
For almost seventy years the popes resided at Avignon on the banks of the Rhone far removed from the diocese of which they were bishops. The return of the pope to Rome in 1376 gave hope that this chapter in the church’s life was over and that the *status quo ante* would be resumed. Pope Gregory XI, who bravely brought the papacy back to Rome in the face of much criticism from cardinals and the French nobility, died shortly after his return. The two elections of 1378 produced two claimants to the papal title and the Great Schism. Questions still persist. Who was truly elected pope in 1378—Bartolomeo Prignano, the Italian archbishop of Bari, or the French cardinal Robert of Geneva? Each took a papal name and number: Urban VI, who stayed in Rome, and Clement VII, who returned to Avignon. Then after 1409 another claimant was added to the mix. A contemporary map of Western Europe would have shown a division among these claimants largely upon national lines. The question of the legitimacy of rival claimants soon raised a more practical question: how to resolve the schism? The *via facti* (the use of military force) soon proved impractical. In 1394 the University of Paris gave the opinion that there were only three ways: *via concilii generalis* (by a general council), *via compromissi* (by arbitration), and *via cessionis* (by abdication of the rival claimants). Not until the Council of Constance imposed a solution in 1417 did the schism end.

[For the most recent contribution to the literature on this subject see the important article by Daniel Williman, “Schism within the Curia: The Twin Papal Elections of 1378,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 59 (2008): 29–47.]

A virtual mountain of literature has appeared on this subject with a considerable amount from the period of the schism itself. Polemicists quickly appeared in the Urbanist and Clementine camps. Their treatises have been the subject of serious students of the schism since the nineteenth century or in some cases, even earlier. Professor Blumenfeld-Kosinski provides us with a study of other, non-polemical literature: visionaries and their “revelations,” poets and their allegories, prophets and their apocalyptic views. This material is not generally included in general works on the schism, and her study of these texts is most welcome.

Two things must be mentioned up front. First, as the author points out, large parts of Western Europe are not included here, and, in fact, the book
is largely Francocentric. Second, the central theme *imaginaire* is announced in the introduction and appears occasionally in subsequent chapters: “it refers to the ideas, conceptions, and even prejudices that informed the creation of texts and images in a given period.” The reviewer may not be unique in finding this an unhelpfully vague concept. Perhaps one sign of this is that the first chapter has nothing to do directly with the Great Schism. The reaction of three writers to the schism of 1159, while instructive about that period, is relevant to the stated subject of this book only by a stretch and could have been presented elsewhere to our profit.

Even before the outbreak of the Schism in 1378 there were visionaries who urged the popes to return from Avignon to Rome: Birgitta of Sweden, Pedro of Aragon, and Catherine of Siena. The latter two lived on to witness the early years of the schism, both supporting Urban VI and both dying (1380 and 1381) deeply disappointed that the division of the church had not ended. Among the visionaries of the early period of the schism the author introduces us to the neglected Constance de Rabstens, who supported the Roman claimant, and to three who supported the Avignon contender: the adolescent Blessed Pierre de Luxembourg, who after his death was used as a poster child for Avignon; the Dominican friar Saint Vincent Ferrers, ardent supporter of Clement VII, yet who cooled towards his successor Benedict XIII in the 1390s and later; and, finally, Marie Robine, whose support for the same Benedict turned to disillusionment. The stories of Ursulina of Parma, Ermine de Reims, and Saint Colette could have been omitted without any loss.

Two chapters discuss poets who used allegory—frequently dream allegory—to veil their own views about the schism. The exposition of the *Songe du Vieil Pelerin* of Philippe de Mézières is particularly effective, especially the scene where Queen Truth sits in judgment on Urban VI. Eustache Deschamps wrote *ballades*, many touching on the schism, the most striking perhaps being his description of the church as a two-headed, two-tongued monster. With the vivid image of two competing armies Honoré Bovet described the schism, while the prolific Christine de Pizan includes in her *Mutacion de Fortune* (1403) the image of the two contenders squeezed together on a narrow throne.

In the final chapter, the author presents “a few examples of the prophecies that emerged at the time of the Great Schism or were reinterpreted as having presaged this traumatic event.” This reviewer found this material fascinating, particularly the prophecies of Telesphorus of Cosenza, who thought that the schism fulfilled visions from the Book of the Apocalypse.