

The Council of Constance

1414-1418

A Crisis in Leadership: The Popes? The Cardinals? The Council Decides!

In 1387, after 7 consecutive popes had resided in Avignon in southern France, Pope Gregory VI moved to Rome and died. The cardinals met there to elect a successor, while being pressured to select a Roman citizen. They selected Urban VI but within months found him unfit and declared the election invalid, claiming the choice was not made freely. They deserted Urban, asked him to abdicate, and elected Clement VII. The Great Schism of the west was underway.

Year	Rome	Avignon	Pisa	Comment	Papal Claimants*
1378	Urban VI.....			Urban replaced the cardinals with 29 new ones.	1
1378.....	↓	Clement VII.....		The popes excommunicated each other.	2
1389	Boniface IX... ↓			Urban died. New cardinals elect Boniface.	2
1394.....	↓	Benedict XIII.....		Clement died. Avignon cardinals elect Benedict.	2
1404	Innocent VI... ↓			Boniface died. New cardinals elect Innocent.	2
1406	Gregory VII... ↓			Innocent died. New cardinals elect Gregory.	2
1409.....	↓		Alexander V... ↓	Cardinals from both camps elect Alexander.	3
1410.....	↓		John XXIII... ↓	Alexander died. The cardinals elect John.	3

All the popes stated a need to end the schism but did not succeed. John lost support and appealed to German King Sismund for help. Sismund demanded a general council to resolve the issue.

Vying for the Papacy

Statue Commemorating Council of Constance

From the 'Seattle Catholic' *The Council's* task was to end the schism. John called the Council into session but also tried to manipulate it. This activated the council and they took an unusual step in deciding to vote as 'The Nations'. They then put John on trial, found him guilty of gross practices, and deposed him. Then they asked Benedict to abdicate, but he remained defiant. Finally, they asked Gregory to abdicate, and he agreed if allowed to convoke the council to give it legitimacy. This was done and the Council declared the Holy See vacant.



The Council of Constance moved the church:

From		To
Who is in charge?	➡	<u>The Council</u> is the final Authority
When should the Council meet?	➡	Set a schedule: The next in 5 years, then 7 years, and then every 10 years.
What about the pope?	➡	Defined an Oath to be taken by an elected Pope.

Results of The Council of Constance

22 Cardinals and 30 representatives from 'The Nations' elected Pope Martin V, ending the schism. The Council also condemned Jan Hus, ruled on issues of national sovereignty, rights of pagans, and just war in response to a conflict. The Council was important in the development of the relationship and the proper tension between Counciliar and Papal supremacy.

* Urban and his Roman successors were determined by the Church to be the legitimate pope lineage which is why John XXIII, who invoked Vatican II, could choose that 'unused name'.