



Conciliar Movement and Important philosophers related with the movement

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Abstract

The Conciliar Movement was one of the most significant political and religious developments of the late Middle Ages, emerging in response to the growing concentration of authority in the Papacy and the crisis created by the Great Western Schism (1378–1417). The movement advocated the supremacy of a General Council over the Pope in matters concerning the governance and reform of the Church. Its primary objective was to limit papal absolutism, promote ecclesiastical accountability, and establish constitutional principles within the Church. The movement also contributed to the evolution of political thought by emphasizing the concepts of collective authority, representation, and the rule of law. Prominent philosophers and theologians such as Marsilius of Padua, William of Ockham, Jean Gerson, Pierre d'Ailly, and Nicholas of Cusa played a crucial role in developing its intellectual foundations. This study critically examines the historical background, philosophical principles, major contributors, and enduring significance of the Conciliar Movement, highlighting its influence on constitutionalism, representative governance, and the subsequent development of modern political thought.

Keywords: Conciliar Movement, Papacy, Constitutionalism, General Council, Medieval Political Thought.

Background:

In 13th century Pope and his authority was at its zenith. But struggle between Philip IV and Pope Beniface VIII led to the defeat of Pope. From this point Pope authority started receding. Year 1305 to 1378 regarded as "Babylonish captivity". Reason being those 70 years was a long period and Pope was living in Avignon in France.

In year 1378 Pope Gregrey died. His successor was Urban VI of Italy. French cardinals elected French Clement VII as Pope. For the first time in the history two Popes were struggling for recognition. Recognition for the highest authority in Christian world.

Struggle of two Popes led to the religious chaos. Rulers started taking sides according to their interests. Organization of Church witnesses not only Chaos but loss of dignity too.

Right thinking Christians started raising questions about the chaotic condition of the church and Pope authority. These Christians wanted to unify church and do serious reforms.

Causes:

(i) Great Schism- Basic reason for conciliar movement was division in the organization of Church Division occurred because of Pope return to Italy. In 1378 cardinals elected Urban VI as Pope. Later on French ruler inspired cardinals for the election of Clement VII as Pope. Clement VII decided to stay in Avignon. Both of them claimed to be real Pope. They expelled each other from the organization. Both of them appointed Cardinals, Bishops and other officers of church. These



developments led to the division of Christians. France and its allies supported clement VII. Adversaries of France supported Urban VI. This division was affecting christian world.

2-Reaction against Papal absolutism:- Pope due to his actions became symbol of absolutism. Pope Benedict and Pope Gregory did not present before council. Council decided to elect new Pope Alexander V and relieved both the Popes from their post. This revolutionary step made the situation worse.

Council of Constance:-

John twenty third successor of Alexander V convened council at constance. This council was the biggest after council of Nycia in year 325. In this council 5000 representatives participated. Through this council unity was established in the organization of Church. It was decided about Pope post. Council declared that there was only one Pope in place of two or three. Council declared that this council receives power from Christ and every believer had to obey the directions of the council. Council elected Martin V as new Pope marking the end of great schism.

Council of Basel-

This council took place in year 1423 but failed to take any concrete decision.

Pope Martin convened a council in year 1423. Council was known as Seena council. In this council very few religious authorities reached. As soon council declared its supremacy Pope Martin dissolved the council. In year 1431 next council was convened. In this meeting council declared itself supreme. Pope did not accept the supremacy of the council and asked for its disintegration. Council succeeded in implementing few of its decision but over all it failed. Basel council continued till 1448.

In the first half of 15th century council played an important role but in the second half of 15th century Pope emerged powerful and important in comparison to council.

Though conciliar movement did not get complete success in controlling pope absolutism but it had major impact on various aspects of social and political life.

Conciliar movement definitely gave impetus to constitutionalism and limited government in religious field. Though theory of constitutionalism gained ground in religious field but impacted political field too. Though conciliar movement failed to make Church democratic but European political system accepted the theory of democratisation and constitutionalism.

Kind of torture against adversaries. Engaged in all kinds of immoral activities and bringing bad name to the church. Pope was also interfering in the jurisdiction of civil authorities. Matters of civil nature was declared religious. Pope was involved in politics. He used to humiliate rulers in public. His actions were bringing religious authority and political authority against each other. Church was not having any control over its action. Thus absolutism of Pope was bringing bad name to the authority of the Church. Finding no alternative people started raising their voice against Pope.

Moral degradation of papacy:- One of the important reason for conciliar movement was moral degradation of Pope. During his stay in Avignon Pope was enjoying all earthly pleasures. in Avignon Papal institution was marked by corrupt practices. Patrarch compared papacy with hell where all pervert practices exist.



Attempt to make Church a representative body

Inspired by the development in the political field, religious field demanded representative body. This democratic practice along with nationalism gave birth to National democratic states. Parliament of Britain and France played crucial role in the country. To curb malpractices and corruption undertaken by Pope & demand for making Church more representative gained ground. Thinkers like Marsilio and William advocated representative nature of Church. Purpose was to control Pope absolutism. Members of proposed general council should be elected by the common Christians.

Objectives of Conciliar movement:

- 1- To Unite the organization of Church again
- 2- To formulate a council which can control the absolutism of Pope.
- 3- To eradicate corruption from the organization of Church.
- 4- To stop the moral degradation of Church.
- 5- To ensure transparent use of the property controlled by the church.
- 6- Ensure election of one pope in place of two.

Thinkers who supported conciliar movements:

John of Paris wrote a book named his "De Potestat Rigiald Popli" In this book he presented views about Church and Pope. He said that supremacy of Pope was merely administrative. Pope cannot claim any supremacy on the basis of religious affairs. Pope subordinates may raise their objection, if pope indulged in some illegal and corrupt practice.

William of Okkham in his 'Dialogue' opposed all types of absolutism. He advocated election as a basis of Pope authority. He accepted General council as a mechanism of ending papal absolutism. Marsilio of Padua declared in defensor Pacis that all powers of Church should not be given to one person. Power of Church resides in all the believers. He said that General council should have the power to take all decisions.

John Wiklif a resident of Britain studied theology. After studying theology he became antagonist of papal authority. He claimed that all powers and property belongs to God. Pope or any other person can not claim to be the master of all the property. In the eyes of God all are equal.

John Hus refused the claim of Pope. He opposed absolutism of Pope. Papal power should be used for general welfare. Pope was using power for his own interest. Religious authority should be used by general council in place of Pope. Huss said that political authority should interfere in the functioning of Pope because it was not subordinate to Pope.

John Gurson was of the view that Pope was only administrative agent of Church. He wanted that religious authority should rest with council. He said that mixed form of rule was best for church and state both.

Development in Conciliar Movement:

The Council of Pica- In year 1409 first council took place in Pisa. The council was not convened by Pope. Question was raised against the legality of the council. Answering about the legality of the council John Gurson said that because of failure of Pope's effort to convene council, efforts made by other important religious authority was legal. In this meeting council declared itself supreme. Council decided to send message to rival popes. Message was sent to ensure their presence before council.



Conclusion-

Conciliar movement definitely promoted democratic supremacy. Basic declaration of conciliar movement about spiritual supremacy residing in Christians influenced political field too. Citizens started believing that political supremacy resides in the citizens of the state. This movement helped in promoting nationalism. Idea of nation, nationality and nationalism started gaining ground in Europe. Pope absolutism was controlled.

Thus, we can say that conciliar movement promoted "Supremacy of the masses". It also accepted consensus for the guiding principle for any authority.

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