



The figure of Pedro Martínez de Luna, known in history as Pope Luna, has been a subject of fascination, controversy, and mystery for centuries. This Aragonese cardinal of the 14th century became one of the most debated popes of the Catholic Church, not only for his role in the Western Schism but also for his determination, theological firmness, and incredible resilience in the face of adversity. But who was this man who divided Europe and defied his opponents until his last days? In this article, we'll delve into the life and legacy of Pope Luna, a historical figure who still stirs passions and reflections in the Catholic world today.

1. Historical Context: The Western Schism

To understand Pedro de Luna, it's essential to place him in the context of the Western Schism, one of the most complicated and divisive periods in the history of the Church. After the papal seat moved to Avignon, France, in 1309, the Catholic Church entered a crisis of authority. The Avignonese popes, perceived as submissive to French power, created an atmosphere of distrust among the faithful and Church leaders. In 1378, when the papacy returned to Rome, discontent erupted: a group of cardinals, unhappy with the elected pope, Urban VI, fled and elected a new pope, Clement VII, who established his seat in Avignon. Thus, the Western Schism was born, dividing Christianity for nearly forty years between two (and even three) rival popes.

It was in this climate of confusion that Pedro de Luna, a respected cardinal and man of great intelligence, was elected in 1394 as Benedict XIII, pope of the "Avignon obedience." With his election, the Spanish cardinal took on a monumental responsibility, and he did so with firmness and conviction. From the outset, he demonstrated his unwavering commitment to fight for the unity of the Church, though paradoxically, his stance would end up being seen as a cause of division.

2. Benedict XIII: Pope Luna's Unyielding Fight

Benedict XIII was no ordinary pope. From the start of his pontificate, he showed an unusual commitment to his role and to defending his legitimacy as head of the Church. Convinced of his valid election, he resisted pressure from cardinals and secular leaders to abdicate for the sake of unity. While other popes in Avignon had shown a readiness for negotiation and politics, Pope Luna held his ground with a tenacity that not only earned him enemies but also the admiration of those who saw in him a model of firmness in faith.

But what made him so unyielding? For Benedict XIII, his papacy was not just a matter of politics or prestige; it was a divine mission. From his perspective, abdicating would have been a betrayal of God's will and of the Church itself. Through years of study and service, he had



acquired a deep understanding of theology and canon law, allowing him to defend his legitimacy with solid doctrinal arguments.

Despite his struggle, European politics wore him down. In 1409, the Council of Pisa attempted to resolve the schism by declaring the papacies of Benedict XIII and his Roman rival, Gregory XII, null. However, instead of unifying the Church, this council only added a third pope to the conflict: Alexander V, and later his successor, John XXIII. The triple division dealt a devastating blow to papal authority and to the faith of Catholics, who saw with confusion how their spiritual leaders split into factions.

3. The Siege of Peñíscola and Final Resistance

Despite attempts at resolution, the pressure on Benedict XIII only intensified. In 1415, the Council of Constance succeeded in getting both the Roman and Pisan popes to step down and elected Martin V as the legitimate pope in a final effort to restore unity. But Pope Luna, installed in his fortress in Peñíscola, refused to yield. Though isolated and with few followers, Benedict XIII continued to consider himself the true pope until his death in 1423.

This final episode of his life, surrounded by loyal followers in a coastal fortress, highlights Pedro de Luna's incredible tenacity. Even in his old age, surrounded by dangers and under constant siege, he did not abandon his conviction. Some see him as a symbol of resistance, while others see him as an obstinate man whose intransigence contributed to the division of the Church.

Peñíscola Castle became the final refuge of Pope Luna and a symbol of his struggle. In this castle, he continued to celebrate Mass, perform rites, and, to the extent possible, exercise his papal ministry. Until his last breath, he refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of any other pope, insisting that his election had been valid and that no council had the authority to depose him.

4. Historical Interpretations: Saint or Villain?

The figure of Benedict XIII has been interpreted in various ways over the centuries. For some, his firmness makes him a hero of faith, a man who would not be intimidated by political power or external pressure. For others, his stance was the cause of a schism that weakened the Church in one of its most critical moments.

Catholic theology often remembers Benedict XIII as a controversial figure, though some consider him worthy of admiration. His dedication to the idea of a Church free from secular



influences is a testament to his faith and love for the Church. At the same time, his unwillingness to yield to reconciliation efforts demonstrates the complexities of religious leadership and the difficulty of balancing unshakable principles with the need for unity.

5. Legacy and Reflections for Today's Church

Pope Luna's legacy remains relevant for the Church today. In a world facing internal and external divisions, the figure of Benedict XIII serves as a reminder of the importance of principles and the danger of extreme inflexibility. While Pope Luna sought to preserve the purity and authority of the Church, his inability to find a path to reconciliation shows the risks of a unilateral vision.

For today's believers, his story invites reflection on managing differences within the Church and balancing respect for tradition with the need for dialogue and adaptation. His life is a reminder that in times of crisis, unity and charity must be central values in the search for truth.

Pope Luna is a fascinating and complex character in Church history. Beyond the labels of obstinate or visionary, his life and legacy invite profound reflection on the meaning of authority, the value of unity, and the power of personal conviction. Through his story, we find lessons that resonate strongly in today's Church, constantly challenged to be faithful to its principles but also to serve as an instrument of peace and reconciliation in a world that continues to seek spiritual answers amid division.