



Papal Decline

Loss of Papal Prestige from 13th to 16th Centuries

1

Introduction

- In the last lesson, we ended with the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 where the papacy was at its height.
 - Once at it's height, the papacy moves towards decline. Between 1215 and 1517 (4th Lateran Council until Martin Luther) papal prestige collapses.
- This will mainly be caused by internal corruption and external tyranny.
 - People would not tolerate it forever.
- In this lesson, we will talk about the Fourth Lateran Council and it's decisions.
- Then we will talk about papal financial corruption.
- We will conclude by discussing the Great Papal Schism.



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Fourth Lateran Council

- The era of Innocent III concludes with the Fourth Lateran Council.
 - Building up to that Council, Innocent builds the church into a monarchy with himself on the top as a king.
 - He established the papal legates. These were ambassadors that were appointed directly by the pope, and their job was to travel to different countries and make sure the bishops were carrying out the pope's policies.
 - This was to discourage bishops of a country from siding with their monarchs over papal policy.
 - Innocent also imposed the first general income tax on all Catholic clergy, and of course, it had to be paid to the papacy.
- The Fourth Lateran Council occurred in 1215, and it was the most attended of all the Western councils.
 - It had 412 bishops, 800 abbots, and many other delegates of absent bishops.
 - Even delegates of secular rulers were there.
 - At the council, it was decreed that all Catholics must confess their sins to a priest at least once per year. And they also had to take Communion at least once per year (Easter).
 - It was at this council that an official definition of transubstantiation was instituted.
 - The Council also condemned the Waldensians and Cathars (they will be discussed later).



3

Growing Antisemitism

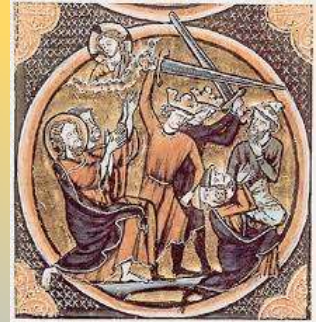
- Also, Jews that did not accept Christianity had to wear distinctive clothes and live in segregated areas in cities and towns.
 - The word ghetto comes from the areas the Jews were forced to live in.
- This anti-Jewish attitude grew throughout the Middle Ages.
 - All Jews were expelled from England in 1209, and from France in 1306 (and then more completely in 1391).
 - In Spain, there was a large massacre of Jews in 1391, and this then culminated in their total expulsion from Spain in 1492. The Portuguese expelled them in 1496.
 - Germany did not formally expel them because it's government was decentralized. But the antisemitism was actually worse there.
 - Multiple times German Christians massacred entire Jewish communities. In 1349, a Christian mob in Strasbourg marched all 2,000 Jewish residents of the city to the city cemetery and burned all at the stake that refused to convert to Christianity.
- The Fourth Lateran Council's decisions about Jews reflected the deep hatred that already existed, and once it was sanctioned by the church, the barbarism only got worse.



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Antisemitism

- The Catholic communities spread rumors that Jews abducted and murdered Christian babies.
- They accused them also of making a mockery of communion wafers. These rumors were absurd, but the people believed them.
- The Gentiles clearly ignored Paul's exhortations in Romans 11.
- Some try to pinpoint the hatred on the fact that the Church forbid Christians from practicing usury, and so they had to rely on Jews for loans.
- In other words, their problem was letting the Jews have economic power over them. Of course, this theory fails to account for the majority of antisemitism.
 - In fact, all the typical theories all fail: Economic theory; Chosen People Theory; Scapegoat Theory; Deicide Theory; Outsider Theory; Racial Theory.
 - A simple litmus test discredits these theories.



5

Papal Names

- After the time of Innocent III, the papacy will decrease in power and prestige. Before diving into that, a quick note on papal names would be helpful.
 - Popes were not born with the names we associate with them. The selection of their names was significant.
- For example, if they select a name and place a number after it, they are identifying with the other popes of that name and their work.
 - If a pope picked the name Pius, they seek to emphasize papal authority. Pius IX was the pope in the 1800s who declared the doctrine of papal infallibility.
 - If a pope picked the name John, they are supposed to be a pope of love and conciliation. They associate themselves with the apostle.
 - If a pope takes the name of Paul, they are a pope of rigid orthodoxy (of Catholicism).
 - If a pope chooses the name Innocent, they are battlers of heresy.
- Many popes did not live up to their names.
 - Out of the 300 bishops of Rome, a fair share were declared heretics, were assassinated, corrupt, and fathered illegitimate children.
 - Twenty-four of the 300 were Anti-Popes (thought they should be popes). All of this shows the popes were not infallible.

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Papal Financial Corruption

- One reason people will turn against the papacy is due to financial exploitation.
- The papacy regularly used Simony – the idea that religious favor could be bought with money.
 - The name comes from Simon Magus in Acts 8 when he tries to buy the Holy Spirit's power with money.
- Since the pope had vast authority over the church, there were a number of financial activities of simony that were implemented.
 - Annates, collations, commendations, reservations, jus spoliarium, tithing, dispensations, and indulgences.
- Annates: This was the clerical tax begun by Innocent III.
 - Either a bishop or an abbot (head of monastery) had to give their first year of income to the pope.
 - These were paid positions (off the backs of the people), and since only popes can appoint bishops and abbots, they demanded the annate in return for giving them the job in the first place.



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Simony

- Collations was another financial tool used by the pope.
 - When a bishop moved up positions to a larger bishopric, he had to pay their first year of income to the pope again. If you have three bishoprics (small, medium, and large), and the bishop of the large one dies, then the medium bishop goes up to the large, the small one goes to a medium, and the newly ordained bishop gets the small. All three then give their first year's income to the pope.
 - So the replacement of one bishop could lead to three new annates. Collation was the rotating of shifting of bishops and abbots to get more annates. It was obviously a scheme to get more money.
- Commendations was the next tool, which was an annual tax each bishop had to pay just to keep their current position.
 - There was always the fear that the pope could rotate you down to a smaller bishopric and collect another annate. By paying the commendation, it secured your spot where it is at. It protected you from downward collations.
- Another exploitation was Reservations. This is when there is a bishop vacancy, but the Pope personally delays filling it.
 - All the income that would have gone to the bishop, goes to the Pope. There was incentive to allow long vacancies in the richest dioceses. A priest would administrate in the place of a bishop, for a fraction of the price.

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Simony

- **Jus spoliorem** was also used. It means “just spoils.”
 - If a bishop was successful in secular matters and gained property, income, and lands while in the office given to him by the pope, the pope has 100% rights to all that he acquired when he dies.
 - Due to celibacy, bishops had no legitimate children to inherit their goods anyway.
- The next example of simony was tithing (not biblical tithing).
 - It started out as a crusade tax. Bishopsrics of a lot of property had to pay an annual property to tax to help fund the crusades.
 - Often bishops would collect this from the people. When the crusades ended, the popes still wanted this income. They renamed it tithing.
- Another tool was a corruption of dispensations. Dispensations were grants from the papacy that enabled many different things.
 - The authorization of a new holy order was called a dispensation. Well, this papal authority to grant dispensations was also used to ignore justice for money.
 - A wealthy person that committed ecclesiastical violations could pay a certain amount of money to avoid excommunication.
 - A dispensation could be granted to exonerate the payee. Rulers that found themselves in trouble with the Pope could make use of dispensations.



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Simony

- The final and worst form of simony was indulgences. These will continue right up to the Reformation and were the initial cause of Martin Luther’s problems with the church.
- An indulgence is a piece of paper with a space for your name, how much money you are contributing, and how many years this gets off purgatory for you.
 - People did not want to end up in purgatory, and the uncertainty of how long they would be there made them susceptible to indulgences. People could even buy indulgences for dead relatives to get them out of purgatory sooner.
 - It was all justified by the “treasury of merits.” This form of simony, more than the rest, insulted the finished work of Christ.
- Papal corruption became increasingly visible in the clothing, accessories, and building projects of the papacy.
 - For example, Boniface VIII (1294-1303) had a papal crown with 48 rubies, 72 sapphires, 45 emeralds, and 66 large pearls.
 - This is a far cry from the poor fisherman that Jesus used the lay the foundation of His church.



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Political Challenges to the Pope

- Papal decline also was a result of shifting politics. Frederick II, the Holy Roman Emperor crowned by Innocent III, will battle future popes. Both sides weaken in the disputes.
 - The Holy Roman Emperor decreased in prestige to the point where the real power in Germany were the local princes. Germany unity was broken until the 1800s.
 - The new political challenge to the papacy will be the kings of France. Indeed, an entire period ensues where the popes are the pawns of the French crown.
- The growing power of the French crown reached a high point under Philip the Fair (1285-1314), and conflict with Pope Boniface VIII was inevitable.
 - England and France were planning war against each other (this would become the Hundred Years War), and this would divert tax money away from the pope.
 - Clergy land was abundant, and the crowns intended on taxing the clergy to finance the war.
- Boniface decreed excommunication for all who paid the taxes without papal permission.
- In retaliation, Philip forbid gold and silver being exported from France, and this had crippling effects on the economy of Rome.
- Boniface compromised by allowing the French clergy to make voluntary donations to Philip's war.
- In 1301, Boniface sent a papal legate to Philip to complain about his seizure of church property.



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Philip vs. Boniface VIII

- Philip arrested the legate and charged him with treason. Boniface ordered his release and summoned the king to Rome.
 - Instead, Philip called a meeting of French nobles, clergy, and commoners (The Estates General), and they supported the king in his defiance of the Pope.
 - Boniface then responded with a papal bull (edict) *Unam Sanctam* in 1302 that made claims for the papacy that outshined even the claims of Innocent III.
 - It asserted that all political authority is subject to the papacy and that submission to the Pope is necessary for salvation. The civil sword is to be used for the church and the spiritual sword is to be used by the church. But both swords ultimately are in service to the church.
- Philip declared that Boniface was unworthy of the position of Pope, and he argued that true church authority is an ecumenical council (all the creeds by way of such councils).
- So he summoned Boniface to appear before an ecumenical council of the whole church.
 - The French parliament, the French clergy, and Paris university all agreed with this declaration (that is civil, ecclesiastical, and scholastic leaders all standing against the Pope).
 - Boniface prepared to excommunicate Philip, but before he could, Philip had him violently kidnapped and imprisoned. They demanded that Boniface resign, but he refused. Allies then rescued him from imprisonment, but he died a month later as an old broken man.

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Philip vs. Boniface VIII

- The power struggle was far from over. Boniface thought he could pull off what Innocent III did nearly 80 years earlier. He miscalculated.
 - Like Innocent, he tried to claim Jeremiah 1:10 for the papacy: *See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.* It did not work.
- Philip appealed to French national feeling against the claims of the papacy.
- This revealed something new in Europe—something that would guarantee future papal decline.
- Prior to this, national identity was not very strong.
 - Catholic identity was strong. Europe was united under Christendom. The national identities were subservient to the Catholic universal identity. That began to shift.
 - Soon French people would see themselves as French first and Catholic second. This sentiment will only grow exponentially in centuries to come.



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The Babylonian Captivity

- Boniface's successor, Benedict XI (1303-1304), died after only 8 months.
- A French faction of Cardinals saw an opportunity to elect a French Pope, Clement V (1305-1314).
 - He was a weak man that became a tool of Philip. He actually did not even rule from Rome, and after wandering around southern France, he established the papal court in Avignon.
 - Later, Clement VI (1342-1352), purchased the land and made it into a papal city in 1348. It is in France surrounded by nothing but French territory and French interests.
- The papacy remained in France for nearly 70 years (1309-1377), and this has been dubbed the Babylonian Captivity of the papacy.
 - In that entire 70 years, it was captive to French political policies and interests.
 - All seven popes of this period were French, and since the Pope chooses the Cardinals, they made sure all the Cardinals were French. That way, when the Pope dies, the French Cardinals will continue to elect Frenchmen.
- This had a devastating effect on the prestige and influence of the papacy.
 - After all, the entire papal claim is that Peter was the head of the church and founding bishop of Rome. Peter's position was thought to only belong to the Bishop of Rome.
 - Now he is in Avignon. It became clear that the Petrine theory failed. Popes were just politicians. Sometimes they exerted great power, but often they were pawns of kings—in this case, French kings.

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Ecclesiological Challenge to the Papal Claims

- This Babylonian Captivity opened the door for other attacks against the papacy, most of which came from thinkers in the Holy Roman Empire.
 - They already hated the papacy, but this gave them more fuel. Also, in England, William of Ockham, was fierce critic. Once he received protection from the Holy Roman Empire, he wrote much against the French papacy.
 - Another thinker was Marsilius of Padua (1280-1343), a rector at Paris University. He had to flee to the protection of the Holy Roman Emperor too.
- It was during this time that the Emperor, Louis the Bavarian, invaded Italy, captured Rome, and set up a rival people, though this was short lived.
- Marsilius argued that the greatest church authority was not the pope but ecumenical councils. He also argued in agreement with Ockham that there is a difference between the Catholic Church and Apostolic Church.
 - The Catholic Church included both the Western and Eastern Churches and all who believed in Christ. They are all within God's grace.
 - The Apostolic Church is the Church of Rome, which was an embodiment of the Catholic Church—a representation—but it was not infallible. It could err.
 - The Pope's authority comes not from divine right, but instead from the fact that he was a bishop in Rome's capital city. Therefore, he has no right to depose kings.
 - Clergy, like everyone else, is subject to the state in secular matters. He also argued that the state could call church councils, control church property, and appoint clergy. Some have seen Marsilius as a forerunner of Luther and Calvin.

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The Great Schism



- The next phase of papal humiliation was the Great Schism.
 - The papacy in France did not solve French problems. The English were in the midst of the Hundred Years War with France, and every papal election, they insisted that it move back to Rome.
- The papacy finally returns to Rome in 1377 under Pope Gregory XI (1370-1378). He was inspired by a female mystic, Catherine of Siena.
 - She had a vision of the move. Gregory made the move, but then died a year later.
 - The French Cardinals would have liked to move the papacy back to Avignon, but the Roman population was determined to keep the Pope in Rome, and make sure he was Italian.
- Mob pressure caused the Cardinals to elect Urban VI (1378-1389).
 - He was an Italian that wanted to liberate the papacy from French control.
- A few months later, 12 of the 16 Cardinals claimed the election was null and void because it was carried out on the threat of mob violence.
 - They instead chose another Frenchman, Clement VII (1378-1394). He and the Cardinals returned to Avignon.



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The Great Schism Divides Western Europe

- Urban VI stayed in Rome. Now there were two rival popes.
 - This happened a number of times in history when Emperors would set up rival popes for political reasons.
- This was different. Both popes were elected by the College of Cardinals.
 - Both had been elected under the established rules. And both then excommunicated each other. There was no higher authority in the church to adjudicate this. So there was no fix.
- This was called the Great Schism, and Catholic Europe was split right down the middle.
 - The Roman Pope, Urban VI had the support of northern and central Italy, England, the Scandinavian countries, and most of Germany.
 - The Avignonese Pope, Clement VII, had the support of France, Spain, southern Italy, Scotland, and some parts of Germany.
- Urban died in 1389, and the Roman line continued through Boniface XI (1389-1404), Innocent VII (1404-1406), and Gregory XII (1406-



17

The Great Schism Weakens the Papacy

- The Babylonian Captivity damaged the reputation of the papacy, but the Great Schism did far more damage.
 - The visible unity of the Catholic Church was broken. This continued for nearly 40 years.
- The Pope was allegedly the vicar of Christ and having two popes was a disgrace.
 - Only popes could approve new bishops, and every time a vacancy occurred, both popes chose someone, and so two men claimed the office. This often led to fighting over it.
- A French King named Mad Charles VI even claimed all French papal land for himself and announced he could appoint all clergy.
 - This only lasted five years, but it added to the papal humiliation.
- A few years later, French politicians founded the Gallican belief, namely that the pope can only define doctrinal and moral matters, but otherwise the French church is independent from the papacy in all other things (taxation, bishop appointments, etc.).
- This will be extra problematic to papacy in 17th century. But even in the 15th century, it was clear that the Schism stirred up feelings of autonomy of churches in Catholic nations.
 - Eventually, many national churches will embrace a form of Gallicanism. The universal authority of the papacy was damaged in some ways beyond repair.

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Conciliar Movement

- Many great churchmen thought the answer to these problems was making the papacy subject to a council.
- This is known as the Conciliar Movement (root word is council).
- Proponents used the theory that distinguishes between the Catholic Church and the Apostolic Church, and said the former has authority over the latter.
 - Infallibility belonged to the church rather than the papacy.
 - The church as a whole could only be represented by an ecumenical council (they limited this to the Western Church).
 - The pope is chosen to represent the church, but if a pope abuses that calling, a council can depose him.
 - It was also argued that the Pope could be held accountable by the Cardinals.
- They could summon an ecumenical council on their own authority if a Pope refuses correction.
- This was put to the test in 1409 at the Council of Pisa. An ecumenical council was summoned to end the Great Schism.



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Conciliar Movement Tested

- Cardinals summoned the council acting on their own authority.
 - It deposed both rival popes, Gregory XII (Rome) and Benedict XIII (Avignon).
 - It also asserted councils were superior to the papacy.
- The council elected a new Pope, Alexander V (1409-1410). The other two refused to obey, so now there were three popes!
 - England and France backed Alexander V, Italy and much of Germany backed Gregory VII, and Spain and Scotland remained loyal to Benedict XIII.
- In 1414-1418, there was another council, the Council of Constance in Switzerland. It made another attempt to end the schism. The Holy Roman Emperor summoned this council.
 - Alexander V's successor was John XXIII (1410-1415), and the council deposed him for scandalous conduct.
 - The council convinced Gregory to resign. They asked Benedict to do the same, but he refused. So they convinced Spain and Scotland to stop backing him. Then the council deposed him.
 - All three popes were now defeated. The cardinals elected the Italian Cardinal, Colonna. He became Pope Martin V (1417-1431).
 - It was also determined that a council would meet every ten years.

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Significance of the Council of Constance

- The Council of Constance was very significant. It ended the Great Schism by subjecting the papacy to the authority of a council.
 - They demolished the absolute power set up by Hildebrand and Innocent III. It was replaced by a more democratic form of rule.
- Martin V, once in power, was not a friend of the conciliar movement. He fought fiercely with the next two ecumenical councils.
 - His successor tried to disband the council, but it refused.
- Around this time, the Byzantine Emperor and Patriarch of Constantinople reached out to the pope seeking help against the Ottomans.
 - Pope Eugenius IV (1431-1447) negotiated a reunification with the East in the Union of Florence. His prestige was at an all-time high.
- Since he did this without council approval, they tried to depose him, but this caused most people to turn against the conciliar movement.
 - They then tried to crown another pope, which would have created a new schism. At this point, the Council's greatest supporters switched sides and became loyal devotees of the Pope.
- The Council formally dissolved in 1449. The Conciliar Movement was over.
 - Although the idea lived on in the Church, it never made a forceful comeback.
- The papacy was now again the head of the Western Church, but it was severely weakened after all these events.



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Conclusion

- The papacy continued to decline until the dawn of the Reformation.
- Financial corruption and political opposition broke its power.
- Internal power struggles between popes, anti-popes, and councils only exacerbated this.
- Yet the popes were not powerless.
- In an upcoming lesson, we will see they still were able to persecute groups that attempted to break away from the church.

The Decline of Church Power

- During the 14th century the power of the church began to decline.
- European kings, who were gaining power, were no longer willing to accept the idea of Papal supremacy over them.
- One of these conflicts was between Pope Boniface VIII and King Philip IV of France.




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