

The Church: From Grassroots or From God?

Our Catholic Heritage

A Controversy Arises Concerning Papal Power

By MSGR. JAMES F. CONNELLY

After the death of Pope Gregory XI (1378) the 16 cardinals who gathered in conclave at St. Peter's could not agree on one of their number as pope. They, therefore, elected the Archbishop of Bari, Italy (the last non-cardinal to be elected pope), who took the name of Urban VI (1378-1389). The cardinals were pressured by the Roman mob, who gathered outside the conclave and demanded that they elect a Roman or at least an Italian as pope. The mob did not know that the Archbishop of Bari was already elected, and they were appeased only when the cardinals had the Roman among them. A senile cardinal, he dressed up as a pope and paraded before them. When the mob left, the cardinals reaffirmed and ratified Pope Urban VI's election.

Six months later, distressed by his stringent reforms, some of the very cardinals who had elected and acknowledged Pope Urban renounced their obedience to him, claiming that his election was null

because it was made out of fear. They then reelected as claimant to Peter's throne and anti-pope Clement VII (1378-1394), a Frenchman, who took up his residence in Avignon.

The Church was split into two camps. Contemporary Christians found it difficult to discern who was the true successor of Peter. Nations were split according to their political alliances; doctors of theology and canon law were divided in their opinion; religious orders were split in their obedience. Even saints were divided: St. Vincent Ferrer supported the Avignon claimant; St. Catherine of Siena supported the Pope of Rome. A crisis of faith beset the Church, whose death rampaging Islam predicted. Such was the beginning of the Great Western Schism (1378-1417).

When neither the Pope of Rome nor the anti-pope of Avignon would forfeit their offices, cardinals from the Roman and French camps assembled at Pisa, Italy, in 1409, deposed the Pope of Rome and the claimant

of Avignon, and compounded the crisis of electing another anti-pope, Alexander V (1409-1410), whom neither the Pope of Rome nor the anti-pope of Avignon would recognize. Now there was the Pope in Rome and not one, but two additional claimants to his papal powers.

In order to settle the impasse, the Holy Roman Emperor prevailed upon the Pisan anti-pope John XXI-II (1410-1415) to convoke an ecumenical council at Constance, Switzerland (1414-1418).

That great assembly, which had not been canonically convoked by the legitimate Pope of Rome, Gregory VII (1406-1415) proclaimed a brave decree on April 5, 1415, namely that a general council of the Church was superior to the Holy Father. This theory, known as Conciliarism, has never been accepted, nor can it be accepted by the Church. It was not accepted by Gregory XII, who canonically convoked the Council of Constance after April 5, 1415, and then resigned. Nor was it accepted by

Pope Martin V (1417-1431) whose election brought an end to the schism.

Those who favored conciliarism wanted to change the constitution of the Church. The Church, they theorized, could be absolutistic, aristocratic or democratic as the historical situation demanded. One school, led by Marsilius of Padua (d.1342), viewed an ecumenical council as the collective wisdom of the Christendom, composed of clergymen and laity elected by the faithful. Another school, led by Peter D'Ailly (d.1420), would concede the management of the Church to the bishops, of whom the Holy Father would be but one of equals, but reserve doctrinal and teaching superiority to the doctors of theology and canon law. All of these conciliarist theories, even those of today, are contrary to the pre-eminent teaching and ruling authority which Christ gave to Peter and the Eleven. All of these theories break apart on the dogmatic rock of infallibility (First Vatican Council) and the doctrine of collegiality (Second Vatican Council).

St. Joan of Arc — Heroine of the French Nation

By MSGR. JAMES F. CONNELLY

While the Hundred Years War was scarring France, a girl was born in 1412 to the family of Jacques D'Arc, a prosperous farmer in the sleepy town of Domremy, France. She was baptized Jeanne and was destined to become the Maid of Orleans, the heroine of the French nation and canonized saint.

Although Domremy lay on the fringes of the battle zones, its citizens were intensely patriotic and thought that the English were devils incarnate. They truly believed a prophecy then current in the village that God would send a virgin maid to save France from the English.

As Joan grew up like any other farmer's daughter in rural France, the villagers began to notice her humble piety, her devotion to the Mass and her frequent reception of Penance and Holy Communion, and her many charities. When Joan was 14 years old, she began to hear "voices," as she called her visions, which would lead her on the path of patriotism. She began to sense that the Archangel Michael was speaking to her and commanding her to restore the rightful heir of France to his throne. Later another voice bade her lead the young Dauphin to Rheims that he might be anointed and crowned.

Joan was 17 when she told her family of her divine mission. They were at first, stunned, then her father said he would drown her if she persisted

in her plans. Against her father's wishes Joan left Domremy and traveled to the French court, where she convinced those callous soldiers and cynical courtiers of her mission. They gave her a command



(Art by Robert McGovern)

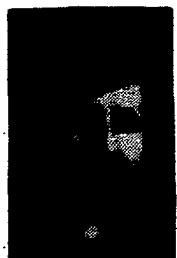
St. Joan of Arc

of troops, whom she led dressed like a young soldier with her hair cut like a man's, her male military garb, her white armor and sword, her fluer-de-lis banner with the names "Jesus-Maria" on it. She fought well and led her troops to victory at Orleans and in many other battles. It was her victorious leadership which led to the crowning of Charles VII (1422-1461) as King of France in Rheims, with Joan at his side.

Twice she was in battle and finally captured on May 24, 1430 at Compiègne. The ungrateful Charles, whose throne she had saved, refused to ransom her from her captors, who then turned her over to the English. The English felt that, if they could ruin her reputation of supernatural prowess, they would not only destroy her but the will to fight of the French nation.

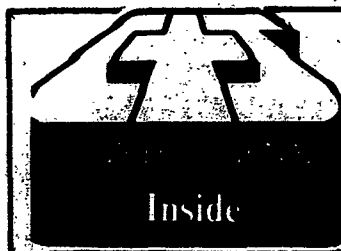
A rigged trial, in which churchmen participated, found her guilty of heresy and witchcraft. She was burned at the stake on May 30, 1431, while holding a crucifix and invoking the assistance of her "voices" and of Christ. As her ashes were being scattered in the Seine, a British witness anticipated the later judgement of the Church: "We have burned a saint!"

In 1455, Pope Callistus III (1455-1458) ordered her trial reopened. The sentence against her was voided. But it was not until 1920 that Pope Benedict XV (1914-1922) declared that faithful, courageous and maligned Maid of Orleans to be St. Joan of Arc.



Deacon Fleming

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To Be Ordained
Priest 6**



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