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Response Paper 5

In 1377, after sixty-six years of the Papacy residing in Avignon France, Pope Gregory XI desired to return the Papacy to Rome. Following his passing the College of Cardinals faced intimidation from the people of Rome to elect a Roman pope. In response, the Cardinals elected Italian Urban V, who returned the Papacy to Rome in 1378. One month later the College of Cardinals returned to Avignon and elected a new Pope Clement VII, marking the beginning of the Great Schism or split within the Catholic Church. The internal conflict brought into question the delineation of power within the medieval Church by academics and the cardinals. Both agreed that the Pope should have limited power with the Cardinals exercising final authority.

During the Great Schism academics and cardinals subscribed to the belief that final church authority should not go to the Pope. However, the belief that the Pope should have limited power originally surfaced even before the beginning of the Schism. In a letter written to a friend by Petrarch, an Italian scholar and poet, expresses criticism and outlines his frustrations with the Avignon Papacy. In it, he states “Here reign the successors of the poor fisherman of Galilee; they have strangely forgotten their origin. I am astounded, as I recall their predecessors, to see these men loaded with gold and clad in purple, boasting of the spoils of princes and nations.”¹ Petrarch detests the actions perpetrated by the Avignon Papacy. He asserts that the

¹ J.H. Robinson, *Reading in European History* (Boston: 1904), p. 502

Avignon Pope is more interested in amassing wealth and emulating a monarchy than propagating the catholic faith. Petrarch compares the Avignon Pope to St. Peter the first Pope. St. Peter lived a simple life and desired to spread the Catholic faith as described in the New Testament of the Bible. He was humble before Jesus and God, substantiated by his wish to be crucified upside down and a willingness to die for his faith. Petrarch makes this comparison to show how the Avignon Pope has distanced the Papacy from its original intentions. In 1378 French Cardinals revolted against Pope Urban VI. In a manifesto where they defended their actions it states “to the great scandal of the clergy and of the Christian people, and contrary to the laws of the church, he accepted his election which he was offered, although not all cardinals were present...”

² The Cardinals justify their rebellion based on the fact that there were absentee cardinals, leading to the presumption that had all cardinals been in attendance the outcome would have been different. In their viewpoint Pope Urban VI took full control, without the benefit of a legitimate election to substantiate his position. Thus, they felt it within their right to rebel against what they perceived to be a violation of the laws of the church.

Academics and Cardinals argued that the College of Cardinals should have the authority to make final decisions as a result of the schism. A letter to the King of France, sent from his committee of fifty-four professors, masters, and doctors, discusses three possible scenarios which could end the Great Schism. One of the possibilities maintains that the feuding popes can assign men of their choosing to an arbitration hearing however, they must meet the approval of the cardinals. It states “and approved by those who according to canon law have the authority [that

^{2 2} Oliver J. Thatcher and Edgar Holmes McNeal, eds., *A Source Book for Medieval History* (New York: Scribners, 1905), pp: 326-327

is, the cardinals] they may also have the right to proceed to the election of a pope.”³ Thus, the commission was attempting to manipulate canon doctrine as way to ultimately shift the final authority to the cardinals. In 1409, the College of Cardinals called a Council in Pisa to resolve the Schism. A transcript of the Council of Pisa states that the college of cardinals “decrees and declares that the united college of cardinals was empowered to call the council, and that the power to call such a council belongs of right to the aforesaid when there is a holy college of cardinals, especially now declared that this detestable schism.”⁴ The College of Cardinals claims that they have the authority to organize and call a council. The cardinals affirmed that the council can only be legitimized and assembled if there is a college of councils. They further argue that their authority derives as a result of the schism.

In 1377, Pope Gregory XI dreamed of restoring the Papacy in Rome, even though home for the Papacy for the last sixty-six years had been Avignon, France. Upon Pope Gregory XI’s death, the College of Cardinals encountered forceful pressure from the citizens of Rome to elect a Roman pope. As a way to appease them the Cardinals appointed Italian Urban V, who reinstated the Papacy to Rome in 1378. In the subsequent month, the College of Cardinals returned to Avignon and designated Pope Clement VII, as the new Pope. This decision lead to the emergence of the Great Schism or division within the Catholic Church. The resulting internal discord gave rise to the debate surrounding the establishment of authority inside the medieval

³ Oliver J. Thatcher and Edgar Holmes McNeal, eds., *A Source Book for Medieval History* (New York: Scribners, 1905), pp: 326-327

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Church by academics and the cardinals. Both entities acquiesced that the Pope should be granted limited power with the Cardinals retaining final dominion.