

CHURCH HISTORY: FROM PENTECOST TO THE GREAT SCHISM

WEEK 7: ST. LEO THE GREAT, ST. GREGORY THE GREAT,

AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PAPACY

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St. Peter – The First Bishop of Rome

- Matthew 16.18-19: “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church. ... I will give you keys to the kingdom of heaven.”
- Luke 22.32: “You must strengthen your brothers.”
- John 21.15-17: “Feed my sheep.”
- Acts 1.15-26: Peter presides over choosing a replacement for Judas
- Traveled to Rome, where he lived for up to 25 years
- Martyred under persecutions of Nero c. 64; buried on the Vatican Hill
- Why is Peter more important than the other apostles? Clearly chosen as a leader by Jesus and seen as leader by the early Church; more mention of Peter in NT than any of the other 12 apostles
- Why Rome? Capital of the empire, center of politics, law, culture, communication; location of death and tombs of Ss. Peter and Paul, as determined by God’s providence
- Why Pope? Successor to St. Peter as Bishop of Rome and as pastor or shepherd of the universal Church; instrument of unity of faith and morals; head of the college of bishops

St. Victor I and the Quartodeciman Controversy

- Early example of the authority and decision of the Bishop of Rome affecting the universal Church
- Controversy: date of annual celebration of Easter
 - Quartodecimans – celebrated Easter on 14 Nisan, the Jewish Passover, no matter what day of the week it fell on (Asia Minor)
 - Roman and Alexandrian custom – celebrated Easter on the Sunday following the Jewish Passover
- Pope St. Victor I (189-198) held synods to address the discrepancy and declared that the Roman practice of celebrating Easter on Sunday should prevail in the universal Church; declared the Quartodecimans excluded from communion (unity) with the Church in Rome and the universal Church; first example of the Pope exercising authority over other churches
- Quartodecimans continued to celebrate Easter on 14 Nisan until the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, which again condemned the practice

St. Stephen I and the Novatian Controversy

- Example of other churches appealing to Rome to settle a question of faith and morals
- Controversy: forgiveness of lapsed Christians
 - Novatian: Christians who had denied the faith under persecutions can never be reconciled with the Church, even on their deathbeds; supported by Cyprian of Carthage in question of baptisms performed by *traditores*: these baptisms were not valid
 - Catholic position: Reconciliation is possible
- Bishops from Gaul and Spain appealed to Pope St. Stephen I (254-257) to declare the Church's position
- St. Stephen I sided with Roman tradition (as well as Alexandrian and Palestinian) that lapsed Christians could be reconciled with the Church and that baptisms performed by *traditores* were valid
- St. Stephens' position and authority were upheld by his successor, Pope St. Sixtus II

St. Leo the Great (440-461)

- Pope during declining days of the Western Roman empire; Rome had been sacked in 410, and continued to be attacked and occupied by barbarians
- Began to use the authority and influence of the papacy in temporal as well as spiritual matters
- In 452, personally went out of Rome to meet Attila the Hun and convinced him not to attack Rome; in 455, met with Gaiseric the Vandal and, while unable to convince him not to invade Rome, won a "peaceful invasion" that consisted only of looting and seizing the city
- Spoke with the authority of St. Peter in dealing with other churches and on doctrinal matters
- Sent his *Tome* to the Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon, where it was received as authoritative: "This is the faith of the Fathers and of the Apostles. This we all believe. Peter has spoken through Leo."
- First Pope to be given the name "Great;" first Pope after Peter to be buried in St. Peter's Basilica (148 of 265 deceased popes are buried in St. Peter's); one of two popes to be declared Doctors of the Church (with St. Gregory the Great)

St. Gregory the Great (590-604)

- Born into a wealthy Roman family; educated in legal studies; became Prefect of Rome, the highest political office in the city; one of the richest men in Rome; gave up his career to become a monk; used his wealth to found monasteries; first monk elected Pope
- Primary achievements as Pope: 1) established the Pope as temporal ruler of central Italy, what became the papal states, organizing a feeding program for a population left starving after barbarian invasions; 2) strengthened papal primacy over other churches; 3) worked to convert the barbarians and to evangelize in England; 4) wrote a lasting collection of theological and spiritual writings, including *Pastoral Care* on the role of the bishop as shepherd of souls

- Strengthened the Church and the Papacy as the dominant unifying force of Europe in the Middle Ages
- Began unification of liturgy, composing many prayers for the liturgy and having some connection to the development of Gregorian Chant, which is named for him
- Second Pope to be given the name “Great;” one of two popes to be declared Doctors of the Church (with St. Gregory the Great); one of the four great Doctors of the Western Church (with Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine)

Significant Popes of the First Christian Millennium

There were 140 Popes in the First Christian Millennium, from St. Peter to Pope Sylvester II (17 below, plus one antipope)

St. Linus (c. 66-c. 78) – first successor of St. Peter, appointed by Ss. Peter and Paul; mentioned as a companion of St. Paul in 2 Timothy 4.21; mentioned in Roman Canon

St. Cletus/Anacletus (c. 79-c. 91) – erected first monument to St. Peter; mentioned in Roman Canon

St. Clement I (c. 91-c. 101) – possibly mentioned by St. Paul in Phil. 4.3; wrote letter to the Church in Corinth, first example of the Church in Rome taking an interest in the intervention of Rome with other communities; Church of San Clemente in Rome built over his house

St Victor I (189-198) – African; first Latin-speaking Pope; first Pope known to have dealings with the imperial household (in freeing Christian slaves using the influence of a Christian imperial mistress); exercised the authority of Rome in setting the feast of Easter on a Sunday, against the Quartodecimans

St. Hippolytus (antipope 217-235) – priest and chief theologian in Rome; wrote extensively, including the *Apostolic Tradition*, which includes the oldest existing Eucharistic Prayer; when a theologically-dubious man became Pope (Callistus I), Hippolytus set himself up as bishop of a small, schismatic group in Rome, becoming the first antipope; continued as “bishop of Rome” through three papacies; eventually was reconciled with the Church of Rome and the Pope; commemorated on the same day as Pontian, who was Pope when he was antipope and with whom he reconciled

St. Stephen I (254-257) – exercised authority of Rome and the Pope against Cyprian and other north Africans who followed Novatian; allowed reconciliation of lapsed Christians with the Church

St. Sylvester I (314-335) – Pope during the reign of Constantine, the legalization of Christianity, and the Council of Nicaea; his influence was negligible next to the authority and influence of Constantine

St. Damasus (366-384) – Pope during the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople, but did not take part; first widespread reference to the papacy as the “Apostolic See;” commissioned St. Jerome to translate the Bible into Latin (the Vulgate)

St. Leo I the Great (440-461) – see above

St. Gelasius I (492-496) – used private wealth to relieve famine and feed the poor; first Pope to be referred to as the “Vicar of Christ;” developed an understanding of the differing yet complementary roles of secular and religious authorities – both received their authority from God, but the religious authority was superior because it was concerned with salvation; several prayers in the Sacramentary are attributed to him

St. John I (523-526) – commissioned Dionysius Exiguus to compute the date of Easter and thus the date of the birth of Christ

Pope John II (533-535) – born Mercury; first Pope to take a new name

St. Gregory I the Great (590-604) – see above

St. Martin I (649-653) – last Pope to be venerated as a martyr (died of cold, starvation, and harsh treatment after being deposed because of his opposition to heresies that were supported by the Emperor)

Stephen [II] (752) – died of a stroke four days after his election, before being consecrated; canon law at different times in history has seen either election or consecration to be necessary to become Pope; generally not considered a Pope because he was not consecrated

St. Leo III (795-816) – crowned Charlemagne as Holy Roman Emperor

Pope John VIII (872-882) – political Pope, leading forces to unite southern Italy against Muslims ; first Pope to be assassinated (poisoned and then clubbed to death)

Pope Formosus (891-896) – on the losing side of political rivalries in Italy, supporting Arnulf of the Franks over Lambert of Spoleto; nine months after his death, Pope Stephen VI [VII], a supporter of Lambert, put Formosus on trial for perjury, coveting the papal throne, and violating canons forbidding the translation of bishops; Formosus’ body was exhumed, put on a throne in full pontifical vestments, and put on trial, with a deacon answering for him; found guilty, with all his papal acts and ordinations considered null and invalid; the three fingers of his right hand used for blessing were chopped off, and his body was thrown into the Tiber River; a hermit retrieved the body and buried it; the populace of Rome revolted, deposed Stephen and put him in jail, where he was strangled to death; rehabilitated by Pope Theodore II (897), who ordered his recovered body to be clothed in pontifical vestments and reinterred in St. Peter’s