

The great schism of the catholic church essay

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According to Catholicism the Pope is the direct successor of the disciple Peter, whom Jesus decided upon to build his church. The importance of the Papacy in European history is unquestionable. The Catholic Church was a key factor in the shaping of European society after the fall of the Roman Empire. In medieval Europe the Catholic Church was believed to be the highest authority and unquestionable.

Catholicism became intertwined with everyday life. However, by the end of the fourteenth century the Church had fallen into turmoil. A crisis known as the Great Schism had befallen the Church. By 1378 A.

D. the Church had been splintered. Rival factions of clergy began holding elections and naming popes. At one point in time there were as many as three individuals claiming to be the legitimate successor to the papacy. The Church was in chaos until the matter was resolved by the Council of Constance which lasted from 1414-1417 A. D. The period known as " the Great Schism" was brought about by numerous events; it cast the Church into years of international turmoil resulting in an evolution of the Churches role in European society.

The Great Schism can not be understood simply by studying the events which took place between the years 1378-1417 A. D. To understand the significance of the crisis one must also look at the period building up to the crisis.

A new social structure was arising in Europe. There was a growing sense of patriotism fostering strong European Nations and producing powerful monarchs. This fact in itself did not thrust the Church into turmoil but it " can
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safely be maintained that sentiment of nationalism contributed to the Schism. The Church would have to find its place in this emerging system encountering numerous conflicts along the way. During the late thirteenth century the Office of the Papacy was at the height of its power. There had been a long succession of powerful popes that had significantly increased papal authority both secularly and spiritually. The centralization and reorganization of papal authority propelled the Office of the Pope to a position as the most influential force in medieval Europe.

However, by the mid-thirteenth century the Church was in decline. A negative shadow was starting to fall upon the papacy. The common people were losing faith in the papacy because it became, " the puppet of European politics; it was made to serve purposes and interests foreign to its own intrinsic functions. " The driving forces behind the Church had always been political and financial. The late-medieval Church had exceeded its means when its, " political requirements forced forward centralization and the exploitation of ecclesiastical resources by the papacy. During the late thirteenth century papal authority tried to reach a new peak under Pope Boniface VIII, whose papacy was one of the many catalysts thrusting the Church into crises. Pope Boniface VIII held the Office between the years 1294-1303 and became the Catholic Churches most able politician though the strides he made would eventually lead the Church down a negative path and cast a bad shadow upon his legacy.

He was an avid proponent for universal sovereignty of the Papacy over the whole of Christendom. As Pope, Boniface assumed more power than his predecessors. He exerted his will in such a way that he soon found himself

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caught up in European politics, quarreling with European powers and calling into question the sovereignty of European Nations and their monarchs. His most notable confrontations were with King Phillip IV of France. At the time a war was raging between France and England. The quarreling between the two started when Boniface issued a decree called "clericis laicos", forbidding the taxation of clergy with the intent of preventing either country from using Church funds to rage their war against each other. King Phillip IV immediately ordered that all exports of clerical funds to Rome be ceased, funds which were crucial for the Church to operate.

Boniface had to yield, recanting his order allowing for taxation during times of emergency. The fighting didn't end there. Boniface continued to make strides to increase Papal authority on both secular and religious matters. He continuously thrust himself into international controversy. In 1302 he issued the "Unum Sanctum", claiming that it was necessary for salvation that all matters both temporal and spiritual to fall under the jurisdiction of the Roman Pontiff. This called into question France's sovereignty under Phillip's rule resulting in the French clergy's labeling of Boniface's decree as heretical.

When Phillip refused to submit to Boniface's decree he was excommunicated. While Boniface was away from Rome at his retreat in Anagni, the place of his birth just outside the city of Rome, a French army surprised him calling for his resignation. When he declined he was taken hostage and tortured severely for three days until he was freed by the townspeople. Boniface never recovered from his injuries and died three weeks later. After the short conciliatory Papacy of Benedict XI, the next

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stage in the sequence of events leading up to the crisis unfolded with the move of the Roman Curia from Rome to Avignon. This move cast a lot of suspicion upon the Papacy because, " when the Papacy was at Avignon, there was a strong current of feeling both in England and in Germany that the papacy, by taxation and disposal of benefices, was taking money out of the country for the benefit of the enemy, France.

" Rome and the Catholic Church have a long history together. For centuries Rome was the center for Catholicism. So, it is understandable why a controversy would eventually arise out of Clement V's move of the Roman Curia from Rome to Avignon in 1305. That fact is that " Rome was nearer the edge of Christendom, more peripheral to it; but Avignon could never be in the fullest sense the proper seat of the papacy. " Clement V was born in Southern France and owed his election directly to the overwhelming number of French cardinals within the Sacred College though he may not have succumbed to French influence as much as was suspected. Instead of moving to Rome Clement decided to take residence at the Papal States in Avignon where he tried to attend to the problems set forth by his predecessor, Boniface VIII.

Clement V was a reasonable man whose Papacy reflects so. Many controversies arose during previous papacies forcing Clement V to try and deal with these ongoing conflicts, however, " he could not choose between the brutal alternatives thrust upon him, hesitating between the merits and dangers of decision: he was too conscious of the human and material factors involved? ... constantly seeking compromise; and in seeking it sacrificed many of the more radical pretensions of his predecessors. " During this time <https://assignbuster.com/the-great-schism-of-the-catholic-church-essay/>

Avignon made up part of the Papal States and was outside of French territory, yet was close enough to come under French influence and bring about controversy. With a line of succession by French popes and Avignon's close proximity to the French border, "the tendency on the part of the French monarchy to influence the papacy whilst in Avignon can not be denied? '..

. urthermore, some papal actions, especially in the diplomatic field, might have lent some superficial support to the common reproach that the papacy was a French appanage" It is during the Avignon Papacy that sentiments against the Pope really start to flare. At Avignon, the Pope and clerical court led lives more like that of princes rather than of clergymen. The extravagance of their parties and feasts are said to have mirrored and exceeded those of their secular counterparts. This type of behavior was clearly in opposition to the teachings of Jesus and his disciples whom lived and promoted a life of poverty and humility. This reflected negatively on the papacy because to those observing the situation from the outside, "the immorality, luxury, and lavascity which had become proverbial at the Court of Avignon, was to say the least, condoned by the the popes" Offenses such as this would continue to amount throughout the Avingnon Papacy. Controversy flourished around the Avignon Papacy.

Clement V's legacy is one of conspiracy for aligning with King Phillip IV against the order of the Knights Templar. John XXII spent fortunes on wardrobe and banquets. During the reign of Pope Clement VI French influence over the Papacy really starts to take hold.

Pope Clement VI had been the Archbishop of Rouen and was formerly an advisor to King Phillip IV. He had very strong ties to the French court and even financed French War efforts. The extravagant lifestyle of the Avignon Papacy reached its pinnacle under Pope Clement VI whose most costly expenditure was his wardrobe. As the years pass and the controversies surrounding the Avignon Papacy surmount, the Papal States become threatened, and the last of the Avignon Popes, Gregory XI, is forced to move the Roman Curia back to Rome or risk losing her allegiance. Romans had grown tired of the absence of the papacy from Rome and had become resentful of the Avignonesse Papacy because to them, " it was a notorious fact that during the long absence of the curia from Rome, wars and many other tribulations had affected nearly all the states, cities, towns, villages, even castles, and had torn them asunder; moreover, French officials had oppressed the population and contributed greatly to the vexations of the people. Pope Gregory XI died shortly after his return to Rome casting the Church into turmoil and bringing about the period known as " The Great Schism.

" Shortly after Gregory XI passes the Church falls into chaos. The whole reason for Gregory's return to Rome was to quell conflicts between competing factions, some loyal to the Pope and others hostile, that were threatening Papal lands. In hopes of preventing a difficult crisis from arising, which was likely to occur due to all of the conflicts going on, Gregory XI " fully aware of the perils facing the Church, took steps to prepare the way by authorizing the majority of the cardinals actually present at his court at the time of his death- that is, actually in Italy- to proceed immediately to the

choice of successor, and in this way avoid the long term dangers of a long vacancy while those members of the college absent in France and elsewhere gathered together. " In that event, the French King would certainly reapply pressure. Also, the Romans would state the case for a Roman selection stating that, " the Roman See, which was and is apostolic, had suffered greatly through the long absence of the pope; also that the state of the city of Rome itself was ruinous and near collapse; that churches, monasteries, cloisters, palaces and many other were in a lamentable and deplorable state; that ecclesiastical goods and possessions in and around Rome were neglected, and that this bad example was now being followed in other parts of Italy, whereby enormous and almost irreparable damage was inflicted upon many churches monasteries, etc. Pope Gregory XI died shortly after his arrival. Rome rioted in an effort to ensure the election of a Roman Pope.

However, there were no descent Roman candidates available. The present cardinals compromised and decided to choose from outside the college. They elected a Neapolitan in hopes of appeasing the Italian sentiment without neglecting any opposition to the election of a Roman pope by absent members of the college. The archbishop of Bari, who had never been a cardinal, became Pope Urban VI on April 8, 1378.

At the time, " all witnesses agreed in praising his high moral qualities, his fervor for reform, and his experience of practical affairs. " Later he would become the subject of criticism when, " his uncompromising demands produced a reaction against him; but it was certainly a worthy choice in a by no means easy situation. Urban VI succeeded to the papacy during a chaotic time for the Church and was immediately faced with opposition because he,

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“ was much more alive than the other cardinals were to the general criticism of the papacy, and was determined to meet the criticism from the beginning, and to set an example, by reforming the curia, beginning with the cardinals’ college itself. “ Urban VI was intent on the reformation of the Office of the Papacy and, “ he was determined also to use the full plenitude of papal power to achieve this end; it was, he thought, the only to breakdown the opposition of vested interests. Urban VI’s succession to the Papacy, without the full backing of the College of Cardinals, was met with strong opposition. A French representative, the Cardinal-Bishop of Amiens, whom arrived in Rome too late for the election was able to rouse a faction of French cardinals into revolt.

Only months after his election, Pope Urban VI was being called upon to abdicate. Weeks later, after Urban’s refusal, the rebellious French cardinals elected a pope who took the name Clement VII, starting the Schism. This period is also known as “ the period of popes and anti-popes. Urban VI was undoubtedly the official successor to the papacy. Among possible electors, Clement VII had only the thirteen rebellious cardinals backing him.

However, Clement VII did have King Charles V of France at his side ready to help his claimant by any means. It was a difficult situation from the start because, “ early attempts to bring about reconciliation were doomed to failure from the very beginning, either because impracticable or because put forward so halfheartedly that their originators could themselves have had but little hope that their proposals would be realized. The split in the Church began between Urban VI and Clement VII and continued on to their successors because, “ each side lowered itself by vituperative and wholly

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undignified outbursts which only widened the gulf between them and made a rapprochement all the more difficult. " When Urban and Clement passed the rival factions of cardinals both elect new popes. Clement VII was succeeded by Benedict VIII. Urban was succeeded by Boniface IX, then Innocent VI, and then Gregory XII. It was obvious that the Schism was only going to continue hurting the Church.

The Schism obviously bore consequences for the Church because, " the calamity of two popes necessarily entailed for Europe a divided allegiance? '... excommunication and counter-excommunication of and by the rival popes, the triads delivered by the one against the other, and the inevitable political intrigues made it almost impossible to entertain much hope of any reconciliation or rapprochement between the two contending factions. " The opposing factions of cardinals eventually realized that they had to do something. They wanted to get together and resolve the matter amongst themselves, but the stubbornness of both Popes was preventing that.

So, with no authority to do so, the opposing groups of cardinals summoned a council at Pisa in 1409. At the council of Pisa the cardinals deemed both popes illegitimate, schismatic, and heretical. The council elected another pope who took the name Alexander V. However neither Benedict nor Gregory agreed to accept the council's decision and the result was the addition of a third pope. The problem was that if the previous popes were illegitimate and the council electing the third pope had no ability to do so then all three popes were illegitimate. Alexander V died the next year before any solution could be reached.

Alexander V's death was inconsequential because the cardinals immediately held another election naming Baldassare Cossa as Pope John XXIII. The crisis did not come to an end until the Holy Roman Emperor, Sigmund, convened the Council of Constance lasting from 1414-1417. The original convening of the council was ruled invalid due to biased pressure from the Holy Roman Emperor, Sigmund of Germany.

The council deposed of both the Pisan and Avignonesse Popes, John XXIII and Benedict XIII, labeling both as anti-popes while also securing the resignation of the Roman elected Pope Gregory XII, whom abdicated but did not empower the council with the authority to elect a new pope thus ensuring the legitimacy of the Roman line of succession. The Schism was brought to an end with the election of Pope Martin V. The official verdict of the Council of Constance did not immediately quell conflicts. Christendom had been split over the crisis with each region honoring allegiances to the pope of their choice. Though the legality of the council was questionable its decision was official and final.