

Part 2: The Medieval Church (500-1500)

Week 5: The Rise of the Papacy

The Office of the Bishop

1. The emergence of bishops (like a senior pastor who preached and pastored) in distinction from presbyters began by the early 2nd century. This was the result from the cultural expectation that one person should be in charge. They pastored large churches in large cities that were most culturally influential.
2. In five major cities, the bishop emerged as highly honored bishops. These cities were Alexandria, Jerusalem, Antioch, Constantinople, and Rome (all in the East except for Rome). Jerusalem lost influence with the Jewish rebellion against Rome in the 2nd century; Alexandria and Antioch lost prestige with the onslaught of Islam in the 7th century.
3. A variety of factors contribute to the dignity of the Roman bishop:
 - a. Politically - bishop of the old Roman Empire, which was of great honor and importance.
 - b. Ecclesiastically - the place of martyrdom for Peter and Paul.
 - c. Spiritually/Theologically - bishops of Rome came down on the right side of theological issues and was considered the guardian of orthodoxy.
 - d. Succession of Bishops - looked upon as succession of orthodoxy. And the church in Rome had an impressive list of the succession of great bishops.

The Formal Development of Papacy

1. "Papacy" comes from the Latin *papa*, meaning "father." The Pope occupies the Holy See, meaning the holy throne ("see" is from the Latin, *sedes*, "throne"). Thus he is called "His Holiness" (the Reformers called him "Holy Hellishness" as he was the antichrist who corrupted the true worship of God).
2. The official Roman teaching today is that the Pope is the official vicar (representative) of Christ on earth.
3. The bishops of Rome began to enjoy their importance and claim importance for themselves. For example, Bishop Stephen in the 3rd century claimed for himself that the very words of Jesus to Peter was the foundation of his office.
4. Later in the 4th century, Rome becomes the court of appeals for many churches in the West during times of heresy (this is important for us as Rome claims that the Pope is the head of the church and the life of the church flows down from him; instead, things were bottom up and the bishop of Rome was the last resort).
5. The Council of Constantinople (381), canon 3, said the patriarch of Constantinople had "the primacy of honor next after the bishop of Rome."
6. In 445 the Emperor Valentinian declared that the Pope was supreme in spiritual matters.
7. With the fall of the (Western) Roman Empire officially in 476, the Empire went East to Constantinople and lasted until 1,453 as the Byzantine Empire. With this fall of the political empire, the only point of continuity that survives is the office of the bishop of Rome.
8. The Emperor was in Constantinople so the bishop of Rome was looked to for leadership politically and spiritually.

Leo The Great (bishop of Rome, 440-461)

1. A fine theologian who began to articulate a very high view of the bishop of Rome.
2. He argued enthusiastically for the bishophood of the Roman church, saying:
 - a. Peter is the concrete universal symbol of Christ.
 - b. It was by special providence that Peter died in Rome.

- c. The pope should be seen as the *primus* of all bishops, "the first of all bishop."
 - d. The pope has *plenitudo potentiae*, "the plenitude of all powers," that all powers are derived from the pope.
 - e. Allegiance to the pope is necessary to salvation, if you're not linked to the head, you're not connected to the body.
3. The convergence of political and spiritual power is seen in his literally saving Rome. In 452 he persuaded Attila the Hun to leave Rome alone while a few years later he persuaded Gaiseric and the Vandals from burning Rome.

Gregory the Great (540-604; bishop of Rome 590-604)

1. First great pope of the West, and considered first great pope of the Medieval church.
2. Born of a wealthy, pious Roman family and given a classical education (although he didn't learn Greek)
3. Then worked for the civil government in Rome and attained a high level of responsibility while being recognized for great abilities.
4. Resigned his work while young, gave away his wealth, became a monk and founded a monastery. Led secluded life of study for several years and studied the Bible and was able to quote extensively.
5. From 579-585 he was the Pope's representative to the Emperor in Constantinople.
6. In 585 he returned to Rome and in 590 became the first monk elected Pope. He pleaded not to be appointed due to his ill health, attempted to escape, then accepted reluctantly.
7. While he exercised the greatest power than any popes before him, he did not, in fact, make the claims for the papacy that Leo made. Leo made a claim for Papal monarchy, that popes rule, but Gregory considered himself one monarch among the many.
8. At this time the patriarch (i.e., bishop) of Constantinople claimed for himself the title "Ecumenical Patriarch." What he meant was that he was the universal bishop. Gregory responded by saying that anyone who claims that he's the universal patriarch, he's the antichrist! (a charge the Reformers made) In response, Gregory declared himself *servus servorum Dei*, "servant of the servants of God," to show how humble he was.
9. Known for promoting care for the poor, evangelism of the barbarians and England, and the establishment of monasteries. Began a program call the "Patrimony of Peter," which meant that lands given to the Pope by Christians were owned by the bishop of Rome in the name of the Roman church.

Protestant Response

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XXV, VI.

There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor can the pope of Rome, in any sense, be head thereof: *but is that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself, in the Church, against Christ and all that is called God.*

Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, 1932 Statement: Of the Antichrist

As to the Antichrist we teach that the prophecies of the Holy Scriptures concerning the Antichrist, 2 Thess. 2:3-12; 1 John 2:18, have been fulfilled in the Pope of Rome and his dominion. All the features of the Antichrist as drawn in these prophecies, including the most abominable and horrible ones, for example, that the Antichrist "as God sitteth in the temple of God," 2 Thess. 2:4; that he anathematizes the very heart of the Gospel of Christ, that is, the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins by grace alone, for Christ's sake alone, through faith alone, without any merit or worthiness in man (Rom. 3:20-28; Gal. 2:16); that he recognizes only those as members of the Christian Church who bow to his authority; and that, like a deluge, he had inundated the whole Church with his antichristian doctrines till God

revealed him through the Reformation -- these very features are the outstanding characteristics of the Papacy. (Cf. Smalcald Articles, Triglot, p. 515, Paragraphs 39-41; p. 401, Paragraph 45; M. pp. 336, 258.) Hence we subscribe to the statement of our Confessions that the Pope is "the very Antichrist." (Smalcald Articles, Triglot, p. 475, Paragraph 10; M., p. 308.)