

**Great Western Schism (1378-1417):** On the death of Gregory XI (1370-78) who brought the papacy back to Rome from Avignon in 1377, the college of cardinals composed overwhelmingly of Frenchmen was pressured by a Roman mob to elect an Italian. The man they chose as pope was the non-cardinal Neapolitan, Bartolomeo Prignano, a sixty-year old canonist and vice-chancellor of the Church, who took the name Urban VI (1378-89). He was duly installed as pope with the cardinals' free but irregular participation. When Urban VI began to act strangely, insulting the cardinals, ordering reforms in their lifestyle, and imprisoning, torturing, and executing those he suspected of opposing him, twelve of the sixteen cardinals who had elected him escaped Rome to Anagni. The other surviving cardinals from the conclave later joined them there where they declared Urban's election invalid since done under duress. Moving to Fondi in Neapolitan territory, they proceeded to elect a new pope, Cardinal Robert of Geneva, a military leader who was related to the French and German ruling families. Taking the name Clement VII (1378-94) and failing to defeat Urban VI militarily, he retired to Avignon with his cardinals. Urban VI entrenched in Rome created a new College of Cardinals.

The rulers of Christendom took sides: France, Scotland, Savoy, Naples, and the Iberian kingdoms following Avignon, with northern Italy, most of the Empire, England, Poland, Hungary, and the Scandinavian kingdoms backing Rome. Noted holy persons also supported the rival lines: Peter of Luxembourg, the Franciscan sister Colette Boylet of Corbie, and the Dominican Vincent Ferrer backed the Avignonese popes; the Dominican Catherine of Siena and the Bridgettine founder Bridget of Sweden defended the Roman claimants. In an effort to find a solution to the schism, the University of Paris collected over 10,000 proposals and reduced them to three: abdication by one or both popes, arbitration by a commission that would hear the claims of each, or a decision by a general council. The rulers of Christendom sought to restore church unity. When Clement VII died, King Charles VI of France (1380-1422) tried to prevent the election of a successor, but the cardinals refused to open his letters until the election was completed and Cardinal Pedro de Luna (c.1342-1423) was duly enthroned as Benedict XIII (1394-1417). Pressure from the rulers of France, England, and the Empire failed to get Benedict to resign. Withdrawals of obedience (and with it of revenues) could not be sustained for political reasons. Similar pressures were not brought to bear on the Roman popes. Although as a condition for his election the Avignonese Benedict XIII and the Romans Innocent VII (1404-06) and Gregory XII (1404-15) had promised to do all in their power to heal the schism, even if it meant abdicating, they skillfully avoided doing so. Benedict XIII and Gregory XII together with their colleges of cardinals agreed to meet in Savona on the Ligurian coast west of Genoa in 1407. They were simultaneously to resign and their colleges to join in the election of a single pope. While Benedict XIII appeared on schedule in Savona and even sailed to Portovenere near La Spezia to spare his rival further travel, Gregory XII got only as far as Lucca where he sent word that he could proceed no further for twenty different reasons based on financial and security concerns. Deserted by the French king, Benedict XIII retired to Perpignan in the Kingdom of Aragon. Disgusted with Gregory XII, most of his cardinals abandoned him and went to Pisa where in 1408 they were joined by four cardinals from the Avignonese obedience and together they called for a council to meet in Pisa in 1409 to heal the schism. The rival council called by Gregory XII for Cividale (1409) was poorly attended, that called by Benedict XIII for Perpignan (1409) was attended almost exclusively by Iberian prelates. The council meeting in Pisa garnered wide support and at its fifteenth session (5 June 1409) the two popes were deposed. Three weeks later the Cretan Pietro Philarghi (c. 1342-1410), cardinal archbishop of Milan, was elected as Alexander V (1409-10). He secured the allegiance of France, England, various

German states, and northern Italy and was succeeded by the Neapolitan cardinal and soldier Baldassare Cossa (c. 1370-1419) who took the name John XXIII (1410-15).

To bring an end to the now three rival obediences (Rome, Avignon, and Pisa), Emperor Sigismund prevailed on John XXIII to call a council to meet in Konstanz in 1414. By the bull *Haec sancta* (1415) the council claimed supremacy in matters of faith and restoring church unity. It deposed John XXIII in May 1415, accepted the resignation of Gregory XII in July 1415, and deposed Benedict XIII in July 1417. In November 1417 a special committee composed of twenty-two cardinals and thirty other members of the council met in conclave and elected Oddo Colonna as Martin V (1417-31) who was eventually recognized by all Christian rulers as the sole legitimate pope. The Great Western Schism was ended.

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