

THE SAILOR FROM NEGROPONT

ANGELUS MURPHY, O.P.

ECCLESIASTICAL CAREER



ANGELUS CORRER was born in Venice about the year 1327, the son of a noble patrician family. His birth took place during the pontificate of John XXII, the second of the popes to reside at Avignon. History is silent about more than five decades in the life of Angelus Correr destined to play so important and so decisive a rôle in the termination of that sorrowful period in the Church's history which has come down to us as the "Great Western Schism."¹

On January 17, 1377, Pope Gregory XI entered Rome and took possession of the First See of Christendom, thus putting an end to the Avignonian residence of the popes, or what the Romans with just cause referred to as the "Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy." Gregory XI died in March of the following year, just before he could effect his announced intention of returning to Avignon. Angelus was now fifty years of age and still a simple priest, having as yet attained no ecclesiastical distinction.

Urban VI, Gregory's successor (elected in April of 1378), enmeshed in what was to prove the longest and most pernicious

¹ Papal Succession 1370-1431 :

Gregory XI	1370-1378	}	Roman Obedience
Urban VI	1378-1389		
Boniface IX	1389-1404		
Innocent VII	1404-1406		
Gregory XII	1406-1415		
Martin V	1417-1431		

Anti-popes during the schism :

Clement VII	1378-1394	}	Avignon Obedience
Benedict XIII	1394-1423		
Clement VIII	1423-1429		
Alexander V	1409-1410	}	Pisan Obedience
John XXIII	1410-1415		

schism of the Western Church, opposed by an adamant anti-pope, betrayed by the very cardinals who had elevated him from the archbishopric of Bari to the papacy, looked about for champions of his cause. He found in the humble, unpretentious Angelus Correr a devoted adherent of the Apostolic See, a filial and obedient son of Holy Mother Church, and in 1380 appointed him bishop of Castello, a city located on the Tiber north of Rome. Henceforth advancement was to be rapid for the aging bishop, for within twenty-six years he would be found sitting in the Chair of Saint Peter.

During the next decade he was appointed to the sees of Venice and of Chalcis, this latter the capital of the isle of Negropont, the largest island of Greece.² These two appointments were probably from the hands of Urban, who reigned until 1389. Pope Boniface IX, seeing that Angelus was a gifted shepherd, named him titular Patriarch of Constantinople, retaining at the same time the bishopric of Chalcis. Nine years later, about 1400, the same pontiff sent him as Papal Nuncio to Naples, where the situation was already out of hand: a bloody civil war was in progress and the fickle Neapolitans changed their fealty to the various claimants to the papacy as often as they deemed it advantageous to themselves.

Under Pope Innocent VII Correr held the posts of Apostolic Secretary and Legate to the March of Ancona. The fact that he administered the former office provides an insight elsewhere lacking into the intellectual attainments of the future pope. Angelus must have been a scholar of at least greater than ordinary erudition, since at this time the execution of papal briefs, which had to be prepared with the utmost possible accuracy and haste, devolved upon the Apostolic Secretary, and the appointment was generally given to one who could best acquit himself of the task.³

Seven months after his coronation as pope, Innocent, ascertaining the virtue and talents of the venerable Angelus, created him Cardinal Priest of the Title of Saint Mark, June 12, 1405. A year and a half later, on November 30, 1406, Cardinal Correr was elected pope, fourteen of the eighteen cardinals of the Roman obedience being present in the conclave. Angelus, now in his eightieth year, was the choice of the cardinals ostensibly because

² Negropont is the present day Eubœa and is situated northeast of Attica and Bœtia on the Euripus Strait.

³ Pastor, Ludwig, *The History of the Popes*, Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trübner and Company, Ltd. (London: 1938), Volume I, p. 170.

of his sincere piety, his genuine ability, and his earnest desire to do all in his power—even resigning the papal dignity if it were for the good of the Church—to put an end to the terrible schism embarrassing Christendom. He consented to the election and assumed the name Gregory XII.

PONTIFICATE

The papacy was now everywhere degraded, a political pawn in the hands of the secular princes. Its divided authority, doubtful, was unheeded; its voice, smothered and unheard. So low had sunk the papal prestige that in the consistory preceding Gregory's election, Peter Paul Vergerio did not think to hesitate when he said:

Of a truth, it seems to me that if, by the will of God, Peter and Paul were now to rise from the dead and enter here, they would not recognize the Church. I think they would no more receive it as their own than they themselves would be received by us. For unless they carried Bulls (in which they have no part but a portrait) you would have no faith in them; and they could hardly even expect to be trusted if they had neither gold nor silver.⁴

Gregory's work was cut out for him; all his efforts looked to the time when he would no longer be pope.

Gregory, as did all the other cardinals present in the conclave, took a special oath before the election, which embodied these important points:

- 1) He bound himself to abdicate if Benedict XIII, the reigning anti-pope, should do likewise or should chance to die, provided the cardinals of both obediences would unite to elect a new pope.
- 2) Within a month after his election he would notify Benedict and his cardinals, the Christian princes and the bishops everywhere of this undertaking.
- 3) Within three months of his election he would send ambassadors to Benedict to arrange a suitable place for a personal interview.
- 4) Gregory promised not to create any new cardinals, unless to equalize his College with that of the anti-pope. This obligation, however, was to cease if, through the fault of Benedict, union was not accomplished within fifteen months (a fact often overlooked by historians).
- 5) He would not dispense or absolve himself from this pact.⁵

⁴ Pastor, *ibid.*, n. 4; translation.

⁵ Adapted from Hughes, Philip, *A History of the Church*, Sheed & Ward. (New York: 1947), Volume III, p. 262.

Immediately after his election Gregory repeated the above oath and took exceptional care to see to it that it received all possible publicity. He assured those about him that, to repair the rent in the garment of Christendom, he was ready, notwithstanding his seventy-nine years, to set out with staff in hand or to cross the sea in an open boat to meet Benedict. Gregory wrote the anti-pope to this effect on December 12, 1406, and added that, in imitation of the woman in the Old Testament who preferred to give up her real claim to the child rather than consent to its being divided, they should both abdicate. Benedict replied in a similar vein and they agreed to meet at Savona, a city in the republic of Genoa and subject to France, which owed allegiance to Benedict, no later than All Saints' Day, 1407. Gregory, fearful of being captured by the French (a fear not groundless, since the anti-pope had secretly made provision for his capture and imprisonment), went as far as Lucca. Benedict, on his part, went to Porto Venere and no farther. Thus pope and anti-pope remained, within a day's journey of each other, both refusing to continue to Savona. Europeans jested disgustedly: "One is a land animal afraid of the sea [Benedict], the other a sea animal fearful of the land."

On May 4, 1408, while yet at Lucca, Gregory elevated his confessor, John Dominic Banchini, O.P., Archbishop of Ragusa, to the cardinalate. This worthy friar has suffered much from his contemporaries and from modern historians, the chief blame for Gregory's not resigning being laid to him. The hatred borne him is manifested in a satire purporting to be a letter from Satan to "John of Ragusa." The letter concludes by exhorting Cardinal Banchini to continue opposing Gregory's abdication and informs him that Satan has reserved for him the hottest place in the depths of hell, between Arius and Mohammed, where other supporters of the schism are ardently awaiting his arrival. "Farewell," it closes, "and be as happy as was our dear son Simon Magus."⁶ (John Dominic Banchini was beatified in 1832 by Pope Gregory XVI.)

Enraged by the failure of the claimants to the papacy to meet, cardinals of both parties began to desert their lords. Ten of Gregory's and twelve of Benedict's cardinals assembled at Pisa and convoked the illegitimate "Council of Pisa" on March 25, 1409. On June 5 this *conciliabule* (an illegitimately-convoked coun-

⁶ Simon Magus, the father of *simony*. This supposedly implies that John Dominic's ecclesiastical preferments were simoniacal.

cil and therefore no council) drew up a farcical deposition of both Gregory and Benedict as schismatics and heretics, and on the 15th elected Peter Cardinal Filargo, O.F.M. Conv., a Cretan Greek, as Alexander V. There were now three men claiming the bishopric of Rome! Alexander died the following year and was succeeded on May 17 by John XXIII, Balthazar Cossa, a cardinal more renowned militarily than ecclesiastically.

What was the character of the events that took place at Pisa? The succinct answer of Cardinal Hergenröther, a celebrated canonist, is:

Either Gregory was or was not legitimate before the Council took place. If he were legitimate, he did not cease to be by the decision of a headless assembly; if he were not, neither were the Cardinals who elected Alexander V, and their new election was invalid and unlawful. In the first nineteen sittings the Council had no Pope—without a Pope there is no Œcumenical Council. No right existed by which the Pope could be deposed; if Gregory broke his word, he sinned, but he did not forfeit his Pontificate. If there was no right to depose the Pope, there was no right to appoint a new one.⁷

When he heard what had happened at Pisa, Pope Gregory XII wept bitterly. He could see that this state of affairs might go on indefinitely: illegitimate councils might be held at decreasing intervals, each one putting forth an anti-pope until a counterpart of the Greek Schism unfolded. Already rumors were heard that the best remedy for the ills besetting Christianity was "A pope in every country." The conciliar movement was becoming stronger daily, supported by the secular princes and the great universities. Realizing all this, the pope wept.

CONSTANCE: ABDICATION

The Pisan anti-popes were bound by a conclave oath to convoke a council not later than 1412. John did so but it was not at all well attended; delegates from nearby France and Germany did not even arrive until the council was over. The following year Emperor Sigismund, John's champion, replying to the anti-pope's request for military aid in his battles with the other two claimants to the tiara, demanded that first, as a prerequisite to his supplying help, a new general council be summoned. John reluctantly agreed to the Emperor's desire that it be held in the Ger-

⁷ Pastor, *op. cit.*, p. 190, fn. 2.

man city of Constance. Very much apprehensive about his own fate, and that only, he entered Constance on October 28, 1414, five days before the conciliabule opened.

John's fears were not unfounded. When he first saw the Lake of Constance he exclaimed, "This is how foxes are caught!" Realizing his own approaching doom and hoping to disperse the conciliar fathers, he fled Constance disguised as a stable groom on May 20, 1415, breaking an oath to resign which he had sworn to the conciliabule two months previously. This act was later alleged as a crime disgracing the papacy. On the 29th of the same month, within a few days of his capture, he was deposed by the assembled delegates; two days later John formally accepted the sentence passed on him and ratified it. He swore never to call his deposition into question and handed over his seal and the Ring of the Fisherman. Then Cardinal Cossa was confined to prison in the custody of the Count Palatine Louis of Bavaria. Having no knowledge of German, he was unable to converse with his guards and spent his imprisonment writing verses on the transitory nature of mundane glory. Four years later he submitted to Pope Martin V. He died in November, 1419, so poor that the legacies he bequeathed could not be paid.

Events were now rapidly moving toward a climax. While the affairs described above were taking place, Gregory, at the instigation of John Dominic and to restore peace and unity to the Church, had decided that the opportune time to abdicate had come. He meticulously arranged and executed matters in such a way as to safeguard all that he claimed to be—and was. In two Bulls dated Rimini, March 13, 1415, Charles Malatesta, Lord of Rimini and his loyal protector, and Cardinal Banchini were commissioned to convoke a general council at Constance as his envoys. Further, he constituted Malatesta his proxy in resigning the papacy. The Bulls were addressed to Sigismund and appointed him to preside at the council; they in no way recognized the cardinals and other prelates assembled at Constance as constituting as yet a general council. It was expressly provided that the council should not be regarded as being convoked by Balthazar Cossa and that the latter should not preside thereat. Malatesta and Banchini then set out for Germany with the power to end the schism.

Accordingly, after they arrived at Constance, John Dominic read the Bull of Convocation and authorized, in Gregory's name, all that the council should do. Gregory was now directing the

drama and the conciliar fathers accepted the rôle he assigned them. Georg Phillips observes :

If even we admit the proposition that Gregory XII's fresh convocation and authorization of the Council were a matter of form, this form was the price to which he attached his abdication; and it meant nothing less than that the Assembly should formally acknowledge him as the lawful Pope, and accordingly confess that its own authority dated only from that moment, and that all its previous acts . . . were devoid of all œcumenical character. The recognition of Gregory XII's legitimacy necessarily included a similar recognition of Innocent VII, Boniface IX, and Urban VI, and the rejection of Clement VII and Benedict XIII.⁸

The council, now legitimately convoked, then declared that all the canonical censures imposed by reason of the schism were lifted. Next, Malatesta read the Bull empowering him to resign the papacy in the name of Gregory XII. On its part the council ratified all Gregory's acts, accepted the cardinals of his obedience into the Sacred College, promised that all his officers would be confirmed in their posts and declared that if he were barred from re-election to the papacy (which he was) it was not because of any personal unworthiness but only to avoid a repetition of the schism.

Finally, Charles Malatesta read the Act of Abdication, dated March 10, 1415 :

I hereby renounce, cede and resign [the supreme pontificate] in this holy synod and universal council which represents the Holy Roman Catholic Church.

The Holy See was then declared vacant and the *Te Deum* sung in thanksgiving for the termination of the schism. The date was July 4, 1415. Gregory assumed the pontifical habit once more at Rimini, assembled a consistory and announced all that had taken place at Constance. He then laid aside the tiara, divested himself of the papal insignia and protested that he would never again resume them. And he kept his word. In a letter written shortly afterward he signed himself "Angelus, Cardinal Bishop."

CONCLUSION

As an expression of gratitude for his magnanimous concession the council conferred on Angelus Correr the Cardinal Bish-

⁸ Pastor, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

opric of Porto, recognized him as dean of the Sacred College, appointed him permanent Legate to the March of Ancona and decreed further that he was to have rank second only to that of the pope. But Angelus did not long enjoy these dignities; he died at Recanati in his ninety-first year, October 18, 1417. When his tomb in the cathedral at Recanati was opened in 1683, his body was found in a state of perfect preservation, still clad in the papal robes.

Angelus' speedy death was regarded as a sign that he had been the true pope, since God did not permit that another pontiff should be elected during his lifetime.⁹ In the *Auguries of Malachy*, a work which professes to depict the character of each of the popes until Peter II, the last pope, Gregory is portrayed as the "Sailor from Negropont," a name that can be viewed as particularly fitting since he was once bishop of Chalcis on Negropont and piloted the Bark of Peter through the tempestuous sea of schism, finally bringing It safely to harbor. His last words as he was called to receive his eternal reward were—

"I have not understood the world, and the world has not understood me."

⁹ The Council of Constance elected Otho Colonna, Cardinal Deacon, former Archbishop of Urbino, and as yet only a subdeacon, on Saint Martin's Day, November 11, 1417. He chose the name Martin V. Benedict XIII had been deposed by the council on July 26, 1417. He died at Peñiscola, Spain, May 23, 1423, persisting in his schism to the end, after having braved four popes, two other anti-popes and two "councils."

THE PERFECT SPIRITUAL MAN

"If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man (St. James 3:2)."

In anyone who is born of the Spirit, all sensible and exterior actions, and especially his conversations, are from the Spirit. They are fragrant with the Spirit, for scarcely anything other than God or the ordination of things to God is mentioned. From that it is manifest that exterior deportment—the control of the external senses, especially speech—is frequently indicative of a spiritual man.*

St. Dominic spoke only of God or to God.

* From *The Gifts of the Holy Ghost* by John of St. Thomas in the translation of Dominic Hughes, O.P. Copyright 1951 by Sheed and Ward, Inc., New York.