

Criticism of the Church

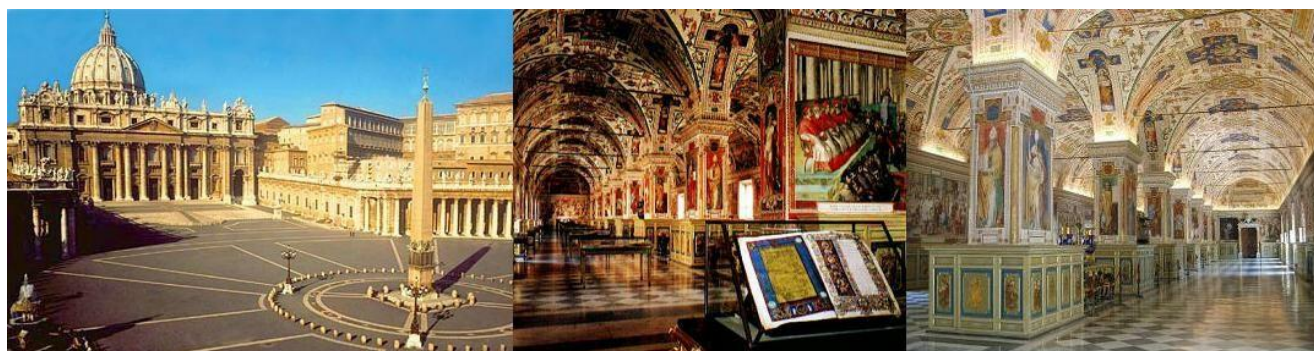
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If you say that the history of the Church is a long succession of scandals, you are telling the truth, though if that is all you say, you are distorting the truth.

~ Gerald Vann

Introduction

To a large degree, the Bible and the church have been lumped together in people's minds and the frustration that some have felt with the actual "institutions of Christianity" have made them question and throw out the church, the Bible, and even Christianity itself. Many of the criticisms are overblown, but the church does have things to answer for. Here are some examples:

- For centuries the Catholic Church was a secular political power that vied with other governments for control and supremacy. Ignoring the separation enforced in the Old Testament between priests (religious leaders) and kings (secular leaders), and the New Testament pattern of multiple elders to avoid the tendency toward dictatorship, the Catholic Church centralized power by establishing the Papacy and the Vatican in the fourth century, with the Pope being the supreme leader. Subsequent popes sought to expand their authority, and at times there were vicious battles to seize the Papal ring. This is in contrast to Scriptures such as James 3:16-17: "For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy."

Many individual pastors and priests were lights for God, but the central leadership became corrupt and hypocritical. Thus the church's mission to care for the spiritual needs of people was continually compromised by the political ambitions and concerns of its leadership for money and power.

It is said that the apostle Peter died in Rome, but if so, he came there at the end of his life.

Therefore, Peter was not the first “pope” in the sense that the word is used today. There were church leaders (“bishops”) who led the church in Rome and elsewhere from the first through the fourth centuries, but at the time Rome was just one church among many, so the claim by the Vatican to divine overarching authority through Peter is completely false. It is significant that in Paul’s letter to the Romans he greets many people who were in Rome, but Peter was not among them.

There was no formal hierarchy of churches or leaders for the first three hundred years, as that would have never been allowed by the apostles; they were very much aware of the potential problems with centralized and autocratic leadership. Peter was not even the head of the church in Jerusalem – as indicated in Acts 15, the leader was James the brother of Christ. Peter himself wrote: “Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.” (1 Peter 5:1-3). The Vatican is therefore rebuked by the very man they alleged to be their first pope, and the entire papal edifice is based on deception.

Roman society was mostly non-Christian, and until the time of Constantine, the church had a very uneasy relationship with the government. Therefore, the papacy did not truly begin until after Constantine’s Edit of Milan in AD 313, and it was not until AD 445 that the idea of Peter being the first pope was promulgated. That was done by Pope Leo I who felt the need to seek Biblical support for his own power. Furthermore, the Vatican claim that there was an unbroken line of popes from Peter to the present is another attempt to gloss over the papacy’s sordid history. For example, as we shall see, Pope Benedict IX was run out of office in AD 1045 because of his unworthiness, and Sylvester III took his place. When Benedict IX returned, he sold the Papal throne to Gregory VI, but still refused to give up his own claim. So at this time, all three men claimed to be the legitimate Pope. In 1046, the German Emperor Henry III settled the matter by deposing all of them and appointing a fourth pope, Clement II.

- Early efforts to translate the Bible into vernacular languages were met by extreme hostility from the Vatican, because they wanted to control what people could read and think. Translators such as John Wycliffe and William Tyndale in England, Jan Hus in Bohemia, and Martin Luther in Germany were killed or persecuted. Before the invention of the printing press in 1440, the Catholic Church did most of the publishing, and had a list of banned books (the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*) which were illegal to publish, distribute, or read.

“We prohibit also that the laity should be permitted to have the books of the Old and New Testaments; unless anyone from the motives of devotion should wish to have the Psalter or the Breviary for divine offices or the hours of the blessed Virgin; but we most strictly forbid their having any translation of these books.” ([Toulouse, 1229](#))

“Nobody may be in possession of the Old or New Testament books in their mother tongue. If someone has such books, they must hand them over to the local bishop within eight days of the announcement of this ordinance so that they can be burned. [Otherwise they shall be treated as a heretic]” ([Bréziers, 1233](#)).

The effort to eliminate what authorities consider to be “heresy” is a human propensity and not limited to Catholics. It is equally true of the totalitarian Marxist dictatorships of the 20th and 21st centuries who were and are much crueler and more repressive than the Vatican ever was. Leftists in general seek to criminalize opposing voices as “hate speech” and criminalize it. For example, the Scottish National Party is seeking seven-year prison terms for parents who oppose gender transitioning for their children.

- The Catholic Church has called for wars, and for people to “fight for God, and against heresy.” Of course, the church needed to stand for the teaching of the Bible and to arbitrate theological disputes. But they went much farther to the point of persecuting and killing those considered to be heretics, as well as those who attempted various reforms. The Albigensian Crusade against the Cathars and the Waldensians were sad examples of this. This pattern was repeated later, in the slaughter of the Huguenots.

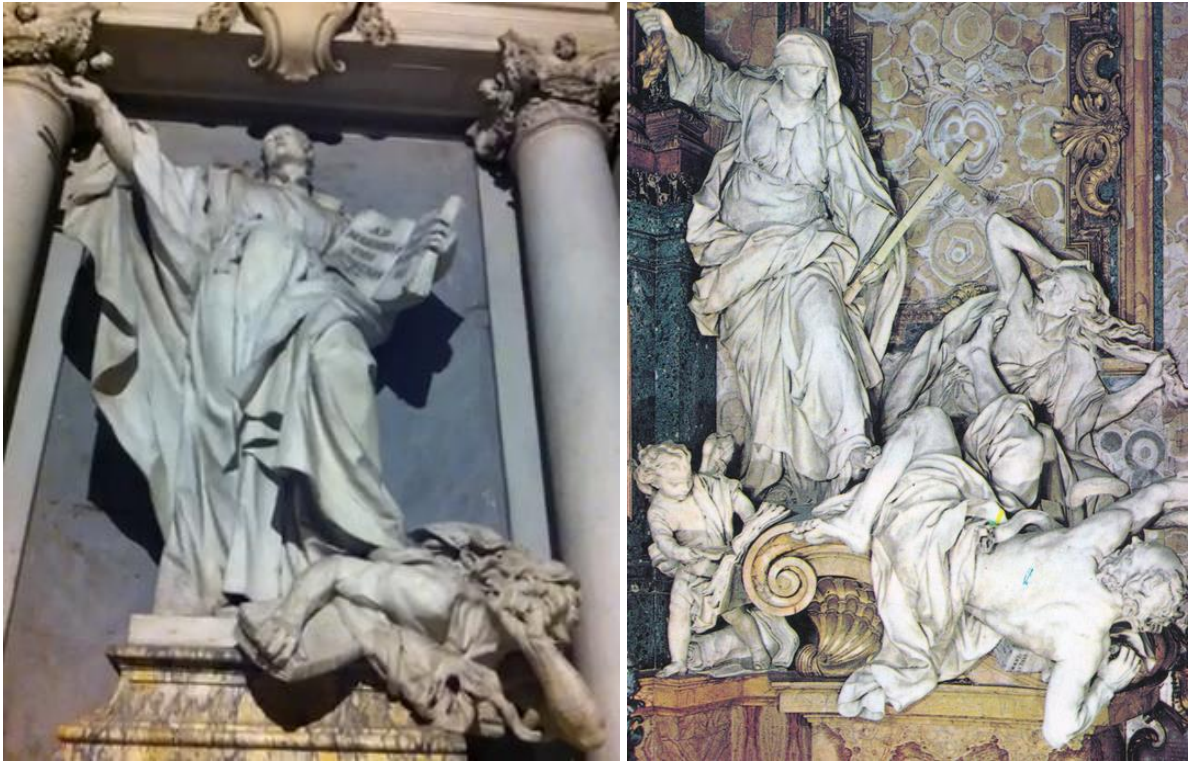
“The church may by divine right confiscate the property of heretics, imprison their person, and condemn them to flames. In our age, the right to inflict the severest penalties, even death, belongs to the church. There is no graver offense than heresy, therefore it must be rooted out.” ([Conti, c. 1200](#))

The Vatican supported kings and secular authorities throughout its history, and therefore was seen at times as supporting oppressive rulers and regimes. However, at the grass roots level the church often helped those who were marginalized and oppressed. The church founded the first hospitals in history, and Christians created schools, orphanages, and many other institutions to educate and bless people. Christianity has been the largest force for good in the history of humanity.

However, the papacy and the Vatican were the largest source of organized persecution in history until the twentieth century, when communists assumed that dubious distinction by killing millions in China, Russia, Cambodia, and elsewhere, and Islam began targeting Christians in Indonesia, South Sudan, and other countries

- The Jesuits (the Society of Jesus) was founded in 1540 by Ignatius Loyola. They were known as *Deus Militatus* (Soldiers of God), the personal army of the pope to attack the enemies of the Vatican, fight heresy, and purify the faith. They have also been very active in education, science, and academia through the centuries and have the largest worldwide network of schools and universities. But their primary historical purpose was to defeat Protestantism and restore Papal rule. Thus, they have been spies, infiltrators, assassins, and political subversives in the Counter Reformation and the slaughter of thousands in the Thirty Years War and the Inquisition.

The Vatican has employed Jesuits in targeted assassination attempts against its political enemies, such as the attempt to kill Queen Elizabeth I of England in the early part of her reign because of fears that she would declare England to be Protestant and suppress Catholics. Jesuits also assassinated William of Orange, Kings Henry III and Henry IV of France, Czars Alexander I and Alexander II of Russia, and Mexican President Benito Pablo Juarez. There are anti-Protestant statues in Catholic churches near the Vatican – Ignatius Loyola crushing Martin Luther (holding a Bible) under his foot, and the mother Mary throwing Luther and Jan Hus, a Protestant reformer, out of heaven.



Today the Jesuits and other Vatican leaders have become communists and atheists supporting “liberation theology” which focuses on interpreting the teachings of Christianity (and especially of Jesus) through the lens of social justice and advocating Marxist revolution and socialist politics. Jesuits became instrumental in helping revolutionaries such as the Sandinistas in Nicaragua to overthrow governments and establish Marxist dictatorships. The 2nd Vatican Council declared that communism and Marxism were acceptable, softened the teaching of the church on abortion and homosexuality, and opened the door to the ecumenical movement, that the Bible is simply one source of truth among many.

- Politics in the Catholic Church in past centuries was often brutal, where the appointment of popes often resulted in power struggles between various factions. Cardinals were often appointed on the basis of political favoritism and would sometimes pay large sums in order to obtain their office. In return they would normally be able to collect and keep a portion of the offerings from the churches in their area of dominion – like buying a McDonalds franchise. Becoming a cardinal or a bishop was thus perceived in crass financial terms as an investment rather than a spiritual responsibility.
- At times the Vatican engaged in nefarious and disreputable fund-raising schemes, such as simony (the sale of spiritual benefits or offices for money), and indulgences (getting oneself or another person out of hell or purgatory in exchange for payment to the church). The church also sold indulgences to priests allowing them to keep wives and/or concubines, and the accumulation of wealth unfortunately became a goal that led to further corruption and cynicism. Some Protestant churches and televangelists in our day, such as Jim Bakker in the 1970s, have also been guilty of this.

- Some religious leaders and groups have used twisted versions of Christian teachings to claim prophetic gifts and demand absolute obedience from their followers. These include the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, founder of the “Moonie” cult; Children of the Way; David Koresh of the Branch Davidians; the People’s Temple, where the messianic leader Jim Jones led his followers to drink cyanide in a mass suicide; and others. While such groups malign the reputation of Christianity, most Christians do not consider them to be Christian at all.
- In many societies, women were treated as chattel and second-class citizens, and at times in the past the church has taught or at least encouraged this. In many cases Bible verses were taken out of context in order to justify such treatment. However, this issue is much larger than just the church; how people are treated is controlled by the generally prevailing attitudes in each society. The church can certainly influence attitudes, but there are also many other factors at work.

It must also be said that throughout its history, the church has generally attempted to elevate the status of women, and the progress that women have made in the last century is largely due to Christian influences. The Bible teaches that men and women are of equal worth, but it rejects the notion that they are equivalent or interchangeable. It therefore recognizes the reality that there are fundamental physical and psychological differences between the sexes that have been there from the beginning and will continue because the differences are biological in nature.

- Some liberal churches have tried to rewrite the Bible in order to make it gender neutral, or to modify it in other ways in order to change teachings that they disagree with. Others have dispensed with the Bible altogether and their churches have essentially become clubs.
- The church has had many sexual scandals down through the years, from the early popes to the twentieth-century preacher Jimmy Swaggert. The Catholic Church is now struggling with the issue of pedophilia in the ranks of their priests, as well as the bishops who protected them and moved them from one parish to another. Underlying this scandal are other systemic problems – the high percentage of homosexual priests due to the celibacy requirement, and the declining number of applicants to the priesthood.
- Some contemporary churches and ministries have promoted what came to be called “the health and wealth gospel” which treated God as a type of spiritual vending machine – if one puts in the correct amount of offerings and good works, one would supposedly receive good health and financial benefits automatically provided in a tit-for-tat manner. This is essentially a modern form of indulgence. Christianity is therefore viewed by some as a means of financial gain – a guaranteed investment and annuity program for those who choose to participate. A similar problem is known as “easy believism” or “cheap grace.” It is the notion that all a person has to do is say the correct prayers and believe the right things, and then that person will be all set for eternity. Supposedly once that has happened it does not matter what a person does, and he or she is free to live life in any way they please.

The Bible does teach that God’s grace is a free gift and cannot be earned (it must be received by faith), but it also teaches that people will be judged on the basis of what they have done and how they have served others. In other words, belief and faith are absolutely necessary as a starting point for a relationship with God, and no one is worthy enough to enter heaven on the

basis of one's own personality or good works. On the other hand, belief and faith are meaningless if they do not reform our character and affect the way that we live. As Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruits" and at the final judgement in Revelation 20 in front of "The great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away," people are judged on the basis of their actions.

- On some occasions biblical teaching has been used as a general excuse for the exploitation of the environment in irresponsible ways, such as the wholesale slaughter of the buffalo in early America, or the clear-cutting of forests. Blame is assigned because the Bible gives mankind dominion over the natural world. But this is a distortion of biblical teaching. The Bible teaches that human beings are stewards of the world and its resources, and therefore responsible for how we use them. Therefore, destructive and irresponsible uses of the environment are wrong according to the Bible, and developing reasonable policies to provide a healthy environment is appropriate and necessary. However, the Bible rejects the notion fostered by some environmental and religious groups that animals are equal to people, and that eating meat or using animal products is wrong.
- The Vatican under the now-current Pope Francis (a Jesuit who has packed the college of Cardinals with fellow Jesuits) has abandoned biblical Christianity and instead is embracing social justice and ecumenicism where "all paths lead to God," as well as calling for a one-world government and a one-world religion. He has sought alliances with the Dalai Lama and with Muslim Imams, but in general rejects Protestant Christianity, and views his primary concerns as feminist, homosexual, and transgender advocacy, socialism, abortion, and global warming. In his advocacy for homosexuality he is strongly opposed by many Catholic leaders, especially those in Africa, but like the Vatican and the Papacy in the past, he is once more leading the Catholic church away from God.

The church, like all organizations, is made up of fallible humans who, in some cases, have done many bad things. It demonstrates the reality of Jeremiah 17:9: "The heart is deceitful above all things... who can understand it?" God's continued presence and blessing is dependent on the lifestyle and behaviors of those who call on His name, and God is not a respecter of persons. "God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble." James 4:6.

A study of church as well as secular history alerts us to two opposing dangers: 1) the more that power is centralized, the greater capacity there is for corruption, exploitation, and abuse, as in Lord Acton's dictum, "All power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." This is true for all authority, civil as well as ecclesiastical; and 2) when the church is marginalized society suffers because civilization requires morality, and morality requires divine authority.

These conflicting ideas are abundantly illustrated in the history of the Church and most glaringly in the Papacy of Rome which began in the fourth century. There were some good popes down through the centuries, but they represent only a few points of light in a general sea of darkness. For centuries the Papacy controlled much of northern Italy – a region known as the "Papal States." Popes behaved in much the same way as the secular rulers around them. Ironically, the best thing to happen to the Vatican was the loss of the Papal States, which were taken by Napoleon in 1815, restored for a few years, and then permanently lost in 1929. The Vatican remained a sovereign state but was reduced to its current one square mile of territory. It was at this point that the Catholic Church reluctantly returned to its spiritual role, and ultimately regained the respect and authority that it had lost.

Unfortunately, the Vatican is in the process of once again losing respect and abandoning its self-proclaimed role as the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth. During the Protestant Reformation the Papacy was often referred to as “the Whore of Babylon” from Revelation chapter 17 because of its corruption. But after decades of reform the recent popes have started a new form of spiritual decline, and under the leadership of Pope Francis the Vatican is once again losing its soul.

Confronting the ‘Distinguished Bigots’

Before proceeding with criticisms of the Church in general and of the Catholic Church in particular, it is necessary to address the distortions and outright lies that anti-Christian intellectuals have made and repeated. In the words of Rodney Stark, it is necessary to confront the “distinguished bigots” who have misrepresented Christianity and the Church such as Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Edward Gibbon, Bertrand Russell, William Manchester, Daniel Boorstein, etc., and expose their bigotry ([Stark, 2016, pp. 1-7](#)).

1. *Anti-Semitism.* The Church supposedly invented and actively participated in almost two thousand years of anti-Semitic violence, justifying it by claiming that Jews were responsible for the crucifixion of Christ. Pope Pius XII was supposedly “Hitler’s Pope.”

The reality is that anti-Semitism was invented by the Roman Empire who persecuted Jews and later Christians for their refusal to worship the emperor and other Roman divinities. From the time of Christ through the early 300’s Christians were a minority and in no position to persecute anyone, and for the next eight hundred years the church was generally at peace with Jews until the time of the Crusades. Even then Anti-Semitic persecution was carried out almost entirely by secular groups, which unfortunately became a pattern carried out repeatedly in the following years, and this was done by people who were nominally Christian. But far from encouraging attacks, Jews were protected by the church officials whenever possible, and the popes at the time strongly criticized violence against Jews. The Church eventually went after heretics such as the Cathars, but not Jews.

Protestant reformers such as Martin Luther made anti-Semitic statements, but they may well have been in response to Jewish teachings in various portions of the Talmud, such as the following: a) Mary the mother of Jesus had an adulterous affair with a Roman soldier, and Jesus was therefore a *mazmer* (a bastard), and should have been excluded from Jewish religious life; b) Jesus had adulterous relationships and was guilty of sorcery; c) Jesus was not crucified but rather stoned to death with his body hung on a tree; d) Jesus is spending eternity in hell, boiling in excrement ([Shäfer, 2007](#)). Despite these inane claims from the Talmud, neither Catholic or Protestant church officials encouraged violence against Jews.

Thus, there have been many silly and ridiculous statements such as the feminist theologian Rosemary Reuther who claimed, “The Church must bear a substantial responsibility for the tragic history of the Jew in Christendom which was the foundation upon which political anti-Semitism and the Nazi use of it was erected”, and Robert Osborn, “Christians have been anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic apparently from the beginning.”

2. *The Crusades and “Holy War.”* Muslims were the ones to set the pattern for holy war in the years after the death of Mohammed in 632. For the next 300 years they attacked many

countries, conquering and then ruling over them. These included Iran (Persia), Iraq, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, all of North Africa (the Maghreb), Armenia, the Balkan territories, Spain, Sicily, and southern Italy. Many Christian areas such as Hippo, the home of Augustine in North Africa (in what is now the country of Algeria), were wiped out by Islamic forces. The Muslims in Spain attempted an invasion of France in 732 but were repulsed under the leadership of Charles Martel at the Battle of Tours. Muslims also took Sicily in the 820s, and in 846 they attacked Rome and desecrated the tombs of St. Peter and St. Paul. For centuries the Castilian and Basque peoples of Spain revolted against their Muslim overlords, and finally were victorious in 1492, the year that Columbus set sail for America. The Muslim characterization of Andalusia in Spain as a paradise for everyone is a myth ([Fernandez-Morera, 2016](#)).

Europe in the Middle Ages was rightly fearful of being totally overrun and conquered by Islamic forces, and the Emperor in Constantinople requested help against the Turks. The desire to defend themselves and retake lost territory from their Muslim enemies therefore resonated with virtually everyone in Europe. The Crusades were thus an attempt to redress the brutality of the Islamic conquest, and retake territory that had been lost. They are often used to paint the church and Christianity as evil, especially by extremist Muslims such as Usama Bin Laden and by western-bashing liberals. The Crusades were supposedly promoted by “power-mad popes seeking to expand Christianity through the enforced conversion of Muslim masses, which constituted a black stain on the history of the Catholic Church.” ([Ekelund et al., 1996](#)). The chair of Islamic studies at the America University in Washington, DC indicated, “The Crusades created a historical memory which is with us today – the memory of a long European onslaught.” ([Curry, 2002](#)). Both of these statements are lies.

Muslims are entirely hypocritical on the Crusades, justifying their own conquests and excusing the killing and subjugation of other peoples by claiming that jihad is commanded by Allah. But when the people who were attacked defend themselves and strike back, it is purely evil. Atrocities during the Crusader period were committed by both sides and especially bad was the wholesale slaughter of the civilian population in Jerusalem when the Crusaders took the city in 1099. But the atrocities performed by Muslims are rarely, if ever, admitted. For example, the inhabitants of the Templar fortress of Safad were massacred in 1266 after being promised that they would be spared if they surrendered. Even worse was the total massacre of every man, woman, and child when the Muslims retook Antioch in 1268. After the city fell, the gates were ordered shut and every inhabitant of the city was hunted down and slain. It was the worst atrocity performed by either side in the entire Crusader era, and it was committed by Muslims.

3. *The Myth of the Dark Ages.* The Church has been accused of “Imposing a Europe-wide scholarly amnesia which afflicted it from at least AD 300 to 1300, in which Christianity built a grand barrier against the progress of knowledge” and “Christianity inaugurated a millennium in which reason was enchained, thought was enslaved, and knowledge made no progress.” ([Stark, 2016, p. 73](#)).

This is a *total lie* and is especially embarrassing to historians like Daniel Boorstein who had no excuse and understood that it is not true but repeated the lie anyway. Rome fell into the hands of the “barbarians,” but the barbarians actually improved society. Not only was there no fall into the Dark Ages, rather this period was one of the greatest innovative eras of all history, as technology was developed on a scale that no civilization had previously known. It was during

this period that Europe (and eventually America) began its great technological leap forward that put it far ahead of the rest of the world, where it remains to this day.

The Romans made little use of technology, as they preferred manual labor performed by slaves which were endemic in Roman society. Contrary to the thinking of progressives, it was Christianity that opposed slavery due to Christian notions of the worth of each individual. This resulted in the development of technology to replace the need for manual labor. Water and wind power were harnessed, and dams were built. Agriculture was revolutionized by the three-field system of letting land lie fallow, and by the invention of the heavy plow and horse collars for oxen and horses to replace human labor. Selective plant breeding in monasteries provided more productive crops. Chimneys were invented to heat homes without needing holes in roofs to let out the smoke. Eyeglasses were invented, and the development of saddles and stirrups improved the riding of horses which was the transport system of that era. That invention was decisive, for example, in the defeat of the Muslims at the battle of Tours in 732, where the first knights organized by Charles Martel rode over their enemies.

Incredible progress was also made in the arts, music, and science. In Greek and Roman times music was monophonic and consisted only of melody. Medieval musicians invented polyphony and harmony, and music notation was invented so that it could be recorded in written form. Higher education and universities were developed, and virtually all of the scientists whose discoveries were a critical base of contemporary society were Christian, including Boyle, Newton, Pascal, and others, whose intellectual basis was the understanding that God created a stable world and encouraged people to research its secrets and use them for the betterment of society.

Technology improved but the real improvement was in the area of morality, including the treatment of slaves and women. All known societies above the primitive level have been slave societies, and even American Indian tribes kept slaves long before the arrival of Columbus ([Stark, 2016, p. 81](#)). Christendom was the only society to reject it and affirm the value of women because of the teachings of the Apostle Paul.

Anti-Christian intellectuals such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Hume, and Gibbon sought to minimize Christian influence and therefore constructed the myth of the Dark Ages, which is now being rejected by historians ([Stark, 2016, p. 55](#)). What is therefore truly myth is the Renaissance and the supposed “secular enlightenment” which were simply extensions of the advances made during the Middle Ages. The latter were therefore a period of light rather than darkness, and some directions of current culture, especially in the areas of psychology, represent a devolution.

4. *Persecution of Tolerant Pagans.* This was a deceptive myth promulgated mainly by Edward Gibbon to explain the transition of society to Christianity in the days of Constantine and the following emperors. In the words of Gibbon, the pagans were “imbued with the mild spirit of antiquity” so the Christians wiped them out. The reality is that paganism was rejected not because of violent Christian opposition, rather because it was increasingly seen to be morally and intellectually bankrupt, and therefore it was gradually abandoned. Policies of the papacy to persecute heresies only applied to those considered to be Christian, not to people outside the church.

5. *The Gnostic Gospels*. These writings, such as *The Gospel of Thomas*, *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, *The Gospel of Judas*, and others have been proclaimed as “providing new light on Christ” and were suppressed supposedly because they “challenged the patriarchy of Biblical authors” and showed that the new testament writers got Christ wrong. However, the fact is that they were written 100 to 200 years after the New Testament period by Gnostics who were not Christian and who had their own theological axe to grind. The only reason for attention to these writings is that they attack Christianity, and it is alleged that they support feminism and homosexuality. In 2012 Karen King revealed that she had discovered an ancient fragment of papyrus with Jesus stating, “She is my wife.” It was only later that it was revealed that the fragment was a modern forgery ([Stark, 2016, p. 51](#)).
6. *The Inquisition*. This has long been one of the stock stories of widespread persecution of witches, homosexuals, and others by Catholic authorities, especially in Spain. The Inquisitors, led by Tomas de Torquemada conducted autos-de-fe and burned hundreds of heretics along with their books at the stake. Their property was then said to have been confiscated by church authorities.

However, the term “auto-de-fe” actually means “act of faith,” therefore it consisted of an appearance by someone convicted of sins and who offered a public confession of their guilt. Only rarely did an auto-de-fe end with an execution, and this was only done by secular authorities. The Inquisition never conducted any actual executions, so the stories of weekly mass burnings are completely fictitious ([Stark, 2016, p. 121](#)). During the first fifty years of the Inquisition from 1480 – 1530 there were around 1,500 executed, or 30 per year. In the rest of the Inquisition (1530 – 1700) there were 44,674 trial cases in Spain of which 826 were executed, or less than 10 per year. During the period of 1530 – 1630 an average of 750 were hanged per year in England (a total of around 75,000), with many of them being for minor crimes such as theft. In contrast, Spain executed on a few individuals who typically were repeat offenders of serious crimes. Furthermore, the use of torture by the Spanish Inquisition is another myth, because the inquisitors were skeptical of the validity of torture to convict, and it is generally accepted that the Spanish prisons were by far the most humane in Europe ([Stark, 2016, pp. 122-123](#)). See Stark’s chapter on the Inquisition for a thorough debunking.

The final death toll from the entire period of the Inquisition (1480 – 1700) in Europe as a whole is estimated at 40 to 60 thousand, which pales in comparison to the 200 million killed by communists in order to implement socialism and their attempt to stamp out anti-communist heresy. It is from the lies about the Inquisition that Matilda Gage’s feminist myth of 9 million burned witches was derived.

Just as the statue of Christ the Redeemer holds out his arms above the city of Rio de Janeiro, the real Jesus still holding out his arms to us:

Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy. Behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end... The Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost. *Revelation 22:11-13, 17*

Criticism of the Church Throughout History



A study of the papacy can be very depressing because of the excesses and hypocrisy demonstrated by many of the so-called Vicars of Christ. This must be balanced against secular society which was typically worse. However, the church should have held to the higher standards of the Bible, but often failed to do so. Following is a brief chronology of some eras in church history taken from a number of sources: ([Cawthorne, 2004](#); [Chamberlin, 1969](#); [Duffy, 1997](#))

- To be a Christian in the early days of Christianity (AD 33 and following) often meant hardship, persecution, and sometimes death. The Jewish leaders arrested Christians beginning around AD 37 (the apostle Paul, author of many NT writings, had originally been a persecutor of the church), and the secular Roman leaders followed suit. Roman emperors from Nero (AD 54) through Diocletian (AD 305) persecuted Christians with varying degrees of intensity. But the next emperor, Constantine (313-337), completely reversed course and Christianity was eventually made the official religion of the empire under Constantine's successors. He did this because he saw himself as the great political unifier and desired to use Christianity to unify the entire empire.
- Sylvester I (314-335) was perhaps the first pope. He presided over the church during the sea change brought about by Constantine's edicts that Christianity was to be an accepted religion. Wealth in many forms (tax revenues and abatements, landholdings, farms, buildings, silver and gold, and so on) began to flow into the Church of Rome, and a large building program was launched. As we shall see, the decline began very quickly.
- Damasus I (366-384) came to power as pope by hiring a group of thugs to forcibly depose his rival Ursinus and throw him out of Rome. He renounced his wife and children when assuming the papacy but engaged in what became a long-standing tradition with popes – having affairs with ladies. He was known as “the matron's ear tickler,” and enjoyed entertaining in the Vatican, but strangely, he wrote on the virtues of virginity and indicated that “intercourse was defilement.” St. Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin producing the Vulgate version during this time (the standard Catholic Bible used for centuries afterward), was Damasus' secretary of affairs and strongly disapproved of the pope's romantic activities. In the year 378 the pope was finally charged with the crime of adultery and tried before a synod, but the emperor stepped in to stop the trial, and Damasus had the bishops from the synod murdered. Despite his adventures, Damasus was canonized as a saint after his death.

Damasus was pope during the reign of the Roman emperor Gratian (359-383) during which

time Catholicism became dominant in the empire, and then Theodosius I (379-395) who made Christianity the state religion. This action brought everyone into the church whether they were Christian or not and was perhaps the event that corrupted the church more than anything else. As wealth and influence increased, the church became increasingly autocratic, hierarchical, and focused on money and power. The popes essentially became politicians.

- Siricius (family of Tiburtius, 384-399) swung to the opposite pole on the issue of sexuality (these swings were frequent from pope to pope). He was against sex altogether and felt that married priests should put away their wives. Even sex in marriage was “immorality.” St. Jerome, who was still involved in church affairs, felt that the pope went too far, and he wrote against these policies. For his efforts he was later banished from Rome. Siricius also excommunicated Jovian, a monk who was critical of fasting and celibacy, and who had the audacity to suggest that the Virgin Mary had lost her virginity when she gave birth to Christ. He also condemned the Bishop of Naissus for teaching that Mary had other children after Jesus. The Bible clearly indicates this – for example, James was a brother of Christ and was both a leader in the Jerusalem church as well as the author of the NT book named after him.

The great Christian writer and philosopher St. Augustine of Hippo also lived during this time. His book, *The City of God*, is still a classic, but on the subject of sex he was completely aligned with Siricius. Augustine had been a playboy in his youth, but after becoming the Bishop of Hippo he completely changed his thinking and condemned even marital sex. He wrote in his *Soliloquies*, “Nothing is so powerful in drawing the spirit of a man downward as the caresses of a woman, and that physical intercourse which is part of marriage.” In one of his sermons he warned, “Husbands, love your wives but love them chastely. Insist on the work of the flesh only in such measure as is necessary for the procreation of children. You must descend to it against your will, for it is the punishment of Adam.” Augustine’s thinking and writings were a significant cause for the negativity of the church toward sex, and a swing toward celibacy for the clergy. Augustine also wrote the following:

“Heretics (those who are not members of the Catholic Church or who do not hold to Catholic doctrine) worship a God who is a liar, and a Christ who is a liar.”

- Innocent I (401-417) was the son of the prior pope Anatasius I. He was perhaps the first true pope in the sense that he was the first to claim that the See of Rome was superior and had authority over all of the other churches.
- Leo I the Great (440-461) was deeply involved in the politics of his day – he is probably best known for having met with Attila the Hun in AD 452 and allegedly persuaded the latter not to invade Italy. Leo continued and expanded on the superiority of Rome, repeatedly proclaiming that the apostle Peter, who had been “given the keys to the kingdom,” was the first pope, and therefore all popes in Rome had the authority of Peter. Through his energy and efforts Leo greatly increased the power and influence of the papacy, thereby setting the pattern for its later claims. He was also the first pope to claim the right of torturing and executing heretics.
- Gelasius I (492-496) was the first pope to be designated as the “Vicar of Christ” and wrote that there were two powers in the world – the church and the state (centuries later forming the basis for the eventual discussion of this issue in the U.S. Constitution), but that the church was more important because it was concerned with eternal and not merely temporal matters. He

demanded more obedience to papal authority and increased the tension between the Eastern and Western churches. However, he was also known for his personal holiness and sense of justice.

- Anastasius II (496-498) was pope when St. Remigius (St. Remy) baptized Clovis, the greatest of the Merovingian kings. It has been alleged that Remigius, acting on the authority of Anastasius II – or one of the later popes such as Hormisdas – bound the church to the support of the Merovingian dynasty as Stephen II did with the Carolingian rulers several hundred years later. St. Remigius spoke thus to Clovis at the latter's baptism in 496, "Your posterity shall nobly govern this kingdom, which will give much glory to the Holy Church. It shall inherit the Empire of the Romans. This nation will not cease to prosper so long as it follows the path of truth, but decadence will come upon it with vices and bad customs. For, in truth, it is in this way that all kingdoms and nations have fallen into ruin."

Anastasius attempted to heal the increasing divisions between the western and eastern branches of the church, but died before anything could be done. He was therefore one of only two of the first fifty popes not to be canonized.

- Symmachus (family of Fortunatus, 498-514) who had a pagan background, was charged with unchastity, adultery, and the misuse of church property, and was called before a synod for trial. The first time he refused to give evidence; the second time he did not appear at all; and the third time he argued that as pope, no human court could judge him (this was a legal defense that later popes would also use). Because his election had been disputed, another pope also had been given authority (Lawrence) and there were effectively two popes at the time. Symmachus therefore spent much time creating documents to bolster his own case, and to prove that the pope could not be judged by any man. He, too, was canonized after his death.
- Vigilius (537-555) was an ambitious man who came to power by overthrowing the existing pope Silverius who had recently been elected. When the emperor desired that Silverius receive a fair trial, Vigilius stage-managed it and arranged to have the ex-pope shipped off into exile, where he died several months later. But Vigilius had a number of problems of his own: he was later arrested by the emperor over political and doctrinal issues, but after agreeing to recant, he changed his position and waffled several times. This eventually led to his being excommunicated by a church council in Rome, and being placed under house arrest, where soon afterwards he died. The conduct of his papacy brought much public shame on the institution.
- Gregory I the Great (Gregorius of Gordianus, 590-604) was a man of great piety and energy who became pope after the city of Rome had been repeatedly sacked and plundered. He served as both head of the church as well as the civic leader of Rome, attempting to shield the city from the ravages of the Lombards as well as improve the welfare of the people of Rome. Gregory was considered to be the noblest pope of the Middle Ages and was perhaps the best ever. He was an energetic leader who brought hope to the city of Rome as well as the church. He was also interested in using music in worship and was known as "the Father of Christian Worship." He had been a monk before becoming pope and had a deep respect for the monastic life and the vow of poverty.

However, he returned to the policy of celibacy, although the richer bishops could purchase the

privilege of keeping their wife or concubine by the payment of an indulgence. Gregory also wrote a number of books on sexual behavior, and especially on the penalties that should be ascribed to various sexual activities and sins. For example, a man must not enter the church after having intercourse with his wife unless he first washed himself, but the sex had to be for procreation only and not for pleasure, otherwise it would be a sin and the man could not enter the church at all. “Unnatural intercourse” in marriage was especially condemned, and *coitus interruptus* was a worse sin than fornication or adultery. Anything that prevented conception meant that the sex was just for pleasure, and therefore evil. Gregory’s books and his obsession with sex led to a long series of debates and theological discussions through the years over the proper punishment for various sexual practices.

- Boniface III (Cataadioce family, 607) sought and obtained a decree from the emperor of Constantinople which stated that “the See of Blessed Peter the Apostle should be the head of all the Churches.” This ensured that the title of “universal bishop” belonged exclusively to the bishop of Rome, and effectively ended the attempt by Patriarch of Constantinople to establish himself as “universal bishop.”
- Martin I (649-655) was a supporter of the poor, but was arrested by the Byzantine Emperor Constans II, carried off to Constantinople, and ultimately banished to the Crimea.
- Zacharias (741-752) and Stephen II (752-757). Zacharias or Zachary was a consummate diplomat in a difficult political era and outlawed the trading of slaves in Rome. These popes cut a very significant deal with the then rulers of France – Charles Martel, who defeated the Muslims at the Battle of Tours in 732, and son Pepin III (the Short). Charles Martel’s father Pepin II (the Fat), the major domo of the Merovingian kings of France, had previously seized power and deposed the Merovingians, and in 679 he assassinated Dagobert II, supposedly the last of the Merovingian line. Therefore, Pepin II had the power of the kingship but not the title. Both he and his son Charles Martel never called themselves kings for fear of public reprisal, and thus felt a need to legitimize their rule. Rome, meanwhile, was still troubled by the Lombard invasions, so during the years of 751-754, the two sides negotiated a deal in which the pope anointed Pepin III, the son of Charles Martel, as the King of France at the St. Denis Cathedral in Paris¹ in return for military assistance in eliminating the Lombards. The Lombards were defeated by 756 and their northern territories in Italy were given to the Papacy in a document known as the *Donation of Pepin*.

Thus the Papal States were founded, which subsequently formed the basis of papal revenue and power. The defense and control of the Papal States became the cornerstone of papal policy and interest, and for the next thousand years this territory continually involved the popes in the politics and wars of Italy and Europe. In return, Pope Stephen II declared through a solemn vow that no other ruling family could ever be recognized in France. The Carolingian dynasty was thus established, and Charles (later Charles the Great or Charlemagne), the son of Pepin III, became its greatest king.

The grant of the Lombard territory to the Vatican by Pepin was strongly protested by the Emperor in Byzantium, but at that time a document appeared known as the *Donation of*

¹ The St. Denis Cathedral, now located in a heavily Muslim area of Paris, is a royal necropolis where many kings were buried, and contains the sword and the regalia of Charlemagne.

Constantine. The text was purportedly a decree of the emperor Constantine I, dated 30 March of 315, a year mistakenly said to be both that of his fourth consulate and that of the consulate of Gallicanus. It recounts a fictitious tale of how Pope Sylvester rescued the Romans from a dragon, and how he miraculously cured the emperor's leprosy by the sacrament of baptism. In gratitude Constantine supposedly professed Christianity and desired to bestow on the seat of Peter in Rome "Power, dignity, glory, vigor, and imperial honor," and "supremacy over the four principal sees of the church – over Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Constantinople, and also over all the churches of God in the whole earth." For the upkeep of the church Constantine supposedly gave landed estates "in Judea, Greece, Asia, Thrace, Africa, Italy and the various islands" and to Sylvester and his successors he granted the imperial insignia, the tiara, and "the city of Rome, and all the provinces, places and cities of Italy and the western regions." The document had so many errors and false claims that the church hierarchy knew that it was an audacious fake probably written by Stephen II, and in 1440 it was definitively shown to be a forgery. However, it was used by the Vatican in the intervening 700 years to support its claims to ecclesiastical and political power.

A quote from Stephen II indicated that he knew of or had seen the Shroud (later known as the Shroud of Turin); "Christ had spread out his entire body on a linen cloth that was white as snow. On this cloth, marvelous as it is to see... the glorious image of the Lord's face, and the length of his entire and most noble body, has been divinely transferred."

- Paul I (757-767) and Stephen III (768-772). These popes were political appointees by factions in Rome (Paul was the brother of Stephen II) and were challenged by opposing popes appointed by other factions (when Stephen was appointed there were fights in the Rome, and a number of the supporters of the rival popes were blinded and had their tongues cut out). Paul was continually worried about the politics of his day, that the Emperor of Byzantium would support the Lombards and try to turn the Franks against the Vatican. Stephen was also worried about this and in 769 he helped Charlemagne to reconcile with his brother Carloman and pressured them to support the still infant Papal States, by reminding them of the help that their father had given the papacy in the past.

The creation of the Papal States in 756 set off a murderous rivalry for control, resulting in violence, betrayal, and judicial murder. Carloman died in 771 leaving Charlemagne as the sole king of the Franks, and in 773-4 Charlemagne crushed Lombard resistance to the pope's sovereignty and confirmed papal rule over northern Italy. Most of the popes of the late ninth and tenth centuries were all selected by the warring families of Rome, for whom murder, rape, and theft were the order of the day.

- Adrian I (772-795) and Leo III (795-816). These popes ruled when Charlemagne came to power, and they strongly supported him. Leo crowned Charlemagne as emperor on Christmas day in 800 which was a very influential event tying the Vatican to the *ancient regime* in France; this alliance lasted for a thousand years until the French revolution of 1789.
- Boniface VI (896), Stephen VI (896-897), Romanus (897), Theodore II (897), John IX (898-900), Benedict IV (900-903), Leo V (903-904). Most of these popes were appointed through the influence of the Spoleto family who ruled Rome for portions of this time. Agiltruda, the Duchess of Spoleto, was a powerful woman from this family, and she was instrumental in the rise and fall of a number of the above popes. Boniface VI ruled for only fifteen days and then

was poisoned by her and replaced by Stephen VI. Stephen, a madman, conducted a most unusual trial: he had the body of Formosus, the pope who had preceded Boniface, exhumed from the grave. The corpse was then dressed in papal vestments and put on trial for crimes against the Spoleto family (Formosus had led an army that had formerly freed Rome from the power of the Spoletos). The corpse was found guilty, several of its fingers were cut off and given to Agiltruda, and it was dragged through the streets of Rome and thrown in the Tiber. But the “cadaver synod,” as it came to be known, caused an uprising against Stephen VI, and he was thrown in prison and strangled. Agiltruda then had Romanus appointed pope but got tired of him after four months and installed Theodore II, only to tire of him soon afterward as well (both Romanus and Theodore died in mysterious circumstances).

- Sergius III (904-911), Anastasias III (911-913), Lando I (913-914), John X (914-928), John XI (931-936). Two women, a mother and daughter combination (Theodora and Marozia) who were mistresses to the popes became very influential in having all of the above popes appointed. When Marozia was fifteen years old she became the mistress of Sergius III, who was forty-five at the time, and who had murdered the previous pope Leo V and seized the papal ring. Their son became Pope John XI, and Marozia’s grandson became Pope John XII. She also had great and great-great grandsons who ascended the papal throne. Anastasius III, Lando I, and John X were all selected through the influence of Theodora. John X was the bastard son of Lando (who was a notorious womanizer) and became Theodora’s lover. After Lando’s death, Theodora used her influence to have John X become pope so that they could continue their affair with greater ease.
- John XII (955-964) was the grandson of Marozia and could reasonably be compared to the Roman emperor Caligula. After his death a series of charges were posthumously filed against him as follows: “He perjured himself, breaking his oath to the Great Emperor. He stole the treasury of the popes and fled to Rome’s enemies, was deposed by the Holy Synod and was replaced by Leo VIII. Then the apostate returned to Rome, evicted Leo VIII, cut off the nose, tongue, and two forefingers of the Cardinal Deacon, flayed the skin of Bishop Otger, cut off the head of Notary Azzo, and beheaded sixty-three of Rome’s clergy and nobility. During the night of 14 May 964, while having illicit relations with a Roman matron, he was surprised in the act by the matron’s angry husband who, in just wrath, smashed his skull with a hammer and thus liberated his soul into the grasp of Satan.” It was said of John XII, “He spent his entire life in adultery”, and Catholic bishop Luitprand states that “he had no respect for single girls, married woman or widows – they were sure to be defiled by him.”

John XII was sixteen (some say eighteen) when he became pope and he appointed ten year-old boys as bishops for pranks; the people that he appointed as church officials were all morally and spiritually corrupt like himself. He gambled with parishioner’s offerings and used the papal treasury to pay off his gambling debts. He was bisexual and was accused of running a brothel out of St. Peters as well as maintaining a harem in the Lateran palace; there were complaints of nuns and female pilgrims to Rome sometimes being abducted and forced to serve as his sex slaves. He was alleged to have committed incest with two of his sisters and one of his father’s concubines, and it is said that whole monasteries spent days and nights praying for his death. When he was called to stand trial for charges against him, he excommunicated his accusers and ignored them, telling them that as pope he was above all human justice. He died at age twenty-four at the hands of an angry husband, whose wife he was in the process of

using. The papacy of the tenth century is therefore sometimes referred to as the “papal pornocracy” run by the “whores of Rome” (Theodora and Marozia).

- Benedict VI (973-974) was the illegitimate son of a monk, and he made a policy of taking foreign ladies who came to Rome from France, England and Spain, seducing and raping them, and keeping them in Rome as courtesans.
- Boniface VII (Franco, 984-985) was described as a “horrid monster” by Pope Silvester II, and the synod in Rheims characterized him as “a man who in criminality surpassed all of the rest of mankind.”
- John XVIII (1004-1009), Sergius IV (Pietro Martino, 1009-1012). John XVIII was born Giovanni Fasanus, which means “cock” in Italian. He abdicated and was thought to have been poisoned. Sergius IV was given the nickname “Buccaporci” meaning “Pig’s Snout.” Both of these popes were appointed and controlled by the Crescentius family.
- Benedict VIII (Theophylact of Tusculum, 1012-1024) The Archbishop of Narbonne accused him of “simony, assassination, usury; of disbelieving the Eucharist and the immortality of the soul; of employing violence to obtain the secrets of the confessional; of living in concubinage with two of his nieces and having children by them; and by using the money received from the sale on indulgences to pay for the Saracen invasion of Sicily.” Bishop Beno accused him of “many vile adulteries and murders,” and an attempt was made to take him to Lyon to face charges, but Benedict resisted this, using the typical papal defenses.
- John XIX (Romanus, 1024-1032). John came to power when the Tuscolani family took over Rome. In 1027 John received a visit from King Cnut (Canute) of England who came to Rome on a pilgrimage because “I heard the from wise men that St. Peter the Apostle has received from the Lord a great power of binding and loosing and bears the keys of the kingdom of heaven; therefore I deemed it useful to seek his patronage before God.” John XIX was typical the tenth century popes, but for Cnut, the pope was not a leader, a reformer, or an example of holy living. Rather, he was simply the guardian of the holy mysteries. This was to change in the next century but provides insight into how the papacy was viewed in the tenth century.
- Benedict IX (Theophylactus of Tusculum, 1032-1048) after John XIX died his twelve-year-old nephew was made pope and became Benedict IX by bribery. He was one of the worst if not the worst pope ever. It was said of him that “as a child on the chair of St. Peter, he grew up in unrestrained license, and shocked the dull sensibilities of a gross and barbarous age by the scandals of his daily life.” It was also said that the child-pope “manifested a precocity for all kinds of wickedness.” He was bisexual, sodomized animals, ordered murders, and dabbled in witchcraft and Satanism. One observer wrote that “It seemed as if a demon from hell, in the disguise of a priest, occupied the chair of Peter and profaned the sacred mysteries of religion by his insolent courses.” ([Gregorovius, 2010](#)). Another wrote, “That wretch, from the beginning of his pontificate to the end of his life, feasted on immorality.” It was also alleged that, “in woods and remote places, he was accustomed to invoke evil spirits, and by necromancy to work woman to his lust.” Like his predecessors, he lived in luxury like a sultan in the Lateran Palace. Meanwhile his brothers ruled the city of Rome as if they owned it, and the result was a crime wave that filled the streets with robbery and murder. Ferdinand

Gregorovius described the situation thusly, “All lawful conditions had ceased... Only an uncertain glimmer falls these days when the Vicar of Christ was a pope more criminal than the Emperor Elagabalus.”

Benedict also hosted lavish homosexual orgies in the Lateran palace, and by the time he was twenty-three, his conduct was so appalling that an effort was made to strangle him at the altar during a Mass. This attempt was unsuccessful, but in 1044 he was deposed for a time and Sylvester III bribed his way to the papacy. But Sylvester’s moral standards were similar to Benedict’s, and Benedict soon returned and regained his power. Then, in a strange turn of events, he grew tired of the papacy, and planned to marry his cousin, the daughter of Girard de Saxo, who had stipulated that Benedict had to give up the papacy if he wanted her hand. So Benedict sold the papacy to his godfather John Gracian for 1,500 pounds plus Peter’s pence – the tribute from the Church in England – for life. But Benedict’s prospective bride turned him down, and he went back to the Lateran palace and turned it into a brothel in order to generate income. Benedict was finally driven from Rome in 1048 and died in obscurity. Dante and others believed that in Benedict IX, the papacy had reached its lowest ebb, and in his *Inferno*, Dante consigned Benedict, along with a number of other popes to the lowest circle of hell.

- Leo IX (Bruno of Egisheim-Dagsburg, 1049-1054) was a reformer who sought to redeem the papacy from the sordid depths into which it had sunk under Benedict IX and the papal pornocracy. In his short years in office he made whirlwind tours to the capitals of Europe to preach against simony (the sale of church offices for cash), lay investiture (the selection of monks, priests, and bishops by secular rulers in order to control the office and the associated revenues), and clerical marriage. Leo was also able to enforce his policies, and began disciplining bishops and priests, and eliminating the age-old system of payment for church offices. He also gathered around him a group of leaders who were also interested and intent on reform. Leo desired to have the church return to the policy of celibacy for all priests, most of whom were married. It was reported that during the consecration of priests at that time, they were asked four questions: “Have you sodomized a boy? Have you fornicated with a nun? Have you sodomized any four-legged animal? Have you committed adultery?”

Leo was also the pope under which the Great Schism took place between the Western Church of Rome and the Eastern Church of Constantinople. Relations had declined over a long period of time, and like other popes, Leo had a huge ego and a very lofty view of his own position. He had demanded that the Eastern Church completely submit to his rule, which they refused to do. So in 1054 the Pope and the Patriarch excommunicated each other, causing a permanent split between east and west.

- Gregory VII (Hildebrand of Sovana, 1073-1085) was a very short man, possibly a midget, who nevertheless was one of the most energetic and determined of all of the popes. Like Leo before him, he had a mystically exalted view of his office, and his views were proclaimed in a document known as the *Dictatus Papae* which contained twenty-seven maxims on the pope’s power and authority. These were far-reaching and exceeded anything that had come before, for example: 1) the pope can be judged by no one, and that no one may be condemned while he had an appeal pending in Rome (this created a field day for the lawyers at the time); 2) the pope is supreme over all bishops, and therefore his legates take precedence over all others, regardless of their rank; 3) all princes and rulers (and everyone else as well) must kiss the pope’s foot; 4) the pope is “inerrant,” he can never be in error about any pronouncement

throughout all eternity; 5) a duly ordained pope is automatically made a saint by the merits of St. Peter (very hard to swallow considering the behavior of the tenth century popes); and 6) the pope has the power to depose emperors and can absolve subjects of their allegiance to wicked rulers (the definition of “wicked” was not fully spelled out). The last maxim was especially bold, and Gregory based it on the permission granted by Pope Zacharias and Stephen II to Pepin III to depose the Merovingian kings of France, assassinate Dagobert II, and establish the Carolingian dynasty. In other words, the pope could unilaterally perform actions such as these whenever he felt that it was in the best interest of the papacy and the church. He was deeply involved the “investiture controversy” – the issue of whether church leaders could be selected by secular rulers.

“His lifework was based on his conviction that the Church was founded by God and entrusted with the task of embracing all mankind in a single society in which divine will is the only law; that, in its capacity as a divine institution, it is supreme over all human structures, especially the secular state; and that the pope, in his role as head of the Church, is the vice-regent of God on earth, so that disobedience to him implies disobedience to God: or, in other words, a defection from Christianity. But any attempt to interpret this in terms of action would have bound the Church to annihilate not merely a single state, but all states.” ([Chisholm, 1911](#)).

Gregory apparently believed that it was not a good thing for people in general to read the Bible, as this might provoke thought and therefore lead to heresy. He also attempted to impose celibacy, and in 1074 he deposed all married priests. His efforts led to the separation of large numbers of husbands and wives, and the latter often had to turn to prostitution to support themselves; some of the abandoned women committed suicide. However, Gregory had a female adherent in the person of the Countess Mathilda who often accompanied him; it was rumored that he had a longstanding affair with her, and therefore his strictures against marriage were seen as being hypocritical. In 1076 a group of Italian bishops, led by the Bishop of Pavia, excommunicated the pope for separating husbands and wives and consequentially favoring licentiousness in the clergy over honorable marriage. The Council of Brixen in 1080 condemned Gregory for “sowing divorce among legitimate spouses.” He ultimately had a confrontation with the Holy Roman Emperor, Henry IV, and though a series of circumstances was able to make Henry do penance to him; Henry stood for three days in the snow dressed only in a hair shirt before Gregory would receive him (Gregory was used to this sort of thing, as he practiced self-flagellation). Henry was resentful at this shabby treatment and later attacked Rome. Gregory managed to cobble together a defense using Norman troops, but once the battle with Henry was over, the Normans sacked Rome. Gregory was blamed for this and forced to flee; he died in exile.

- Urban II (Odo of Châtillon, 1088-1099) was the pope who was instrumental in promoting and organizing the first crusade. Urban traveled across Europe preaching the crusade and drew a tremendous response. The Muslims had set the pattern for holy war in the years after the death of Mohammed in 632, by conquering a number of countries and then moving into Eastern Europe. The Moors (Spanish Muslims) had overrun Spain and attempted an invasion of France in 732 which was repulsed by Charles Martel at the Battle of Tours, but they continued to threaten Europe, conquering parts of Hungary and Bulgaria and threatening Constantinople, the seat of the Roman empire, which they finally conquered many years later in 1453. The Saracens (Muslims from North Africa) overran Sicily in the 820’s and held it for many years. They also took and held parts of southern Italy and in 846 they attacked Rome, desecrating the

graves of St. Peter and St. Paul, and stripping them of all of their riches. Therefore the Muslims were passionately hated and despised, and the call of Urban II to liberate Jerusalem from the infidel stirred passions all over Europe. There had also been much movement of peoples over the preceding decades, and wars and skirmishes had become endemic as local lords in many places fought each other for dominance. Therefore, the church in Burgundy and Aquitaine had begun movements known as the Peace of God and the Truce of God in an attempt to halt and moderate the violence of the aristocracy. Urban saw the crusade as a way of creating a long-standing peace and truce by redirecting these military energies against the real enemy, and he proclaimed indulgences (pardon from divine punishment) on all who went to fight from a pure heart. Urban's slogan for the crusade was *Deus vult*, ("God wills it"). He also put the property and families of the crusaders under the protection of the church and exempted them from jurisdiction of the secular courts.

Despite the almost universal appeal and enthusiasm for this venture, the first crusade often teetered on the brink of disaster, because there was no central leader to make decisions and enforce discipline. Each crusading group was led by its own lord, but they frequently quarreled and at times almost came to blows. The fact that they were able to fight their way through Turkey and Syria and succeeded in taking Jerusalem in 1099 was almost a miracle. Urban's actions resulted in many crimes against humanity and the death of thousands because of how the leaders and the armies of the first crusade treated the territories through which they traveled on their way to the Levant.

The curia or papal court of officials was also founded in Urban's day, as the burden of legal cases multiplied because of the *Dictatus Papae* of Gregory VII. It had, of course, existed in various forms under previous administrations, but Urban organized and expanded it. The curia was essentially a bureaucracy which grew and took on a life of its own, as bureaucracies are wont to do. It was said that the only saints venerated at Rome were Albinus and Rufus, silver and gold; "Blessed are the wealthy, for theirs is the court of Rome." The issue of clerical celibacy was more-or-less also settled in Urban's time. At the Council of Piacenza in 1095, clerics passed a resolution finally outlawing the marriage of priests, and it is said that some of the wives were sold into slavery. Urban then introduced the *cullagium* which was a sex tax, and allowed a priest to keep a concubine if he paid the requisite annual fee. The next several popes were all hard liners against any form of sexual activity.

- Paschal II (Ranierius, 1099-1118) was a former monk intent on reforming the church. In 1111 he made a very unusual offer to Henry V, the emperor at the time. If the state would renounce its claim to appointing bishops, and permit free elections, the church would renounce all of its regalia – land, property, and income derived from the state, and would then live on voluntary tithes and offerings (along the lines of how churches in America exist now). However, when these terms were read, the princes and bishops rioted, and refused to even consider the deal. Paschal was thrown in jail until he gave up his proposal.
- Honorius II (Lamberto Scannabecchi, 1124-1130) was also a would-be reformed who sought to increase Papal influence and attempted to impose celibacy on the church in England. He sent Cardinal John of Crema as his papal legate to denounce that practice of concubinage among the priests. The Cardinal duly assembled a council in London, and against much opposition, tried to pass a canon threatening the demotion of all clergy in England who would not give up their wives or concubines. Then he celebrated a mass and the assembly dispersed. But the

English clergy followed him, and after a suitable period burst into the place where he was staying, only to find the Cardinal *nudatus usque ad unguem* – naked to his fingernails, in the company of a courtesan in a similar state of dishabille. After raising a toast to the Cardinal, they left him to continue his ministrations. The Cardinal was then sent back to Rome with a letter to tell the Pope to put his own house in order.

- Anacletus II (Pietro Pierleoni, 1130-1138). Anacletus was appointed at the same time as Innocent II and they struggled for power. Anacletus had been a cardinal in the vein of John of Crema and had several children by his own sister. He took his own concubine with him whenever he traveled as a papal legate.
- Innocent II (Gregorio Papareschi, 1130-1143). Innocent got himself elected pope after the death of Honorius II but spent his first eight years in a struggle for power. He finally overthrew Anacletus II through the influence of the Holy Roman Emperor and Bernard of Clairvaux; he repaid the favor to Bernard by designating the Knights Templar as a papal order.
- Eugenius III (Bernardo Pignatelli, 1145-1153) was the ex-disciple of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who also died in 1153. It was said of Eugenius that he was “a simple character, gentle and retiring – not at all, men thought, the material of which Popes are made.” Many claimed that Bernard was the actual pope, and that Eugenius was merely his lackey, because the former made virtually all of the decisions. Bernard had also been heavily involved in promoting the election of Innocent II in 1130. Bernard had joined the Cistercian monastic order in 1112 at the age of twenty-two, and only three years later at age twenty-five he was appointed the abbot of a new Cistercian monastery in Clairvaux due to the influence of his family. But his energies and contacts led him far beyond the monastery. The Knights Templar had been founded in 1118 (some say earlier, 1111-1114) by Hugues de Payen, a nobleman from the court of Champagne, for the purpose of defending pilgrims visiting the Holy Land. They were strongly supported by Bernard, who in 1128 organized a church council at Troyes to honor them and gain papal support (which was given later by Innocent II, no doubt in partial repayment for Bernard’s support). Bernard himself drew up their charter and the instructions for members of their order based on Cistercian monastic regulations. Significantly, the order was exempted from taxation and all secular control and was answerable only to the pope. Troyes was a strategic center for the Templars until the order was wiped out, and was also the home of Chretien, the most significant author of grail romances and tales of chivalry. There are a number of interesting connections relating Bernard to the Templars, as follows:
 1. One of the original nine members of the Knights Templar was Andre de Montbard, who although younger in age, was Bernard’s uncle. After the death of Hugues de Payen, the first Grand Master of the Knights Templar, Andre de Montbard became the Grand Master, tightening the familial connections between the Knights, the Cistercians, and Bernard.
 2. The Count of Champagne (the liege lord of Hugues de Payen and Andre de Montbard) is said to have had a conclave concerning Jerusalem in 1104 in France. He then traveled to the Holy Land and remained there for several years. In 1114 the Count was said to have considered joining the Knights, but decided against it, and then donated the land on which the Cistercian monastery in Clairvaux was built and of which Bernard was made the abbot in the following year at the young age of twenty-five.

3. Prior to 1112, the finances of the Cistercian order were very limited, but shortly thereafter the order expanded tremendously, and by the time of Bernard's death, had over three hundred abbeys, many of which Bernard had personally established.
4. Bernard became an enthusiastic cheerleader for the Crusades and spent much of his time from 1128 onward trying to gain support for sending additional troops and material to Jerusalem for the support of the Crusaders and the Templars. It is therefore possible that some kind of deal was struck whereby financial resources from Jerusalem were sent to Clairvaux for the furtherance of the Cistercian order, and in return Bernard essentially became the European mouthpiece for the Templars and the Crusades. The Cistercians were a very popular monastic order (it was said of the Cistercians that "they had the only secure path to heaven"), and many people of wealth made large donations to them due to the efforts of Bernard.
5. The Templars venerated Bernard, took his "bridal mysticism" concepts (discussed below) and melded them into their version of chivalry.
6. When Pope Eugenius III proclaimed a Second Crusade in 1145 (almost certainly under the urging and direction of Bernard), the latter went all across Europe, preaching and urging people to get involved. He received a large response, but the Second Crusade suffered from the same serious problem that had almost caused the failure of the First Crusade, namely the lack of an overall leader who could command respect and enforce discipline among all of the other leaders and troops. The Second Crusade went in three directions at once and was an unmitigated fiasco. Bernard was blamed for and spent the last years of his life dealing with the criticism that was heaped upon him. His answer was the people of Europe had become too sinful and therefore were not sufficiently worthy of God's help.
7. Bernard was an interesting, complex, and great man who was at once an ascetic, and lived an austere life (at times), but also a man-of-the-world, who was heavily involved with politics and power. His writings reveal that he had a high sense of the holiness of God, and like many of his era, believed that sexual activity corrupted people. His veneration for the Virgin Mary bordered on obsession, and he wrote many sermons on the Song of Solomon, denying that they had any human or erotic content, and indicating how all believers (men and women) needed to become female (a receptive vessel like Mary) and to become the literal bride of Christ. Thus he developed his doctrine of bridal mysticism which has greatly troubled Catholicism since his time. For example, he instructed his male monks to "let their breasts swell with the pure milk of the gospel." See the articles "Religion and the Corruption of Eroticism" ([Sorensen, 2011b](#)), and "Commentary on the Song of Solomon" ([Sorensen, 2011a](#))

Bernard could also be very arrogant and spiteful, especially when his religious views were challenged. The philosopher and theologian Peter Abelard lived in the same era and conducted his famous romance with his young fourteen-year-old female student Heloise around 1118 (Celestine III, a later pope, was also Abelard's student at the time). Abelard became enamored with Heloise, and when she became pregnant, he disguised her as a nun and brought her to his family where they were secretly married. But the truth leaked out and Heloise's family had Abelard castrated. He became a monk, and she became a nun, but they continued to write long romantic letters to each other, and she burned with passion for

him. Their letters and Abelard's thoughts on theology and sexuality were later published and became very popular.

Abelard's teaching was opposed by St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who took exception to his application of logic to biblical interpretation. Abelard believed that the Bible should be approached using reason and logic (which is the approach that is more-or-less universal today), but Bernard believed that the authority of the Scriptures had to be accepted purely by faith, and that only religious authorities had the ability of reliably interpret them and expound on their meaning. Abelard invited Bernard to a debate, but the latter turned the occasion into an inquisition; Abelard was confined to a monastery and died soon afterward.

8. Despite all of these issues, Bernard was canonized as a saint soon after his death.
- Adrian IV (Nicholas Breakspear, 1154-1159) he was the first and only English pope, and ruled at a time of crisis, with the city of Rome largely against the Vatican, and with political instability all around. In an amazing act of audacity, Adrian granted all of Ireland to the English king Henry II. His justification was that, since the Donation of Constantine, countries within Christendom were the Pope's to distribute as he would, and he may have been influenced by the fact that the Irish church did not pay Peter's Pence which was a major source of the Papacy's income. England Monarchs paid the Roman Catholic Church an annual fee for the "legal" and perpetual enslavement of Ireland by Adrian's grant until the time of Henry VIII.
 - Alexander III (Roland, 1159-1181), Lucius III (Ubaldo Allucingoli, 1181-1185) and Celestine III (Giacinto Bobone, 1191-1198). Alexander, Lucius, and Celestine tried to relax the church policy on marriage and sexuality, but encountered opposition from those who felt that this would place a grave stain on the church. It was also during this time that the third crusade was launched.
 - Innocent III (Lotario dei Conti di Segni, 1198-1216) was certainly the most influential pope of the middle ages, and one of the most powerful popes of all time. He had a legal background and was witty, sharp, pious, as well as extremely arrogant. Like Gregory VII he had an exalted view of his own position. Papal authority and influence had declined, and he attempted to restore the power of the Vatican over both spiritual and secular realms – absolute rule over the Papal States and the submission of all secular rulers to him.

With his background in law he worked to organize and enunciate the beliefs of the church (e.g., the doctrine of Transubstantiation was first defined during this time). In the year of his death he declared the Magna Carta of England null and void (his support of King John led to civil war in England). Another major theme of his papacy was the suppression of heresy. The swings back and forth between asceticism and sexual repression on the one hand, and freedom and sexual license on the other had created groups who began to "theologize" their desires and to transform existing beliefs in new ways. The Cathars of southern France and Spain were Innocent's prime target. They were Gnostics who believed in dualism (equally powerful "good" and "bad" gods/forces), and along with Christians in general, they had become disgusted with the church and the worldliness of the Catholic clergy. The Cathars were also ascetics, giving up wealth, sex, and the consumption of meat because these were from "the world", and therefore evil according to Cathar doctrine. It was their devotion and spirituality

which made the group appealing to people, in contrast to many of the French clergy who were wealthy and debauched. Innocent first attempted to convert the Cathars, but when they ignored his appeals, he finally called for a crusade against them in 1209, which over the next 35 years virtually wiped them out.

Innocent also began to persecute and slaughter other Christian groups such as the Waldensians. They were former Catholics, and like the Cathars, they were disgusted with the papacy and took the Bible as their sole authority. This was anathema to Innocent who like other popes prohibited Bible reading by the laity. So they were hunted down and killed by Papal forces. This persecution continued for three hundred years and later became known as the Inquisition which was carried out by Jesuits. The Waldensian crusade was a precursor to the Protestant revolution and reformation.

“There was no village of the Vaudois valleys but had its martyrs. The Waldensians were burned; they were cast into damp and horrid dungeons; they were smothered in crowds in mountain caverns, mothers and babes, and old men and women together; they were sent out into exile in the winter night, unclothed and unfed, to climb the snowy mountains; they were hurled over the rocks; their houses and lands were taken from them; their children were stolen to be indoctrinated with the religion which they abhorred. Rapacious individuals were sent among them to strip them of their property, to persecute and exterminate them. Thousands of heretics or Waldensians, old men, women and children, were hung, quartered, broken upon the wheel, or burned alive and their property confiscated for the benefit of the king, and Holy See.” ([Thompson, 1876](#))

Innocent also called for a fourth crusade which like his persecution of heretics, resulted in much bloodshed and suffering. Jerusalem had been retaken by the Muslim forces of Saladin in 1187. But instead of fighting Muslims, the armies of the fourth crusade sacked Constantinople, the eastern capital of the Roman Empire, causing a long-standing hatred and suspicion between east and west, and ultimately resulting in the 1453 Muslim conquest of Constantinople. Innocent was disappointed but made no move to stop the crusaders, thinking erroneously that the fall of Constantinople would also result in the Eastern Church submitting to his rule. He was also a virulent anti-Semite and encouraged the crusaders to attack and despoil Jews. It was under his leadership that anti-Semitism became a common practice in many parts of Europe, and he was responsible for the deaths of over one million people. Innocent’s papal name was therefore possibly the ultimate oxymoron.

- Gregory IX (Ugolino di Conti, 1227-1241) established the Papal inquisition in 1233 to formalize the persecution of heretics, and appointed a number of Papal Inquisitors, mostly Dominicans and Franciscans, for the various regions of France, Italy and parts of Germany. In 1234 he invested the doctrine of *perpetua servitus iudaeorum* (the perpetual servitude of the Jews) with the force of canonical law. According to this, Jews would have to remain in a condition of political servitude until Judgment Day, and he ordered that all copies of the Jewish Talmud be confiscated and burned. The doctrine then found its way into the doctrine of *servitus camerae imperialis*, or servitude immediately subject to the Emperor’s authority, promulgated by Frederick II. In 1234, Gregory issued a papal bull calling for a new crusade to the Holy Land, leading to the Crusade of 1239. He also endorsed the Northern Crusades and attempts to bring Orthodox Slavic peoples in Eastern Europe under Papal authority.

It was said of Gregory, “he was the man of perdition whom they call Antichrist, and who in his extravagant boasting says, ‘I am God, I cannot err.’”

- John XXI (Peter Juliani, 1276-1277), Nicolas III (Giovanni Gaetano Orsini, 1277-1280), Martin IV (Simon de Brion, 1281-1285). These popes were, in some ways, a return to the tenth century. John XXI was criticized for “moral instability”, Nicolas was criticized for nepotism in the appointment of cardinals, and of Martin IV it is said that he took to his embrace his predecessor’s concubine.

After John’s death (he was killed when his apartment collapsed), it was rumored that he had actually been a necromancer. In Dante’s *Inferno*, simoniacs (those who have bought and sold church offices for money) are placed head-first in holes, flames burning on the soles of their feet. Nicholas was the chief sinner in these pits, which is demonstrated by the height of the flames on his feet. At first, he mistakes Dante for Pope Boniface VIII. When the confusion is cleared up, Nicholas informs Dante that he foresees the damnation not only of Boniface VIII, but also Clement V, an even more corrupt pope.

From this time also comes a story of the Bishop of Liege who was deposed in 1274. He supposedly had seventy concubines, some of whom were nuns, and sixty-five illegitimate children. He had boasted in a public banquet that in twenty-two months he had fathered fourteen children. St. Bonaventure, a close friend of Innocent V, compared Rome to the harlot of the Apocalypse, drunk with the wine of her whoredom. “In Rome,” said Bonaventure, “there is nothing but lust and simony, even in the highest ranks of the church. Rome corrupts the prelates, the prelates corrupt the clergy, and the clergy corrupt the people.”

The Papacy had supported the French monarchy for centuries, but this backfired in Martin’s time. He supported Charles of Anjou who planned to take Sicily and then invade Byzantium in the aftermath of the fourth crusade. But due to the diplomatic efforts of emperor Michael Paleologus, Sicily rose against Charles in a massacre known as the “Sicilian Vespers”, and stinging defeat for Charles, and a huge embarrassment for the Vatican. Martin excommunicated the new ruler of Sicily and ordered a crusade, but all in vain.

- Celestine V (Pietro Angelerio, 1294) and Boniface VIII (Benedetto Caetani, 1294-1303). Celestine V was a true holy man who desired to reform the church, but he ran into opposition from virtually everyone and resigned after five months in office. He was replaced by Boniface VIII who imprisoned Celestine, and quickly returned to the old ways. Boniface was often involved in politics which led to a number of bitter quarrels with leaders in France, Sicily, and Italy. He was also a bisexual who kept a mother and her daughter as his mistresses, and went after young boys as well, and claimed that sex with anyone is “no more of a sin than rubbing your hands together.” Boniface was also reported to have said that the Eucharist was “just flour and water,” and some said that he was an atheist. He also promoted his relatives and offered indulgences to anyone who would fight against the Colonnas, the family of his arch-rivals. Eventually he went mad and committed suicide, and his body was later dug up and burned as a heretic. Boniface declared that 1300 was the “year of jubilee” and thousands of pilgrims descended on Rome and enriched the papal coffers. He proposed to be an atheist but in 1302 he issued the “Unum Sanctum” officially declaring the Roman Catholic Church as the only true Church, outside of which no one can be saved.

The Catholic encyclopedia states, “Scarcely any possible crime was omitted - heresy, gross and unnatural immorality, idolatry, magic, simony ... his whole pontificate was one record of evil.” Dante wrote his book *The Divine Comedy* about the jubilee celebration and compared the traffic arrangements in Hell to the arrangements made for the movement of pilgrims in Rome. He also assigned Boniface to the lowest circle of hell in his book, *Inferno*, and described the Vatican as a “sewer of corruption.”

- Clement V (Raymond Bertrand de Got, 1305-1314), Clement VI (1342-1352). During most of the entire fourteenth century, the papacy moved to Avignon, France because of the power and influence of the French court. This was later known as the “Babylonian Captivity” and was a disaster for the church as well as for the Papal States in Italy, as it exposed and made public many anti-papal feelings. Most of the popes during this era were totally worldly, with little or no regard for the true mission of the church.

Clement V was a great entertainer, spending thousands on grand balls and dinners. In order to raise cash he expanded the “incest indulgence,” allowing closer relatives to marry if they paid a fee. He also created an indulgence for divorce. But like other popes he persecuted those he considered to be heretics, such as the Dulcians in Lombardy. In 1308, he ordered the preaching of a crusade to be launched against the Mamluks in the Holy Land. The Hospitallers responded and set off in early 1310, but instead of sailing for the Holy Land, they instead conquered the city of Rhodes from the Byzantines, similar to what happened with the fourth crusade of 1204.

However, Clement was most famous for the inquisition of the Knights Templar, which was begun in 1307, and concluded with the burning at the stake of Jacques de Molay, the Templar Grand Master in 1314. But Clement was merely a pawn in the hands of the French king Philip IV (“the fair”), who instigated this and forced Clement to cooperate (one of Clement’s first acts as pope was to withdraw a bull of Boniface VIII that asserted papal supremacy over secular rulers). The French crown was deeply in debt to the Templars and sought to repudiate the debt by charging them with usury, credit inflation, fraud, heresy, sodomy, immorality, and other abuses. On Friday, 13 October 1307, hundreds of the Knights Templar were arrested in France, and as with other inquisitions, captured Knights were tortured and forced to confess to a wide range of fantastic horrors (this date was the origin of superstitions about “Friday the 13th”). It was said that Jacques de Molay cursed Clement and King Phillip from the flames before burning to death; both the pope and the king died later the same year. According to one account, while Clement’s body was lying in state, a thunderstorm arose during the night and lightning struck the church where his body lay, setting it on fire. The fire was so intense that by the time it was extinguished, the Pope’s body was all but destroyed.

- John XXII (Jacques Duèze, 1316-1334) lived a princely life in Avignon like his predecessor Clement V and was deeply involved in foreign politics as well as combatting heresy (Meister Eckhart was condemned and died during this period). But John was distrusted due to his close ties to the French crown. He was also at the center of a controversy of the poverty of the Franciscans who contended that Christ and his apostles owned nothing, but his cardinals condemned the idea on the grounds that it would interfere with the Church’s right to have possessions.
- Benedict XII (Jacques Fournier, 1334-1342) was an ex-inquisitor of the Cathar heresy, involved in many incidents of torture and sexual inquest. He was accused of being “a Nero, a death to

the laity, a viper to the clergy, a liar, and a drunkard.” Petrarch, the Renaissance poet described him as an unfit and drunken helmsman of the church. Petrarch supposedly had a beautiful sister who the pope fancied, and Benedict offered Petrarch the office of cardinal for her. The poet refused, but Benedict bought her from another brother. The popes, in Petrarch’s description, therefore “abhorred lawful wives, but loved unlawful whores.” Others describe Benedict as weak and dissolute, scorned by his licentious court. The poet Alvaro Pelago wrote, “Wolves have become the masters of the church.” Petrarch described the papacy at Avignon as “the shame of mankind, a sink of vice, a sewer where is gathered all of the filth of the world. There God is held in contempt, money alone is worshiped, and the laws of God and man are trampled underfoot. Everything that breathes is a lie: the air, the earth, the houses, and especially the bedrooms.” Avignon was, in Petrarch’s words, “The fortress of anguish, the dwelling place of wrath, the school of error, the temple of heresy, once Rome, now the false and guilt-ridden Babylon, the forge of lies, the horrible prison, and the hall of dung.”

- Clement VI (Pierre Roger, 1342-1352) continued the prior policies and was reported to have said, “Before me, no one had any idea how to be pope.” He enjoyed the wealth and his perquisites of office and got along well with the secular powers around him. He is also reported to have said, “If the King of England wants his ass made a bishop, he only has to ask.” Clement lived in luxury and was said to have bought forty different type of gold cloth from Syria. He also had many women to attend him, and prostitutes were so plentiful that it is said that Clement began taxing them. A deed of sale has been discovered showing the papal offices buying a brothel, and notes that the purchase was made, “in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ.” Petrarch describes Clement as, “An ecclesiastical Dionysus,” and that Avignon was “swept along in a flood of the most obscene pleasure, and incredible storm of debauch, the most horrid and unprecedented shipwreck of chastity.”

In 1348 the Black Death struck Avignon, and three-quarters of the population died, over sixty-two thousand in a period of three months. Clement isolated himself and survived the plague, but despite his granting remission of sins to all who died of the plague, people blamed it on him and on the sins of the papacy. When he died his nepotism was reflected in the 44 statues of relatives which surrounded his sarcophagus, and people celebrated his death.

A later pope Gregory XI returned to Rome in 1377, but power struggles over the Papacy continued with popes in both Rome and Avignon as well as a third pope who had been chosen to replace the others who then refused to step down. All three popes excommunicated each other, making the problems in the church painfully visible to all. After the debacle of the three popes at the end of the Avignon era, the Council of Constance had finally settled the situation in 1417. They deposed or secured the resignation of all three popes, and elevated Martin V in Rome as the surviving pontiff. From that point on the unilateral power of the pope and his being above the reach of human judgment was curtailed, and the power of the popes over secular rulers was much more limited. In 1440 the scholar Lorenzo Valla proved that the document the *Donation of Constantine* which many popes had used as the foundation of their secular power was not written in the fourth century, but rather was an eighth century forgery. Meanwhile, when the popes returned to Rome after a century in Avignon, they found the papal buildings and facilities in shambles and in great need of reconstruction.

- Nicolas V (Tommaso Parentucelli, 1447-1455). Nicolas put all of his energies into encouraging art and rebuilding Rome and encouraged Renaissance artists. He called his new buildings

“sermons in stone.” In 1450 he celebrated another jubilee, again bringing many pilgrims to Rome and money into the papal coffers. Despite problems such as the outbreak of plague which lined the routes into Rome with corpses, the jubilee was a huge success.

It was during this time that Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks (1453) and the Hundred Years War ended the same year. Nicholas responded by calling a crusade against the Ottomans, but it never materialized. He also gave the Portuguese the rights to the western coast of Africa to acquire and trade slaves with African chieftains and Muslim slave traders.

- Pius II (Enea Silvio Bartolomeo Piccolomini, 1456-1464). Before he became pope, he was a writer of erotic and pornographic plays and stories, such as his play *Chrysis* and his novel *Lucretia and Euryalus*. It was said that he fathered twelve illegitimate children. He also tried to restore marriage to the clergy, because at the time many local people would not accept a curate without a concubine, as they were concerned about having their wives debauched. But the effort to eliminate celibacy was never fully implemented.
- Paul II (Pietro Barbo, 1464-1471) boasted that if elected pope he would buy each cardinal a villa to escape the summer heat and so was easily elected. He also acquired extravagant wealth for himself – he had a papal tiara made for his own use studded with “diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, topaz, large pearls, and every kind of precious gem”, and built the Palazzo San Marco as his personal residence, amassing a great collection of art and antiquities. But he was very suspicious – audiences with him were only granted at night, and even good friends were forced to wait several weeks to see him. After his death when his possessions were inspected cardinals found 54 silver shells filled with pearls, to a value of 300,000 ducats, jewels and gold intended for refashioning worth another 300,000 ducats, a magnificent diamond worth 7,000 ducats, and a collection of 800 gemstones. He was said to wear rouge and was reputed to be homosexual.
- Sixtus IV (Francesco della Rovere, 1471-1484) built many structures in Rome and was the pope who built the Sistine Chapel (named for him) and decorated it with paintings demonstrating the power of the papacy which ironically was on the decline. In order to increase his personal security he made a number of his relatives cardinals and sold church offices to raise money. Along with this came a revival of interest in everything from ancient Greece and Rome, and subtle theological shifts were made to show that Christianity was not the enemy of the Greek, Roman and even ancient Egyptian gods, but rather the fulfillment of them. Alexander VI later had a painting commissioned showing the mysteries of Osiris as a type of the saving work of Christ.

Sixtus was also heavily involved in political machinations regarding control of the Papal States, starting wars against Florence, Ferrara, and Venice, and then continually shifted allegiances between them. He planned the murder of Lorenzo and Giuliano de’Medici during High Mass at the cathedral in Florence, which did not succeed, but the result was a bloody war between Florence and Rome. Sixtus was also very crass in regard to sexuality. He built a brothel in Rome and taxed prostitutes, increased the “mistress” tax on priests who kept them, and it is said that he was bisexual and enjoyed sodomy. Along with Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain he founded the Spanish Inquisition, and in 1478 he approved Tomas de Torquemada to be the grand inquisitor of Spain which resulted in the torture and death of many innocent victims. The Portuguese had been given rights to engage in slave trading on the western coast

of Africa, and the rights were confirmed by Sixtus.

It was said of him, “that he embodied the utmost concentration of human wickedness.” Sixtus was even hated in Rome – when he died the papal apartments were ransacked and the chaplain had to borrow a cassock to cover the pope’s corpse. He was the uncle of the later pope Julius II, another militant homosexual.

- Innocent VIII (Giovanni Battista Cybo, 1484-1492) continued where Sixtus left off. His election was a completely political event – the papal conclave of 1484 was rife with factions and gangs rioted in the streets. He made peace with Florence using his illegitimate children to create alliances (this idea was expanded during the reign of Alexander VI), and then began hostilities with Naples. He had several concubines, and it was said of him – “Eight wicked boys born, and just as many girls, so this man could be entitled to be called Father of Rome.” It was also said of him that, “His Holiness rises from the bed of harlots to bolt and unbolt the gates of purgatory and heaven.” Franceschetto, one of his sons, was said to roam the streets at night breaking into people’s houses and raping any woman that took his fancy. Innocent also kept slaves – King Ferdinand of Aragon gave him 100 Moors who were shared with favored cardinals.

Innocent was also very concerned about heresy – he urged a crusade against a Christian sect known as the Waldensians in Germany and offered indulgences as a reward for killing them. He also wrote the preface for the book *Malleus Maleficarum – the Witches’ Hammer*, a handbook for searching out and punishing witches, and he gave the authors, two Dominican monks, authority to function as inquisitors. To benefit his patron Lorenzo de’Medici, Innocent made Lorenzo’s fourteen-year-old son a cardinal (he would eventually become Pope Leo X), but his poor handling of international relations alienated other realms and left the reduced Papal states in anarchy by the end of his life. Constantly confronted with a depleted treasury, he resorted to the common Papal expedient of creating new offices and selling them to the highest bidders. On his deathbed in the summer of 1492 he ironically begged the cardinals to choose a successor who would be an improvement on himself. Instead they chose the man who was one of the worst popes in history.

- Alexander VI (Rodrigo de Borja, 1492-1503) became Pope in August of 1492, a week after Columbus set sail (he was a Spaniard and immediately confirmed the rights of the Spanish crown in the New World). He was a clever and vindictive man, and it was said that he committed his first murder at the age of twelve. His maternal uncle, Alonso de Borja, was pope Calixtus III, and he was made a cardinal along with his cousin Luis de Milà y de Borja. Rodrigo then used his position to gain control of a large number of benefices, bishoprics and abbeys, which generated a large income.

Contemporary accounts suggest that Rodrigo was “handsome, with a very cheerful countenance and genial bearing. He was gifted with the quality of being a smooth talker and of choice eloquence. Beautiful women were attracted to him and excited by him in quite a remarkable way, more strongly than how iron is drawn to a magnet.” He was also an intelligent man with an appreciation for the arts and sciences and an immense amount of respect for the Church. He was capable and cautious, a gifted speaker, fluent in conversation, and considered a “political priest” by some. Nevertheless, as a young man and cardinal he seemed to have a penchant for scandal and had numerous mistresses and illegitimate children

(one of these became Pope Innocent X), but due to the lax times in which he lived it did not affect his later rise to the papacy. For example, in 1460 where he was the honored guest at a christening party, men were excluded and only women were allowed to attend. In 1461 he met the Roman beauty Vannozza Catanei after sleeping with both her mother and sister, and he maintained a life-long relationship with Vannoazza, who bore him Cesare, Juan, Lucrezia, and Jofre. To cover up their relationship he had her installed in Venice and arranged for another man to “marry” her. Rodrigo’s Italianized name “Borgia” became a byword for libertinism and nepotism.

When Innocent VIII died Borja “bought” the papacy, using much of the property and benefices that he had acquired earlier to buy off the cardinals, who were under no illusion as to what they had done. Cardinal Giovanni de’Medici, the future Leo X, said to another cardinal, “We are now in the clutches of perhaps the most savage wolf the world has ever seen. Either we flee or he will, no doubt, devour us.” When Savonarola, a would-be reformer of the church, criticized Alexander, the pope had him burned at the stake.

Like previous popes, Alexander kept mistresses and concubines and it was said that there were sometimes nude dancing girls in the Vatican during and after Mass. After Vannozza became older, Alexander took another mistress, Giulia Farnese, and made her brother Alessandro a cardinal (he was nicknamed “Cardinal Petticoat,” and later went on to become Pope Paul III). Alexander had Giulia immortalized in a painting where she posed as a bare-breasted Madonna, and she became known as the “Bride of Christ,” and the “Pope’s Whore.” He also appointed his son, Cesare Borgia, as a cardinal. Cesare was also his military enforcer, maintaining control and suppressing rebellion in the Papal States. But Alexander was a clever diplomat and avoided armed conflict unless he felt it was absolutely necessary. His son Cesare was a clever, ruthless, and violent man, and there are many illustrative stories about him and his father. Here are several examples:

1. Alexander had originally groomed Cesare for a career in the church, and his brother Juan as a military leader. But Cesare later murdered Juan in order to take the position for himself. It was said that he would stand on the balcony of the Vatican and after a group of criminals were forced into a pen underneath his window, he would shoot them for fun with his sister Lucrezia at his side. It is thought that Niccolo Machiavelli wrote *The Prince*, his famous treatise on power politics, about Cesare Borgia.
2. Lucrezia, the pope’s daughter by Vannozza, was reputedly the femme fatale of the Renaissance, and on several occasions the pope used her to secure political alliances. After her first marriage, the pope decided that the alliance that had been engendered with her husband was unnecessary. So he and Cesare arranged for a divorce so that they could marry Lucrezia to someone else to secure another coalition. The divorce was authorized by the pope on the grounds that she was still a virgin, but at the time she was six months pregnant. She bore a son that was first claimed to be that of a lover, then Cesare’s, and later that of the pope himself (either Juan or Cesare had the supposed lover murdered just in case). Lucrezia went on to be the wife and consort of a third man, after her second husband was strangled to death by Cesare.
3. Cesare and his father at one point were discussing how they should reward a mercenary leader of one of their armies who had helped them suppress a rebellion in a particular city.

They finally decided to assassinate the man and name the city after him. Dead bodies of men who opposed them or had offended Alexander or Cesare would periodically be found floating in the Tiber River. The historian Thomas Tomasi wrote, "It would be impossible to enumerate all of the murders, the rapes and the incests, which were every day committed at the court of the pope. Scarcely the life of man could be long enough to register the names of all of the victims murdered, poisoned, or thrown alive into the Tiber." Machiavelli wrote, "The Italians owe a great debt to the Roman church and its clergy. Through their example we have lost all true religion and have become complete unbelievers. Taken as a rule, the nearer the nation dwells to the Roman Curia, the less religion it has."

4. There is an interesting fictional story in *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexander Dumas in which the pope and Cesare arranged for two of the wealthiest men in Italy to become cardinals and invite them to the Vatican for dinner. Then they poisoned the new cardinals and attempted to seize their entire estates. This may be based on the truth, as Alexander made a law that the estates of cardinals reverted to the papacy after death, and it was reported that would poison cardinals after they had purchased their offices so that he could quickly sell the offices again.
 5. Cesare was said to be a sexual fiend, having many women and contracting syphilis in the process.
 6. Pope Alexander VI died in 1503 at the age of 72. It was said that he was in good health, but died soon after eating dinner, and it is likely that he accidentally drank wine from the wrong glass which had been poisoned. His body swelled up after death, turned black, and quickly began to putrefy and to ooze foul smelling liquids. The body swelled up so large that it would not fit into a coffin, and instead it was rolled up in a carpet. After Alexander's death Cesare was quickly thrown out of power and died soon afterward.
- Julius II (Giuliano della Rovere, 1503-1513) was completely concerned with power, prestige and territory, taking his papal name in emulation of Julius Caesar. His uncle was pope Sixtus IV and della Rovere was an influential and power-hungry cardinal, but he was defeated in the papal election of 1492 by the money and the alliances made by the Borgias. Della Rovere tried to have Alexander VI assassinated, and when that was unsuccessful, he fled from Rome and made alliances with the pope's enemies. Alexander wanted to find and eliminate della Rovere, and a number of Cesare Borgia's military and political machinations were directly related to suppressing and dealing with him. So after the death of Alexander when della Rovere became pope as Julius II, he was mainly concerned with revenge as well as strengthening his grip on power.

He was known as the "Warrior Pope" and "Il Terribile" because of his extreme militancy, his volcanic spirit, and his homosexuality. It was said that he carried a stick with him to hit anyone who annoyed him. He spent most of his life in armor leading the papal armies in fighting, but he was also a patron of the arts, and hired Michelangelo to paint the Sistine chapel during his tenure. When Michelangelo made a sculpture of him, Julius said, "What is that under my arm?" "A book, Holiness," replied Michelangelo. "What do I know about books? Make it a sword instead!" yelled Julius. Erasmus wrote a satirical sketch about him, in which he appears after death before the gates of heaven and asks St. Peter for admittance. Peter didn't recognize him, so finally Julius held up his papal keys. Peter examined them, shook his head, and said,

“Sorry, these don’t fit anywhere in this kingdom.” Julius then planned to organize a crusade to invade heaven.

Martin Luther visited Rome in 1510 and saw for himself the greed and utter corruption of the papacy. His complete disgust with the Vatican, along with the sale of indulgences by papal representatives in Germany, were the main reasons for his criticism and ultimate break with the Catholic Church. He, along with other religious leaders began the movement that was later known as the Protestant Reformation.

The Protestant Reformation was a return to Biblical principles of fairness and justice, and to the avoidance of the one-man rule that characterized the Papacy. However, Martin Luther and some protestant leaders followed the anti-Semitic positions of the Vatican, which led to pogroms against Jews in Europe, and ultimately to the holocaust in World War II.

- Leo X (Giovanni di Lorenzo de’Medici, 1513-1521) had been a cardinal as a child, and although he did not exhibit as many of the excesses of his immediate predecessors, he was known as the “gay pope.” When he was elected it was said that he was suffering from chronic ulcers on his posterior. He loved parties and gave a number of masked balls at which it was said that young boys would emerge from puddings.

Leo financed a ruinous war in the Papal States in order to support the political ambitions of his brother. Even though the war was successful, it increased brigandage and anarchy in the Papal States and wrecked the papal finances. Leo also spent money freely on art and building projects. To remain financially solvent, the Pope sometimes resorted to desperate measures, pawning the Papal jewels, and selling palace furniture, tableware, and even statues of the apostles. He borrowed such immense sums from bankers that upon his death, many were ruined. Additionally, Leo sold cardinals’ hats and memberships to a fraternal order he invented in 1520, the “Papal Knights of St. Peter and St. Paul”, as well as indulgences in return for donations.

A few previous popes had tried to eliminate nefarious fund-raising schemes, but now these were challenged by Martin Luther's 95 Theses. Leo refused of course to acknowledge the legitimacy of the demands of what would become the Protestant Reformation, and his Papal Bull of 1520, *Exsurge Domine*, condemned Martin Luther's criticisms and excommunicated him. But Leo failed to understand the depth and seriousness of the rising anti-Papal sentiment, and his actions galvanized the Reformation. For example, the pope had repeatedly used rich Scandinavian benefices to reward members of the Roman curia, and in 1516 he sent a papal nuncio to Denmark to collect Peter’s pence funds. This led to the Reformation in Denmark-Norway and Holstein; King Christian II expelled the nuncio, eliminated contact with Rome, and summoned Lutheran theologians to Copenhagen.

Despite the above issues, Leo had a winsome personality, and he was famous for remarking, “God has given us the papacy, let us enjoy it.” David Hume said of him that “he was too intelligent to believe in Catholic doctrine and was one of the most illustrious princes that ever sat on the papal throne. Humane, beneficent, generous, affable; the patron of every art, and friend of every virtue.”

- Adrian VI (Adriaan Florensz Boeyens, 1522-1523) was a reformer bent on cleaning up the Vatican. He dismissed many members of the Curia and caused astonishment by celebrating Mass every day. He also tried to rebuke Luther and exert his authority over the Reformation but at this point it was too late for dialog, and the die had already been cast.
- Clement VII (Giulio di Giuliano de' Medici, 1523-1534) came to the papal throne at one of the most tumultuous times in history. Even though he had had high positions as chief advisor to the two prior popes, the church was almost bankrupt, the Protestant Reformation was spreading, and foreign armies were poised to invade Italy. In an analysis of Clement's papacy, historian E.R. Chamberlin writes, "In all but his personal attributes, Clement VII was a protagonist in a Greek tragedy, the victim called upon to endure the results of actions committed long before. Each temporal claim of his predecessors had entangled the Papacy just a little more in the lethal game of politics, even while each moral debasement divorced it just a little more from the vast body of Christians from whom ultimately it drew its strength."
- Paul III (Alessandro Farnese, 1534-1549) was known as Cardinal "Petticoat" because he had sold his sister to Alexander VI. It was also said that he poisoned his mother and niece to gain the entire family inheritance, and he had several affairs which included incest in his own family. However, the primary aim of his papacy was to advance the Farnese family. The request of Henry VIII, King of England, for an annulment of his marriage had been received, but had been denied, and Henry had responded by going ahead with his own plans. Paul excommunicated Henry, but the latter, after researching the chastity of the clergy in England and finding many examples of priests living with wives, concubines and whores, excommunicated Paul and made the entire church of England Protestant. Paul then went after Lutheran Protestant heretics in Germany and had many of them tortured and killed.
- Julius III (Giovanni Maria Ciocchi del Monte, 1550-1555) was a strange man who appointed his teenage monkey keeper as a cardinal and treated him as a son. He also loved onions which he had delivered to the Vatican by the cartload. He returned to the tradition of devotion to personal pleasure.
- Paul IV (Gian Pietro Carafa, 1555-1559) was an ex-inquisitor originally appointed by Paul III. He was very much against heresy in all forms and started a document called the *Index of Forbidden Books* which listed all books that were banned and could not be published or read. These of course included all of the Protestant works, but ironically it also included a document written by Paul IV himself during the reign of the prior pope. This document delineated the sexual behaviors and practices of the bishops and the Curia in Rome and had been leaked to the Protestants. The index later included the works of Machiavelli and Dante. Paul was suspicious of everyone and was a tyrant during his pontificate.

Prior to this time few people were literate and books had to be copied by hand – most of the copyists worked for either for the Church or in a monastic order.² But with the invention of the printing press it got increasingly hard for the church to control what could be published and disseminated. Also the reformation opened large areas of Europe that were no longer under the sway of Catholicism, and the seamy underbelly of the papacy began to be revealed; the Roman Church became known as "the whore of Babylon." The Protestant opposition and

² In regard to the impact of monastic copyists, see: Cahill, T. (1995). *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, Doubleday

condemnation of the Catholics led to a reform movement in the Catholic Church called the Counter-Reformation, which was an attempt to redress and atone for its sins, but also to attack and destroy Protestants. Ironically, one of the leaders of the Counter-Reformation was Francis Borgia, the great-grandson of Pope Alexander VI.

Paul IV was also deeply anti-Semitic. In 1555 he issued one of the most infamous papal bulls in Church history (*Cum nimis absurdum*) which ordered the creation of a Jewish ghetto in Rome, walled off from the rest of the city. Jews were forced to sell all their houses and landed property, confine themselves to trading in second-hand clothing and rags, avoid all contact with Christians, and live in the ghetto. A single gate, locked every day at sundown, was the only means of reaching the rest of the city. The Jews themselves were forced to pay all design and construction costs related to the project and suffered in many other ways.

At the end of Paul's life there were riots in Rome. His statue, erected a few months before, had a yellow hat placed on it, similar to the yellow hat that he had forced Jews to wear in public, and after a mock trial, the statue was decapitated and thrown into the Tiber. Later popes continued to persecute Jews.

- Pius IV (Giovanni Angelo Medici, 1559-1565) was petitioned very strongly by the Council of Trent in 1560 to allow clerical marriage in the hope of curbing sexual misdeeds in the clergy. But Pius responded by saying that "celibacy or virginity is better than marriage, and celibates are in a state of perfection. Anyone who says otherwise is a heretic."
- Pius V (Antonio Ghislieri, 1566-1572) was a reformer who sought to reduce papal nepotism and expenditures. But he was also an inquisitor and took a hard line against heresy. He opposed the Protestant Huguenots in France. He also attacked Queen Elizabeth I of England, declaring her a heretic and released her subjects from their allegiance to her. In response, Elizabeth, who had thus far tolerated Catholic worship in private, now actively started persecuting them for treason. Pius was instrumental in organizing the Counter-Reformation which ultimately led to the ruinous Thirty Years War of 1618-1648 as the Papacy attempted to dictate international politics.
- Gregory XIII (Ugo Boncompagni, 1572-1585) it was during his time that the Gregorian calendar, named after him, was adopted. He continued the reforms of his predecessor Pius V and also Pius' persecution of heresy. After the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of Huguenots in France in 1572 in which thousands were killed, Pope Gregory had the bells in Rome rung and celebrated a Te Deum mass. A commemorative medal was later issued with Gregory's portrait and on the obverse a chastising angel, sword in hand, and the inscription UGONOTTORUM STRAGES ("Overthrow of the Huguenots").
- Gregory XV (Alessandro Ludovisi, 1621-1623) was during these years that Catholic armies, heavily financed by the papacy, fought Protestant ones and were successful. The Counter-Reformation initially seemed to be victorious, but as time went on, Protestantism became more entrenched in Europe. To the dismay of the papacy, it no longer had the power to dictate policy to secular leaders, and political considerations became much more significant than obedience to the pope.

- Urban VIII (Maffeo Barberini, 1623-1644) was pope during much of the Thirty Years War, and also during the Galileo debacle. Galileo was one of the more respected scientists in Italy, but he defended the scientific position of Copernicus who said that the earth goes around the sun rather than the earlier belief that the sun went around the earth, which was considered theologically correct. The church really didn't care that much about the scientific argument until Galileo claimed the Bible "proved" Copernicus was correct. He was then cautioned about making theological statements about scientific hypotheses, but due to his arrogance Galileo insisted that he was correct and provoked a confrontation. This has been blown up by secularists into a "church vs. science" debate which it never was. As it turned out even Copernicus (and therefore Galileo) were misguided as they thought that the orbits of planets were circular. Kepler later demonstrated that the orbits were ovoid.

Urban practiced nepotism on a grand scale – various members of his family were enormously enriched by him, so that it seemed to contemporaries as if he were establishing a dynasty. Urban's immediate family amassed 105 million scudi in personal wealth. He also patronized art on a grand scale, and the consequence of his artistic and military actions was a massive increase in papal debt. He inherited a debt of 16 million scudi, and by 1635 had increased it to 28 million. Members of the Spanish faction of the College of Cardinals were so horrified by the conduct of the pope that they conspired to have him arrested and imprisoned. With the Spanish plan failed to eliminate Urban, the debt had reached 35 million scudi, consuming more than 80% of annual papal income in interest repayments by 1640.

- Innocent X (Giovanni Battista Pamphilj, 1644-1655) prosecuted the family of the prior pope for extortion and the return of church assets. The Peace of Westphalia was signed in 1648 during Innocent's papacy ending the Thirty Years War. He fulminated against it because it solidified Protestant positions, but he was ignored.
- Innocent XI (Benedetto Odescalchi, 1676-1689) was a reformer pope who was respected for his piety and morality. He first turned his efforts towards reducing the expenses of the Curia, passing strict ordinances against nepotism among the cardinals. He lived very parsimoniously and exhorted the cardinals to do the same. He reduced the papal debt, and within a few years income was in excess of expenditures. Innocent also sought to raise both clergy and laity to a higher moral standard of living, insisting on education and an exemplary lifestyle. He closed all of the theaters in Rome (considered to be centers of vice and immorality), suppressed gambling houses, and passed strict rules in relation to the modesty of dress among Roman women.

This was also the period following the voyage of the Mayflower that carried the Pilgrims to Plymouth (1620), and the settlements which eventually became New England. The Pilgrims were religious separatists who were persecuted by the Church of England. They first moved to the Netherlands and eventually chartered a ship to carry them to America and the new world. All of them signed a statement of governance document known as the *Mayflower Compact* written by William Bradford which later became the model for the Constitution of the United States.

The Pilgrims had friendly and mutually beneficial relations with the Native American tribes, especially the Pokanokets whose leader was Massasoit. Many of the settlers, such as Roger Williams in Providence, Rhode Island, developed very positive relationships with Native

American peoples. However, in the following generation tensions rose primarily due to the Puritans of Massachusetts who wanted more land and engaged in unfair practices to obtain it. Massasoit's son Metacomet (later known as King Phillip) became sachem of the Pokanokets after the death of his father, and he took the opposite position of distrust. In fits and starts he led an often reluctant and confused revolt of some of the tribes (others refused to join him) against the English colonists who were also somewhat confused and divided about how to respond to Indian aggression. But atrocities by Native Americans led to English reprisals which plunged New England into a very destructive war. Many towns and villages were burned, many on both sides were killed, and proportionately it was more destructive than the American civil war. King Phillip's War lasted from 1675-78, but in the far northern states the war continued and devolved into a conflict known as the French and Indian War. It also set the stage for the Indian wars of the 1800's.

- Alexander VIII (Pietro Vito Ottoboni, 1689-1691) reversed many of the policies of his predecessor and emptied the Vatican treasuries.
- Benedict XIV (Prospero Lorenzo Lambertini, 1740-1758) was one of the mostly learned scholars of all of the popes as well as being a competent ruler.
- Clement XIII (Carlo della Torre di Rezzonico, 1758-1769) the Jesuits had been a problem for some time due to their subversive political activities, and Clement came under pressure to suppress them. But being a Jesuit himself, he supported them instead.
- Pius VI (Count Giovanni Angelo Braschi, 1775-1799) was the pontiff during French Revolution. This was an extremely agonizing time for the papacy because the Vatican and the *ancient regime* had been tied together in many ways for a thousand years since the time of Pepin and Charlemagne. The government of France was bankrupt, and the wealthiest people were the bishops, so the government declared that all of the church property now belonged to the state. All of the excesses of the church in France over the centuries were now called to account. Churches and monasteries were ransacked, church leaders were sent to the guillotine, and under the influence of atheistic philosophers such as Voltaire, the government declared that France would be a totally secular state. Pius watched all of the happen in horror, and finally he joined in a league against France which backfired when Napoleon came to power, invaded the Papal States, and took most of the territory away from the Vatican. Pius himself was taken prisoner and died a year later.
- Leo XII (Annibale Francesco Clemente Melchiorre Girolamo Nicola della Genga, 1823-1829) was pope in the aftermath of Napoleon. He was a rather severe man who created a large espionage network to hunt down people involved in public immorality (theaters, etc.) He also condemned Bible societies, and persecuted Jews in Rome as many of his predecessors had done.
- Gregory XVI (Bartolomeo Alberto Cappellari, 1831-1846) was strongly conservative and traditionalist, opposing modernizing reforms in the Papal States and throughout Europe. He sought instead to strengthen the religious and political authority of the papacy. He encouraged missionary activity abroad and condemned the slave trade, but his harsh repression, financial extravagance and neglectfulness left him very unpopular.

Gregory also opposed basic technological innovations such as gas lighting and railways, believing that they would promote commerce and increase the power of the middle class. That in turn would supposedly lead to demands for liberal reforms which would undermine the monarchical power of the Pope over central Italy. He in fact banned railways in the Papal States, calling them chemins d'enfer ("roads to hell"), a play on the French for railroad, chemin de fer, meaning "iron road."

- Pius IX (Giovanni Maria Mastai Ferretti, 1846-1878) declared that popes were "infallible" in matters of faith and morality and was also the pope to declare in 1854 that the Virgin Mary had been "immaculately conceived," and was therefore without sin, not only in her birth but also in her life. In support of this Pius also strongly supported the concept of "the perpetual virginity of Mary."

In 1864 he wrote the "Syllabus of Errors" as a strong condemnation of liberalism, modernism, moral relativism, secularization, and separation of church and state. Pius reaffirmed Catholic teaching in favor of the establishment of the Catholic faith as the state religion in nations where the majority of the population is Catholic. However, his most important legacy is the First Vatican Council, convened in 1869, which defined the dogma of papal infallibility

Pius had the longest reign of any pope in history: thirty-one years. Like Leo XII before him, he opposed Bible societies and was against the freedom of the press. His name in Italian was "Pio Nono," and therefore he was often lampooned by calling him "Pio no no." It was during his time that the Papal States were lost and a republic founded in Italy. Pius refused to recognize the new kingdom, which he denounced as an illegitimate creation of revolution. He excommunicated the nation's leaders whom he declared as being "forgetful of every religious principle, despising every right, trampling upon every law" and indicated that their reign over Italy was therefore "a sacrilegious usurpation." He and subsequent popes were thus very hostile to the Italian state and tried to influence Catholics to refrain from voting in elections.

- Leo XIII (Vincenzo Gioacchino Raffaele Luigi Pecci, 1878-1903) was known for his intellectualism and his attempts to define the position of the Catholic Church with regard to modern thinking. In his famous 1891 encyclical *Rerum novarum*, Leo outlined the rights of workers to a fair wage, safe working conditions, and the formation of trade unions, while at the same time affirming the rights of property and free enterprise, and therefore opposing both the extremes of socialism and laissez-faire capitalism. He worked to encourage understanding between the Church and the modern world, bringing normality back to the Church after the tumultuous and separatist years of Pius IX. Leo's intellectual and diplomatic skills helped regain much of the prestige lost with the fall of the Papal States. He tried to reconcile the Church with the working class, particularly by dealing with the social changes that were sweeping Europe. The new economic order had resulted in the growth of an impoverished working class who had increasing anticlerical and socialist sympathies, and Leo helped to reverse that trend. He also strongly affirmed that science and religion coexist, and re-founded the Vatican Observatory which was eventually taken over by Jesuits.

This was also the period when the well-known Jesuit priest and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was developing his theories that attempted to combine Darwinism with Christianity ([Sorensen, 2020](#)). In 1912-14 he worked with several others in the discovery of the

“Piltdown man” which was a fraudulent attempt to demonstrate human evolution. In 1912, Charles Dawson claimed that he had discovered the “missing link” between ape and man. In a deception similar to what was done earlier in 1891 by Eugene Dubois who “discovered” Java man (another paleontological fraud), Dawson later announced that more bones and artifacts were found at the same site, and supposedly from the same individual. It was later shown that a human skull had been combined with an orangutan jaw with the teeth filed down in order to fit (the place where the skull would normally connect with the jaw was broken off to hide the deception). It is not certain who perpetrated the fraud, but Chardin was deeply involved. His books *The Phenomenon of Man* and *The Divine Milieu*, discuss his ideas that humanity has evolved in a Darwinian fashion, and will continue to do so until the “Omega Point” is reached. In Chardin view this is essentially the development of a one-world pantheistic consciousness similar to the Buddhist concept of nirvana, in which all individuals surrender their identity into the “cosmic all.” To cover the fact that his ideas were completely antithetical to Christianity, Chardin termed this as the development of “Christ consciousness.”

The Piltdown hoax was eventually discovered and reported in 1953, but it was not until 1982 that the lower jaw was tested and determined to be from an orangutan. Therefore, it took 41-74 years to fully reveal the fraud, and in the meantime, it had been repeatedly used along with Java man and other fossils to depict Darwinism as a fact. Such was the desire of scientists to find actual evidence for Darwinism and promulgate it, that that over five hundred doctoral dissertations were based on the Piltdown fossil before it was discredited. (For a critique of Darwinism, see ([Sorensen, 2020](#))) In 1926 Chardin was also involved in the discovery of the skull that became known as Peking man, but the original fossils have mysteriously disappeared, casting doubt on their nature and interpretation.

Chardin’s ideas and writings were at first questioned by some leaders of the Catholic Church, but have now been accepted by Jesuits and the Vatican as replacing traditional Christianity. For example, Pope Benedict XVI in his book *Credo for Today – What Christians Believe* (2009) states that “Creationism contradicts the idea of evolution and is untenable today.” In Chardian fashion, Benedict then reinterprets the second coming of Christ as “reaching the Omega Point in which a new kind of God, man, and mind will emerge.” This is despite serious criticism of Chardin. According to Daniel Dennett (1995), “It has become clear to the point of unanimity among scientists that Teilhard offered nothing serious in the way of an alternative to orthodoxy; the ideas that were peculiarly his were confused, and the rest was just bombastic re-description of orthodoxy.” In 1961, British immunologist and Nobel laureate Peter Medawar wrote a scornful review of *The Phenomenon of Man* for the journal *Mind*: “The greater part of it is nonsense, tricked out with a variety of tedious metaphysical conceits, and its author can be excused of dishonesty only on the grounds that before deceiving others he has taken great pains to deceive himself.” Perhaps the Piltdown and the Peking man fossils were the basis for Chardin’s self-deception.

- Benedict XV (Giacomo Paolo Giovanni Battista della Chiesa, 1914-1922) was pope during World War 1 which he called “the suicide of Europe.” Benedict declared the neutrality of the Vatican and attempted perspective to mediate peace, but both sides rejected his initiatives.
- Pius XI (Ambrogio Damiano Achille Ratti, 1922-1939) wrote *Casti Connubii*, redefining Christian marriage and condemning contraception. He wrote that the Catholic Church “must stand erect in the midst of the moral ruin which surrounds her, in order that she may preserve

the chastity of the nuptial union from being defiled by this foul stain.” He and other popes were strongly urged to drop their objections to contraception but did not do so because they would then have to admit that the papacy had been wrong for centuries. In 1932 Pius ordered German Catholics to drop their resistance to Hitler, and shocked Catholics around the world when he backed Mussolini’s invasion of Abyssinia, although he later retreated from his support of Il Duce. He also negotiated a deal with Mussolini in which the church formally gave up control of the Papal States in return for the establishment of Vatican City in Rome as a sovereign territory. The church also received a large sum of money in exchange, which was invested and produced a great increase in papal wealth.

- Pius XII (Eugenio Maria Giuseppe Giovanni Pacelli, 1939-1958) worked tirelessly for peace and against Hitler after he understood what the motives of the Fuhrer really were. His public policy was neutrality for which he was heavily criticized, but he endeavored to help the victims of the war, especially Jews, and when the Nazis occupied Rome in 1943, Pius opened the Vatican to Jewish refugees, granting them Vatican citizenship and smuggling them to other countries. Israel Zolli, the chief Rabbi of Rome, was so impressed by Pius’ actions that following the war he became a Roman Catholic and even took the Pope’s first name as his own when he was baptized. Hitler once said of Pius, “he is the only human being who has always contradicted me and who has never obeyed me.” Joseph Goebbels wrote in his diary in 1942, “It’s a dirty, low thing to do for the Catholic Church to continue its subversive activity in every way possible and now even to extend its propaganda to Protestant children evacuated from the regions threatened by air raids. Next to the Jews these politico-divines are about the most loathsome riffraff that we are still sheltering in the Reich. The time will come after the war for an over-all solution of this problem.”
- John XXIII (Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, 1958-1963) and Paul VI (Giovanni Battista Enrico Antonio Maria Montini, 1963-1978) these popes initiated and completed the 2nd Vatican Council which made major changes in church direction and policy. As indicated above, Jesuits and other church leaders were supporters of “liberation theology” which focuses on interpreting the teachings of Christianity (and especially of Jesus) through the lens of social justice and Marxism. Jesuits became instrumental in helping revolutionaries such as the Sandinistas in Nicaragua to overthrow governments and establish Marxist dictatorships. The 2nd Vatican Council declared that communism and Marxism were acceptable, softened the teaching of the church on abortion and homosexuality, and opened the door to the ecumenical movement, that the Bible is simply one source of truth among many.

Jesuits were deeply involved in Nicaragua prior to and after the bloody 1979 overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship by the Sandinista revolutionary movement. Four Jesuit priests including Fernando Cardenal (who had been affiliated with the Sandinistas since 1973), accepted posts in the post-Somoza government. Here is a critique of the legacy of liberation theology and socialism in Nicaragua:

“It never really was a government of the poor, but through propaganda and the sharing out of crumbs it managed to deceive many of the gullible, both within and outside the country. The funds from the Venezuelan oil cooperation (by fellow socialist Hugo Chavez) served to cover up a political economy based on cheapening the cost of labor, which impoverished the country and exacerbated sub-employment and the informal economy. The April 2018 crisis was the result of an accumulation of needs and frustrations, principally due to the expiration of the

subsidies from the Venezuelan oil money. The balloon deflated, and at that moment the true face of the economic and social failure of the Ortega camp emerged.” ([Chamorro, 2024](#)).

- John Paul II (Karol Józef Wojtyła, 1978-2005) was a more conservative leader who tried to moderate the interpretation and implementation of the 2nd Vatican Council. For example, he held to traditional church teachings on abortion, homosexuality, and the ordination of women. He was Polish and had closely identified with the Solidarity anti-communist movement in Poland, having personally seen the impact of communism. He also condemned liberation theology and attempted to restrict the involvement of Jesuits and other church leaders in Marxist movements. In response, the Polish communist government unsuccessfully tried to humiliate John Paul by claiming that he had fathered an illegitimate child, by drugging a woman in a location where he had worked and tried to force her to report that she had had sex with him. When in Sicily the pope denounced the Mafia and organized crime, saying the “One day the judgement of God will arrive,” and the Mafia bombed two historic churches in Rome in response. He initiated dialogs with Buddhist and Muslim leaders, but without compromising Christian teachings or doctrine. John Paul’s travels took him to 129 countries, more than any other pope in history, and he attracted crowds that numbered in the millions.
- Benedict XVI (Joseph Aloisius Ratzinger, 2005-2013) continued John Paul’s rapprochement with Muslim leaders but went much farther in an ecumenical direction, indicating that Africa and Asia are threatened by “the Western systems of materialism and secularism and their exclusion of God.” He also ignored Muslim terrorism and the desires of Muslim leaders to conquer the world for Islam.

As previously mentioned, Benedict was wedded to the pantheistic and Darwinian worldview of the Teilhard de Chardin, the well-known Jesuit who attempted to comingle Darwinism with Christianity. In his Cathedral of Aosta homily of July 24, 2009, Benedict indicated our future is a Buddhistic nirvana where everyone becomes absorbed into the cosmic all: “The role of the priesthood is to consecrate the world so that it may become a living host – a liturgy. So that the liturgy may not be something alongside the reality of the world, but that the world itself shall become a living host, a liturgy. This is also the great vision of Teilhard de Chardin; in the end we shall achieve a true cosmic liturgy, where the cosmos becomes a living host.” In 2013 Benedict became the second pope in history to resign.

- Francis I (Jorge Mario Bergoglio, 2013-Present) continued the philosophy of the Benedict XVI and has taken a number of actions to move the Catholic Church much further in an ecumenical direction, toward New World Order and a one-world government. He is a Jesuit, a resolute supporter of communism, social justice, and liberation theology, and has rejected the concept of an absolute right to property for individuals, stressing instead the “social purpose” and common good that must come from sharing the Earth’s resources. He has also enlarged the College of Cardinals in order to pack it with his supporters and ensure that the Jesuit mindset will be continued, and is facing an increasing level of opposition from Catholics around the world ([Brown, 2017](#); [Harlan & Pitrelli, 2023](#)).

Francis is committed to ecumenicism and removing any exclusivist Christian or Biblical claims, such as Jesus’ statement in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life – no one comes to the Father except through me.” He has signed an agreement with Sheikh Ahmed al-Tayeb, one of the most important imams in Sunni Islam, and declared that “God willed a

plurality of religions.” Among other issues, the agreement claims that terrorism is “due to an accumulation of incorrect interpretations of religious texts and to policies linked to hunger, poverty, injustice, oppression and pride.” Catholic universities have been ordered to teach this declaration. The ancient Byzantine basilica of Hagia Sophia was recently converted into a mosque without any criticism from the Vatican, which has encouraged radical Islam’s goal of re-playing events of the ninth century when they conquered Rome.

The pope also cares deeply about minorities except Christians persecuted by Islam, which he downplays in order to avoid offending Muslims. Francis has also admired Buddhist teachings and met with Jewish leaders, and his concept is a one-world family that will host church, mosque, and synagogue. The only exception to his ecumenical outreach is conservative Christians especially in America whom he regards as “fake believers and hate mongers.” Francis is thus promoting a one-world religion to accompany the one-world government in which America and the free-world would be taken over by a socialist global regime.

He also indicated that the United Nations doesn’t have enough power and must be granted full governmental control “for the good of humanity,” and a new global political authority is needed to “tackle the reduction of pollution and the development of poor countries and regions.” His request echoed that of the prior pope Benedict XVI, who in a 2009 encyclical proposed a kind of super-UN to deal with the world’s economic problems and injustices. One wonders if Benedict and Francis understand how corrupt the UN is and have any concept of the consequences of power concentration. In 2017 Francis further asserted that the creation of a one-world government is necessary, and he wants all religions and political leaders to sign a globalist pact for a “new humanism.”

Examples of Francis’ hostility to Christianity was the 2022 appointment of a pro-abortion economist to the Vatican’s Pontifical Academy for Life, and the removal of Bishop Joseph Strickland from the diocese of Tyler, Texas in 2023. The pope criticized American Catholics during a visit to Portugal in August for having a “very strong, organized, reactionary attitude” on issues such as abortion and sexuality rather than focusing on real concerns such as climate change and caring for migrants. Michael J. Matt, editor of *The Remnant*, wrote, with the firing, Francis was “actively trying to bury fidelity to the Church of Jesus Christ. This is total war – Francis is a clear and present danger not only to Catholics the world over but also to the whole world itself.”

Perhaps the Catholic Church and Francis’ most egregious error is support for homosexuality and transgenderism. St. Patrick’s Cathedral, the largest in New York City, recently hosted a funeral for Cecelia Gentili, an atheist and trans-activist sex worker, at which the crowds referred to her/him as a “holy whore” and “Ave Cecelia” ([Javaid, 2024](#)). In late 2023 Francis approved pastoral blessings of people in same-sex unions through the “Fidcia Supplicans” proclamation and has received widespread backlash against it ([Mares, 2024](#)). This was written by the Argentinian Cardinal Monsignor Manuel Fernández who Francis appointed as his chief theological advisor. Fernández’ books include, *Heal Me with Your Mouth: The Art of Kissing*, a strange book for a celibate priest, and the more controversial and graphically erotic, *Mystical Passions: Spirituality and Sensuality*. The book includes an imaginary erotic encounter that was supposedly told to Fernández by a 16-year-old girl between her and Jesus Christ on the shores of Galilee, as Mary, the mother of Jesus, approvingly stands by. In an odd reprise of the “Bridal Mysticism” doctrine of Bernard of Clairvaux, the book discusses “mystical orgasm”

with Jesus, and how same sex unions can be consummated without sin. Fernández has also been appointed by Pope Francis to lead the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith which investigates allegations of clergy abuse, despite problems in his own diocese similar to those of Cardinal Law from Boston who covered up the homosexual rape of boys by Catholic priests, “Fernández’s recent handling of a clergy sex abuse case in his home Archdiocese of La Plata raises great concern. In his response to allegations, he stood in stout support of the accused priest and refused to believe the victims. Showing disregard for the safety of children, Fernández kept the priest at his parish post even as more victims came forward. For his handling of this case, Fernández should have been investigated, not promoted to one of the highest posts” ([Doyle, 2023](#)).

Regardless of the sins, foibles, and abuses of power of past church leaders throughout history, it must also be kept in mind that other rulers at the same time did similar things and worse. The difference was that leaders of the church, the supposed human representatives of Christ, should have lived up to a much higher standard. Some popes and church leaders, such as Pius XII and Hadrian VI, did set a high standard, and there were many reform movements throughout church history. But sadly most popes demonstrated their own sinfulness in gross displays of hypocrisy.

The recent popes, especially the current pope Francis, represent a downward spiral with a contemporary twist. As a Franciscan (taking his papal name from St. Francis of Assisi), Francis is committed to personal poverty. However, his piety and humility are a patina for his anti-Biblical and anti-Christian positions:

1. Commitment to radical social justice movements advocating the tearing down of capitalism, the removal of patriarchy and male leadership, and the acceptance of the LGBTQ+ and transgender agenda.
2. Preaching of ecumenism is an effort to subvert and replace Christianity with a globalist pantheism.
3. Advocacy of a one-world socialist government and a one-world religion – a revival of the conditions prior to the Tower of Babel event in Genesis.
4. Funding and acceptance of research efforts relating to transhumanism and extra-terrestrials, even though they may be extremely dangerous and lead to demonic control.

Jesuits are deeply involved in hybrid studies to develop “transhumans” – a Brave New World using genetic engineering to create beings that have both human and non-human capabilities (e.g., robot soldiers). But in what may be a shock to many, the Vatican is directly and deeply involved in the search for extraterrestrial life. In a program known as VATT (Vatican Advanced Technology Telescope), another Jesuit-led initiative, the Vatican has purchased the most sophisticated radio telescope in existence and installed it on Mt. Graham in Arizona. This telescope, which has been provocatively named “LUCIFER” (the original name of Satan), is used to locate “exo-planets” which are planets elsewhere in the universe that may be capable of sustaining life. The VATT facility was launched in 1978 by George V. Coyne, an atheist Jesuit, who made statements similar to Francis, “that all religions lead to the same God.” The Vatican’s position has now become that *not* believing in aliens and not being willing to accept their moral superiority and the associated religious concepts is heresy and is based on an antiquated and dying belief system ([Putnam & Horn, 2013](#)).

Why would the Vatican spend millions in parishioner funds looking for space aliens? In the words of Coyne, the goal is to “contact extraterrestrials and baptize them into the Catholic Church.” More realistically, the Vatican views aliens as “space brothers” who will educate us, stop wars, eliminate guns, prevent environmental problems (i.e., global warming), and do the things that they want a one-world government to do.

In the aftermath of the thousands of UFO sightings since the Roswell event of 1947³, there have also been alien abductions. Many people, especially women, have been abducted by aliens and have been subjected to various invasive biological processes including implantation and sperm and egg collection (Jacobs, 1993). The Jesuit leadership is also very well-aware of the presence of UFOs, and despite the complete failure of SETI initiatives⁴ to locate intelligent extraterrestrial life on other planets, and the fact that UFO vehicles have never been detected arriving from or leaving the earth, the Vatican is deeply involved in researching, contacting, and welcoming aliens. Here are some statements by Catholic spokesmen:

“For man to take his proper place as a citizen of the universe, he must transcend the narrow-mindedness of his early provincialism, and be prepared to graciously accept the inhabitants of other worlds as equals or even superiors... Extraterrestrial visitors to our planet might display an astonishing knowledge and understanding of the universal laws of nature, as well as psychic abilities that enable them to exercise powers of mind over matter to an amazing degree. To our bewildered human race, their wondrous deeds would be indistinguishable from the miraculous.” (Delano, 1997).

“They [extraterrestrial aliens] might be blessed with harmony and concord in the working of their bodily and spiritual faculties; they might be spared the ultimate dissolution of death.” (Raible, 1960).

“Such beings may be far ahead of us in science and related fields... and their vision of salvation might be based on a savior other than Jesus – even a messianic member of their own race.” (Grasso, 1960).

The “Anunnaki from the planet Nibiru” were said to be ancient alien deities that visited earth and supposedly helped humans to evolve and develop society (they are a large part of the continual television and internet fodder on this topic, such as the program *Ancient Aliens*). It was said that they would return at a time of crisis to, once again, save us from ourselves. However, the Anunnaki were probably the “sons of God” – the fallen angels of Genesis 6, who used human women to create a race of transhuman hybrids known as the Nephilim. The latter were malicious giants whose presence led to the extreme evil and the terror that preceded the Great Flood.

Revelation chapters 6-17 and other Biblical passages warn us that a great deception will occur in the last days prior to the great tribulation and the return of Christ. A one-world government and a one-world religion will be put in place prior to the worst times ever to be experienced on our planet. This is the era when people will have to receive “the mark of the beast” in order to survive, and in the words of Jesus, “unless those times were shortened, no one would survive.” The Vatican is helping to prepare the way for this disaster.

Many Catholics are committed Christians and are unaware of the both the horrendous history of the

³ See, for example: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roswell_UFO_incident

⁴ See, for example: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Search_for_extraterrestrial_intelligence

Vatican, as well as being ignorant of and/or excusing the policies of the current leadership. Nevertheless, during the Protestant Reformation the Catholic Church was often referred to as the “Whore of Babylon, clothed in scarlet” from Revelation chapter 17 because of the corruption of its leaders. In the Bible, the term “whore” refers not merely to prostitution, but even more-so to spiritual apostasy and being joined to other gods rather than the one true God of the Bible. By his seeming spirituality and his patina of piety Francis is therefore more dangerous than evil popes such as Alexander VI. The Vatican is once again losing its soul and is in danger of truly becoming the “Whore of Babylon.”

Retrospective on the History of the Church

Whenever we consider historical kingdoms and past political entities it is very hard for us as twenty-first century westerners to be able to place ourselves back in the societies of the past and appreciate the issues and the problems that they had to deal with. This is true for at least three reasons:

1. The abundant and diversified economies of the western world of today provide us with goods and services that were unknown in that day and required much more time and energy to produce (e.g., consider the difference between buying a hamburger at McDonalds with having to slaughter a cow, butcher it, cook it, etc.; it also assumes that you had a cow in the first place).
2. Unlike today, the efforts of most people who lived prior to the nineteenth century were focused on sheer survival, with little time for leisure or education. Prior to the invention of the printing press in 1450, relatively few people owned books or could read. Media did not exist.
3. The political stability present in America and Western Europe was far from the reality of most people throughout history. This point is especially telling. In America, we have the luxury of being able to criticize and lampoon our political leaders because of the inherent stability of the political systems of our country, and the fact that there are few enemies in the world who could seriously damage us. But this was not so in the past, and people accepted and even expected authoritarian leaders who demanded unquestioning obedience because the peace provided by authoritarian leadership was almost always (rightly or wrongly) thought to be better than the chaos of no leadership.

Corruption in western secular society as well as the church was gradually reduced by a series of factors from the late 1200s through the early 1900s that brought about a complete sea-change in the way that political power was exercised in the western world, as follows:

1. The Magna Carta (the “Great Charter”) was signed by King John of England in 1215 under duress when London was forcibly entered by English nobles demanding his submission. The charter limited the power of the king and gave his subjects many rights. However, there was extreme distrust between the two sides, and many of the specifics of the charter did not become reality until later. Incidentally, the Papacy sided with the king in his efforts to abandon the Magna Carta.
2. The Protestant Reformation became widely popular because of the utter spiritual depravity and apostasy of many popes, especially those of the Renaissance era (Sixtus IV, Innocent VIII,

Alexander VI, and Julius II). Much of the Protestant growth was fueled by the invention of printing press in 1450, which for the first time in history made possible the wide dissemination of written materials.

3. The American Declaration of Independence launching America as a separate nation, and the publication of *The Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith (which explained the principles of a market-based economy and is one of the most significant books ever written), both took place in the year 1776. The cornerstone of America was in its constitution, delineating three branches of government and limiting the power of each branch, and thus ensuring that no one person or entity could gain total control. It also required that political leaders be periodically elected by the people, thus creating a democratic republic in lieu of the monarchies that existed in Europe. These principles were eventually copied by many other nations.
4. The Papacy lost its political power and ultimately all influence over territory when the Papal States were finally surrendered (the current structure was finalized in 1929). This led to the papacy regaining much of its spiritual authority and to some of its finest hours, such as Pius XII's support of the Jews in World War II.
5. The morality and ethics of the society were generally based on biblical and Christian concepts, providing a foundation for personal freedom (elimination of slavery, private property rights, etc.), which ultimately led to economic freedom (anyone can start their own business). It is significant that the first book printed after the invention of the printing press was the Bible.
6. Freedom of the press allowed books to be produced that could be critical of existing power structures.
7. The economic freedom of America and later Europe led to the growth of the middle class, and a larger number of people who were educated, who could afford education for their children, and who had sufficient leisure time to become knowledgeable of and involved in political events. Furthermore, the increasing wealth and the size of the potential customer base led to the growth of news media and organizations who then had a market for their products, and who began investigating and reporting on political corruption and high-handedness, making it increasingly difficult for people in power to get away with misdeeds. This has not, of course, stopped the power elites in America and Europe from attempting to control people and use them for their benefit. But it has required that this work be done in more secrecy with expensive media campaigns to hide the facts, and to convince people that additional government controls are for their benefit. Even so the truth is sometimes revealed, and corrupt politicians and business/union leaders are brought to trial.
8. The power elites have responded by gaining control of most if not all of the newspaper, television, school textbook, and media-related companies in an attempt to control what people read and think. The direction of the major media is completely in line with the thinking of anti-Christian focus of Pope Francis, toward social justice, liberation theology, ecumenical humanism and global government. But the growth of the internet where virtually anyone can publish material and such mediums as talk radio have to some degree blunted the impact of this control.

Even though both chivalry and the church often failed to achieve their moral goals and high standards of behavior, that fact does not invalidate the standards or lessen the need for such things. Just because we fail to hit the target does not mean that targets should be dispensed with. However, contemporary western society has, in general, attempted to do just that, and has reached the place where it has rejected the idea that there is and should be a fixed set of standards.

Today's society has, to a large degree, forgotten the foundations of its freedom and has reached the place where it is attempting to reduce the moral base that was and continues to be an essential part of its fabric. It is now thought that morality is essentially fungible and dictated by the government. For example, politicians are now concerned with encouraging sex changes, and at the same time resisting abstinence-based sex education by giving condoms to teenagers with the reasoning, "they are going to do it anyway."

It is not our purpose to provide a comprehensive analysis of this topic, but perhaps an example would be helpful: the National Education Association and the teacher's unions in America have been continually pushing for a concept known as "outcome-based education," in which there are no grades or standards, (grades are said to be damaging to the egos of those who do not fare as well). This is essentially an attempt to socialize education and pull everyone down to the same level, and it provides an excellent insight into why parents are abandoning public schools in droves, and why we need educational vouchers to permit parental choice. These are, of course, strongly resisted by the NEA and the teacher's unions.

As Allan Bloom, a university professor who has taught and observed several generations of college students, so ably describes in his book *The Closing of the American Mind*, much of our society has completely accepted the notion that everything is relative, and that there are no fixed absolutes. Following is a sample of his observations:

On the relativity of truth:

There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative. That anyone should regard the proposition as not self-evident astonishes them, as though he were calling into question $2 + 2 = 4$.

The relativity of truth is not a theoretical insight for them, but a moral postulate. The danger they have been taught to fear from absolutism is not error but intolerance. Relativism is necessary to openness; and this is the virtue, the only virtue, which all primary education for more than fifty years has dedicated itself to inculcating. Openness... is the great insight of our times. The true believer is the real danger. The study of history and culture teaches us that all the world was mad in the past; men always thought they were right, and that led to wars, persecution, slavery, xenophobia, racism, and chauvinism. The point is not to correct the mistakes and really be right; rather it is not to think you are right at all.

On student behavior:

Openness has driven out the deities leaving only a speechless, meaningless country... Students now arrive at the university ignorant or cynical about our political heritage, lacking the wherewithal to either be inspired by it or seriously critical of it.

Young Americans have less and less knowledge of and interest in foreign places. In the past there were many students who actually knew something about and loved England, France, Germany, or Italy... Such students have almost disappeared, replaced at most by those who are interested in the problems of Third World countries and in helping them to modernize. This is not learning from others but condescension and a disguised form of a new imperialism.

On male/female relationships:

In the past it was understood to be the woman's job to get and hold the man by her charms and wiles because, by nature, nothing else would induce him to give up his freedom in favor of the heavy duties of family. But women no longer wish to do this, and they consider it unfair according to the principles governing us... And no matter what women hope, nothing else can effectively make most men share equally the responsibilities of childbearing and child rearing. The divorce rate is the most striking symptom of this breakdown... Nobody is sure who is to make the advances, whether there is to be a pursuer and a pursued, and what the event is to mean. They have to improvise because roles are banned, and a man pays a high price for misjudging his partner's attitude.

And here is where the whole business turns nasty. The soul of men – their ambitious, warlike, protective, possessive character – must be dismantled in order to liberate women from their dominion... But this effort must fail because in an age of individualism, persons of either sex cannot be forced to be public-spirited, particularly by those who are becoming less so.

On parenting:

Parents do not have the legal or moral authority that they had in the Old World, and they lack self-confidence as educators. There is nothing left of the reverence toward the father as the symbol of the divine on earth, the unquestioned bearer of authority... The dreariness of the family's spiritual landscape passes belief... The delicate fabric of the civilization into which successive generations are woven has unraveled, and children are raised, not educated... People sup together, play together, travel together, but they do not think together. Hardly any homes have any intellectual life whatsoever. Educational TV is the high water mark.

Summary:

Thus what is advertised as a great opening is actually a great closing. No longer is there a hope that there are great and wise men in other places and times who can reveal truths about life.

Picture a thirteen-year-old boy watching MTV. He enjoys the liberties hard won over the centuries by the alliance of philosophic genius and political heroism, consecrated by the blood of martyrs; he is provided with comfort and leisure by the most productive economy in the history of mankind; science has penetrated the secrets of nature in order to provide him with the marvelous and lifelike sound and image reproduction he is enjoying. And in what does this progress culminate? In orgiastic rhythms, the joys of killing parents and policemen, winning fame and wealth by imitating drag-queens, and so

on. In short, life is made into a nonstop, commercially prepackaged masturbational fantasy. ([Bloom, 1987](#)).

This is a powerful indictment of the forces in our society that are pushing us further toward an amoral relativism and against religion, such as feminism, the entertainment industry, the gay rights movement, public education, the teachers unions, and so on. These influences need to be opposed and redressed so that the foundation of our society, the moral and spiritual values of our people, are not destroyed.

Explaining, teaching and inculcating morality and ethics is one of the key things that the church is, or should be, all about. When we are confronted with the failures of the past, the point is therefore to understand what went wrong and to fix the failures so that we can become more “right” as Bloom indicates above. This of course requires an informed religion that rejects the errors of the past.

It must also be remembered that the church – individual believers as well as Christian institutions – have been the greatest source of good and of unselfish love in the history of the world. Even during the times of the church’s greatest weakness, evil, and confusion, there were still many who quietly served God without fanfare or recognition and continue to do so. Many businesses have been launched with the concept of not merely making a profit and providing desirable goods or services, but also enabling their employees to make a good living. Most of the world’s hospitals, and the bulk of charitable work to the poor and the needy, were and are being carried on by the church and organizations related to it. Furthermore, the church has inspired thousands to reform their own lives and to serve others in the name of God. Jesus said, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it.”

The missionary work of the church has sometimes been criticized on the grounds of prejudice and insensitivity, but missions have likewise been a huge source for good. Saint Patrick of Ireland is an excellent example. He almost single-handedly brought Christ to Ireland in the fifth century, to a people who were ready to hear what he had to say and responded to it. Celtic Ireland, consisting of many small tribes and inspired by Druidism, was a cruel and hard world of savage drunken conflict, and gods that ate people. The Irish were constantly fighting each other, and in battle they would strip themselves naked, daub on blue paint, drink alcohol until they almost passed out, and then run howling and shrieking to kill each other and their enemies. Their religion was one of hidden taboos that once broken would curse a person for life, so the ideal for a man was to die young and in battle. Patrick was able to show them the holy mystery of Christ, the revelation of God that heals and transforms, but without compromising their Irishness, or turning them into something that they were not, and he was the first person in recorded history to oppose slavery and slave trading.

Patrick devoted the last thirty years of his life, from roughly his late forties to his late seventies to his warrior children, that they might “seize the everlasting kingdom” with all of the energy and intensity that they had lately devoted to killing and enslaving one another, and seizing each others’ kingdoms.

Patrick’s gift to the Irish was his Christianity, the first de-Romanized Christianity in human history, a Christianity without the sociopolitical baggage of the Greco-Roman world that completely enculturated itself into the Irish scene.

With the Irish, even with their kings, he succeeded beyond measure. Within his lifetime or soon after his death the Irish slave trade came to a halt, and other forms of violence, such as murder and inter-tribal warfare, decreased. ([Cahill, 1995](#)).

A more contemporary example is Hudson Taylor who in the 1850s sailed to China, founded the China Inland Mission, and was one of one of the first missionaries to enter the inland provinces. He wore the same clothes and ate the same food as the Chinese people did, in an effort to identify with them. He survived wars, sickness, disease, and lootings, and his first wife and several of his children died in China – all of this he suffered for the sake of Christ and for the Chinese people. But he persevered and by the end of his life there were around 800 missionaries and health care workers, and some 125,000 Chinese Christians. He died in 1905, before the communist takeover of China, and the following years saw the brutal suppression of the church by Mao and the communists, and the imprisonment and execution of many of its leaders. With all of the persecution and oppression, it was thought that the church had ceased to exist, but now that communist power has waned and the society has become more open, it is estimated that there are perhaps 80 million Christians in China. They are Hudson Taylor's legacy, and the spirit of his work lives on.

Following is a portion of a Celtic warrior-poem call the *Breastplate of Saint Patrick*, a cri de cour of how the kingdom of heaven can be entered. It goes far beyond simply meeting people's practical needs; it touches the heart and the soul, which is what Christian life and missions are truly all about.

I arise today, through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through belief in the threeness,
Through confession of the oneness,
Of the Creator of Creation

I arise today, through the strength of heaven,
Light of sun,
Radiance of moon,
Splendor of fire,
Speed of lightening,
Swiftness of wind, Depth of sea,
Stability of earth, Firmness of rock.

I arise today, through God's strength to pilot me,
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me, God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's way to lie before me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's host to save me
From snares of devils,
From temptation of vices,
From everyone who shall wish me ill,
Afar and near,
Alone and in multitude.
Christ to shield me today
Against poison, against burning,
Against drowning, against wounding,

So that there will come to me abundance of reward.
Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I arise.

I arise today, through the power of the Creator of Creation.

Billy Graham's Prayer for America

Heavenly Father, we come before you today to ask your forgiveness and to seek your direction and guidance.
We know Your Word says, "Woe to those who call evil good," but that is exactly what we have done. We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and reversed our values.
We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery.
We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare.
We have killed our unborn and called it choice.
We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable.
We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self-esteem.
We have abused power and called it politics.
We have coveted our neighbor's possessions and called it ambition.
We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression.
We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment.
Search us, Oh God, and know our hearts today; cleanse us from every sin and set us free.
Amen!

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