

THE CRIMINAL HISTORY OF THE PAPACY

The papal office has an unparalleled record of corruption and criminality over the centuries, and the true history of the popes is one of scandals, cruelty, debauchery, reigns of terror, warfare and moral depravity.

Part 1 of 3

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Most Catholics go through life and never hear a word of reproach for any pope or member of the clergy. Yet the recorded history of the lives of the clerical hierarchy bears no resemblance to its modern-day portrayal, and the true stories of the popes in particular are among the most misrepresented in religious history.

The Catholic historian and Archbishop of New York, John Cardinal Farley (d. c. 1916), subtly admitted that the "old legends of their dissolute lives may be partly true...that they didn't sternly insist upon sexual virtue and injustice was a general licence of the papal court, but it is probable that moral improvement was at the vanguard of their thinking" (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, Pecci ed., 1897, iii, p. 207). The real character of the popes as a rule has been so falsely represented that many people don't know that so many popes were not only decadent but were also the most savage and perfidious of military strategists ever known. Cardinal Farley added this comment:

"The popes were temporal rulers of the civil territory and they naturally had recourse to force the re-establishment or extend the States of the Church until the conclusion of peace was confirmed ... their attempts to purify particularly the Duchy of Rome caused them considerable distress and the need to resort to violence, but always on the side of mercy ... lives were lost in the service of truth but the legal basis for the Christian Church to hold and transmit properties for the benefit of revenues was given to them [the popes] by Emperor Constantine in 312."

(*Catholic Encyclopedia*, Pecci ed., ii, pp. 157–169)

The comments of the cardinal warrant our attention, for within them rests a little-known story of the leaders of the Christian religion and reveals that today's presentation of popes as incorruptible moral oracles is untrue. The hidden history of doctrinal foundations that permitted a papal alliance with conflict and licentiousness, and to what degree decadence among the clergy is "partly true", provides for an extraordinary story—one that has no precedent or parallel in the history of world religions. In the preface to an official papal record commissioned for publication by the Holy See, called *The Popes: A Concise Biographical History*, the Christian reader is tactfully prepared for some upcoming and unpleasant facts about popes with this apologetic admission:

"Some Catholics may find surprises when they read the papal biographies in this book. The part we are accustomed to think of the pope playing in the Church may need a little adjustment."

(*The Popes: A Concise Biographical History*, Eric John, ed., Burns & Oates, Publishers to the Holy See, London, 1964, p. 19, published under the imprimatur of Georgius L. Craven)

This comment provides readers with a note of caution in dealing with papal history, but in this biographical history the Holy See did not think it prudent to publish full details of the true nature of the papal court. Its real history is intermingled with "centuries of trafficking in ecclesiastical appointments, deceit, scandals, immorality, aggression, frauds, murder and cruelty, and the true disposition of the popes is knowingly falsely presented by the Church today" (*A History of the Popes*, Dr Joseph McCabe [1867–1955], C. A. Watts & Co., London, 1939).

For centuries, the Church maintained a comprehensive account of the lives of the popes who, up until the 11th century, called themselves "ecumenical patriarchs", and amazing

excesses are recorded. Official Catholic records provide extraordinary confessions of wickedness in the whole Christian clergy, and the implications surrounding this knowledge begin to assume major new proportions when considered in light of the central Church claim of unquestionable piety in the clerical hierarchy.

The editorial committees of the *Catholic Encyclopedia* claim that their volumes are "the exponent of Catholic truth" (preface), and what is presented in this overview is assembled primarily from those records and *without prejudice*. In the same spirit, we also have available several papal diaries, letters and reports from foreign ambassadors at the Holy See to their governments, monastic documents, senatorial Roman records as well as access to the official and ancient registers of the ecclesiastical courts of London. Also of great help in this investigation was the availability of an original version of Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, a tome that Pope Clement XIII (1758–69) ordered destroyed immediately after its publication in 1759. These documents uniformly report a condition of centuries of extraordinary debasement in the papal hierarchy and, when considered in conjunction with the circumstances of their production, their contents can only be classed as astounding. The pretended holiness and piety of popes as publicly presented today is not represented in the records of history, and that provides proof of the dishonesty of the Church's own portrayal.

Pious Catholic historian and author Bishop Frothingham extended this summary of Christian leaders up to his time:

"Many of the popes were men of the most abandoned lives. Some were magicians (occultists); others were noted for sedition, war, slaughter and profligacy of manners, for avarice and simony. Others were not even members of Christ, but the basest of criminals and enemies of all godliness. Some were children of their father, the Devil; most were men of blood; some were not even priests. Others were heretics. If the pope be a heretic, he is *ipso facto* no pope."

(*The Cradle of Christ*, Bishop Frothingham, 1877; see also *Catholic Encyclopedia*, xii, pp. 700–703, *passim*, published under the imprimatur of Archbishop Farley)

And heretics they were, with many popes publicly admitting disbelief in the Gospel story, as we shall see. These facts are well known to Catholic historians who dishonestly tell their readers that the popes were virtuous and competent men with "soaring religious minds" (*The Papacy*, George Weidenfeld & Nicolson Ltd, London, 1964). The reality of the matter is that they were intent only upon their own interests, not those of God, and cultivated a system of papal vice more assiduously than Catholic writers of Church history dare to reveal openly. They were resented by the laity and, when better economic conditions awakened the minds of a developing European middle class, there was widespread rebellion against them. Christian records show that popes were clearly a long way removed from the modern-day

presentation of their character, and in trying to portray them with a pious past the Church developed a doctrinal façade that brazenly and deceptively presents them as devout.

With the late-20th-century model of the papacy in one's mind, it is difficult to imagine what it would have been like in the 16th or 14th centuries, let alone the 10th or the eighth. The now-called expounders of "Christian virtue" were brutal killers, and "crimes against the faith were high treason, and as such were punishable with death" (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, Farley ed., xiv, p. 768). Popes waded through rivers of blood to attain their earthly objectives and many personally led their episcopal militia into the field of battle. The Church ordered its "secular arm" to force its dogma upon humanity by "mass murder" (*The Extermination of the Cathars*, Simonde de Sismondi, 1826), and "the clergy, discharging in each district the functions of local state officials,

seem never to have quite regained the religious spirit" (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, Farley ed., i, p. 507). Apologetic contributors to Christian history vainly try to portray an air of sophistry about a papal past that scandalised Europe for centuries and one that is clearly unsophisticated and primitive.

As the line of popes begins obscurely, we shall begin our assessment in the year 896 when "a body of nobles with swinish and brutal lusts, many of whom could not write even their own names" (Annals of Hincmar, Archbishop of Reims; pub. c. 905), captured the papacy and drew it to a close 631 years later in 1527 when, under the subterfuges of Pope Clement VII (1523–1534), Rome fell to the army of Emperor Charles V.

In this brief evaluation of just a few popes of these centuries, we read:

"On the death of Pope Formosus (896) there began for the papacy a time of the deepest humiliation, such as it has never been experienced before or since. After the successor of Formosus, Boniface VI, had ruled only fifteen days, Stephen VII [VI] was raised to the papal chair. In his blind rage, Stephen not only abused the

memory of Formosus but also treated his body with indignity. Pope Stephen was strangled in prison in the summer of 897, and the six following popes (to 904) owed their elevation to the struggles of the rival political parties. Christophorus, the last of them, was overthrown by Sergius III (904–911)."

(*Catholic Encyclopedia*, ii, p. 147)

Such periods of "deepest humiliation" to the papacy were quite recurrent, and have been even into the 21st century when the extent of priesthood paedophilia was publicly exposed (Apology of Pope John Paul II, March 2002). It was Pope Stephen VII (VI), "a gouty and gluttonous old priest" (Bishop Liutprand of Cremona, c. 922–972), who ordered the rotting corpse of Pope Formosus to be exhumed from its grave of eight months, tied upright in a chair and put on trial for transgressions of the canons. In front of his putrefying body and dressed in purple and gold regalia stood the pope, his bishops, the nobles of Rome and Lamberto of Tuscany.

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The "trial" was a grotesque and obscene farce. The pope paced backwards and forwards and shrieked at the corpse, declaring it guilty. A deacon, standing beside the decomposing body of the ex-pope, answered on its behalf. In this macabre incident, today piously called the "Cadaver Synod", the deceased pope was duly condemned, stripped of his vestments, three fingers cut from his right hand and his remains dumped into the River Tiber.

"In this disgusting business, he [Pope Stephen VII (VI)] cannot be excused for what followed. In declaring the dead pope deposed he also annulled all his acts, including his ordinations. His grim and grisly role provoked a violent reaction in Rome, and in late July or early August Pope Stephen was imprisoned and later strangled."

(*The Popes: A Concise Biographical History*, *ibid.*, p. 160)

Morbid in its realism, the mental limitations of ancient popes is thus shown. From these and similar displays, we understand why the monks at the Eulogomenopolis monastery, today called Monte Cassino, described the Asinarian Station (later renamed the Lateran Palace) as "an abode of wrath, a charnel-house...a place of exotic vice and crime".

The Unholy Reign of the Whores

Bishop Liutprand of Cremona, whose *Antapodosis* treats papal history from 886 to 950, left a remarkable picture of the vice of the popes and their episcopal colleagues, maybe with a little jealousy: "They hunted on horses with gold trappings, had rich banquets with dancing girls when the hunt was over, and retired with these shameless whores to beds with silk sheets and gold-embroidered covers. All the Roman bishops were married, and their wives made silk dresses out of the sacred vestments." Their lovers were the leading noble ladies of the city, and "two voluptuous Imperial women", Theodora and her daughter Marozia, "ruled the papacy of the tenth century" (*Antapodosis*, *ibid.*). Renowned Vatican historian Cardinal Caesar Baronius (1538–1607) called it the "Rule of the Whores", which "really gave place to the even more scandalous rule of the whoremongers" (*Annales Ecclesiastici*, folio iii, Antwerp, 1597). All that Bishop Liutprand reveals in detail about Theodora is that she compelled a handsome young priest to reciprocate her passion for him and had him appointed Archbishop of Ravenna. Later, Theodora summoned her archiepiscopal lover from Ravenna and made him Pope John X (pope 914–928, d. 928).

John X is chiefly remembered as a military commander. He took to the field in person against the Saracens and defeated them. He indulged in nepotism, or the enrichment of his family, and his conduct prepared the way for a deeper degradation of the papacy. He invited the Hungarians, who at this time were still half-civilised Asiatics, to come and fight his enemies and thus he brought a new and terrible plague upon his country. He had no principles in his diplomatic, political or private conduct. He spurned Theodora and enticed the charming young daughter of Hugh of Provence into his papal bedroom. Spurned,

Theodora then married Guido, Marquis of Tuscany, and together they carried out a *coup d'état* against John X. Theodora died suddenly by suspected poisoning, and John X entered into a bitter quarrel with Marozia and the leading nobles of Rome. John had brought his brother Peter to Rome, raised him to the rank of nobility, and heaped upon him the profitable offices which the elder nobles had come to regard as their preserve. It was an internal struggle for power. The nobles, led by Marozia, drove Peter, Pope John and their troops from the city. The pope and his brother increased their army and returned to Rome, but a body of Marozia's men cut their way into the Lateran Palace and murdered Peter before the pope's eyes. John was captured, declared deposed in May 928 and smothered to death with a pillow in the Castel Sant' Angelo.

Marozia and her faction then appointed Leo VI (928) the new pope, but replaced him seven months later with Stephen VIII (VII). He ruled for two years and then Marozia gave the papacy to her son, John XI (c. 910–936; pope 931–35). He was illegitimately fathered by Pope Sergius III, as "confirmed by Flodoard, a reliable contemporary writer" (*The Popes: A Concise Biographical History*, *ibid.*, p. 162). Sergius had previously taken the papacy by force with the help of Marozia's mother, Theodora. Both Theodora and Sergius took a leading part in the earlier outrage on the corpse of Formosus, and Sergius was later accused of murdering his two predecessors. The Church defended itself, but in doing so revealed that he wasn't the only pope sexually involved with Marozia:

"It is commonly believed that Pope Sergius, although a middle-aged man, formed a union with the young Marozia and by her had a son, the future Pope John XI. Most of the information we have on the career of Marozia and the Roman scandals in which she and a series of popes were involved is derived from hostile sources and may be exaggerated."

(*The Popes: A Concise Biographical History*, *ibid.*)



This rare painting is reproduced from a 17th-century edition of *Antapodosis*, a 1,000-year-old text written by Bishop Liutprand of Cremona who died c. 972. It purports to show Pope Stephen VII (VI) overseeing the exhumation of Pope Formosus's corpse in readiness for its trial. An interesting aspect of this painting is the pope's headgear, reminiscent of the "crown of horns" worn by the Caesar clan.

With sacerdotal dictatorship, Marozia ruled Christianity for several decades from the papal castle near St Peter's, and dealt with everything Christian except routine matters. She could not sign her own name, yet she was the head of the Christian Church—a fact known to historians who have at least an elementary acquaintance with the papal record. She was amorously aggressive, callous, densely ignorant and completely unscrupulous. She appointed ruthless warrior-bishops to strengthen her factions, and she triumphed in her rule over opponents. To translate the words of the Roman people literally, they called her "the Popes' whore" (plural) and she was directly responsible for selecting and installing at least four popes. Modern-day apologists say her promotions were "scandalous", but those popes are now accepted by the Church as "legitimate" successors of St Peter. At the time, however, large bodies of good folk deeply resented the obscene farce the papal religion had become and turned upon it with disdain and anger.

Later in his papacy, Pope John XI took ill and Marozia temporarily installed an elderly monk in the papal chair. He subsequently refused to resign and was forcibly removed to a prison cell to be starved to death. John XI then resumed his position and exhausted his remaining wealth hiring soldiers to restore order in Rome. The city was heavy with a feeling of revolt against the Church and the appalling clerical morals that existed throughout Italy. John XI then set out to recover and secure the rich temporal domains of the papacy, but in 936 he died. Thus, in this condensed description, we learn with amazement of the days when loose women ruled the Holy See and a Christian doctrine had not yet been developed.

The Papacy Sold amidst New Depths of Wickedness

As incredible as it may seem, the papacy then sank to a lower depth of wickedness and remained in this condition for nearly a thousand years. Christian historians airily brush aside the true nature of the popes, saying that they never regarded them as "impeccable" and ignoring the fact that they committed outrages against every standard of human decency.

Pope John XII (Octavian, c. 937–964, pope 955–964, *The Popes, A Concise Biographical History*, *ibid.*, pp. 166–7) was another in the succession of impious popes and he opened his inglorious career by invoking pagan gods and goddesses as he flung the dice in gambling sessions. He toasted Satan during a drinking spree and put his notorious mistress/prostitute Marcia in charge of his brothel in the Lateran Palace (*Antapodosis*, *ibid.*). He "liked to have around him a collection of Scarlet Women", said the monk-chronicler Benedict of Soracte, and at his trial for the murder of an opponent his clergy swore on oath that he'd had incestuous relations with his sisters and had raped his nuns (*Annals of Beneventum* in the *Monumenta Germaniae*, v). He and his mistresses got so drunk at a banquet that they accidentally set fire to the building. It would be difficult to imagine a pontiff who was farther removed from saintliness, yet in an age when the

average life of a pope was two years, he held the throne for 10 years. However, his life came to a sudden and violent end when, according to pious chroniclers, he was killed by the Devil while raping a woman in a house in the suburbs. The truth is that the Holy Father was thrashed so severely by the enraged husband of the woman that he died of injuries eight days later. Emperor Otto then demanded that the clergy select a priest of respectable life to succeed John XII, but they could not find one. The new pope, Leo VIII (963–965), was a layman drawn from the "civil service who was put through all clerical orders in one day" (*ibid.*). Leo VIII is reckoned by the modern-day Church to be "a true Pope", but "his election is a puzzle"—one that canonists have not cared to unravel (*ibid.*).

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* gives additional accounts of papal debasement:

"The Popes 'Benedict' from the fourth to the ninth inclusive (IV–IX) belong to the darkest period of papal history... Benedict VI (973) was thrown into prison by the anti-pope Boniface VII (d. 983), and strangled by his orders in 974. Benedict VII was a layman and became pope by force, and drove out Boniface VII. Pope Benedict IX [c. 1012–1055/1065/1085; pope 1032–45, 1047, 1048] had long caused scandal to the Church by his disorderly life. His immediate successor, Pope Gregory VI [1044–46], had persuaded Benedict IX to resign the Chair of Peter, and to do so bestowed valuable possessions on him." (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, i, p. 31)

Anti-pope Boniface VII was described by Gerbert (to become Pope Sylvester II, 999–1003) as "a horrible monster that in criminality surpassed all the rest of mankind", but the "scandal" of Pope Benedict IX deserves special mention. His name was Grottaferrata Teofilatto (Theophylact, in some records) and in 1032 he won the murderous scramble for the wealth of the papacy. He immediately excommunicated leaders who were hostile to him and quickly established a reign of terror. He officially opened the doors of "the

palace of the popes" to homosexuals and turned it into an organised and profitable male brothel (*The Lives of the Popes in the Early Middle Ages*, Horace K. Mann, Kegan Paul, London, 1925). His violent and licentious conduct provoked the Roman people, and in January 1044 the residents of the city elected John of Sabine, under the name of Pope Sylvester III, to replace him. But Sylvester was quickly driven out by Benedict's brothers and fled for his life into the Sabine hills.

Benedict IX then sold the papacy to his godfather, Giovanni Graziano, who assumed the papal chair as Pope Gregory VI, but in 1047 Benedict reappeared and announced he was reclaiming the papacy. The Church added that he was "...immoral...cruel and indifferent to spiritual things. The testimony to his depravity shows his disinterest in religious matters, and his disrespect for an ascetic life was well known. He was the worst pope since John XII" (*The Popes: A Concise Biographical History*, *ibid.*, p. 175). Upon his death, undertakers refused to build him a coffin. He was

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surreptitiously buried in a cloth under the cover of darkness. Four succeeding popes then briefly held the papal position, and the following paragraph from the *Catholic Encyclopedia* is pregnant with evidence of the moral depravity of the entire priesthood:

"At the time of Leo IX's election in 1049, according to the testimony of St Bruno, Bishop of Segni, 'the whole Church was in wickedness, holiness had disappeared, justice had perished, and truth had been buried; Simon Magus was lording it over the Church, whose popes and bishops were given to luxury and fornication. The scientific and ascetic training of the popes left much to be desired, the moral standard of many being very low and the practice of celibacy not everywhere observed. Bishops obtained their offices in irregular ways, whose lives and conversations are strangely at variance with their calling, who go through their duties not for Christ but for motives of worldly gain. The members of the clergy were in many places regarded with scorn, and their avaricious ideas, luxury and immorality rapidly gained ground at the centre of clerical life. When ecclesiastical authority grew weak at the fountain head, it necessarily decayed elsewhere. In proportion, as the papal authority lost the respect of many, resentment grew against both the Curia and the papacy.'"

(*Catholic Encyclopedia*, vi, pp. 793-4; xii, pp. 700-03, passim)

Pope Leo IX (b. 1002, d. 1054) was an unscrupulous adventurer who spent his pontificate touring Europe with a quota of armed knights and left the world worse than he found it. The Church called him "Lapsi" (lapsed), coyly admitting that "he defected from the faith...he fell away by actually offering sacrifice to the false gods (*thurificati*)...it is not known why he recanted his religion" (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, Pecci ed., iii, p. 117).

St Peter Damian (1007–72), the fiercest censor of his age, unrolled a frightful picture of decay in clerical morality in the lurid pages of his *Book of Gomorrah*, a curious Christian record that remarkably survived centuries of Church cover-ups and book-burnings. He said: "A natural tendency to murder and brutalise appears with the popes. Nor do they have any inclination to conquer their abominable lust; many are seen to have employed into licentiousness for an occasion to the flesh, and hence, using this liberty of theirs, perpetrating every crime."

After a lifetime of research into the lives of the popes, Lord Acton (1834–1902), English historian and founder-editor of *The Cambridge Modern History*, summarised the militarist papal attitude when he observed:

"The popes were not only murderers in the great style, but they also made murder a legal basis of the Christian Church and a condition of salvation."

(*The Cambridge Modern History*, vol. 1, pp. 673-77)

Maybe they took their example from Jesus Christ who, after being made king, issued this murderous instruction: "Bring my enemies here that did not wish me as king, and kill them in my presence" (Gospel of Luke, 19:27, Mount Sinai Manuscript of the Bible, British Museum, MS 43725, 1934). The Catholic Bible provides a softer approach: "But those, my enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them

before me" (Luke 19:27). Popes today do everything in their power to present Jesus as a harmless religious preacher and a prophet of peace, but carefully refrain from entering into discussion about this Gospel passage, one that nullifies everything that Christianity purports to represent.

Papal Warships and Rival Imperialist Popes

Around the time of St Peter Damian, we find a reference to the existence of a papal navy crewed by Christian warrior-sailors. It was originally founded in 881 by Pope John VIII (pope 872–882; d. 882), but details of its size or missions do not publicly exist (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 6, 1973, p. 572). However, from a later solitary reference to "the Pope's fighting fleet" recorded in 1043 (Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, 1759), it was still operational at that time. This extraordinary record was found in documentation

once belonging to the powerful Roman Crescenti family, who played an important part in papal coups from the middle of the 10th century to the beginning of the 11th century. The Pope's Navy was still operational in the 16th century, some 700 years after its inception, for Pope Gregory XIII (b. 1502; pope 1572–85) commissioned Giorgio Vasari (1511–74) to paint a picture of the fleet while it was moored at the port of Messina in Sicily.

The true significance of records of such a military force nullifies the modern-day presentation of the "sweetness and light" that the Church

today says Christianity brought to the world.

Further apologising for centuries of pandemonium caused by popes, and giving a smear of whitewash to their actions, the Vatican has admitted that at the time of Pope Alexander II (1061–73) "the Church was torn by the schisms of anti-popes, simony and clerical incontinence" (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, i, p. 541). The development of a multiplicity of popes simultaneously operating in conflict with each other is a little-known episode in Christian history and provides clear evidence of the existence of powerful factional opponents scheming to gain solitary control of the Papal States. "The Church was disturbed many times in her history by rival claimants to the papacy...the strife that originated was always an occasion of scandal, sometimes of violence and bloodshed" (*Catholic Dictionary*, Virtue & Co, London, 1954, p. 35). Initially, rival imperialist popes were elected by noble French families to root out Roman ecclesiastical vice, and subsequently new elements appeared in a variety of ways, enduring for 400 years.

In modern times, the Church labelled the anti-popes "devils on the chair of St Peter", claiming that they were unlawfully appointed (*Catholic Dictionary*, *ibid.*). That distinction, however, is purely arbitrary, for each multiple pope was canonically elected at Church conclaves. Here is an extraordinary confession from the Church:

"At various times in the history of the Church, illegal pretenders to the papal chair have arisen and frequently exercised pontifical functions in defiance of the true occupant. According to [Cardinal] Hergenrother (d. 1890), the last anti-pope was Felix V (1439–49). The same authority enumerates twenty-nine in the following order... [naming them]."

(*Catholic Encyclopedia*, i, p. 582)

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Each opposing papal hierarchy was supported by formidable military factions, and the subject of popes warring against each other is a topic too vast even to summarise here. Their struggles for power were conducted with amazing bitterness, and the word "schism" is not strong enough to describe the depth of the fury that raged for centuries within the Christian religion. Catholic historians admit that "even now it is not perhaps absolutely certain from the two lines of popes who was pope and who was anti-pope, or which anti-pope was a legal anti-pope" (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, Pecci ed., iii, 107; also, *Catholic Dictionary*, *ibid.*).

This is luminous clerical reasoning, but there is more to this peculiar side of Holy See history and it is found in a book called *Secrets of the Christian Fathers*, written in 1685 by Roman Bishop Joseph W. Sergerus (d. c. 1701). He provides evidence from Church archives at his disposal that at some periods in papal history there were four popes occupying the papal chair(s), each in a different building, city or country, operating independently with their own cardinals and staff and holding their own canonical councils. He names them, and one example from 12 quadruple sets of popes is that of the self-declared Pope Benedict XIV (1425) who, for years, rivalled popes Benedict XIII (1427), Clement VIII (1429) and Martin V (1431). In more recent times, Church historians have ingeniously referred to the fourth member of the quadruple set as "a counter anti-pope" (*The Popes: A Concise Biographical History*), and stated that "this is not the place [in Church reference books] to discuss the merits or motives of the multiple claimants" (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, Pecci ed., iii, pp. 107-8; *Catholic Dictionary*).

The introduction of the word "anti-pope" was a retrospective move by the Church to eliminate the reality of simultaneously serving popes and thus provide itself with a singular continuous ministerial succession of popes from St Peter to Benedict XVI today. Investigation of the Church's own records, however, reveals that the claim of an unbroken papal continuity is false. Bishop Bartolomeo Platina (1421–81), a Christian historian and the first prefect (1475–81) of the embryonic Vatican Library, admitted that direct lineage "was interrupted by repeated periods after Nicholas I (pope 858–867); an interregnum of eight years, seven months and nine days, etc.". Those breaks are piously called "vacations" and are recorded by Bishop Platina as totalling "127 years, five months and nine days" (*Vitae Pontificum* ["Lives of the Popes"], Bishop Platina, first pub. c. 1479; also *Catholic Encyclopedia*, xii, pp. 767-68). However, Platina failed to record the "vacations" that occurred in the nine centuries or so preceding Nicholas I, for "unfortunately, few of the records (of the Church) prior to the year 1198 have been released" (*Encyclopaedia Biblica*, Adam & Charles Black, London, 1899). Clerical insiders know writings purporting to record the lineage of popes are false, saying:

"As for the pretend catalogues of succeeding bishops of the different assemblies from the days of the apostles, exhibited by some ecclesiastical writers, they are filled up by forgeries and later inventions. Thus diocesan bishops came in, whose offices

are considered as corruptions or dishonest applications, as dictated by the necessities of the Church, or of instances of worldly ambition."

(*The Authentic and Acknowledged Standards of the Church of Rome*, J. Hannah, DD, 1844, p. 414)

However, humanitarian and biblical scholar Desiderius Erasmus (c. 1466–1536) got it right when he frankly stated that "succession is imaginary" (Erasmus, in *Nov. Test. Annotations*, fol. Basle, 1542), simply because its modern-day portrayal is contrary to recorded historical fact.

Around 50 years after the time of Pope Alexander II (d. 1073), an influential and opposing faction elected Lamberto of Bologna

as Pope Honorius II (1124–30) and the Church maintained its two rival popes, each bitter and warring opponents both living murderous, debauched and luxurious lifestyles. There is no doubt that Honorius was determined to buy or force his way into the papal chair and he succeeded, preserving his position for the term of his life. Upon his death, two new popes, Anacletus II (1130–38) and Innocent II (1130–43) were elected and consecrated on the same day by opposing clerical factions. Before his election, Pietro Pierleoni (anti-pope Anacletus II) was military leader of a rival army whose family had fought for 50 years (in total) for control of the Holy See—a confrontation subtly called the "Fifty Year War" by the Church today. If we can believe his enemies, he disgraced the papal office by his gross immorality and his greed in the accumulation of lucre. When Pierleoni died in 1138, his faction elected Victor IV to the papal chair (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, i, p. 447). The Church remained in bitter conflict, still under the divided control of two popes, neither possessing a Bible and each operating independently (*Confessions of a French Catholic Priest*, Mathers, New York, 1837).

The extent of papal transgression is expanded by the words of the Church through the Pecci edition (1897) of its *Catholic Encyclopedia*:

"At the time of Gregory VII's elevation to the papacy (1073–85), the Christian world was in a deplorable condition. During the desolating period of transition, the terrible period of warfare and rapine, violence, and corruption in high places, which followed immediately upon the dissolution of the Carolingian Empire, a period when society in Europe seemed doomed to destruction and ruin, the Church had not been able to escape from the general debasement to which it had so signally contributed, if not caused. The tenth century, the saddest perhaps in Christian annals, is characterised by the remark of Cardinal Baronius (Vatican historian, 1538–1607) that 'Christ was asleep in the vessel of the Church'."

(*Catholic Encyclopedia*, Pecci ed., ii, pp. 289, 294, *passim*; also vi, pp. 791-95)

Another peculiar event from the annals of Christianity takes us into the 12th century and this piece of evidence makes us wonder

Investigation of the Church's own records, however, reveals that the claim of an unbroken papal continuity is false.

just what was going through the minds of the popes. After an intriguing conclave lasting 10 weeks, Gherardo Caccianemici was elected pope in 1144 and adopted the name of Lucius II. Modern Catholic historians look upon him as "a pillar of the Roman Church" (*The Popes: A Concise Biographical History*, *ibid.*, p. 215), but the truth of the matter is much different. The Italians saw with dismay the new papal policy in which Pope Lucius II ordered a crusade against his own flock in Rome. Eleven months later, he personally led papal troops into battle and stormed the city. However, the residents, led by Giordano (Jordan) Pierleoni, rose up against him and the pope's army was defeated with great loss of life. Badly wounded in the battle, Lucius II died of injuries on 15 February 1145 (*The Pope Encyclopedia: An A to Z of the Holy See*, Matthew Bunson, Crown, New York, 1995).

The Inquisition and the Crusade against the Cathars

The "glorious 12th century", which for some reason the faithful exalt proudly above all others of the Dark Ages of Faith, was ushered in with the horrific Inquisition and the 35-year crusade against the Cathars (sometimes called the Albigenses). "By this term [Inquisition] is usually meant a special ecclesiastical institution for combating or suppressing heresy" (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, viii, p. 26)—"heresy" simply meaning "holding a different opinion". Its introduction was the only time in Christian history when the Church was united in purpose and spoke with one voice. The Inquisition became a permanent office of Christianity and, to justify the tribunal's principles, the popes introduced a potent instrument in the form of an additional series of fictitious documents called the "Forged Decretals of Gratian". The assembled forgeries are some of the greatest impostures known to mankind, the most successful and most stubborn in their hold upon unenlightened nations.

The darker features of this period are not in dispute among authoritative historians, and here, if ever, we must proceed with severe discrimination. In this period of Christian history, hundreds of thousands of people were butchered by the Church and the fairest half of France was laid desolate. In 1182, Pope Lucius III (1181–85; d. 1185) gained control of the official apparatus of the Church, and in 1184 declared the Cathars heretics and authorised a crusade against them. A crusade is a war instigated by the Church for alleged

religious ends, and was authorised by a papal bull.

Eighty-six years earlier, in 1096, Pope Urban II (1042–99; pope 1088–99) sanctioned the first of eight Church crusades that extended in time to a total of 19, and they continued unabated for 475 years (1096–1571). Heresy, said the Church, was a blow in the face of God and it was the duty of every Christian to kill heretics. Earlier still, Pope Gregory VII (1020–85; pope 1073–85) officially declared that "[t]he killing of heretics is not murder" and decreed it legal for the Church and its militants to kill non-believers in Christian dogma. Up until the 19th century, popes compelled Christian monarchs to make heresy a crime punishable by death under their civil codes, but it was not heresy

that instigated the crusade against the Cathars: its purpose was to "yield the papacy additional land and revenues, and the popes engaged in brutalities, threats and all kinds of stratagems to attain their ends" (*The Story of Religious Controversy*, Dr Joseph McCabe, 1929, p. 40).

The Cathars, a peaceable and pious body of people, were now singled out by the Christian hierarchy for total destruction. We find it hard today to realise the commotion raised by Christianity and the ardour of the popes' bitter campaigns against the Cathars, and later against the progeny of Frederick II and then the Knights Templar.

Pope Celestine III (1106–98; pope 1191–98) supported the earlier decision of Pope Lucius III to annihilate every Cathar from the face of the Earth. To do this, now early in the 13th century, Pope Innocent III (Lotario di Segni, 1161–1216; pope 1198–1216), "one of the greatest popes of the Middle Ages" (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, viii, p. 13), ordered Dominic de Guzmán (1170–1223) to develop a troop of merciless followers called "the Catholic army" (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, v, p. 107), and an initial force of 200,000 foot troops was established with assistance from 20,000 mail-clad, horse-mounted knights. The general populace labelled them the "Throat-cutters" but Dominic deemed them the "Militia of Jesus Christ" (*ibid.*),

and he later increased the army by an additional 100,000 troops. The Catholic writer Bishop Delany (d. c. 1227) said that the Church's fighting force developed into 500,000 troops against a body of ordinary, unarmed folk who saw that, in practice, the papal system of religion was frivolous and false.

The crusade against the Cathars began on 22 July 1209, and it was a ruthless demonstration of the Church Militant. Arnaud Amaury (d. 1225), the Abbé of Cîteaux, commanded troops



This mosaic of Pope Innocent III, showing him around the time he became pope at the age of thirty-seven (c. 1198), is from the old basilica of St Peter. Innocent III ruled "one of the most shameful episodes in Christian history" (*The Papacy*, *ibid.*, p. 67). Because of his vehemence in dealing with "the menace of heresy" (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, viii, p. 16), his name in later times became a synonym for cruelty (*Diderot's Encyclopédie*).

bearing a banner with a green cross and a sword, and members of the French nobility, including the Duke of Burgundy and the Count of Nevers, accompanied him. The truth of the matter is that when the army was activated, it was directed and manipulated unequivocally under the control of the Church of Christ. With the instructions of Abbé Amaury, the Church undertook one of the most gruesome massacres of human beings in world history.

What followed was horrific. The crusade started at Béziers, and some chroniclers say that all inhabitants of the city were massacred within one week. Some put the number of the dead at 40,000 men, women and children. It is said that during the first few days, 6,000 or 7,000 people were systematically taken to the Church of St Magdalene and individually slaughtered. It is a great pity that we have no reliable records of the population of Béziers. One can only point out that it was one of the great cities of the prosperous and, for those days, highly populated Languedoc. What stands out with certainty about the massacre on 22 July 1209 is its appalling extent and its indiscriminate nature. But there was worse to come.

It is remarkable that, until recent times, there has been little comment on the extent of the Church's horrors against the Cathars. With the increasing interest in Catharism in the last few

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decades, there have been attempts on the part of Catholics to seriously minimise the extent of this outrage and conveniently downgrade the magnitude of the carnage to irrelevancy. Such efforts to suppress the truth of Christian history, while not wholly successful, seem to have strengthened the faith of those who wish to believe. The way in which Catholic writers now make light of this appalling papal outrage is shameful. The fact that popes carried out these murders in the name of Christ is especially unfortunate for Christians. If we accept

the Church's excuse that the crusaders were men in a mood of deep religious sentiment who set out to repress a body of people who did not believe the Christianity formally professed, then we are accepting an untruth. What is beyond doubt is that when the Catholic army was mobilised, it was the most appalling killing machine Europe had ever seen.

The consequence of the sack of Béziers was stunning and was something analogous to the effects of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima in the Second World War. It was a horror of a magnitude exceeding anything in the memory of the people of the Midi. That popes could authorise such human tragedies to occur in a purportedly enlightened age is grim proof of the sightlessness that can be engendered by "blind faith".

After Béziers, Church troops marched triumphantly to Carcassonne, the greatest fortress of the day. It could justifiably have been regarded as a prize which could only fall after months or years of siege, but it succumbed in less than a month after the sack of Béziers (*The Great Heresy*, Dr Arthur Guirdham, Neville Spearman, Jersey, 1977). Europeans shuddered when they heard that another 5,000 people were slaughtered at Marmande on 26 September 1209, and Guillaume de Tudèle records a dreadful description of men, women and children being hacked to pieces by the Militia of Jesus Christ. That the supposed preaching of Christ ever came to be the basis of such exuberant aggressiveness against human beings is a matter for reflection. The records and literature of the Cathars were as ruthlessly destroyed by the

Church as were the living exponents of the faith, and this evidence is provided in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (iii, pp. 435-37) under a sterilised entry headed "Cathars".

Unable to achieve constant, crushing victories in battle because of the Cathars' fortifications, the popes embarked upon an official policy of systematic devastation of their farms, buildings, vineyards, wheat fields and orchards. The devastation caused by the Catholic army was immense and the loss to civilisation is difficult to comprehend. Historians estimate that more than 500 towns and villages disappeared from the map as a result of its depredation. After three and a half decades of brutality and ruthlessness, the disdain of Europe deepened when the final battle against the Cathars took place at their castle stronghold, Montségur, in 1244.

In later times, the Church naively confessed that the motive for its unprecedented butchery and devastation of the Cathars was "their wealth...and their contempt for the Catholic clergy, caused by their ignorance and the worldly and the too-frequently-scandalous lives of the latter" (*Catholic Encyclopedia*, i, p. 268).

"The Inquisition," said Bishop Bruno of Segni, a 16th-century Catholic writer, "was invented to rob the rich of their possessions. The pope and his priests were intoxicated with sensuality; they

despised God because their religion had been drowned in a deluge of wealth" (*A History of the Popes*, McCabe, ibid.). Around the same time we have the complaint of the papal legate Elmeric, who said that the popes were relaxing their zeal to persecute because there were "no more rich heretics".

Is there a parallel to these motivations in the history of religion? We are thought to be offensive if we refuse to speak devoutly of a divinely guided "Holy Roman Church". Christian writers, with a habitual

indifference to the truth, would have us forget these facts and accept their artifice that the "Holy Fathers" were men of pious integrity. But the worst was yet to come.

Continued next issue...

Author's Note:

Some of the dates for the popes and events in papal history are estimates; even the Church admits as much. The dates were further complicated by the changes made to the Julian calendar by Pope Gregory XIII (pope 1572-85) in 1582.

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