

Western Schism, also called Great Schism or Great Western Schism, in the history of the [Roman Catholic Church](#), the period from 1378 to 1417, when there were two, and later three, [rival popes](#), each with his own following, his own Sacred College of Cardinals, and his own administrative offices.

Shortly after the return of the papal residence to [Rome](#) following almost 70 years of the [Avignon papacy](#), the [archbishop](#) of Bari was elected [pope](#) as [Urban VI](#) amid demands by the Roman populace for “a Roman or at least an Italian.” Urban VI proved to be so hostile to the [cardinals](#), who had assumed great powers during the years at Avignon, that a group of cardinals retired to [Anagni](#) and elected one of themselves, Robert of Geneva, as [Clement VII](#), claiming the election of Urban VI had been invalid because it was made under fear. Clement VII then took up residence at [Avignon](#). Although Roman Catholic church historians generally agree that Urban VI and his successors were the [legitimate](#) popes, there has never been an official pronouncement to this effect.

The double election had disastrous effects upon the church. The followers of the two popes were divided chiefly along national lines, and thus the dual papacy fostered the political antagonisms of the time. The spectacle of rival popes denouncing each other produced great confusion and resulted in a tremendous loss of [prestige](#) for the papacy.

Various proposals for ending the [schism](#) were made, especially by the [University of Paris](#), which suggested either mutual resignation or a decision by an independent tribunal or a general council. This last proposal was in line with the growing [conciliar movement](#), according to which a general council has greater authority than a pope. Both lines of popes refused to submit. Eventually cardinals from both obediences, seeking to end the schism, arranged the [Council of Pisa](#), which met in 1409 and elected a third pope, [Alexander V](#), who was succeeded shortly thereafter by Baldassare Cossa, who took the name [John XXIII](#). Under pressure from the emperor [Sigismund](#), John convoked, in 1414, the [Council of Constance](#), which [deposed](#) him, received the resignation of the Roman pope, [Gregory XII](#), and dismissed the claims of the Avignon pope, [Benedict XIII](#). That series of events opened the way to the election of [Martin V](#) in November 1417, whereby the schism was ended.

#### **[Council of Constance](#) [Western Schism](#)**

Gregory XII, original name Angelo Correr, (born c. 1325, [Venice](#) [Italy]—died Oct. 18, 1417, Recanati, Papal States), [pope](#) from 1406 to 1415. He was the last of the Roman line during the [Western Schism](#) (1378–1417), when the papacy was contested by antipopes in [Avignon](#) and in Pisa.

He was bishop of Castello in the [Papal States](#) (1380) and Latin Patriarch of Constantinople (1390) when made a [cardinal](#) (1405) by Pope [Innocent VII](#), whom he succeeded on Nov. 30, 1406. His [pontificate](#) was challenged by the Avignonese [antipope Benedict XIII](#), with whom he was to have negotiated for their mutual abdication to end the Schism. After the French declared neutrality (1408) in the dispute between Rome and Avignon, the [Council of Pisa](#) pronounced both the Roman and Avignonese popes deposed (June 1409). Gregory protested but resigned on July 4, 1415. He first, however, approved the [Council of Constance](#) (Germany), which denounced Benedict as a heretic and elected Pope Martin V. Gregory died as cardinal bishop of Porto, a title conferred on him by the council.