹Ibid., 477.

¹³⁰For the events culminating in these acquisitions see Angold, *A Byzantine Government in Exile*.

tradition, but his instructions in his letter to Michael Apostolis also encompassed the theological heritage of the East. The biblical implications of the *remnant of Israel* and the Byzantines' understanding of themselves as the *New Israel* and the *Chosen People* and Constantinople as the *New Jerusalem* also need to be taken into account.¹³¹ Surely Bessarion, who was capable of seeing the fall of Constantinople as the visitation of the divine wrath upon the city for its sins (those being in his understanding the departure from sound doctrine and the rejection of the Union), could also see the disaster as the work of the divine economy, a sacrifice meant to expiate the sins of the entire world, which would, at length, result in the restoration of the Empire to its former glory.¹³² If the means to do so were again through a temporary relinquishment of political control to the Latins, so be it.

Bessarion's letter to Michael Apostolis indicates the rationale for his collecting of manuscripts which would eventually result in the immense library which he bequeathed to the City of Venice. He states:

As long as there are Greeks somewhere, they are capable of achieving greatness in the future. Many things can happen over a long period of time, and the Greeks will be aided in attaining their goal if they can find in a safe place everything that has been written in their language, at least what has been written until now. For having found it, they will augment it.¹³³

¹³¹Ahrweiler, *L' idéologie politique*, 124-6. See also Michael Angold, *Church and Society under Comneni*, 508-9. See also Doukas, *Decline and Fall of Byzantium*, regarding the fall of the city due to sin (XXXIX, 22, 227-9), the disgrace of the altar in Hagia Sophia by the infidel Turk due to the people's sins (XL, 21, 231-2), the transfer of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah's prophecy regarding Old Jerusalem to New Jerusalem, including a bitter migration from Jerusalem to Babylon (XLI, 17-18, 239).

¹³²Ahrweiler, *L' idéologie politique*, 124-6.

¹³³Letter 30, Mohler, 3, 478-9.

In his letter to the Doge of Venice, Cristoforo Moro, announcing the donation of his library to the City of Venice (1468).¹³⁴ Bessarion states that, when he first arrived in the city in 1438, it appeared to him a 'second Byzantium'.¹³⁵ This observation, together with other impressions made upon him during his youth, particularly in the Peloponnese (when Venice held sufficient prestige throughout the *Romania* that princes and communities had sought protection from the Turkish menace by accepting the overlordship of the Republic) predisposed him to put his trust in the power of the Republic.¹³⁶ Bessarion chose Venice as the recipient of his library to a large extent because the largest 'remnant of his people' in the West resided there, because the Venetians had always demonstrated their empathy with Byzantine sensibilities and because Venice seemed to be the most viable entity for rescuing the Roman Empire from the Turks. Certainly there had been much evolution in Bessarion's thought, under the tyranny of circumstances, since he had so optimistically offered advice to the Despot Constantine on the revival of the Peloponnese.

Bessarion's views on the status of the Byzantine Church had, likewise, evolved. He no longer considered that the Church in Constantinople was the legitimate seat of ecclesiastical authority, since, while the legitimate Patriarch, Gregory III, still lived and resided in Italy, the conquering Turk, Mehmed II, had installed a new Patriarch, Gennadius II, in his place. It was a bitter irony that this was none other than George Scholarius, his former friend and advocate of union, latterly one of his chief adversaries. To Bessarion,

¹³⁴Letter of donation, *PG* 161, 700-2, ed. Labowsky, *Bessarion's Library*, 148-9.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, 148.

¹³⁶*Ibid.*, 148.

when the 'legitimate' Patriarch, Gregory III, died in 1459, the patriarchal throne was vacant. That Pope Pius II, not the legitimate ruler of Constantinople, appointed and installed Isidore of Kiev on the Patriarchal Throne (20 April 1459)¹³⁷ was a compromise that mattered little to Bessarion, given the machinations that had occurred in Constantinople, and this may be evidence, too, of his own acceptance of papal supremacy over the whole of Christendom.

The subsequent fall of the Peloponnese to the Turks in 1460 was a particularly heavy blow to Bessarion, for he had more and more come to see the Morea as the place where the spiritual and cultural reintegration of East and West could originate and from where a campaign for the recapture of the entire East could emanate. On Palm Sunday 1462, in an elaborate ceremony heavily overlaid with symbolism, Bessarion, in the company of the seriously ill Isidore, accompanied the Head of St. Andrew, the legendary founder of the Church of Constantinople (which the Despot Thomas had brought with him from the Peloponnese to prevent it from falling into the hands of the infidel) to Rome. The following day, in solemn procession the Pope himself carried the reliquary to St. Peter's and placed it on the high altar. Then Bessarion, speaking for St. Andrew, first addressed Peter and Paul, the two apostolic founders of the Roman Church, calling them to vengeance against the Turks who had driven him into exile, and then appealed to Pius II, as the successor of his

¹³⁷See Gill, *Personalities of Council*, 75, for particulars of Isidore's tenure of this position. Gill notes that when the Latin Patriarch of Constantinople, Giovanni Cantareno, died, no successor was appointed, but on 24 January 1452 Isidore was granted the temporalities of the See with the condition that he appoint a vicar to undertake the work associated with the appointment.

brother, Peter, to avenge the blood of Christians.¹³⁸ The papacy certainly interpreted the event as a sure indication of its supremacy over the whole of Christendom.

Bessarion's birthplace, Trebizond, fell to the Turks on 13 August 1462 shortly before he was appointed administrator for the gravely ill Uniate Patriarch Isidore (13 December 1462) and upon the latter's death (27 April 1463) he was himself installed as Patriarch of Constantinople.¹³⁹ He styled himself in the Byzantine manner as Oecumenical Patriarch in his *Encyclica ad Graecos* (27 May 1463)¹⁴⁰, his last written communication with the East, albeit now directed only to those individuals in places under the control of the Republic of Venice, who formed, in his view, a Church in exile.¹⁴¹

Rejection of the Eastern Church

To Bessarion, the successive disasters of the failure of Varna, the fall, in rapid succession, of Constantinople, the Peloponnese and Trebizond, his own ineffectiveness in

¹³⁸The Pope leaves a vivid account of this event in Book VIII of his *Commentaries*. See *The Commentaries of Pius II*, trans. Florence A. Gragg, with historical notes by Leona C. Gabel, *SCSH*, XXXV (1951), 523-42. See also Ludwig Pastor, *History of the Popes from the Close of the Middle Ages*, 7th ed. 6 vols. Translated by F. Antrobus. London, 1891-1923; Vol. 3: 258 ff.; Stinger, *The Renaissance in Rome*, 174-7; Setton, *Papacy in Levant*, 2: 228-30.

¹³⁹For dating of these events see Gill, *Personalities of Council*, 76.

¹⁴⁰*Encyclica ad Graecos*, PG 161, 449-80.

¹⁴¹That Bessarion could have been viewed as the legitimate Patriarch of Constantinople by some in the East is entirely possible. Even the historian Phrantzes, who was a high court official participating in many of the events he narrates and personally knew the last three Byzantine emperors refers to him as 'Patriarch of Constantinople.' See Phrantzes, *Fall of the Byzantine Empire*, XLII, 11, p. 87. On Phrantzes' life and the quality of his history see introduction by Philippides, trans., 10-13.

securing another crusade in the West and the indignity of a pseudo-Patriarch being installed in Constantinople at the hands of the Moslem conqueror, Mehmed II, all confirmed that the wrath of God had descended upon the East. In his *Encyclica* Bessarion lashes out against the Byzantine Church's obstinacy and intransigence in neither accepting the union achieved at Florence nor the sound doctrine which it embodied.¹⁴²

Bessarion details once more how and why he accepted the union, referring to his own treatises and briefly commenting on some of the arguments he had presented in them.¹⁴³ He also briefly relates his own life story, including the regard with which he was held in the East, how his erudition was admired, and how he, though young, had received honours before older men.¹⁴⁴ He urges his spiritual charges to remain true to the Union, indicating his own clear adherence to the Latin Church and the primacy of the pope.¹⁴⁵ He clearly acknowledges the Roman Church as the one built upon the faith of Peter and holding to sound doctrine which is evidence that this, not the present Church in the East, is the one with which Christ promised to remain.¹⁴⁶ views which are remarkably similar to those expressed long ago by Andrew Chrysoberges in his letter to Bessarion before the Council.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴²*Encyclica ad Graecos*. PG 161. 453A-C.

¹⁴³*Ibid.*, 456-57C.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 461C-D.

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 466A-C.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 468A-480A. Cf. 457D-459A.

¹⁴⁷See discussion above. Chapter III. 96.

Although Chrysoberges' complaint against the East had been its acceptance of the Palamite doctrine, as Bessarion's theological works clearly show, he felt that the manifestation of God in his uncreated energies could be accommodated to the Latin doctrine of the Procession. He had no desire to widen the gulf between the churches. Rejection of the Palamite doctrine was not a contributing factor leading to his conversion to the Roman Church. His acknowledgement of the greater claims of the Latin Church to legitimacy evolved over a considerably longer time and it was based solely upon his own developing conviction that the Byzantine Church had forfeited its authority by rejecting the Union of the Churches achieved at Florence and the sound doctrine which it embodied.

Bessarion clearly still felt the bite of the anti-unionist campaign against him, his own inability to secure the desired rescue of the East, and his personal cost in honours and friendships. In an extended impassioned entreaty he offers a testament to his conversion and convictions:

... the closer death approaches, the more the purity of the faith consoles me: in the hope that my belief in sound doctrine, for whose sake I put honour aside to cleave wholly to the truth, will compensate to my salvation for my lack of works.... What I might have had with you, I held in little regard and the things of the present world—may God bear me witness-- 'I counted but as dung' [Philippians 3.8] and would have thrown them all away, even if they had been many times greater and would have returned to you, never turning back, if I had not been myself aware that I was choosing what was nobler and more puissant to salvation, if I had not been convinced that the holy Roman Catholic Church was teaching and believing what leads to eternal life.¹⁴⁸

Bessarion's sincerity in accepting the Union achieved at the Council of Florence and the validity of the Latin doctrine of the Procession of the Holy Spirit is today less and less questioned. His decision extracted a heavy toll (as indeed it had done for Beccus before

¹⁴⁸*Encyclica ad Graecos*, PG 161, 461C, 464A-B.

him) in the loss of his place and reputation amongst his compatriots and the destruction of close friendships. The *volte-face* of George Scholarius was perhaps the most bitter pill to swallow for George attained the Patriarchal throne and the pinnacle of power in the Eastern Church, albeit in Bessarion's view illegally, while he himself, although twice a papal candidate (1455) and (1471) never acquired the supreme seat of power in the Western Church.

In Bessarion's mind Byzantium had fallen due to the wrath of God descending upon it for refusing to acknowledge the truth of the Latins' Faith. Such a view resulted at length in his formal rejection of the Byzantine Church and provided him with an acceptable justification for his own inability to resolve the complexities of the eastern dilemma. However, his interaction with the East was, in a sense, only half of the story for he also faced western challenges to his plan for spiritual and cultural reintegration of Eastern and Western Christendom.

CHAPTER VI

ADDRESSING THE WESTERN CHALLENGE

In August 1469, three hundred copies of Bessarion's major work, *In calumniatorem Platonis*, rolled off the press of Sweynheym and Pannartz in Rome¹ and the author wasted no time in distributing his work far and wide throughout western Europe. He immediately received congratulations from many of the leading Greek and Latin scholars of the time for his brilliant defence of Plato's philosophy in the face of a damning attack against the same from the Aristotelian, George of Trebizond.² Bessarion's treatise, however, contained a great deal more. It represented the culmination of his thirty year mission to achieve cultural reintegration and spiritual reconciliation between East and West and the means by which he had overcome some significant challenges to his own agenda and to his reputation as an orthodox Christian Humanist.

A Mission for Cultural and Spiritual Reconciliation

In his early years in Italy, developments seemed to augur well for Bessarion's plans. He was exhilarated by the preparations well underway for a united Christendom to drive back

¹On the activities of these printers in Italy and the works published see Feld, "Sweynheym and Pannartz," 282-335.

²See, for example, the congratulatory letters from Marsilius Ficino, John Argyropoulos, Francesco Filelfo, Antonio Bercadalonio, ed. Mohler, 3, 544-5, 594-602.

the Turks and restore Byzantium to her former glory. Moreover, he immediately took upon himself the task of enlisting the support of secular leaders in the West as part of his perceived mission for rescue of the East. In March 1442 he wrote from Florence to King Charles VII of France in order to win his allegiance to the Council of Florence³ and about the same time, he sent a translation of a sermon of Basil of Caesarea to King Juan II of Castile in obvious appreciation of his change of allegiance to the papal cause.⁴

After the failure of the crusade of Varna (1444), Bessarion's efforts naturally intensified but to no avail. Although all the popes of the Quattrocento were alert to the Islamic danger to Christendom, they were seldom able to obtain the unity of purpose and resources needed from the secular powers to organize crusades to turn back the Turkish advance. The financial resources and prestige of the papacy were both at a low ebb; popes operated from a position of weakness open to challenge from the secular powers who were themselves clearly divided and in an almost continual state of conflict. Bessarion himself headed several papal legations that attempted to assist the secular princes in settling their differences or to rouse them to a crusade. He undertook missions to Germany in 1459, Venice in 1463 and France in 1471; he wrote further letters of entreaty to some secular

³Bessarion evidently entrusted the letter to French emissaries, who arrived at the papal court in 1441 and returned to France in 1442 with Bessarion's letter and one from Pope Eugenius IV. See Monfasani, "Still More Bessarion Latinus," 225 and n. 7, citing *Bibl. Nat.*, ms. Lat. 8577, fol. 36v, and earlier literature on the arrival of such a letter at the French court.

⁴A Spanish translation of the preface and the sermon survive in Ms Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, 10445 (olim Kk. 46), ff. 69r- 74 v, discussed by Monfasani, "Still More Bessarion Latinus," 226 and n. 4, with Latin summary of both provided, 227-8.

powers, culminating in a series of orations in the Greek classical style in 1470, intended to move them to action by appealing to their own self interest.⁵

Initially Bessarion's hopes of achieving a cultural and spiritual reunion also proceeded according to plan. As his letter to Constantine, Despot of the Morea, just prior to the ill-fated Crusade of Varna bears witness, he familiarized himself with western culture, particularly with those aspects of it which the East could use to advantage.⁶ He also plunged headlong into satisfying and sustaining a western appetite for the Greek classical and patristic heritage.

Although Bessarion certainly realized that scholastic theology was deeply entrenched in the Latin Church, his experiences at the Council of Florence had demonstrated to him that Christian Humanism also appeared to flourish in individuals such as Nicholas of Cusa and Fra Ambrogio Traversari, the latter, unfortunately, having died in 1439 prior to Bessarion's return to Italy. Pope Eugenius IV also seemed open to the apophatic patristic heritage of the East. Nicholas of Cusa was even enthusiastic about the works of Proclus. In Bessarion's mind a base existed upon which he could gradually expand to incorporate the whole Greek philosophical tradition and realign western thought along the lines of the Byzantine neo-platonic commentary tradition in which he enjoyed so much expertise. By so doing, he would also return the western church its apophatic roots.⁷

⁵*Orationes Contra Turcas*, PG 161, 647-76. For overview of the five pontificates see Pastor, *History of the Popes*, vols. 1-4. For discussion of Bessarion's orations see James Hankins, "The Crusading Movement in the Fifteenth Century," *DOP* 49 (1995), 23-46.

⁶See discussion above, Chapter V, 145-9.

⁷See discussion above, Chapter IV, 132-52.

Under Bessarion's supervision, during the pontificates of Eugenius IV (d. 1447) and Nicholas V (1447-55), Rome became a haven for humanist scholarship. Pope Nicholas V enthusiastically supported translation of important secular and sacred texts. Bessarion's extensive knowledge of the Greek theological and philosophical works and his recognized philological expertise were greatly prized and he endeavoured to influence the choice of texts and their translation in the humanist manner. Transmission of an extensive portion of the Greek heritage in Latin translation had been completed by the death of Pope Nicholas V (25 March 1455).⁸

It is certainly not insignificant that the first work rendered into Latin under Bessarion's supervision was Basil's *Adversus Eunomium* (completed January 1442),⁹ since, in seeming to support the Latin addition of the *filioque* to the creed, it had proved so influential in Bessarion's own acceptance of the Latin doctrine at the Council of Florence.¹⁰ Moreover, it confirmed the stature of one of the most revered and eloquent Fathers of the Eastern Church who clearly espoused the same apophatic attitude which Bessarion had exhibited in his *Oratio dogmatica* at the Council of Florence and in his polemical debate

⁸On Bessarion's involvement with papal translating activities see especially Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 69 sq.; Hankins, 1, 174-92.

⁹Date established by Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 48-50. See Bessarion's letter of dedication to Pope Eugenius IV, Mohler, 3, 450-2.

¹⁰See discussion above Chapter IV, 108-9 and n. 22, and Chapter V, 163-4.

against the anti-unionists in the East. Faith dealt with divine things beyond the reach of discursive reasoning.¹¹

However, after this promising initial progress towards cultural-religious reintegration, Bessarion's enterprise came under increasing scrutiny. Many of the leading Greek and Latin humanists at Rome formed an élite circle which met in his residence where he endeavoured to further Latin appreciation for his Byzantine heritage, but the interests and actions of important members of this group did not always conform with his own views or agenda. Philological disputes that emerged in discussions amongst the members eventually escalated into a challenge, not only to his advancement of the Byzantine theological and classical heritage, but also to his own reputation for piety and orthodoxy within the major philosophical debate of the fifteenth century: the Plato-Aristotle debate.

The Clash of Diverging World Views

George of Trebizond, Bessarion's great adversary in the Plato-Aristotle controversy, was initially a distinguished member of the Cardinal's inner circle.¹² An expatriate Greek and convert to the Latin Church (1426), George enjoyed a well-established reputation in the West as a humanist rhetorician, philologist, translator and teacher. Under Bessarion's

¹¹On Basil's elevation of apophatic theology over natural reason in his polemics against Eunomius in the Arian controversy see Sheldon-Williams, "Greek Christian Platonist Tradition," 434 ff., Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 11-12; Pelikan, *Christianity and the Classical Tradition*, 28.

¹²John Monfasani, *George of Trebizond* (1976); idem, *Collectanea Trapezuntiana* (1985), has added immensely to our understanding of the chronology and context of George's life and works. For the preliminaries to the confrontation between George and Bessarion see Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 47-136; for the relevant documentation, see idem, *Collectanea Trapezuntiana*.

supervision he rendered into Latin eleven separate works of the Eastern Fathers, several of Aristotle's works on natural philosophy and some mathematical texts between 1441 and 1448. A short time later, however, a major philological dispute arose within the Bessarion circle concerning the differences between the textual reading of the Vulgate and Greek New Testament. Bessarion, who promoted the superiority of the Greek textual tradition, found George's persistent support of the Vulgate version particularly disturbing.¹³ Three additional clashes occurred between George and Bessarion with regard to translating activities, two of which severely questioned Bessarion's own Christian Platonism.¹⁴

Another philological challenge developed within the Bessarion Circle in late 1453 or early 1454 while Bessarion was serving as papal governor in the City of Bologna (1450-55). Lorenzo Valla, who had rejected the authenticity of Pseudo-Dionysius in his *Collatio*

¹³This was in the context of Valla's revision of his *Adnotationes in Novum Testamentum*, (text printed in Lorenzo Valla, *Opera Omnia* I, Basel, 1540, reprint, with introduction by E. Garin, Turin, 1962) and the textual differences in John 21.22. Valla opted, as Bessarion said he should, for the Greek reading. George steadfastly refused to retract his support for Jerome's interpretation. On a treatise supporting the Vulgate he produced (ca. 1450-1) and subsequent redactions, see discussion, Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 90-102. For one of the later versions see *Sic volo eum manere*, PG 161, 867-82. Bessarion eventually composed his own rebuttal, *Si eum vole manere donec veniam, quid ad te?* (Greek text, Mohler, 3, 70-90; Latin translation, PG 161, 623-40). Monfasani, 90, n. 112, indicates that this might as Mohler, I, 400, contends have been written in 1456, but Bessarion is identified in the rubrics of both manuscripts as Cardinal of Sabina and Patriarch of Constantinople, titles which he only held contemporaneously in 1468.

¹⁴George's translation (1448) of Eusebius' *De praeparatione evangelica* expunged most of the Platonic references; his preface and overview to his translation (1450) of Plato's *Laws* vehemently denounced Plato's social and moral evils; his commentary, accompanying his translation (December 1451) of Ptolemy's *Almagest* ignored Bessarion's instructions to rely upon Theon of Alexander's interpretation of the text. On these incidents see Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 80, 104-8.

Novi Testamenti written prior to his coming to Rome.¹⁵ discovered, through conversations with Theodore of Gaza (ca. 1400-75).¹⁶ that the initial appearance of the Dionysian *corpus* in Byzantium in the late fifth or early sixth century had been greeted with considerable skepticism. Moreover, Theodore was inclined to support the allegations put forward at that time indicating that Dionysius could have been the fourth century monophysite heretic, Apollinaris of Laodicea.¹⁷

Bessarion's own philological expertise should have brought him to a similar conclusion, not with regard to Apollinaris, but, rather, concerning the clear similarity he knew existed between the works of Dionysius and those of the Neoplatonist, Proclus. Since, instead, he vouched for the traditional designation of Dionysius as the disciple of St. Paul,¹⁸ one could suggest that the Cardinal recognized in Theodore's disclosure the real threat to his own efforts to advance Byzantine theology and platonic philosophy. Had Dionysius been branded a heretic or had the discussion expanded even further to include Dionysius' similarity to Proclus, considerable doubt would have been cast, not only upon Bessarion's prolific use of Dionysius' works, but also upon the worthiness of the entire Greek patristic

¹⁵See *Collatio Novi Testamenti*. *Redazione inedita*, ed. A. Perosa (Florence, 1970), 167, as cited by John Monfasani, "Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in Mid-Quattrocento Rome" in *Supplementum Festivum: Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, eds. James Hankins, John Monfasani and Frederick Purnell, Jr. (Binghamton, 1987), 190 and n. 6.

¹⁶On Theodore Gaza, who was educated in Thessalonica and Constantinople and had been a translator in the services of the papacy at the Union Council, see Geanakoplos, "Theodore Gaza, Byzantine Scholar" in idem, *Constantinople and West*, 68-90.

¹⁷For dating and discussion of this incident, see Monfasani, "Pseudo-Dionysius in Mid-Quattrocento Italy," 190-3.

¹⁸Ibid., 192-3 and n. 16; 213-14.

heritage. The Eastern Church had on more than one occasion been accused of attempting to foist false doctrines upon the Western Church during the Arian, Christological and Iconoclastic controversies; Bessarion had personally witnessed one such accusation at the Council of Florence.¹⁹

Bessarion was initially successful in averting these threats to his promotion of the Byzantine apophatic tradition in the West. Dionysius' traditional designation was safeguarded for a time by Bessarion's philological reputation and the intervention of Pope Nicholas V who concurred with the Cardinal's judgement. The Pope forced Theodore to silence²⁰ although Valla made two further references to the pseudonymity of Dionysius in his own works.²¹

Bessarion was not slow to act with regard to the threat to his cultural program presented by George of Trebizond's independent thinking. By 1451 George was no longer a valued member of Bessarion's inner circle and, having become involved in some unseemly escapades concerning Giovanni Aurispa and Poggio Bracciolini in the papal chancery in

¹⁹*Acta Graeca*. 385-7.

²⁰See Theodore's preface to the pope (1454) accompanying his translation of Pseudo-Alexander of Aphrodisias' *Problemata*, ed. F. E. Cranz. "The prefaces to the Greek Editions and Latin Translations of Alexander of Aphrodisias." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*. 102 (1958): 510-46. with relevant passage where he refers to the pope's instructions. 541: trans. with discussion. Monfasani. "Pseudo-Dionysius in Mid-Quattrocento Rome." 209.

²¹*Adnotationes in Novum Testamentum, Opera omnia*, 1: 852. ed. Garin. and *Encomium S. Thomae, Opera omnia*, 2: 351. ed. Garin. cited and discussed by Monfasani. "Pseudo-Dionysius in Mid-Quattrocento Rome." 190-1.

1452, George found it prudent to leave Rome and to seek employment in Naples.²² Bessarion advanced the career of Theodore Gaza as the foremost translator of Greek texts and an expert on Aristotelian philosophy, albeit one who, like many of those educated in the Byzantine tradition, tended to harmonize the views of Aristotle and Plato. In 1453 some of George's translations were branded faulty and Theodore re-translated several works of Aristotle previously undertaken by George.²³

During the conclave to elect a successor to Pope Nicholas V (1455) Bessarion was made most painfully aware that his plans for cultural and spiritual reintegration of East and West could meet with even more formidable opposition. Although he entered the conclave as one of the leading contenders, he was eventually rejected in favour of the Spaniard, Alphonso Borgia. The support he had initially enjoyed melted away after Cardinal Alain of Avignon informed members of the conclave that in electing Bessarion they would be handing the Latin Church to a Greek, an unshaven foreigner and until recently a schismatic.²⁴

Bessarion's failure to attain the supreme pontificate in the Latin Church was a devastating blow to him. He was not only denied the authority and control of resources needed to direct western crusading efforts to free Constantinople from the Turks but this humiliating rejection also brought home to him a stark reality. Despite his not insignificant

²²On these incidents see Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 109-12. For confrontations that had already taken place between George and both Lorenzo Valla and Theodore Gaza regarding Byzantine and Latin rhetoric in 1449-50, see 79-83.

²³On Theodore's attitude and translating activities see Geanakoplos, "Theodore Gaza, Byzantine Scholar," 82-4.

²⁴This incident is recorded by Pope Pius II. See *Commentaries of Pius II*, vol. 1, 1937, p. 75. Cf. Platina, *PG* 161, cx, and Pastor, *History of the Popes*, 2: 325.

efforts to stress the cultural and spiritual similarities between East and West. his Byzantine heritage was viewed in highly influential circles as a decided disadvantage. His disappointment and bitterness are likely expressed in his letter to Michael Apostolis (ca.1455), where he states: "I am deeply grieved when I see our people suffering everywhere. in public and in private. so little esteemed . hated. persecuted. abused Try to endure such jealousy which flourishes everywhere ... particularly against foreigners and especially if they are learned men."²⁵ Bessarion was to face an even greater challenge in the evolving events associated with the Plato-Aristotle controversy.

It is to be noted that no one theme runs continually throughout this well-known philosophical debate from beginning to end: the views, aims and ambitions of the various participants follow no clear delineation.²⁶ The eastern phase of the dispute during the 1440s involved two of Bessarion's former associates.²⁷ On the Aristotelian side stood George Scholarius, influenced to a great degree by Latin scholasticism;²⁸ on the Platonic, Plethon, the Neoplatonist.²⁹ Their altercation clearly concerned which of the two ancient

²⁵Letter 31. Mohler. 3. 481.

²⁶On the Plato-Aristotle controversy in general see Monfasani. *George of Trebizond*. 201-29; Hankins. 1. 205-17; Lohr. "Metaphysics." 561-8; Mohler. 1. 335-98.

²⁷On this phase of the debate see especially Woodhouse. *Gemistos Plethon*. 240-307. See also Turner. "Career of George Scholarius." 430-1; Monfasani. *George of Trebizond*. 205-7.

²⁸See his *Defence of Aristotle*. *Oeuvres*. IV. 1-116.

²⁹See his *Reply to the Defence of Aristotle*. PG 160. 979-1020.

philosophers was the more compatible with Christian theology, the point Plethon had first raised at the Council of Florence.³⁰

The western phase of the *querelle de philosophes* emerged within the Bessarion circle in Rome during the 1450s. The initial salvoes, involving expatriate Byzantines, were conducted in Greek and largely concerned the respective merits of the two philosophers.³¹ Bessarion tried to quell this dispute by advocating the traditional Byzantine approach: Aristotle reigned supreme in natural theology, Plato in metaphysics, but in line with the Byzantine commentary tradition, their views were not considered incompatible.³² However, when George of Trebizond entered the fray, he wrote in Latin and thus opened the discussion to a wider western audience. Moreover, in comparing the merits of the two philosophers, George reoriented the discussion towards their respective compatibility with Christianity. He also launched a concerted attack against the members of the Bessarion circle, whom he held responsible for all the misfortunes he had suffered at Rome.

³⁰See discussion above, Chapter IV, 140-1.

³¹The individuals involved in this philosophical debate were Hesias (a Greek monk), Theodore Gaza, Michael Apostolis, Andronicus Callistos, Nicholas Secundinas and, reluctantly, Bessarion. See his contribution, *De Natura et Arte* (1458), Mohler, 3, 91-147. On this stage of the debate see Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 208-29; Hankins, 1, 208-16.

³²Mohler 3, 89-90; 148-50. See discussion by Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 208-9; Hankins, 1, 208-9.

George's initial attack (in 1456)³³ took the form of a polemic against Theodore of Gaza's translation (1454) of Aristotle's *Problemata*.³⁴ George accused Theodore of deliberately providing a false interpretation of Aristotle in order to overthrow the Christian Aristotelianism of the great scholastic theologians: Thomas Aquinas, Albert Magnus, Duns Scotus and Giles of Rome. This work was followed by the *Comparatio philosophorum Aristotelis et Platonis*.³⁵ an attack on Bessarion, the advocate of Platonism, whom he perceived to be his real enemy.

In the *Comparatio* George advances Aristotle as superior to Plato in every respect. He first compares the learning of the two philosophers. He acknowledges the formal eloquence of Plato's writings but labels this a disadvantage since Plato's works lack the philosophical value of Aristotle's works and they only serve to seduce the ignorant. George then extends his discussion to an examination of the two philosophers' agreement with Christian doctrine. George states that, whereas it might seem that Plato agrees with Christianity, in actuality he preserves Greek polytheism: he espouses a doctrine of creation from unformed matter: he believes in the pre-existence of souls. Aristotle, by contrast,

³³I follow the chronology of events and new dating of texts established by Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 162-70.

³⁴*In perversionem Problematum Aristotelis a quodam Theodoro Cage editam et problematice Aristotelis philosophie protectio*, Mohler, 3, 275-342. See discussion by Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 152-6.

³⁵References are to *Comparationes Philosophorum Aristotelis et Platonis a George Trapezuntio viro clarissimo*, ed. Iacobus Pentius de Leuco (Venice, 1523, reprint, Frankfurt, 1965), as cited by Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*. On the textual history of George's work see p. 166 and idem, *Collectanea Trapezuntiana*, 600-2. Monfasani is in the process of preparing a new edition of the *Comparatio*.

teaches monotheism, creation *ex nihilo* and the immortality of the human soul. The third book denounces Plato's immorality and insidious influence in political life, which George traces through the neoplatonic tradition to arrive at Pletho's philosophy.³⁶

Certainly here was a challenge to his reputation as a Christian Platonist that Bessarion could not ignore, particularly since there were dimensions to this quarrel which went far beyond a comparison of the two ancient philosophers' views and merits. George of Trebizond considered himself a prophet with a mission to rewrite sacred history: his evolving prophetic vision permeated all of his philological, philosophical and theological thinking.³⁷ If, in his early years in Italy, Bessarion was aware of George's prophetic mission, it caused him no great concern and did not appear to be inconsistent with his own plans. George's vision was fixed upon a succession of popes and secular rulers as the *saviours* of Christendom sent to lead crusades against the Turks.³⁸

However, after the fall of Constantinople in 1453, George's prophetic mission underwent a radical readjustment. Thereafter, he sought to convert the Islamic conqueror.

³⁶See discussion of Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 156-62; Hankins, 1, 236-45; Lohr, "Metaphysics," 56l.

³⁷Monfasani, *George of Trebizond* (1976), first made modern scholars aware of George as a self-declared prophet. For the combination of Byzantine and Latin sources upon which George based his prophecies, the evolution in his vision and its interdependence with his philological, theological and philosophical undertakings, see particularly 133-6, 159-60.

³⁸These included Pope Eugenius IV, Pope Nicholas V, King Alfonso of Naples and the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III. See discussion by Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 35-53; 128-31.

Mehmed II. to Christianity.³⁹ Certainly he was not the only individual who conceived such a plan. Pope Pius II composed a letter to Mehmed II which offered him recognition as the Emperor of the Greeks and the East in exchange for his conversion.⁴⁰ George Scholarius, the first Patriarch of Constantinople installed by Mehmed, also explained the orthodox faith to the conqueror in hopes of effecting his conversion.⁴¹ Such efforts were, of course, anathema to Bessarion who consistently worked for a crusade to rescue the East from the Turks and, as indicated above, could have embraced other contemporary Byzantine eschatological beliefs.⁴²

George's prophetic vision had been a major impediment in his earlier philological dispute and interpretative difficulties with Bessarion, although it is unlikely that the Cardinal and his circle had been aware of this at that time. Subsequently, however, George's vision began to merge with his grievances against his former associates. He came to believe that a Platonic conspiracy to undermine Christian theology existed at Rome. He considered that this perfidy had originated in Pletho, the prophet of a new, universal, platonic religion

³⁹See George's treatise, *On the Truth of the Faith of Christians to the Emir when he stormed Constantinople* (July 1453), ed. Zoras, *Georgios ho Trapezountios* (Athens, 1954), discussed by Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 131-6, and idem, *Collectanea Trapezuntiana*, 491.

⁴⁰Letter ed. G. Toffanini, *Pio II: Lettera a Maometto II* (Naples: 1453), cap. xix. See discussion by Franz Babinger, *Mehmed the Conqueror and his Time*, trans. Ralph Manheim, with a preface by William C. Hichman, (Princeton, 1978), 198-200; R. J. Mitchell, *The Laurels and the Tiara: Pope Pius II, 1458-1464* (London, 1964), 171-2; Pastor, *History of Popes*, 3: 256-7. Historians consider that the letter was likely never dispatched.

⁴¹Scholarios, *Oeuvres*, III, 434-75. See discussion by A. Papadakis, "Gennadius II and Mehmet the Conqueror," *Byzantion*, 42 (1972), 88-106.

⁴²See discussion above, Chapter V, 171-2.

devised to supersede both Christianity and Islam. To George, Pletho's rationalism presupposed the end of revealed religion and rendered Aquinas' Christian Aristotelianism irrelevant. Moreover, George began to consider that Bessarion's promotion of Byzantine theology and Platonism over Latin scholasticism was putting in place the circumstances that would lead to the complete annihilation of the West by the Turkish onslaught. When Bessarion nearly emerged from the 1455 conclave as pope, George began to fear that the Cardinal might succeed at the next papal election, which would undermine his own plans for Mehmed II's conversion and recognition as the supreme secular ruler of the entire world. By exposing Bessarion's apostasy, the *Comparatio* was intended to prevent him from attaining the papal tiara.⁴³

The third Book of George's *Comparatio* gave expression to his prophetic vision by describing the successive emergence in the world of four influential representatives of Platonism. He states that Plato's introduction of depraved Platonic hedonism, a perverse philosophy, had corrupted and, at last, destroyed the Roman Empire from within and that Platonic works played a part in all the early heresies that plagued the early Church. In George's scheme, a second Plato had then arisen in the form of Mohammed, who conquered the Empire from without. He was followed at length by a third Plato, Gemistus Plethon, the apostle of revived paganism, whose ideas had spread to Europe. George concludes by calling upon the Latin clergy to expunge this evil before it undermines Latin Christianity, allowing

⁴³Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 157-9.

for the appearance of a fourth Plato [Bessarion], more terrible than all the rest in spreading the perversion.⁴⁴

Bessarion was not slow to act in the face of this assault against his reputation and whole life's work: by 1459, he had composed a reply. He sent an early draft of what would become the *ICP* (consisting at that point of three books) with a covering letter to Theodore of Gaza in Naples⁴⁵ for his perusal, comments and suggestions.⁴⁶ Bessarion expresses his concern with regard to the possible effects that George's malicious work, written in Latin, might have upon western scholars who have so little knowledge of Plato. The Cardinal asks Theodore to pay particular attention to Book II which demonstrated how Platonic philosophy was more compatible with Christianity than Aristotelian natural philosophy⁴⁷ and indicates

⁴⁴Latin text. *Comparatio*, III, f. T6v, trans. Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 158-9, who identifies Bessarion as the fourth Plato. George relates a conversation he had with Plethon at the Union Council, where the latter asserted "that within a few years the entire world, with one mind and one preaching, would adopt the same religion. I asked him, 'Christ's or Mohammed's?' 'Neither,' he replied, 'but one that does not differ from paganism.' I was shocked by these words, and have hated and feared him ever after as a poisonous viper." For Latin text of this passage, *Comparatio* III, 21, f. V6v, trans. with discussion see Hankins, 1, 172 and n. 15, and Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 39-40, with discussion of how such a meeting could have occurred between George and Plethon in 1438, since George (who was never a member of the Latin delegation) resided at that time in Bagno, a two day journey from Ferrara.

⁴⁵Theodore had sought employment in Naples after the death of Pope Nicholas V in 1455 since his successor, Calixtus III (1455-8) had little interest in patronizing scholars. See Pastor, *History of Popes*, 2: 525 sq.; Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 137, 152.

⁴⁶Mohler, 3, 487-9. English summary of the letter is provided by L. Labowsky, "An Unknown Treatise by Theodorus Gaza." *Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, VI: 175-7.

⁴⁷Mohler, 3, 488-9.

that he was preparing a fourth book, a criticism of George's translation of Plato's *Laws*.⁴⁸ In his letter of reply, Theodore encourages Bessarion to publish his treatise immediately and silence George.⁴⁹ However, during the pontificate of Pius II (1458-1464) Bessarion's time was largely occupied with efforts to promote a crusade and he was delayed for some time from circulating his own views.

With the election of Pope Paul II (31 August, 1464), however, Bessarion quickly found himself out of favour.⁵⁰ He retired to his monastery of Grotta Ferrata in Tuscany and began to circulate in Latin translation copies of the *ICP* and of a manuscript containing all of his essays dealing with the Greek-Latin theological disputes connected with the Council of Florence.⁵¹ One could suggest that this was an attempt to protect his reputation for

⁴⁸Ibid., 488.

⁴⁹See Labowsky, "Unknown Treatise by Theodore Gaza," 175-94, for a summary of Theodore's letter (in reality a polemical treatise against George of Trebizond's *Comparatio*) with translation of some key portions, 191-4, and Greek text, 194-8. Labowsky, 174-5, indicates that the letters of Bessarion and Theodore comprise part of cod. Marc. gr. 4, a manuscript described in the inventories of Bessarion's library from 1474 to 1546, before subsequently being alienated from the collection.

⁵⁰Bessarion was one of several cardinals who had attempted to hold the pope to the conditions of his election. On the Election Capitulation agreed to by all but one of the cardinals in the conclave of 1464, binding the new pope to prosecute the crusade, to attempt to curb papal abuses of power and to reform the papal court, see Pastor, *History of Popes*, 4: 9-10. On Paul's about-face on the capitulation and the resistance he faced, see 20-5. See also Mohler, I, 319, who considers Bessarion was threatened with excommunication for his resistance.

⁵¹On dating of recensions of the theological *corpus* resulting in the final form of Ms Venice, Marc. Zan. lat. 135, see Monfasani, "Bessarion Latinus," 169-72.

orthodoxy which had suffered such abuse in George's *Comparatio*.⁵² However, in a treatise (now lost), George then attacked Bessarion's *De Sacramento Eucharistiae*,⁵³ one of the items contained in the theological *corpus*, indicating that it contained heretical statements.⁵⁴ Bessarion quickly withdrew the copies of his works from circulation, which one could suggest was in reaction to George's challenge.

Bessarion's *De Sacramento*, written in his view as the *legitimate* Patriarch of Constantinople, is a natural complement to his *Encyclica ad Graecos* (27 May 1463), where he supported the validity of the Latin doctrine of the *filioque*.⁵⁵ The *De Sacramento* affirmed the interpretation of the Eucharistic consecration he had accepted at the Council of Florence. In an oral statement (5 July 1439) made on behalf of the Greek delegation, he had confirmed that the Greek Church followed the Scriptures and the Holy Fathers, especially John Chrysostom, and accepted that the "dominical words are they that change and transubstantiate bread and wine into the true Body and Blood of Christ."⁵⁶ Bessarion also

⁵²Cf., *ibid.*, 169-72, where the rationale is seen only as an attempt to establish himself as a Latin author.

⁵³Greek text, Mohler, 3, 2-68; Latin translation, 3-69 and *PG* 161, 493-526. The Greek version (written no earlier than May 1463 since Bessarion styles himself Patriarch of Constantinople in the heading) was some time later translated into Latin. See Monfasani, "Bessarion Latinus," 171.

⁵⁴In a letter to Bessarion dated 29 August 1469, ed. Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezuntiana*, 161-83. George reviews the circumstances of the writing of his critique of the *De Sacramento* and the heresies he found in it, 169. See Monfasani, "Bessarion Latinus," 171; *idem*, *George of Trebizond*, 222-3; Hankins, 1, 210.

⁵⁵See discussion above, Chapter IV, 177-9.

⁵⁶*De verbis consecrationis et transubstantiatione, a Bessarione exposita in Concilio Florentino. Fragmenta protocolli, diaria privata, sermones*, ed., Hofmann, 24-6. For

refuted the claim made by both Mark of Ephesus⁵⁷ and the fourteenth century Byzantine theologian, Nicholas Cabasilas,⁵⁸ that the *epiclêsis*, a prayer in the Greek rite calling upon the power of the Holy Spirit after the dominical words, completed the Eucharistic consecration.⁵⁹

However, since the Council had likewise proclaimed that the same faith was held by the two churches, although a variety of rites and customs existed, Bessarion also viewed the Byzantine position with some sympathy, while still maintaining the efficiency of the Latin rite. He drew upon the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* of Pseudo-Dionysius to give a symbolic interpretation to the Eucharistic rite as a means of contemplating a higher or inner meaning.⁶⁰ This allegorical understanding of an eternal truth, viewing the Eucharist as a mystery beyond human expression or understanding, was something that both East and West naturally

discussion of debate regarding the act of consecration at the Council see Gill, *Council of Florence*, 266-93; on Bessarion's statement, 292-3. Cf., Syropoulos, X, 8, 292 and X, 17, 307. *Acta Graeca*, 441-2.

⁵⁷*Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, ed. Petit, "Documents relatifs, II," 426-34. Syropoulos, X, 3, 478, states that this treatise was prepared for the Emperor John VIII during the proceedings at the Council of Florence.

⁵⁸*A Commentary on the Divine Liturgy*, trans. J. M. Hussey and P. A. McNulty, with an introduction by R. M. French (London, 1960), 69-76.

⁵⁹Greek text, *De Sacramento*, Mohler, 3, 30-2; Latin translation, 31-3. On the history of the *epiclêsis* in orthodox theology, see Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 96-97, 206-7.

⁶⁰Greek text, *De Sacramento*, Mohler, 3, 60-8; Latin translation, 61-9, citing at intervals passages from *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, III, PG 3, 424B-445C, trans. Luibhead, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 209-24. See also discussion of Monfasani, "Bessarion Latinus," 171 and n. 2. On the importance of Dionysian symbolism in the Eastern Eucharistic rite see Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 29-30.

accepted. It also correlated well with the development of liturgical commentaries in the West.⁶¹

Bessarion proposed that, since the body and blood of Christ could be taken as signs of His Mystical Body, through *synecdoche*, the Greek priest could call on the Holy Spirit to consecrate the 'prefigured' bread and wine after the words of institution, since the prayer was referring to the Communion in which the faithful share in Christ's Mystical Body 'prefigured' by the real body and blood already present on the altar.⁶² Possibly Bessarion is here alluding to the statement of the Latin position on the *epiclêsis* made at the Council of Florence. During a general meeting of the two delegations on 18 June 1439 when this issue was the subject of considerable debate, John of Torquemada had stated: "The prayer of the *epiclêsis* is directed not to the sacramental Body of Christ, but to His Mystical Body, the faithful, that by the Holy Ghost there may be fulfilled in them the ends for which Christ gives himself."⁶³ George of Trebizond, not being aware of the discussion at the Union Council, saw this as tolerating what had just been declared erroneous and, moreover, he declared that no apostolic authority existed for the Greek practice.⁶⁴

⁶¹On the influence of Dionysius' treatise as a liturgical commentary, see Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 118-26.

⁶²See *De Sacramento*, Greek text, Mohler, 3, 58 and 66; Latin translation, 59 and 67.

⁶³*Acta Latina*, 255. See Gill, *Council of Florence*, 280-2, for discussion and translation.

⁶⁴Letter to Bessarion, 29 August 1469, ed. Monfasani, *Collectanea Trapezuntiana*, 169. See discussion by Monfasani, "Bessarion Latinus," 171, n. 2.

The Augustinian theologian, Niccolò Palmieri,⁶⁵ had provided George with the copy of Bessarion's *De Sacramento* and had specifically asked George for a perusal of and comment on the contents.⁶⁶ Palmieri's queries would seem to indicate that he gave some credence to George's charges in the *Comparatio* against Bessarion since he was seeking to have his suspicions about the Cardinal's orthodoxy addressed.⁶⁷ Moreover, speculations were once more circulating in Rome at that time with regard to the true authorship of the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus and the similarities in expression that had been recognized between the writings of Dionysius and those of the Neoplatonist, Proclus.⁶⁸ George's attack had the potential to reinforce suspicions that had previously been raised about the identify of Dionysius by members of Bessarion's own circle in Rome a decade earlier.

The attention being drawn to the *De Sacramento* was, quite contrary to Bessarion's intention in publishing his theological treatises, allowing the question of his orthodoxy to be

⁶⁵Palmieri (1401-68) an Augustinian friar with considerable scholastic training, became Bishop of Catanzaro and then Bishop of Civita Castellana and Orte. He taught in Rome during Nicholas V's pontificate and delivered several extant sermons and orations at the papal court under Nicholas V, Pius II and Paul II, which are a curious blend of Augustinian, Dominican and humanist themes. He enjoyed a considerable reputation for his writings against the Fraticelli. See John W. O'Malley, *Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome: Rhetoric, Doctrine, and Reform in the Sacred Orations of the Papal Court, c. 1450-1521* (Durham, N.C., 1979), 88-90; John Monfasani, "A Theologian at the Roman Curia in the Mid-Quattrocento: A Bio-Bibliographical study of Niccolò Palmieri, O.S.A.," *Analecta Augustiniana* 54 (1991) : 321-81; 55 (1992) : 5-98.

⁶⁶Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 181-2.

⁶⁷Ibid., 182.

⁶⁸On this scrutiny, see John Monfasani, "Pseudo-Dionysius in Mid-Quattrocento Rome," 191-206. Monfasani considers that discussion was widespread, touching even Nicholas of Cusa and his humanist translator, Pietro Balbi, who also had connections with the Bessarion Circle.

scrutinized by an ever widening audience, including many individuals who had already had misgivings about his Byzantine heritage. The Cardinal realized that both he and the expatriate Byzantines closely associated with him must, in self defence, be seen as completely orthodox Christians and integral parts of Latin culture. One could suggest that these concerns lie behind a letter (August 1465) written when he assumed guardianship for the orphaned children of Thomas Palaeologus. He advised the tutor responsible for the education of his wards that they should conform to the ways of the Latins. They should attend Latin churches, dress like Franks and display the highest reverence in the presence of the cardinals. Moreover, they were not to flaunt their imperial lineage since they were exiles and strangers, forced to live on the charity of others.⁶⁹

George's challenges presented Bessarion with another disconcerting problem. Although the scholastic arguments that George had laid out in his *Comparatio* were certainly familiar to the highly sophisticated Latin audience to whom Bessarion had to address a reply, he himself had no deep understanding of Latin scholastic theology.⁷⁰ He sought the collaboration of friends and associates, most particularly his circle in Rome, to assist him in addressing the scholastic sources and questions put forward by George.⁷¹ Those in his employ had good reason to assist him. They owed their livelihood to his patronage; moreover, some had their own particular grievances against George. Ecclesiastics who favoured the Union of the Churches and Latins who admired and respected him felt

⁶⁹Mohler, 3, 531-6.

⁷⁰See above, Chapter III, 97; Chapter IV, 140.

⁷¹This became Book III in the final printed Latin edition.

compelled to rise to his defence in order to protect his reputation for holiness and orthodoxy.⁷²

In addition, although Bessarion certainly waxed eloquent in Greek, he did not consider that his Latin prose was of the same high quality as that displayed by George.⁷³ Since the Latins could not but admire the accomplished eloquence of George of Trebizond's treatise, Bessarion employed his long-time secretary, Niccolò Perotti, to compose the final Latin version of the *ICP* printed in 1469. It was more than pride, however, which stimulated this undertaking.⁷⁴ Bessarion's experience of Latin contempt for him in the College of Cardinals as a "schismatic Greek" in 1455, George's challenges of 1458 and 1464 and his own awareness of his inferiority to George as a Latin orator came together in his mind to confirm the absolute necessity of being seen as an integral part of contemporary Latin culture and a completely orthodox Christian.

Bessarion's first counterattack against George was not, however, the publication of his own views; rather, it was a condemnation of what could be construed as the treasonous activities of his adversary in regard to his journey to Constantinople in 1465 in an attempt

⁷²See discussion by Hankins, 1, 216-17.

⁷³On this point see Monfasani, "Bessarion Latinus," 167-82. For contemporary evidence see the marginal note in Pius II's hand in his *Commentaries* (Cod. Vat. Manuscript Cod. Reg. 1995, p. 156) where, in connection with Bessarion's three hour speech at Mantua (1459), he remarks that the Cardinal was more eloquent in Greek than in Latin. See passage cited and discussion by Mitchell, *Laurels and Tiara*, 158 and n. 56, 281.

⁷⁴The view of Monfasani, "Bessarion Latinus," 181-2, who has determined, 165-80, that throughout his whole life Bessarion was only comfortable composing in Greek and that the works he put forward for publication went through a complicated process of successive translations, the final version often being that of his secretary, Niccolò Perotti.

to convert Mehmed II to Christianity.⁷⁵ George was imprisoned for several months (October 1466- February 1467) in the Castle San Angelo.⁷⁶ Pope Paul II, however, was reluctant to proceed against him and eventually insisted upon his release. It was the Pope (who viewed George with some affection as his former tutor in Venice) who had financed George's trip to Constantinople in 1465.⁷⁷ Given the Pope's association with George's undertaking, it was prudent for Bessarion to proceed no further.

Moreover, the Castle San Angelo soon held within its walls individuals who were very closely associated with Bessarion. In February 1468 the conspiracy associated with the Roman Academy of Pomponius Laetus erupted in Rome and some of the Cardinal's own associates were incarcerated in the fortress.⁷⁸ A comparison between George's accusations

⁷⁵Despite assistance from George Amiroutzes, in the employ of the Sultan, George of Trebizond was unsuccessful in his endeavour: he never gained an audience with Mehmed II. George did, however, write several letters of oration praising Mehmed, in one of which he even dedicated to him a copy of his *Comparatio* and highly recommended the Patriarch Gennadius II (George Scholarius), the adversary of Plethon. George distributed these compositions in Rome after his return. See discussion by Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 185-90. Some of the texts of George's prefaces and treatises are printed, with English translation, idem, *Collectanea Trapezuntiana*, 281-6, 491-575.

⁷⁶In June 1466 Pope Paul II appointed a commission including Bessarion to examine one of George's letters. A few months later more of George's incriminating letters to the Sultan fell into Bessarion's hands. Their disclosure resulted in charges of treason and heresy against George, for the letters revealed that he had sought employment with Mehmed II and had hailed him as *Emperor of the Romans*. See Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 191-4.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 185.

⁷⁸On the events see Pastor, *History of Popes*, 4: 36-65. For review of historical opinion and discussion see A. J. Dunston, "Pope Paul II and the Humanists," *The Journal of Religious History* 7 (1972-3): 287-306; on members of the Roman Academy who were also part of Bessarion's Circle, see 292. See also D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism in Papal Rome*, 97-102; J. Palmerino, "The Roman Academy, the Catacombs and the Conspiracy of 1468," *Archivum Historia Pontificiae* 18 (1980): 117-55; Hankins, 1, 211-14.

against the Platonists in his *Comparatio* and the charges brought against the Roman Academy members show some marked similarities. In the third book of his *Comparatio* George had denounced Plato's immorality. Moreover, he had also contended that Plato's idealism led to Epicurus' materialism. Platonic *eros* led to Epicurean hedonism and Mohammed's union of both led to Pletho's paganism and use of neoplatonic rites, concluding with the allegation that "a fourth Plato will come and overpass all previous 'Platos' in spreading the creed of *voluptas*."⁷⁹ Charges against the Academicians included heresy, irreligion, paganism, materialism and immorality, consisting of hedonism and unmentionable vices. Pomponius Laetus, in fact, was under arrest in Venice, charged with sodomy at the time that the Roman accusations were brought against him: similar allegations had previously been made against Niccolò Perotti and Andreas Contrarius, members of Bessarion's circle.⁸⁰ Individuals within the ecclesiastical establishment, both humanist and scholastic, long familiar with George's *Comparatio*, could easily have identified the same parallel.

By now, Pope Paul II had begun to take considerable interest in the confrontation between George and Bessarion. Some time earlier, Bessarion had allowed a member of his household, Fernandus Cordubensis, an impetuous, youthful defender of Plato, to collect patristic and classical *testimonia* in favour of Plato and to provide comments on them.

⁷⁹See English translation of passage from *Comparatio* in Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 158-9, and discussion above, 195.

⁸⁰See Dunston, "Pope Paul II and Humanists," 299-301; Hankins, 1, 211-14; D'Amico, *Renaissance Humanism in Papal Rome*, 274-6.

Cordubensis' treatise (28 January 1467)⁸¹ was perused by the Pope, who then passed it on to George's friend, Niccolò Palmieri, for a judgement on its contents. In his written reply, some time before his death (October 1468), Palmieri refuted and condemned in minute detail many religious errors he found in it.⁸² Moreover, as a complement to Palmieri's treatise, in the spring of 1469, George's son, Andreas, also produced a treatise of testimonies against Plato.⁸³

By late 1468, however, Bessarion had already gone onto the offensive. He used the power of the press to communicate his views to a wide audience with the assistance of his humanist circle. Until August 1469, when his own major work appeared, the Cardinal sponsored the printing activities of Sweynheym and Painartz at Rome. Andreas Bussi and Theodore of Gaza acted as editors. The program was an overt attempt to show that the Latin Fathers of the Church endorsed the study of classical literature, particularly Platonic philosophy, and it culminated in the publication of Bessarion's *ICP*. Bussi even called upon the impeccable orthodoxy of Bessarion's deceased friend, Nicholas of Cusa (d. 1464), to vouch for the use of Platonic philosophy.⁸⁴ Bessarion might also have felt compelled to take

⁸¹*De laudibus Platonis ex testimoniis tum sacrorum interpretum, tum ethnicorum adversus quosdam doctrinam eius et vitam carpere solitos*, MS Roma, B. Vallicelliana, I. 22, cited and discussed with earlier literature, Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 216-17.

⁸²Ms Montserrat, 882, cited and discussed by Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 218.

⁸³*Contra Platonem ex doctorum auctoritate*, MS Trapani, B. Fadelliana 207 (olim V a 2), cited and discussed by Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 216-18.

⁸⁴In the preface to Jerome's *Epistolea* (13 December 1468) Bussi drew a clear comparison between Bessarion and the Latin Father, stating that Jerome's impeccable orthodoxy was untouched by his love for classical literature and that being so gifted in his knowledge of languages, he was able to translate the wisdom of the scriptures into Latin.

steps to safeguard his precious library containing the patristic and hellenic heritage of East and West, which in the Spring of 1469 was in the process of being transported to Venice.⁸⁵

Bessarion might, indeed, have perceived that a very real threat existed to the mission of a lifetime. His own orthodoxy was being questioned: aspersions were being cast upon Platonic philosophy and the authenticity of the Dionysian corpus: his own relationship with the Pope was uncertain. His answer to all these pressing concerns found final expression in his major work, the *ICP*.

Bussi announced the publication of the *ICP* in the preface to Apuleius' *Opera*, printed 28 February 1469. He states that this work approved by Augustine in his *De civitate Dei* is dedicated to Pope Paul II by Bessarion as the best available source in Latin expressing the views of Plato, whose works have been honoured through the ages and were much admired by Nicholas of Cusa. See Feld, "Sweynheym and Pannartz," 296-8, whose citations are from the collection of Bussi's prefaces, ed. A. M. Quirini, *Libe singularis de optimorum scriptorum editionibus quae Romae primum prodierunt post divinum typographiae inventum* (Lindau, 1761): 114, for preface to Jerome's *Epistolea*: 211-19, for preface to Apuleius' *Opera*.

⁸⁵Bessarion (ca.1463/4) willed his library to the Benedictine monastery of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice. At the suggestion of Paolo Morosini, the Venetian ambassador at the Curia, Bessarion (citing the need for public access) obtained permission from Pope Paul II (September 1467) to make the city of Venice the beneficiary. Labowsky, *Bessarion's Library*, 25, also suggests that he had concerns regarding the ability to compel the monastery to keep the collection intact. Vast, *Cardinal Bessarion*, 296, states that Bessarion sought to protect the collection from being sold after his death by the Pope. Feld, "Sweynheym and Pannartz", 310-11, proposed that fear of papal confiscation of his Platonic texts in the wake of the Academy scandal caused Bessarion to arrange hastily for transportation of the books in early 1469, which Hankins, 1, 214, n. 126 discounts since the decision had already been taken in 1467. However, since the imminent publication of the *ICP* was announced by Bussi in his preface to Apuleius on 28 February 1469 but it did not appear until August, one might suggest that the publication of Andreas' tract against Plato in the Spring of 1469, as mentioned above, had raised the stakes in the game considerably. Hence Bessarion might have seen it prudent to remove his library from Rome in anticipation of a negative reaction from the Pope to the publication of his defence of Plato. See discussion, Labowsky, *Bessarion's Library*, 24-32, for sequence of events and summary of the documents, which are all printed, 148-56. See n. 83 above for Bussi's preface.

CHAPTER VII

IN CALUMINATOREM PLATONIS

It was certainly with much advance notice and considerable anticipation amongst the ecclesiastics and humanists at Rome that the *ICP* rolled off the press in August 1469. The work had experienced a long gestation period and had been expanded over time better to address the challenges to Bessarion's program for cultural religious unity.¹ However, in expressing his own views of the relationship between faith and reason, it was a synthesis of apophatic theology and a neoplatonic version of philosophy similar to what had existed in the patristic age.

A Synthesis of Faith and Reason

In his lengthy study of how Plato was interpreted in the Italian Renaissance, James Hankins has amply demonstrated that the philosophical interpretation of Bessarion's

¹Many problems concerning the textual history of the *ICP* still defy resolution and the work is much in need of an improved edition. The versions used in this discussion are those printed by Mohler, 2. The Greek text is the final redaction of the shorter text first composed by Bessarion in 1459, as discussed above, 195-6. Niccolò Perotti produced the elegant Latin translation of this text printed in Rome (1469), a more concise, clear and powerful oration intended to appeal to a Latin audience, which consisted of the four actual books of the *ICP* to which Bessarion then appended a critique of George's translation of Plato's *Laws* and his earlier treatise, *De Natura et Arte* (1458), discussed above, 192. See Monfasani, "Still Bessarion Latinus," 217-26. See also Hankins, 1, 218, n. 136, and Labowsky, *Bessarion's Library*, 115 sq. Since it was the Latin version that saw distribution at Rome in 1469, I use this text for Bessarion's explanation, noting, if necessary, where it differs significantly from the Greek text.

exposition in the *ICP* is founded on the Byzantine hermeneutical tradition.² Plato reigns supreme in metaphysics, Aristotle, in natural philosophy; their views, however, are really not incompatible. Throughout the entire work Bessarion demonstrates the priority of Plato over Aristotle, as source to epitome, cause to effect. Moreover, as Hankins has further established, Bessarion presents a Neoplatonic version of Platonism based upon Proclus' exposition in his *Platonic Theology*³ and correlates this understanding with the writings of the Pseudo-Dionysius.⁴ However, Hankins has insufficiently recognized that, in so doing, Bessarion was merely relying upon a synthesis of Neoplatonic and Christian principles formulated in Eastern apophatic theology. His debt is not exclusively to Dionysius; he also relies upon the authority of many other Latin and Greek Fathers of the Church to advance an apophatic theological interpretation, using the same principles that underlie his theological works as stated above.⁵ In the traditional Byzantine view, faith dealt with divine things beyond the reach of discursive reasoning.

One must approach any discussion of the *ICP* by realizing that in a truly apophatic and neoplatonic fashion, it operates on several levels. In an overt sense, Bessarion's work is heavily influenced by the rhetorical structure imposed upon him by George of Trebizond's

²Hankins, 1, 217-63.

³See Hankins, 2, Appendix 13, "Bessarion's Debt to Proclus in Book II of the *Caluminator*," 441-4. For Bessarion's familiarity with Proclus' *Platonic Philosophy* from his youth see discussion above, 61-2.

⁴See Hankins, 1, 196, 259-60.

⁵See Chapter IV, 116-31, and Chapter V, 168-70.

Comparatio.⁶ The Cardinal wanted to answer each and every charge made by his adversary and to protect his own reputation by showing that George lacked the theological and philosophical depth to understand correctly the works he cited. Bessarion states at the outset in Book I that he will not even stoop to naming his adversary, since the latter would suffer extreme mortification when the extent of his ignorance on such high matters was revealed.⁷ There was, of course, no doubt as to the author of the *Comparatio* in any contemporary reader's mind. The personal attacks against George's abilities as a translator, philologist, orator, philosopher and theologian are contrasted with the Cardinal's own expertise. However, Bessarion also clearly expected his readers to realize the deeper, hidden meanings (of which George had no comprehension) in his overall exposition of Plato's compatibility with Christianity. Bessarion might also have been insuring that, even if his western audience did not comprehend fully the eastern doctrines that he would present in the *ICP*, expatriate Byzantines would easily find their own orthodox heritage preserved in his theological exposition.

Therefore, in Book I, in reply to the calumnies levelled against Plato by George in the first book of his *Comparatio*,⁸ Bessarion feigns shock that his adversary could even consider that the Fathers were capable of admiring the monster of depravity he depicts: quite the contrary, he states that the consensus of these holy men is that Plato is closer to the Christian religion than Aristotle. This is demonstrated by their use of Platonic concepts in

⁶See Hankins, 1, 245-9, for discussion of Bessarion's format.

⁷*ICP*, I, Mohler 2, 7.

⁸See discussion above, Chapter VI, 192.

explaining their own doctrines.⁹ This would have been clear to all of the Latins if they had not been forced, even until quite recently, to rely upon inaccurate translations of Aristotle's works.¹⁰ This is certainly a less than veiled reference to George, in particular, for Bessarion's readers would have been well aware that the Cardinal had branded George's translations of both Plato and Aristotle faulty (the fifth book of the *ICP* is devoted to correcting George's errors in translating Plato); George was also clearly identified in Bessarion's *De Natura et Arte*, which was appended as the sixth book of the *ICP*.¹¹

Bessarion then addresses George's charges regarding the value of Plato's works as a teaching tool. The Cardinal establishes the need for an allegorical interpretation whereby a reader, with the required intellectual capacity and attitude of heart and mind, would be able to search for the hidden depths of meaning in the text, a capacity and attitude that George was obviously lacking. Drawing a clear comparison to the literal and higher meaning contained in Holy Scripture, Bessarion applauds the "unwritten doctrines in Plato," which are obscure in order to blind the simple and ignorant with too much light. When Plato talks in fables, enigmas and myths in order to hide divine truths from the vulgar, he conforms to the pattern of all religious leaders before and after him. This was the method of Pythagoras, the Chaldeans, and even the prophets and other sacred writers of the Scriptures.¹² who

⁹*ICP*. I.1. Mohler 2. 3-9.

¹⁰*Ibid.*. I.1. Mohler 2. 9.

¹¹See p. 208. n. 1 above and discussion Chapter VI. 195-6.

¹²*ICP*. I.2. Mohler 2. 11; cf.. II.8. Mohler, 2. 157.

warned: "Do not give what is holy to the dogs nor cast your pearls before swine."¹³

Bessarion then proceeds to a discussion of Plato's letters to establish that the dialogues themselves discuss things which it is beyond the power of sensible signs to represent: therefore they cannot be reduced to their literal meaning.¹⁴ Bessarion continues:

Like Pythagoras and the most ancient philosophers, and even the Druids themselves, Plato gave a secret teaching to some initiates. On the first and sublime things, Plato wrote nothing, or at least very little, and even that in a very obscure fashion. He thought that he should not communicate to the multitude the knowledge of such great matters and that it was much better to retain these things and to meditate on them in his mind. But on certain other matters, he did not, to be sure, establish any definite rules like a schoolmaster: how to orate, how to dispute and other such things. He did nonetheless sow in his dialogues, in an attractive and scholarly manner, many useful precepts relating to the arts and disciplines.¹⁵

To establish further the superiority of Plato over Aristotle and the extent to which his own expertise far outstrips that of George, Bessarion acknowledges the usefulness of Aristotle's handbook of knowledge based upon Plato's principles. However, the Cardinal then relates how common experience testifies that knowledge learned from others or from our own meditations is better committed to memory: he stresses that children guard the inheritance of learning acquired from the oral instruction of their parents in the same way that disciples learn from masters, not from words preserved in a book.¹⁶ He further

¹³Ibid., I.2, Mohler 2, 11, citing Matt. 7.6.

¹⁴Ibid., I. 2, Mohler 2, 15-17, citing Plat. Ep. II, 312 D-E, 313 E, 314 A-C, and Ep. VII, 341 B-D and 344 D-E. See Hankins, 1, 254 and n. 229, who identifies this as a critique of George's literal interpretation of the dialogues. Hankins notes that letter 2 is also cited by modern interpreters to support hidden meanings in Plato's text.

¹⁵*ICP*, I.2, Mohler 2, 19.

¹⁶Ibid., I.2, Mohler, 2, 21. See Hankins, 1, 257, and n. 236, who considers that Bessarion is here sneering at George's equating Aristotle's schoolmastering with Plato's

establishes the superiority of an orator like Demosthenes (read Bessarion) over the rhetorical handbook on Demosthenes' methodology compiled by Hermogenes (read George, who had produced a popular handbook using Hermogenes as the model).¹⁷ Subsequently, Bessarion embraces Pseudo-Dionysius as his model for the proper interpretation of the Platonic texts. He readily points out that in his own writings Dionysius had even incorporated the very phrases found in Plato's works.¹⁸ Bessarion's readers were here to understand that, just as *Dionysius* emphasised that designated earthly hierarchs decoded allegorical scriptural revelation, the Cardinal (not his adversary) was the one who could provide the correct interpretation of how Platonic theology related to Christian doctrine.¹⁹

In his second book, Bessarion demonstrates how the Fathers of the Church, who are to be believed in matters pertaining to faith and true religion, preferred to find in the works of Plato, rather than Aristotle, the metaphysical principles to confirm said faith and religion.²⁰ He notes, as did the Fathers, the points at which Plato's doctrine cannot be reconciled with Christian teachings (such as the pre-existence of souls and the multiplicity of gods) and states

esoteric religious wisdom. On *mimesis* see also H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, 2 vols. (Munich, 1978), Vol. 2, 7.

¹⁷*ICP*, I.2, Mohler, 2, 23. See Hankins, 1, 256 and n. 233; 223 for identifications.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, I.7, Mohler, 2, 73. See also the discussion of Hankins, 1, 196, 225, 259-60, with regard to Bessarion's use of Dionysius.

¹⁹For a discussion of how Pseudo-Dionysius' understanding of analogy restricted an individual's use based upon his abilities and limitations see Ray C. Petry, ed., *Late Medieval Mysticism* (London: 1957), 33-6; Rorem, *Pseudo Dionysius*, 18-27.

²⁰*ICP*, II.2, Mohler, 2, 83. Bessarion refers to Basil, Gregory [of Nazianzus], Cyril, Gregory [of Nyssa] among the Greeks and Augustine, Boethius and many others amongst the Latins who studied the works of both Plato and Aristotle.

unequivocally that he does not hold to these beliefs.²¹ Bessarion then presents a synthesis of faith and reason as a solution to traditional theological problems on the nature of God, creation, the soul, fate, providence, free will and the principles of the natural world.²²

In dealing first with the nature of God, Bessarion draws upon the apophatic theology of Pseudo-Dionysius to establish the futility of attempts by natural reason to understand what is, in fact, beyond reason,²³ just as he had previously done by references to the Eastern Fathers in his *Oratio* delivered at the Greek delegation at the Council of Florence.²⁴ Once again, Bessarion states: “Has Dionysius not taken this from Plato and used almost the same words?”²⁵ He provides further citations from Dionysius on the inability to find words to describe the nature of God:²⁶ he then turns to Gregory of Nazianzus’ *Oration on the Resurrection* for confirmation.²⁷

²¹Ibid., II.2, Mohler, 2, 87.

²²Ibid., II.4-11, Mohler, 2, 87-207. See Hankins, 1, 249, who notes that a similar neoplatonic conception of order is found in Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*. See also M. D. Chenu, *Towards an Understanding of St. Thomas*, Chicago, 1964, 304-10.

²³ICP, II.4, Mohler 2, 89-91. Compare Pseudo Dionysius, *Divine Names*, I.1, PG 3, 588 B, trans. Luibhead, 49-50.

²⁴See discussion above, Chapter IV, 116-19.

²⁵ICP, II.4, Mohler 2, 89.

²⁶Ibid., II.4, Mohler 2, 89, citing *Divine Names*, I.5, PG 3, 593 B D, trans. Luibhead, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 53-4. See Walker, *Ancient Theology*, 80, 111-13, who has traced Bessarion’s ideas expressed in the *ICP* as they were studied, cited and incorporated into the writings of sixteenth century French mystics. Walker points to this section in the *ICP* as one particularly used by syncretists.

²⁷ICP, II.4, Mohler, 2, 89-91, citing Or. 45, PG 36, 625 C and 628 A.

Bessarion then proceeds to show how, in fact, the Fathers of the Church, while always recognizing the priority of revelation, had also felt justified in expressing their metaphysical explanations in Platonic terms and principles. In considerable detail he relates the resemblances and differences between Platonic and Neoplatonic triads on the one hand and the Christian Trinity on the other. He acknowledges that Plato spoke of the Trinity in a way far inferior to that of the Catholic religion. Plato was "illuminated by the natural light of reason alone" and only later had God "sent his son to reveal the truth to us more clearly."²⁸

In refuting George's charge that Plato was the source of all heresies, particularly those espoused by Arius and Origen, Bessarion asserts that those who are drawn astray into heresy have only themselves to blame since they have chosen to interpret the Scriptures according to Plato and not Plato according to the Scriptures.²⁹ Plato realized the need for faith and placed it first among the virtues.³⁰ Such is the proximity of Plato to our faith that his philosophy can be used to lead a man to "the more perfect state of our religion"; if one errs by moving from education in sacred letters to Plato's teaching, the fault is his own, not Plato's.³¹ Bessarion's explanation is perfectly in line with Christian Platonism throughout the entire medieval period and his own understanding of the relationship between Platonic

²⁸Ibid., II.5, Mohler, 2, 103. See discussion, Hankins, 1, 254. See also Walker, *Ancient Theology*, 70 and n. 5, 80, for the use of Bessarion's argument as stated here in the writings of sixteenth century French mystics. Cf., n. 23 above.

²⁹*ICP*, II.5, Mohler, 2, 103.

³⁰Ibid., II.5, Mohler, 2, 105, relying on Proclus, *Platonic Theology* 1.25, ed. Saffrey and Westerink, 109. See also Hankins, 1, 235-6 and n. 184; Hankins, 2, 444.

³¹*ICP*, II.5, Mohler, 2, 107. See also Hankins, 1, 236 and n. 189.

Philosophy and theology as he had first conceived it in his youth.³² Moreover, he follows the parameters established by the Eastern Church in the late eleventh century amidst the controversies concerning Michael Psellus' use of Platonic Philosophy and the condemnation of his pupil, John Italus, who had attempted to provide a new synthesis of theology and philosophy.³³

Bessarion then discusses in great detail how much closer Plato's doctrines are to Christianity than Aristotle's.³⁴ In addressing Plato's doctrine of the pre-existence of the soul, the Cardinal establishes that Plato had believed in the soul's emanation from God, understood to mean that the soul was 'eternally begotten' enabling it to 'participate in time', an interpretation of psychic being which Hankins considers 'deifies the human soul' in a way contradictory to orthodox Catholicism.³⁵ One could suggest that this was a possible allusion to the way that Plato's theory of emanation was adopted and transformed in the Byzantine theological tradition.³⁶ Since deification was the core of mystical teaching in the Byzantine Church and it was an integral part of the orthodox vision of God, Bessarion's desire to introduce this doctrine in the *ICP* was totally in keeping with his previous attempts to

³²See discussion above, Chapter III, 61-3.

³³Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 63. Bessarion's use of Proclus and Dionysius is very similar to the methods of Michael Psellus. Compare Psellus' synthesis in Pelikan, *Christian Tradition*, 2, 243-51, with references to Bessarion, 251. For other connections between Bessarion and Psellus see above, Chapter III, 56; 63-4; 69.

³⁴*ICP*, II.6-12, Mohler, 2, 109-219.

³⁵*Ibid.*, II.8, Mohler, 2, 153, citing Plato, *Tim.* 34 B - 35 B. See discussion, Hankins, 1, 257-9.

³⁶See discussion above, Chapter III, 26-8.

support the tenets of the *Tome of Union* in his theological works produced after the Council of Florence.³⁷

Bessarion also put forward some interpretations of Plato's texts, which western humanists would find congenial. He argues like the Middle Platonists that Aristotle only disagreed with Plato's terminology, not his doctrines,³⁸ and expresses once again the need to identify a higher meaning in Plato's text.³⁹ He defends Plato's obscurity by relying upon an equally well established tradition that this was a method of exercising the ingenuity of students to make them value their hard-won knowledge.⁴⁰ He advances Plutarch and Alexander of Aphrodisias as advocates of Plato's superiority to Aristotle.⁴¹

In the third book of the ICP, Bessarion enlists a whole range of patristic and scholastic sources arranged to establish the priority of Plato over Aristotle and to provide the

³⁷Until quite recently, scholars have been inclined to see, in the section of the *Tome* dealing with the vision of God, that the words "and clearly see God himself, One and Three, as he is" indicated that the Byzantine Church was accepting the western doctrine of the vision of the divine essence. See Gill, *Council of Florence*, 285 and n. 3. However, scholars are now more inclined to see these words as a preservation of the Byzantine understanding relating to a vision of the 'divine energies' not the divine essence itself. See de Halleux, "Problème de Méthode dans les Discussions sur l'Eschatologie," 284-99, on the agreement of Bessarion and Mark of Ephesus with regard to the orthodox vision of God in discussions on Purgatory and the wording of the *Tome of Union*; E. Lanne, "Uniformité et Pluralisme: les ecclésiologies en présence," in *Christian Unity*, ed. G. Albergio, 358. See also Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 64-5; idem, *Vision of God*, 10-12, and above Chapter III, 30 and n. 26.

³⁸*ICP*, II.8, Mohler 2, 153. See Hankins, 1, 246, and n. 209.

³⁹*Ibid.*, II.8, Mohler, 2, 157; cf., I.1, Mohler, 2, 3. See Hankins, 1, 254 and n. 229.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, II.8, Mohler, 2, 161.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, II.9, Mohler, 2, 165-6, 173. Hankins, 1, 257, notes that Bessarion, in putting forward Alexander of Aphrodisias, was rendering Aristotle almost as difficult to reconcile with Christianity as Averroes.

correct interpretation of Aristotelian texts. He offers an unbroken consensus of witnesses in the ancient practice of the Christian apologists to suggest that Plato was prevented from clearly publishing his true religious views by the example of Socrates' death⁴² and that Plato derived his theology from the Old Testament scriptures.⁴³ He again elicits a principle central to the doctrinal reading of the humanists by indicating that matters discussed in a serious and wise manner are to be attributed to the author, fanciful or immoral remarks are the result of genre requirements or the need to expose vice in its true form.⁴⁴ Bessarion then establishes that the Platonic hypostases are not coessential with each other and, by relying upon long quotations from Augustine and Aquinas, that the doctrine of the Trinity cannot be reached by natural reason.⁴⁵

⁴²*ICP*, III.4, Mohler, 2, 229.

⁴³*Ibid.*, III.8, Mohler, 2, 244. Bessarion cites the testimony of Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, VIII, xi; Cyril, *Contra Julium*, 1, PG 76, 524 sq.; Eusebius, *De praeparatione evangelica*, passim. Cf., Mohler, 1, 389; Walker, *Ancient Theology*, 14 and n. 2; Hankins, 1, 236 and n. 186. Hankins, 252-3 and n. 220, points out that Bessarion has successfully established, as he had done in his theological method during the Council, an argument from tradition, largely neglected by the majority of scholastic theologians of the high middle ages, but a consensus that the theologians of the Catholic counter-reformation would find most congenial for their own purposes.

⁴⁴*ICP*, III.9, Mohler, 2, 247. See Hankins, 1, 18-26, for overview of the various western methods for reading texts in the fifteenth century, with his discussion of doctrinal reading, 18-20. See also his discussion, 260, of Bessarion's use of this method here.

⁴⁵*ICP*, III.16, Mohler, 2, 297 sq. Walker, *Ancient Theology*, 14 and n. 4 and 41, states that this discussion, based upon the premise that Plato and other ancient theologians are not Christian, addresses the resemblances and differences between Plato and Neoplatonic traditions and Christianity, the typical and persistent themes of syncretisms. With regard to Augustine, the references are to *Confessions*, VII, 9, *De civitate Dei*, X, 23, 28; with regard to Aquinas, *In Sent. Petr. Lomb.* I, dist. 3, q. 1, art. 4; *Summa theologiae* I, q. 32, art. 1; q. 12, art. 2; *Summa contra gentiles* I, 3.

George had attacked Plethon, suggesting that his determinism made revelation unnecessary.⁴⁶ Bessarion levels the same charge against George's attempts to nullify the distance between Aristotle and Christianity.⁴⁷ Bessarion uses Plutarch and Alexander of Aphrodisias to show Plato's superiority over Aristotle on free will and providence and then indicates how Aristotle and Plato had similar doctrines of recollection and the pre-existence of souls. The Cardinal cites the commentaries of Aquinas and other scholastics to prove that George's attempts to find revealed Christian doctrines in Aristotle are illegitimate.⁴⁸

Book Four of the *ICP* re-establishes Plato's reputation for morality. The whole consensus of ancient philosophical commentators on the concord between Aristotle and Plato are put forward, particularly Apuleius, Aulus Gellius and Macrobius.⁴⁹ The works approved by the Latin Fathers as discussed in the earlier printing campaign under Bussi's supervision.⁵⁰

⁴⁶See discussion above, Chapter VI, 194.

⁴⁷*ICP*, III.19, Mohler, 2, 347. See also Hankins, 1, 235, and idem, 2, Appendix 14, "The 'Ancient Theology' of Aristotle according to George of Trebizond," 445-8, where Hankins examines George's attempts to find an ancient theology in the writings of Aristotle with less success than can be done with Plato.

⁴⁸*ICP*, III.19-31, Mohler, 2, 309-421. Hankins, 1, 222 and ns. 146, 149-50, considers that many of the scholastic materials included in this exposition were provided by the Dominican, Giovanni Galto (d. 1484), whom Bessarion acknowledges at III, 18, Mohler, 2, 305. Hankins notes that Bessarion uses the great scholastics as authorities for the interpretation of Aristotle rather than as sources for apodictic arguments in theology.

⁴⁹*ICP*, IV.1, Mohler, 2, 423-43.

⁵⁰See discussion above, Chapter VI, 205-6, and n. 83.

As Hankins indicates, the whole purpose was to show that Aristotle is useful but second rate: Plato is the master, Aristotle, the student.⁵¹

In addressing George's charges of sexual immorality against Plato, Bessarion's appeal is, as before, to the higher meaning hidden in the text in view of the limits of human language to discuss such high matters. Bessarion contrasts 'divine love', described as "honourable, modest, demure, loyal, holy, blessed, a safeguard of chastity and continence, generously inspiring the soul and loving and obedient to virtue" with the 'earthly love' consisting of "lust and luxury, shamelessness and wickedness hurtling rashly towards its evil desire."⁵² Inevitably, the Cardinal remarks, people such as George will confuse the two *eros* and asks if his adversary would also give such literal interpretations to passages which he then cites from the *Canticle of Solomon*.⁵³ Bessarion interprets homosexual romance as metaphysical *eros*, a tradition stemming from Plato's *Symposium* and transmitted through Augustine, Proclus and Pseudo-Dionysius.⁵⁴ The Cardinal states that the good *eros* had been praised by holy men throughout the ages, especially Dionysius, that most holy apostle and Platonist.⁵⁵ Here, Bessarion found one of George's own complaints towards the Neoplatonists most useful as a good argument against his adversary and the suspicions raised

⁵¹Hankins, 1, 246-7 and n. 209.

⁵²*JCP*, IV.2, Mohler, 2, 445.

⁵³*Ibid.*, IV.2, Mohler, 2, 445, citing *Cant.* 1, 10; 2, 5 sq.; 2, 14; 3, 1; 4, 1-7.

⁵⁴On this point, see A. Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. P. S. Watson (London, 1953) and discussion, Hankins, 1, 258-9.

⁵⁵*JCP*, IV.2, Mohler, 2, 447.

regarding the legitimacy of Dionysius. In his *Comparatio* George had complained that the Neoplatonists, particularly Proclus, had stolen their doctrines from Dionysius.⁵⁶ Bessarion agreed.

Bessarion states that, in the *Divine Names*, Dionysius tells us that words are unable to describe the 'yearning' of God for us: God Himself is the source of heavenly love; it is from His unity that the powers pour out that draw us back to Him.⁵⁷ Here, Bessarion clearly employs the Byzantine doctrine of deification, possibly as understood by Gregory Palamas.⁵⁸ to interpret the Neoplatonic doctrine of procession and return.⁵⁹ It is quite possible that in his explication of the 'divine love' Bessarion is attempting to harmonize the love analogies of Augustine and Gregory Palamas in yet a further effort to reconcile the

⁵⁶*Comparatio*, II, 4, f. G8r, cited by Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 157-8, with Latin text printed n. 117. See also discussion by Hankins, I, 238 and n. 193.

⁵⁷*ICP*, IV.2, Mohler, 2, 447, citing extended passages from *Divine Names*, IV, 10-13, *PG* 3, 705 C-712 B, trans. Luibheid, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 78-82. See Hankins, I, 259-61, who points out how strongly Bessarion ties Plato's imagery of pure religious love to Pseudo-Dionysius. See also the discussion of Rorem, *Pseudo Dionysius*, 148-53.

⁵⁸Compare Palamas, *Capita Physica* 37, *PG* 150, 1144-5, ed. and trans. Robert E. Sinkewicz, *Saint Gregory Palamas, The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* (Toronto, 1988), Greek text, 122, Eng. trans. 123, where Gregory refers to the mysterious love coming from the Father. See also discussion, Erickson, "Filioque and Fathers," 164, with English translation of passage: Meyendorff, *Gregory Palamas*, 228-32; Orphanos, "Procession of Holy Spirit according to Later Fathers," 436-46.

⁵⁹See Palamas, *Triads* II, 685-7, cited and discussed by Runciman, *Great Church*, 150-1, for a similar explication of the role of the divine energies in the doctrine of deification, relying upon passages from Pseudo-Dionysius in the *Divine Names*. See also Lossky, *Mystical Theology*, 139. For the doctrine of *theosis* in the Cappadocians see, idem, 67-90; for Gregory of Nazianzus, in particular, see Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness*, 50-3. See also discussion, above Chapter II, 28.

latter's doctrine of the divine energies with western Trinitarian theology.⁶⁰ Certainly the eastern doctrine of deification would have had particular appeal to the humanists concerned with the "dignity of man" made "in the image of God."⁶¹ As Hankins notes, Marsilio Ficino could have derived inspiration for his "Platonic love" motif from Bessarion's *ICP*.⁶²

The Cardinal then provides extended passages and paraphrases from the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* to show that George's quotations are taken out of context.⁶³ Bessarion asserts that Plato's doctrine of recollection has an ontological metaphysical meaning which

⁶⁰See discussion above, Chapter VI, 167-9. See also Hussey, *Orthodox Church*, 260, who points out that deification is found in the western tradition, in an implicit form in the Offertory of the Eucharist and in prayers and hymns, which speak of 'sharing in,' or 'being transformed into' the divinity of Christ. She states that this is the 'participation' discussed by Augustine, *De Natura et Gratia*, 33 (37), understood in the Eastern Church as "participation through the grace of the Holy Spirit in the divine energies but not in the unknowable essence or *substantia* of God." See Meyendorff, *Gregory Palamas*, 228-32, for discussion of Palamas' possible attempts to harmonize the psychological Trinitarian views of Augustine with Byzantine Trinitarian theology. See also Erickson, "Filioque and Fathers," 164-6, who notes that the love analogy of Palamas is rejected by Nilus Cabasilas, in his treatise against the Latin doctrine so influential for the Byzantines at the Council of Florence. See Cabasilas, *Contra Latinos de Spiritus Sancti processione*, ed. Candal, 310-25. For importance of Cabasilas' tract at the Council, see above Chapter IV, 114-15. But see also Robert E. Sinkewicz, *Saint Gregory Palamas, The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* (Toronto, 1988), Introduction, 21, who questions that Palamas is attempting a harmonization with Augustine's views.

⁶¹See R. E. Sinkewicz, "Christian theology and renewal of philosophical and scientific studies: The Capita 150 of Gregory Palamas," who states, 335, that Palamas "had something very positive to say about man and the human endeavor ..." and, 351, "in his advocacy of the high dignity of man he must certainly be considered one of the great humanists of the Palaeologan renaissance." See also Meyendorff, *Gregory Palamas*, 120-1, for his analysis of image and likeness in Palamas' thought connected with the doctrine of grace, meaning participation in divine life.

⁶²See Hankins, 1, 261 and n. 244.

⁶³*ICP*, IV.2, Mohler, 2, 459.

escapes crude literalists who only think in chronological terms. Plato's explanation might seem to suggest that men learned by recollecting what they had experienced in a previous time; what he really was conveying was the ascent of the soul to an awareness of its true origin from God. The soul 'turned within', away from the senses, and by so doing, it recalled or, one might better suggest, became conscious of its higher nature.⁶⁴ Here, again, one could suggest that Bessarion is alluding to the transformation of this Neoplatonic concept in Byzantine theology.⁶⁵ Bessarion chastises his adversary for not realizing the literary demands of the dialogues and offering, instead, a crude, literal interpretation as if addressing a textbook on doctrine.⁶⁶

Bessarion then excuses Plato's social arrangements with regard to marital communism as common practices of his day, expressing the need for unity in a state⁶⁷ and his own belief that the best kind of government was provided by a philosopher-king equipped

⁶⁴Ibid., IV.2, Mohler, 2, 467. See also discussion of Hankins, 1, 259, who sees here Bessarion's ability to use the Neoplatonic understanding of the soul and human conscious, particularly as portrayed by Plotinus, Proclus and Pseudo-Dionysius, to Christianize a portion of Platonic philosophy which had been a difficult feat to accomplish in the West after the time of Augustine.

⁶⁵On the transformation of this Platonic and Neoplatonic doctrine in orthodox theology, see John Meyendorff, "La th me du 'retour en soi' dans la doctrine palamite du XIVe si cle," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, XCLV (1954), in idem, *Byzantine Hesychasm*, 188-206. Meyendorff relates this to the hesychast doctrine of pure prayer and Palamas' Christocentric corrective to Neoplatonic theology. See also above, Chapter II, 28. For western medieval theological interpretations, see Rorem, *Pseudo Dionysius*, 169-74.

⁶⁶ICP, IV.2, Mohler, 2, 479. See discussion of Hankins, 1, 259.

⁶⁷Ibid., IV.3, Mohler, 2, 494-9. For elaboration on Bessarion's political and social views see Hankins, 1, 228, 236.

with a good Platonic humanist education.⁶⁸ Of course, Bessarion also believed that the Byzantine Church had been well-served by its traditional synthesis of faith and reason. The Latin version of the *ICP* lacks a passage in the Greek text which seems to exhibit the same understanding that Bessarion had previously expressed in his *Encyclica ad Graecos* (1463) when, as the *legitimate* Patriarch of Constantinople, he had rejected the Eastern Church.⁶⁹ In reply to George's charge that Platonism had brought about the downfall of the Roman Empire, Bessarion emotionally retorts that Byzantium had fallen exactly because it had abandoned the ancient ways and holy laws which had been in harmony with Plato's doctrines.⁷⁰ In rejecting the union of the churches at the Council of Florence (in Bessarion's view, a union that was in total accord with the apophatic teachings of the Fathers expressed in the doctrines of previous oecumenical councils) the Eastern Church had refused to place faith above discursive reasoning. At the end of the fourth book, declaring that he had satisfactorily addressed all the charges of his adversary, Bessarion triumphantly retires from the field of battle.⁷¹

The congratulations that he subsequently received from far and wide were, in Bessarion's own opinion, well deserved. It has been noted that he made Plato safe for

⁶⁸*ICP*, IV.10, Mohler, 2, 587. For Bessarion's implementation of this concept and its importance in late Byzantine society, see discussion above, Chapter V, 172, and n. 127. See further the discussion of Hankins, 1, 218-19, 231.

⁶⁹See above, Chapter V, 177-9.

⁷⁰*ICP*, IV.16, Mohler, 2, 620. Much of the Greek version of the last chapter is excised from the Latin text. See observations of Hankins, 1, 218-19, 231.

⁷¹*ICP*, IV.17, Mohler, 2, 631.

Christian readers for succeeding generations by achieving for Plato what Aquinas had done for Aristotle.⁷² He had, of course, done much more. His attractive alternative to scholastic syllogistic reasoning and defence of Platonic theology had restored his own theological and philosophical reputation and salvaged his mission for cultural reintegration and spiritual reconciliation. Moreover, in his view, the *ICP* provided a definitive answer to the theological differences between East and West in the Byzantine tradition where philosophy accepted her designated role as a handmaid to theology. He had incorporated the all-important Byzantine doctrine of deification: in accordance with the traditional mystical understanding of the Eastern church, he had established that concord was realized, not by reliance on discursive reasoning but, rather, in appeal to an apophatic understanding that superseded it.

The Aftermath

Although Bessarion had certainly won the battle in his war with George of Trebizond, the latter was in no way prepared to admit defeat. He had already gained access to a copy of the first draft of the *ICP* when it had circulated at Rome in 1464 and he had quickly produced a refutation of Bessarion's exposition in a treatise which is no longer extant.⁷³ However, George's letter of 28 August 1469 to Bessarion provides an informative synopsis of his stormy relations with the Cardinal, tracing events from their first congenial relationship through to the publication of the *ICP* and defending his own translation of

⁷²Hankins, I, 261-3.

⁷³On George's compilation of this treatise and his distribution of it at Rome see Monfansani, *George of Trebizond*, 227-9. See also above, Chapter VI, 197, and n. 53.

Plato's *Laws* and derogatory interpretation of Plato's philosophy.⁷⁴ Monfasani indicates that this was the first occasion upon which George openly opposed Bessarion and clearly laid out the ways in which his prophetic vision mingled with all of his undertakings. George stated that one need not wonder why the Turks had advanced as far as the very borders of Italy when a Roman Cardinal and Patriarch of Constantinople defended the vices of Platonism.⁷⁵ Indeed, by the end of 1469, George was engaged in attempts to show that excerpts from the *ICP* were contrary to the Latin faith: this in appeals to Fransecso Giustiniani, the Venetian ambassador at the Curia,⁷⁶ and to some scholastic theologians in Paris.⁷⁷

However, Bessarion himself felt no further need to reply to George's attacks. He left this task to others. His secretary, Niccolò Perotti, replied to George in a treatise, *Refutatio deliamentorum Georgii Trapezuntii Cretensis*,⁷⁸ which not only defended Bessarion's exposition of Plato, but was a vile invective clearly revealing all of George's questionable activities in Constantinople and in Italy. Bessarion was also not without influence in Paris.

⁷⁴Letter printed, *Collectanea Trapezuntiana*, ed. Monfasani, 161-88. For chronology of events for this latter stage of the conflict between Bessarion and George, see Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 222-9.

⁷⁵Letter to Bessarion, *Collectanea Trapezuntiana*, 170-1.

⁷⁶George's letter is not extant. His activities are known through a letter of Niccolò Perrotti to Giustiniani on the matter, printed and discussed by Lotte Labowsky, "An Autograph of Niccolò Perrotti in the Biblioteca Marciana," *Medieval and Renaissance Studies* VI (1968), 201-2.

⁷⁷It can be confirmed that George's son, Andreas, wrote to some scholastic theologians in Paris on 5 June 1470, enclosing his father's critique to prove Bessarion's heterodoxy. See Legrand, *Cent-dix lettres*, 228; relevant passage provided by Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 226, n. 147.

⁷⁸Mohler, 3, 343-75.

In December 1470, in order to address George's charges against him, the Cardinal enlisted the support of an aspiring humanist, Guillaume Fichet, who had established a printing press at the Sorbonne.⁷⁹ Fichet had himself composed a handbook on rhetoric and thus had personal reasons to provide assistance in maligning George's reputation as a rhetorician.⁸⁰ Moreover, the Cardinal indicated that rewards would be forthcoming for his co-operation.⁸¹ Bessarion hoped to see his *ICP*, Perotti's refutation and George's incriminating letters published in Paris.⁸² These plans, however, never materialized,⁸³ although Fichet did print Bessarion's orations to the western princes, where he took as his model *The Second Olynthiac* of Demosthenes to move his readers to action.⁸⁴

⁷⁹Bessarion's correspondence with Fichet, Mohler, 3, 554-63. For Fichet's replies, see Legrand, *Cent-dix lettres*, 223 sq. It was a letter from Fichet that alerted Bessarion to George's appeal to the scholastics. On this late episode in the relationship between Bessarion and George see also Feld, "Sweynheym and Pannartz," 282-35; Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 226-8; Hankins, 1, 215.

⁸⁰Fichet makes this clear in one of his letters to Bessarion. See Legrand, *Cent-dix lettres*, 229. See also discussion of Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 321-2, who provides an English translation of the relevant passage.

⁸¹Mohler, 3, 559.

⁸²Perotti's work was enclosed with Bessarion's first letter (December 1470). See Mohler, 3, 555. In late August 1471 Bessarion forwarded copies of George's two incriminating letters to Mehmed II. By April 1472 Fichet had received the *ICP* and announced that he would soon print Perotti's rebuttal and George's letters. See Monfasani, *George of Trebizond*, 227.

⁸³*Ibid.*, 227, who suggests that Bessarion's arrival as papal legate in France in 1472 probably made the publication unnecessary.

⁸⁴*Orationes Contra Turcas*, PG 161, 647-76. See also above, Chapter VI, 182-3, and n. 5.

Bessarion had composed his orations to the western princes in response to the capture of Euboea by the Turks in 1470. The demise of this last outpost of Byzantine civilization was a particularly crushing blow to him. He clearly saw that the resurrection of the Empire established by God would not come in his own lifetime and that it had been most fortuitous that he had preserved the intellectual foundations upon which it might in some future time be restored. Nonetheless, despite feelings of despondency, futility and personal forebodings concerning his own deteriorating health and his failure yet again to attain the papal tiara, on 20 April 1472 under the aegis of the new pontiff, Sixtus IV (9 August 1471-1484), his one time protégée, the Cardinal travelled to France in one final effort to foster better relations between the papacy and the French monarchy in preparation for a crusade. The disillusioned prelate died on the return journey at Ravenna on 18 November 1472.⁸⁵

In an elaborate funeral service in Rome at his titular church of the Holy Apostles on 3 December 1472, with the Pope presiding (an honour not in keeping with the conventions of the time) the Cardinal who through so many years had faithfully served the Latin Church in supporting the union of the Churches was ceremoniously laid to rest.⁸⁶ His plans for rescue of the East had not materialized despite his efforts to solve the dilemma of making the union real in both a material and spiritual sense in the East. He had, however, successfully withstood some not insignificant western challenges to his own plans for cultural reintegration and spiritual reconciliation between East and West.

⁸⁵See details of the mission in Pastor, *History of Popes*, 4: 218-21.

⁸⁶Funeral oration by Niccolò Capranica, Mohler, 3, 404. See also O'Malley, *Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome*, 13.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

*Faith gives fullness to our Reasoning*¹

More than a thousand years after Gregory of Nazianzus clearly enunciated this basic principle in Eastern orthodox theology, Cardinal Bessarion, the apostle of union between the two historic churches, proved himself true to the faith of the Eastern Fathers. In a synthesis of mystical theology and neoplatonic philosophy, his own Byzantine heritage had provided him with what he considered to be a solution to the religious differences between East and West. In Bessarion's mind, only an apophatic understanding of God could rise above dogmatic disputation to achieve a true and lasting spiritual union between East and West.

The foundation for this view was developed in Bessarion's youth. As a Christian Humanist, in the age-old tradition of the scholar-monk devoted to both the Hellenic wisdom and to Christian principles and practices, he celebrated the synthesis of faith and reason which he found portrayed in the traditional mystical theology of the Eastern Church. The advanced education he received led to his development as an outstanding rhetorician and Christian Platonist and made him part of the small cultured élite surrounding the imperial courts at both Constantinople and Mistra. There he found an eager welcome for the learning

¹Gregory of Nazianzus, Or. 29.21, PG 36. 103A; trans. Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness*, 260.

despised by many hesychasts within the monastic community. He numbered several of the younger members of some Byzantine noble families among his friends and his oratorical merits even recommended him to the ruling members of the imperial house. Many within his milieu were open to the West on cultural grounds: they sincerely desired the union of the churches. Moreover, Bessarion and his friend, George Scholarius, longed for the cultural religious unity of Christendom of the patristic age. They were nevertheless well aware of the difficulties in reconciling western Thomism with eastern Palamism. Bessarion had acquired, through associations in the East, some idea of western developments and a little knowledge of Latin theology, but he was not a student of western scholasticism and he did not favour the Latin doctrine on the *filioque*.

Bessarion's rhetorical talents had long been recognized by the imperial court when, during the time preparations were being made for the Union Council, his theological abilities were also brought to the Emperor's attention. The intellectual poverty within the ecclesiastical establishment which would be required to defend Orthodoxy at the Council of Florence led to Bessarion's elevation to the episcopate in an effort to bolster the Eastern delegation's prestige and abilities in ceremonial functions, public debate and private deliberation.

The Council of Florence was a major turning point in Bessarion's life. He enthusiastically anticipated contacts with the dynamic West while remaining confident of the Eastern position on the issues of division between the Churches. However, during the course of the Council, the Latin churchmen demonstrated to his satisfaction the legitimacy of their doctrines and practices. He was certain that, despite differences in explanation and

expression. a common faith existed. He demonstrated this confidence to the Byzantine delegation in terms that they would readily accept based in the apophatic tradition of the Eastern Church: he even attempted to reconcile Palamism with western Trinitarian theology.

Bessarion was influential in drawing up the *Tome of Union* which, in celebrating one faith in a variety of rites and customs, also safeguarded the views of the Eastern Church. He was jubilant that, since true reunion had been achieved in an oecumenical council, the Latin aid so desperately needed by the East would be forthcoming. Moreover, not only would the Eastern heritage be preserved, but the whole of Christendom would share in the benefits of spiritual and cultural reintegration. His contacts with the western scholastics and humanists, coupled with Plethon's critique of Latin Aristotelianism, had reinforced for him the close affinity between the apophatic understanding of the nature of God which permeated the writings of the Eastern Church Fathers and those of the Neoplatonists. He thus conceived an attractive alternative to scholastic reasoning and a solution to the theological difficulties between East and West within the terms of the orthodox mystical tradition in its synthesis of Platonic philosophy and Christian theology.

Bessarion was appalled when the Union achieved at Florence faced rapid rejection in the East and he quickly took upon himself a mission in the West to serve the interests of both church and state by providing material, spiritual and cultural succour to the East. After the ill-fated Crusade of Varna, his plans for the preservation and then the restoration of the Empire in the East were never realized. His continued adherence to the Union cost him valued friends: his attempts to persuade the Eastern church to accept the truth of the Latin doctrine by explanation and appeal to an apophatic understanding fell on deaf ears; yet

he expanded his mission to preserve the theological and Hellenic heritage of the Byzantine East in preparation for the day when the Empire established by God would be returned to its former glory. He found a spiritual explanation for his continued disappointments and inability to address the complexities of the eastern dilemma. The Empire had fallen because it had departed from true doctrine: the Eastern Church had forfeited any and all legitimacy when an Ottoman Sultan, rather than the vicegerent of God, installed, in the bitterest of ironies, his former friend, George Scholarius, as the Patriarch of Constantinople.

In the West, Bessarion worked tirelessly to promote crusades to rescue the East from the Islamic inroads. He also strove to satisfy and to sustain an appetite for the Eastern Hellenic and patristic heritage in hopes of realizing a true cultural and spiritual reintegration of East and West. His promotion of the Byzantine heritage led to significant philological, philosophical and theological challenges from humanists within his circle at Rome and from his great adversary in the Plato-Aristotle debate, George of Trebizond, which jeopardised his own reputation for piety and orthodoxy and his whole cultural and spiritual program. Aspersions cast upon the authenticity of Dionysius the Areopagite and George's relentless attacks on the philosophy and morality of Plato tended to reinforce existing antipathy in some influential circles with regard to the Cardinal and his Byzantine heritage. Bessarion's initial attempts to stem this rising tide of criticism in publishing his own philosophical and theological views only served to increase the scrutiny and escalate the debate. With considerable assistance from his humanist circle at Rome, he was at length able to surmount most of these challenges in a concerted press campaign vouching for his orthodoxy, use of Platonic sources and by the publication of his own answer to George's damning attacks.

Bessarion's *ICP* can be viewed, therefore, as the culmination of a life's mission to achieve cultural religious unity between East and West. This treatise, which is better perceived as a work of religious apologetic than a strictly philosophical exposition, operated at several levels. In an overt sense it addressed all of the charges levelled against Plato's philosophy and Bessarion's orthodoxy by George of Trebizond. At a higher level it provided the West with an attractive neoplatonic version of Platonic doctrines based upon Proclus' own *Platonic Theology* and, in line with the Byzantine commentary tradition, reconciled the views of Plato and Aristotle. In an even deeper sense it celebrated the mystical theology of the Eastern Church by appeal primarily to the apophatic theology of Pseudo-Dionysius, supported by the consensus of the patristic tradition in East and West.

The present study has served to enlarge and to reinterpret some key elements in our understanding of Bessarion's theological thought by illustrating how extensively his views reflected the traditional theology of the Byzantine Church. This finding also points to a further rich area for future investigation. Considerable attention has been drawn to connections between Bessarion and earlier Byzantines who figured prominently in the theological and philosophical debates of their own days, men such as Michael Psellus, Nicephorus Gregoras, Demetrius Kydones, Manuel Calecas and Gregory Palamas, to name but a few. A comparison of Bessarion's views with any or all of these figures would greatly expand our understanding of theological thinking throughout the late Byzantine period, particularly (one would think) in view of some interesting correlations which have been drawn between the Cardinal's views and those of Gregory Palamas.

The present writer's interest in Bessarion's theological views was greatly stimulated by James Hankins' study (1990) of how Plato was interpreted in the Italian Renaissance. Hankins emphasised extensive connections to neoplatonic interpretive techniques in Bessarion's writings.² To a Byzantinist, Bessarion's use of Proclus and Dionysius the Areopagite seemed to point to the traditional orthodox synthesis of faith and reason and, moreover, to the mystical theology of the Eastern Church. Curiosity was further aroused by the opinions expressed at differing times by three other noted scholars.

M. D. Feld (1982) in his study of Bessarion's involvement with the first printing activities established at Rome was puzzled as to how a "universally respected, indeed revered clergyman" could have sponsored a "conspiracy to promote and distribute pagan literature" and speculated "as to why so public a figure was driven into such an arcane course of action." Feld considered that the answer lay in "personal and psychological factors now beyond recapture," concerned with Plethon, the fall of Constantinople and lost opportunities to stem the advance of Islam.³ To Feld's speculations, one could now add with confidence that Bessarion was protecting his own mission to reintegrate the cultural and spiritual heritage of East and West. Neoplatonism was an integral part of his own Byzantine experience and he recognized that it had always been used by the Fathers of the Church to formulate their own doctrines in the traditional synthesis of faith and reason. Its implementation in the West would provide an attractive alternative to the Aristotelian-based scholastic theology.

²Hankins, 1. 163-263; idem, 2. 441-4.

³Feld, "Sweynheym and Pannartz," 334.

André de Halleux (1989) and (1991) rejected former views of Bessarion as an anti-Palamite, showing, quite the contrary, how he attended the Council of Florence in full agreement with his own Church's Palamite theology. De Halleux concluded that in the preliminary discussions on purgatory at the Council, the young Metropolitan provided several indications that he supported the traditional Byzantine view of the vision of God. De Halleux expressed doubt as to whether Bessarion, in fact, at any time in his life rejected Palamas' theology on this point.⁴ The present study has found further support for de Halleux's view in Bessarion's attempts to incorporate the Byzantine doctrine of deification in his *ICP*.

John Meyendorff (1991), the modern specialist on the writings of Gregory Palamas, considered that the achievement of a true spiritual union at Florence would have required an open discussion of Palamas' doctrine of the divine energies. Meyendorff suggested that Latins and Greeks might then have come to the realization that their Trinitarian formulations were more complementary than contradictory, but he concluded that neither side wanted such an encounter.⁵ Some years earlier, when the theological understanding of late Byzantine society was just beginning to come under renewed historical scrutiny, Meyendorff (1979), provided a brief analysis of Bessarion's role in discussing the same encounter between East and West at the Council of Florence. Meyendorff acknowledged that Bessarion was "Greek in spirit," and a great patriot and humanist who had experienced "a sincere religious

⁴See de Halleux, "Bessarion et le palamisme," 321-31; idem, "Problèmes de méthode sur l'eschatologie," 289.

⁵Meyendorff, "Was there an Encounter between East and West," 232-4.

evolution.” However, at that time he also questioned how one, who in accepting the Union had turned his back on his own Church’s orthodoxy by denying an experiential knowledge of God, could be considered “much of a theologian.”⁶

The answer to this question must surely be that Bessarion was a theologian steeped in the traditional mystical theology of the Eastern Church: one, indeed, who much like Gregory Palamas (whose theology Meyendorff was at great pains to defend), believed that when discussing the Holy Trinity, “we must not behave in a unseemly manner, vainly quarrelling over words.”⁷ Gregory Palamas, like Bessarion and Gregory of Nazianzus, would have readily agreed that, when dealing with divine matters, *Faith, in fact, is what gives fullness to our reasoning.*⁸

⁶Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 113.

⁷PG 151, 725A, paraphrasing Gregory of Nazianzus, PG 36, 345 C. See above, Chapter IV, 164-5.

⁸Gregory of Nazianzus, Or. 29.21, PG 36, 103A; trans. Norris, *Faith Gives Fullness*, 260.

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