CHAPTER TWO

FROM THREE COLLEGES TO ONE

The crises of the fifteenth century drew pope and cardinals closer together: while the cardinals elected the pope, the pope created cardinals. It was this interdependence that bound them, although it was a tense and often unhappy relationship. The schism complicated their relationship and weakened the cardinals’ stake in the papal imperium.

While the Council of Constance produced a single pope—Martin V—from the three of the schism, it did not extend the same resolution to the College of Cardinals. Each of the three popes of the schism had his own College of Cardinals: part of the council’s success was the result of the concessions made to the members of these three separate colleges, none of whom were deposed but were amalgamated to legitimize Martin V’s election.¹ Along with conciliarism, for the papacy this prevalence of members of the three colleges well into the middle of the fifteenth century was the most enduring legacy of the schism. For example, Alfonso di Carrillo de Albornoz, one of Benedict XIII’s cardinals, died in 1434 at the Council of Basel.² Lucido Conti died in 1437 and Pierre de Foix as late as 1464, both of them cardinals of John XXIII.³ Giordano Orsini, one of Innocent VII’s cardinals, died in 1438.⁴ Cardinal Antonio Correr, brother of Gregory XII, died in 1445.

¹ For example, the seventh of twelve articles drawn up at Constance in December 1415 permitted the cardinals of Benedict XIII full membership of the council if they responded to its summons; see Fillastre in John Hine Munday and Kennerly M. Woody, The Council of Constance. The Unification of the Church, trans Louise Ropes Loomis (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1961), 273–4.
while Gregory XII’s nephew, Gabriele Condulmer, became Eugenius IV in 1431 and died in 1447.5 The first and only attempt to sort out the overlaps between the various members of the schismatic colleges was the main achievement of the brief papacy of Alexander V, the pope elected at the Council of Pisa. The issue was managed rather than resolved thereafter.

Cardinal Fillastre’s diary from the Council of Constance portrays the cardinals as a disparate and competing body of men, thrown together by desperation to preserve their rights.6 They tried to disassociate themselves from recent history, emphasizing that they were the ones trying to solve the problem. Less than two months before the election of Martin V on 11 November 1417, no doubt aware that the pressures they had been under from the nations would be lessened by the election of a pope, their confidence grew. They argued that they were “almost all of recent creation,” and that it was they who had forced their respective popes to attend the council and to abdicate: “they had laboured harder than anyone, and were the first and only clergy to offer in harmonious accord to reform their ranks.”7

Once they had elected the new pope, assisted by national representatives, this mixed bag of cardinals left the council with Martin V and went to Florence, where they prepared for their final journey to Rome itself. This chapter looks at how the problem of the three colleges of cardinals was first created and then resolved, and the measures taken by Martin V and his successors to reconfigure the college.

Three popes and three colleges

Almost all of the popes of the Roman, Avignon, and Pisan obediences promoted new cardinals to bolster their own colleges of cardinals. Urban VI made forty-three new cardinals to replace those who had deserted him to elect Clement VII. Clement VII in turn created thirty-two, and his successor to the Avignon obedience, Benedict XIII, fifteen. The successors of Urban VI in Rome—Boniface IX, Innocent VII, and Gregory XII—made forty cardinals between them. Gregory XII’s

6 15 September, 1417: Fillastre in Munday and Woody, Council of Constance, 402.
7 Ibid.