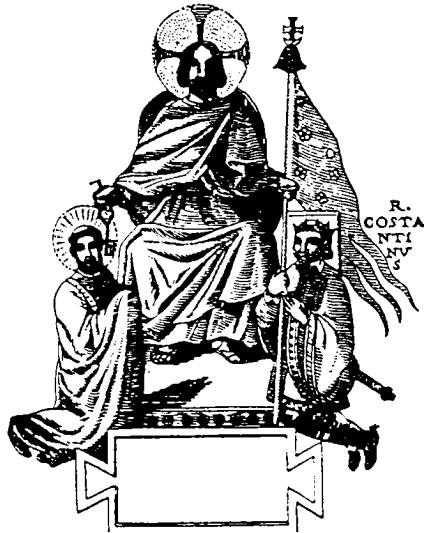


# How the Bishop of Rome Assumed the Title of “Vicar of Christ”

[South Central District Pastoral Conference; April 20-21, 1998]

*by Pastor Philip Schwerin*



## *THE SPIRITUAL AND THE TEMPORAL POWER*

*Christ gives to St. Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and to Constantine the banner of earthly dominion.*

“The Catholic Church believes that St. Peter was the chief Apostle, exercising by Christ’s appointment the supreme power of governing His Church. The Vatican Council says: ‘If anyone says that Christ the Lord did not constitute the Blessed Peter prince of all the Apostles and head of the whole Church militant; or if he says that this primacy is one of mere honor and not of real jurisdiction received directly and immediately from our Lord Jesus, let him be anathema.’”<sup>i</sup>

Both Vatican Councils, as well as the Council of Trent, reinforced the primacy of the pope as descending from the line of St. Peter. But it was not always that way. The thrust of this paper will be to look at the development of the power and primacy of the pope, answering the question of how and when the Bishop of Rome assumed the title of the “Vicar of Christ” on earth.

Actually, we’re going to answer that question right here by stating that if we look to any century for such a development, we would probably point to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. If we try to affix the answer to one individual, it would have to be Innocent III who reigned from 1198-1216. But that would be a little overstating the case as it was a development that started and continued to build for over a thousand years, and the 12<sup>th</sup> century was the culmination of a struggle for power and position in the Christian Church.

The Roman claim of supremacy is based on Matthew 16:18-19:

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

It will not be the scope of this paper to detail Matthew 16:18-19 on which the papal claims lie. Suffice it to say that we do not believe that Scripture, or our Lord, here sets up Peter above the other apostles. Shortly after Jesus spoke these words to Peter, he repeated them to all the apostles on Easter Sunday evening (John 20:22-23). Likewise we do not believe that the “rock” Jesus referred to was Peter, but Christ himself who alone is the Rock on which our faith is built. The apostle Paul wrote, “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ” (I Corinthians 3:11).

Nor will we view the claims of the papacy from the perspective of our Confessions. But we will trace some of the events of the first millennium to the time of Innocent III, through which I believe we can shed a clearer light on the pope eventually using the title of “Vicar of Christ.”

### **The Early History of the Church**

Before the first century was over the Church began to show organizational features which have developed into our own century. We hear of deacons, elders, presbyters, and bishops. An accepted pattern of the beginning of the second century was a bishop governing a particular church. Ignatius, for example, was bishop of the church in Antioch. The *Didache* describes a church organization of travelling apostles and prophets and resident prophets and teachers, showing us various forms of organization in the churches.

Before the end of the second century Rome as the capital and chief city of the Empire was enjoying a position of authority among the other churches of the Empire. The word “Catholic” gradually came into circulation as referring to the true orthodox Church. As church leaders sought to counteract false teaching that crept into the church it was natural to try to go back to the teachings of the apostles and Jesus himself. “Thus an impulse was given to what from that time to the present have been distinguishing marks of the churches in which the majority of those who profess and call themselves Christians have had membership—the apostolic succession of the episcopate.”<sup>ii</sup> While Irenaeus at the end of the second century stated the case for apostolic succession, he never taught that Christ intended any bishop to be the head of the Church.

In this second century bishops became more prominent as essential ingredients of the Catholic Church. Cyprian (d. 258), Bishop of Carthage in the third century, looked to Rome as the chief church in dignity, but only as the first among equals. He explained that Christianity is not a dictatorship: “for neither does anyone of us set himself up as a ‘bishop of bishops’ (*episcopum episcoporum*), nor does anyone by totalitarian methods compel his fellow bishops to the necessity of obedience. For neither did Peter... arrogantly assume anything to himself, so as to say that he held a primacy (*primatum tenere*). Certainly the other apostles were also what Peter was, endowed with a like partnership, both of honor and power (*pari consortio et honoris et potestatis*).”<sup>iii</sup> The Bishop of Rome, however, claimed to have greater authority and it was natural for the bishops in smaller cities to look to Rome in a special way.

We keep in mind that until the fourth century the Church was not accepted by the Roman Empire. That changed when through Constantine, and during the years that followed, the Church

became a recognized state Church. This now made it possible for the Church to exert influence in civil matters, but at the same time the Church became dependent on the civil authorities. Here started a quest for power between the Church and the Emperor. At this time the Emperor was very powerful and it was generally conceded that he should convene the Ecumenical Councils, sanction their decisions and ratify the appointments to higher ecclesiastical offices. Keep in mind that in 330 A.D. Constantine transferred the seat of empire from Rome to Constantinople. This played an important role in the years to come in leaving a power vacuum in the western Mediterranean, in part filled by the papacy.

Among the clergy themselves there developed a hierarchical distinction. Certain bishops were accorded the dignity of patriarchs, namely the bishops of Rome, Antioch and Alexandria, of Constantinople, and of Jerusalem. The bishop of Rome never accepted the title of patriarch, yet strove the more openly for the supreme authority over the whole Church.

Leo I (440-461), also called the Great, was the first pope to so strongly press his authority upon the West. He was an energetic pope and

...infused all his policies and pronouncements, especially his anniversary sermons, with his conviction that supreme and universal authority in the church, bestowed originally by Christ on Peter, had been transmitted to each subsequent bishop of Rome as the Apostle's heir. As such, he assumed Peter's functions, full authority, and privileges; and just as the Lord bestowed more power on Peter than on the other apostles, so the pope was 'the primate of all the bishops', the Apostle's mystical embodiment.<sup>iv</sup>

Leo believed that in him was the voice of Peter. The Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon in 451 declared that Constantinople had the same patriarchal status as Rome (28<sup>th</sup> canon), a statement with which Leo never agreed, and which he even tried to declare invalid. When Leo tried to reinstate a defrocked French bishop, St. Hilary who presided over the Gallican Church as Supreme Pontiff, told Leo to keep his Roman nose out of French affairs. Leo's aspirations were strongly opposed, especially by the patriarch of Constantinople. Yet through him the papacy still gained some ground.

The idea of a primacy was not only foreign, but pagan to the early Church. As St. Cyprian had said a century and a half earlier, so St. John Chrysostom (d. 407) voiced the same, denying that the Church Universal had a visible head. The writings of the Church Fathers and the forthcoming Ecumenical Councils never speak of papal elections. "Documents of the early church were never dated by a pope, and certainly the early Fathers never had to submit their private interpretations to the imprimatur of the Vatican."<sup>v</sup>

Before we leave the early history of the Church and go to the Middle Ages, it would be good to take a cursory look at the Ecumenical Councils held in the first seven centuries. The power of the Emperors is demonstrated during these centuries as they sought to control the Church and make it serve the state and society, just as they had done with non-Christian cults. They called Church councils, presided at them (or through a representative), and even issued decrees on ecclesiastical matters. However, what we want to trace through these Councils is not the dominance of theological controversy, but the title used by the Emperors and the relation of the churches to each other.

## **Emperors Called Ecumenical Councils**

Long before it had accepted the Church, the Roman state had insisted upon controlling the religion of its citizens. Its Emperor was *pontifex maximus*, the chief priest of the cults officially acknowledged by the state, or now, through his powers believed to have come directly from Christ, he was called the Vicar of Christ. It was natural that when the Emperors were Christians they should insist upon having power in the Church. To be sure, they were not members of the hierarchy and did not perform the functions of the Church, but they did have a profound influence on the workings, even the doctrine of the Church.

The Christian Church was never as fully subservient to the emperor as the former pagan state cults had been, but to a degree maintained the independence it had developed in the centuries when it had not been given legal recognition. That does not mean the Emperors lacked power over the Church. Much was the opposite. Constantine and some of his successors sought to bring internal peace in the Church by calling Councils of the Church.

Eventually, the Emperor himself, as we have reported, and as happened in the case of the powerful Emperor Justinian, declared what was sound doctrine. The Emperors enforced the decrees of councils against those condemned as heretics. They had a voice in appointments to high ecclesiastical office, especially in the East, near the main seat of their authority. As time passed, the assent of the Emperor was required even for the assumption of his powers by each successive Bishop of Rome. It was under the Emperors that what came to be called “Ecumenical Councils” became the voice of the entire Catholic Church.<sup>vi</sup>

## **The Ecumenical Councils**

While perhaps a more important scope of these councils is the Christological controversy, that does not fall in the realm of this paper. We only wish to review here the position of the councils on the primacy of the bishops, and those popes who wanted to rule over the other bishops.

### *First Ecumenical Council (325 AD)*

Adopted the African rule and decreed that the boundaries and jurisdiction of the ancient sees should remain unchanged (*Nice, canon 6; Mansi 2, 670*), and that one national church cannot reinstate a bishop excommunicated by another national church (*Constantinople, canon 2; Mansi 3, 559*).

### *Second Ecumenical Council (381 AD)*

Adopted the African rule and decreed that the boundaries and jurisdiction of the ancient sees should remain unchanged (*Nice, canon 6; Mansi 2, 670*), and that one national church cannot reinstate a bishop excommunicated by another national church (*Constantinople, canon 2; Mansi 3, 559*).

### *Third Ecumenical Council (419 AD)*

When Pope Zosimus (418) tried to interfere with the jurisdiction of the African Church by falsifying the text of the 5<sup>th</sup> canon of the First Ecumenical Council, both St. Augustine and Bishop Aurelius in the African Council of 419 warned Pope Zosimus (and later Pope Celestine) not to falsify the documents of the Catholic Church, nor to “introduce the empty pride of the

world into the Church of Christ,” and to keep their Roman noses out of African affairs (*African Council, 419, canon 138; Mansi 4, 515; Migne, P. L. 50, 422-425*).

The same council ruled that no bishop may call himself “Prince of Bishops” or “Supreme Bishop” or any other title which suggests supremacy (*canon 39*), and it ruled that, if any of the African clergy dared to appeal to Rome, the same was *ipso facto* cast out of the clergy (*canon 34; Mansi 4, 431*).

(A side note is that this council, ‘Which condemns any form of papacy or supremacy among bishops, is often quoted as having given to the world the first ‘complete’ Bible, including the Apocrypha.<sup>vii</sup>)

#### *Fourth Ecumenical Council (Chalcedon, 451)*

Ruled that the bishops of Constantinople and Rome were equals, enjoying the “same” ecclesiastical honors (*canon 28; Mansi 6, 1229*). Pope Leo the Great (d.461) fully approved the canons of this council (*Migne, P.L. 54, 1038 & 1143*), that this “Holy, Great and Universal Council” simply addressed the bishop of Rome as “Archbishop Leo” (*Migne, P.L. 54, 951*).<sup>viii</sup>

#### *Fifth Ecumenical Council (553 A.D.)*

“Pope Vigilius wrote a treatise for home consumption, but the Fifth Ecumenical Council immediately forced this Roman bishop to retract his heretical views, and his successor, Pope Pelagius, officially approved this Eastern decision” (*Migne, P.L. 69, 143; Mansi 9, 418*).<sup>ix</sup>

At this council Pope Vigilius was careful not to concede to the Emperor the right to determine matters of doctrine. He refused to yield to the Emperor and stood up for the authority of the Papal See. The Emperor banished Vigilius.

#### *Sixth Ecumenical Council (680 AD)*

Condemned Pope Honorius (d.640) posthumously: “To Honorius, the heretic, anathema” (*Mansi 11, 635*). The same Eastern Council informed the then living bishop of Rome that his predecessor had been officially anathematized by the Catholic Church: as a heretic, as a sinner, and “as one fallen away from the faith” (*Migne. P.L. 87, 1247*).

Before the great Schism all bishops of Rome taught that the ecumenical councils were above any individual bishop, so there is no basis on which to speak of a “papacy” or even of the “rise of the papacy” in these days or those that follow.

#### *The Middle Ages (also called the Dark Ages)*

Of special significance during this period was Gregory I (590-604), called the Great. Gregory came into this important bishopric in difficult times. The Lombards were threatening and the Emperor was quite far removed in Constantinople. Gregory virtually became civil ruler of Italy, negotiating treaties, paying troops, and appointing generals. (Even centuries before this the Teutonic nations left their mark on the European scene and gained control over much of what was the glory of Rome.)

At the same time the Church was torn by internal dissensions and moral corruption. Gregory was strong and was able to lead and control the nations in the West. He had a great influence on the papacy, but it is clear that he was not in control of the entire Church. His jurisdiction was nothing compared with the Patriarch of Constantinople, or at least with the claims being made by that patriarch. For “when Cyriac of Constantinople began to sign the Synodical Acts with Cyriac, Universal Bishop, Pope Gregory wrote immediately to Egypt to

warn the other patriarchs that their jurisdiction was in danger: for 'if *one*, as he (Cyriac) supposes, is Bishop Universal, it follows that you are not bishops.' During the first 1000 years the East came much closer to establishing a papacy than the West."<sup>x</sup> While Gregory spoke so strongly against the Patriarch of Constantinople he "at the same time called himself 'servant of the servants of God.'"<sup>xi</sup> But Gregory would not dare to say that he was the head of the entire Church as the Ecumenical Councils would probably have excommunicated him and forced his resignation. He was buried in St. Peter's, his epitaph acclaiming him as "consul of God."

We can say that with Gregory there began a new era for the Roman Church as he began to show some of the characteristics of the popes of the Middle Ages. "He extended the influence of the Roman See to France, England, Spain, and Africa and it became more and more the custom in ecclesiastical controversies to appeal to the pope for arbitration."<sup>xii</sup> This was all part of the development of position in Rome which eventually led to the claim of "Vicar of Christ." But it cannot be maintained that at this time there was a defined papacy, or even a rise of the papacy. The foundation, however, was being firmly planted.

While the Bishop of Rome struggled for supremacy with the Bishop of Constantinople we find that the Eastern Emperors still maintained tremendous power. Nearly a century after Gregory we find Pope Agatho (678-681) teaching "that Emperor Augustus, as Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic Church, was far better qualified to interpret the Scriptures than the Bishop of Rome: 'Your Highness is incomparably more able to penetrate the meaning of the Sacred Scriptures than Our Lowliness.'"<sup>xiii</sup> At this point in time the popes bowed, or even crawled on their knees before the Eastern Emperors, and it was the Emperors who held the title of "Supreme Pontiff."

### **East and West Drift Apart**

Although for them agreement had been reached over the nature of Christ and the relation of the divine and the human in him, the Western and Eastern sections of the Catholic Church were drifting apart, the one looking to Rome and the other to Constantinople.

A stage in the separation was a council held in Constantinople in 692. It was summoned by the Emperor, but while the East regarded it as supplementary to the Sixth Ecumenical Council and really a continuation of that body, its membership was purely from that section of the Empire. It dealt with matters of organization and discipline rather than doctrine. Its enactments were regarded as binding by the portion of the Church led by the See of Constantinople, but were never fully accepted by Rome or by the section of the Church which has looked to Rome for guidance. This council reaffirmed the position of Chalcedon that "the See of Constantinople shall enjoy equal privilege with the see of Old Rome... and second after it."<sup>xiv</sup>

### **Two Spurious Documents**

In tracking the pope's climb to "Vicar of Christ" we also have to note two documents that played no small part in the claims the pope could make of himself. Those were the Decretals of Isidore and the Donation of Constantine. The Decretals are a collection of papal letters of thirty-three popes, gathered by one "Isidore" from the time of Sylvester I (314-355) to Gregory II (715-731). They depicted the popes as claiming supreme authority from the beginning; permitted all bishops to appeal directly to the pope, thus limiting the authority of archbishops; and regarded bishops and popes as free from secular control. Thus while claiming to be a fourth century document, they were proven to be a ninth century forgery, but not proven so until the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Erasmus. Pope Nicholas I (858-867) was the first one to appeal to these decretals.

The Donation of Constantine is another spurious document from the eighth century purported to be a fourth century document written by Constantine to the Bishop of Rome. It likewise gives the pope temporal powers, honors, and privileges. Even though Pope Sylvester (999-1003) declared it a forgery, it was rewritten by Leo IX (1049-1054). The document said, “We... deem it right that, even as Blessed Peter is known to have been appointed as the Vicar of the Son of God on earth, so also the pontiffs who hold the place of that prince of the apostles, should receive from us and from the empire, a power of primacy (*principatus potestatem*)... that he shall hold a primacy as well over the four principal sees: Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople and Jerusalem, as also over the churches of God throughout the entire world.”<sup>xv</sup> “The document goes on to say that for himself the emperor has established in the East a new capital which bears his name, and thither he removes his government, since it is inconvenient that a secular emperor have power where God has established the residence of the head of the Christian religion.”<sup>xvi</sup> Stating that Peter was appointed as the Vicar of the Son of God was only one step away from the pope claiming that title since his primacy descended from that of Peter. This all inched the pope closer to his assumption of the title “Vicar of the Son of God.”

### **The Great Break of 1054 A.D.**

The great separation of the church of 1054 A.D. was in part the result of the struggle for power between the East and West, both in the governmental and spiritual realm. The Bishop of Rome had for many centuries been regarded as a particular successor of St. Peter. While Rome interpreted this power in a sovereign sense, the East, while giving lip service to the West, was not in agreement with Rome’s position.

Constantinople was forever rebelling against the Pontiff who claimed to be their master. “Actually there were indications that Rome’s conception of its sovereignty was not fully grasped even by those of the Easterns who were well-affected towards Rome.”<sup>xvii</sup> The break of the Church was more than a controversy over the use of *Filioque* and embodied long and hard seated resentment and opposition to the power Rome was continuously trying to wield. The Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.) had put under the anathema any departure from the Nicene Creed, and now the East was ready to condemn the West. They denied and resented any claim of the West to change the Creed without the consent of the East. In the events that followed Pope Leo IX (1049-1054) wrote a strong letter defending the power of the pope in which “he most emphatically asserts the primacy of this see ...quotes all the Petrine texts, and also makes much of the *Donation Constantini*.”<sup>xviii</sup>

Our focus is to look at the claims being made by the papacy at this time. Sometimes the best argument to get your way is to claim that you have more authority than another. That is what the West was doing as it kept pushing its power and authority on the East. They tried it to see if they could get by with it, and progressively the West saw themselves in the light of the power they were proclaiming. The East, of course, hated these papal claims and while considering them arrogant, could do little about altering the course of history. “Thousands of bishops and priests, and millions of devout Christians who firmly held the Creed of Nicaea, rejected as firmly the ‘subjection to the Roman Pontiff’ which (it is claimed) ‘for every human creature is altogether necessary to salvation’, they repudiated the sovereign jurisdiction to which all the faithful are bound to submit, according to ‘the teaching of Catholic truth; from which no one can deviate without loss of faith and of salvation.’”<sup>xix</sup> The split came and the Papacy continued to grow in power. The East continued to interpret the Petrine text as it had done for

1000 years believing that the Church was built on the faith of the apostle Peter, and not Peter himself.

The Catholic or Ecumenical Church, founded by Constantine in 325, had lasted less than eight centuries. The Schism now created two new names: The Greek Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church.

Not until the rise of Roman Catholicism after the Split did the Western theologians begin to explain Matthew 16:18 as referring to the pope and to his primacy. Doeswyck commented that “of all the commentaries on Matthew 16:18, written during the first thousand years of Christianity, not one mentions the “papacy” (the Fathers would not know how to spell the word); not one mentions the “primacy” of the bishop of Rome. Such an idea and interpretation did not even exist as a heresy.”<sup>xx</sup>

### **Pope Leo IX (1054)**

*“Vicar of the Son of God”*

Pope Leo IX effected the Final Schism between East and West. He was the first pope to assume the title of the “Vicar of the Son of God” (*Vicarius filii Dei*). As the Schism brought a break from the Emperor in Constantinople, the Roman Church could now grow appreciably in power and prestige. The Roman bishops of the 11<sup>th</sup> century began to wear tiaras to indicate their new authority; they began to collect Peter’s Pence and papal taxes from the entire West; they began to grant papal indulgences (never granted by the Ecumenical Church); they began to issue papal Bulls; create papal courts, et cetera. This is the beginning of a sharp rise of the papacy, developing out of the split of the old Ecumenical Church.

### **Gregory VII (1073-1085)**

*“Head of the Entire World”*

Shortly after the split between East and West Pope Gregory VII (Hildebrand) took some big steps in papal claims. The scene had been set over the course of the years for someone to lay bigger claims for the papacy and Gregory “claimed the sole title of Pope and Supreme Pontiff of the entire West.”<sup>xxi</sup> History records him as a man of exceptional ability. In 1073 he became the first Roman bishop to openly declare himself the head of the entire world by his papal Bull, known as the *Dictatus papae* (March 1075) which decreed: (1) That the Roman Church was founded by God alone. (2) That the Roman Pontiff alone is to be called “Universal”. (3) That he alone has the power to depose and reconcile bishops... That all princes should kiss his feet, and his alone. Bishop Anselm (d. 1086), nephew of Pope Alexander, immediately incorporated these new decrees into his Collection of Canon Laws, which since have been mutilated. Canon 10 decrees: “That upon one, that is, upon Peter the Lord God has built His church.” Canon 3: “That blessed Peter has handed down the power invested in himself to his successors” (as quoted from *Migne, P.L.* 149, 485-487).

Thus, in the 149<sup>th</sup> Volume of Migne’s Latin Fathers we find in a dubious collection the first interpretation on which Roman Catholicism is founded. It took us more than 1,000 years and more than 148 huge volumes of Latin works to find this first interpretation by a man (Hildebrandt) who was the first bishop to usurp the sole title of ‘Pope’ and ‘Supreme Pontiff.’<sup>xxii</sup>



Gregory strove to bind temporal rulers to the jurisdiction of Rome and to centralize authority in the Church. He said he, and not the Emperor, had the right to give the bishops their position, and showed his power by letting Henry IV wait outside the castle at Canossa for three days before admitting him and granting him forgiveness. The Pope was in power, yet history shows that Henry IV's cause did not die out as he outlived Gregory and continued to insist on the Emperor's control over the bishops. With the strength that the pope had, it was also at this time that the popes, as well as the bishops, began to amass gold and silver. Such power was bound to corrupt.

Yet, as strong as Gregory's power and claims were, he stopped short of calling himself the "Vicar of Christ." That was to come during the course of the next century.

### **The Crusades**

The Pope found a strong support in the Western world in the mighty movement known as the Crusades, as he was the leading spirit. The first Crusade was the most successful in recapturing Jerusalem in 1099. In consequence of the Crusades and the veneration of the common people for the head of the Church the Pope gained one advantage after another over renowned Emperors. "By the 12<sup>th</sup> century we find the first Collections of canon laws in continental Europe which starts out with: Canon 1: On the primacy of Peter. Canon 2: On the primacy of the Roman Church."<sup>xxiii</sup>

### **St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153)**

Bernard was interested in becoming a monk at an early age and before long was one of the most influential religious forces in Europe. Through saintliness and personality he entered into the theological discussions of his day. "The pope, in St. Bernard's mind, was no longer a vicar of St. Peter, but of Christ. The popes began slowly to adopt the title '*vicarius Christi*' as a result of Bernard's influence, until with Innocent III (1198-1216) this became the official and usual title. Bernard, it should be noted, does not seem the inventor of the title '*vicarius Christi*' as a title exclusively applicable to the pope alone"<sup>xxiv</sup> But it does seem that his influence with the title had a marked effect on its forthcoming specific use with the popes themselves.

Ullmann quotes St. Bernard as saying that the pope's position on earth approaches that of God, and that the pope has no equal on earth "*parem super terram non habes.*" "It is rather self-evident, on this basis, that by virtue of the Petrine commission, the pope as Christ's vicar was given the government of the world (*saeculum*), and not merely the government of the *sacerdotium*." Bernard further states:

The pope is the king of the earth, the lord of the heavens, because the apostolic see is "singularly distinguished by divine and royal privileges." Christ himself was supreme priest and king – "*summus et sacerdos et rex*" - and consequently *regnum* and *sacerdotium* were united in Him. The pope is His vicar; and hence as the supreme monarch of this universal *civitas sancta* he disposes of kingdoms and empires and presides over the princes, nations and peoples. In short, the pope is "*vicarius Christi, christus Domini, deus Pharaonis.*" His voice as Vicar of Christ rings out over the entire world.<sup>xxv</sup>

### **Bishop Benzo of Alba (11<sup>th</sup> century humanist)**

As strong as the declarations of St. Bernard were, there were those who disagreed. Bishop Benzo of Alba was an 11<sup>th</sup> century humanist. He as a poet lived and breathed the ancient Roman world and had no place for the Roman Church. He was well versed in Cicero, Cato, Kalin, Horace, Virgil and so forth, as well as the Greek writers Homer, Socrates and so on. According to this poet “the whole world awaits the emperor as if he were a redeemer: ‘*Omnis terra expectat eum quasi redemptorem.*’ Directly descending from the heavens, the emperor is no man of mere flesh - ‘*De coelo missus, non homo carnis*’ - but the ‘Vicar of the Creator.’ The pope himself, according to Benzo, must be created by the emperor ...”<sup>xxvi</sup>

Thus we see in the eyes of some a refusal to give an inch to the papacy and a contention for the ultimate right of the Emperor to control the whole Christian world. But maybe as interesting is the use of the term “Vicar of the Creator” in its application to the Emperor. Even while people were laying claim to the pope as the Vicar of Christ, the same term was still used to refer to the Emperor.

### **Other Popes**

Pope Eugenius III (1145-1153) also designated himself as the true king and priest, implying his power and position as God’s special representative on earth.

Pope Adrian IV reigned from 1154-1159 and claimed that he acted as the Vicar of Christ and that in this function he conferred the gift of imperial power. Although somewhat seen still in veiled terms, he saw himself as the mediator between God and man and believed that imperial power, dignity and crown were conferred by Christ through him. Still the church historians do not regard his claims as strong as that of Innocent III who would follow a half century later, although we are getting ever so close to the term referring specifically to the papacy.

Hector Burn-Murdoch concludes that “it is not easy to discover exactly when this great title became attached distinctively to the pope and detached from bishops in general. Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) was perhaps the first pope to claim the title for himself alone, and Pope Boniface VIII declared in *Unam Sanctam* (1302) that ‘Christ and His Vicar constitute only one Head.’ Yet as late as the thirteenth century, St. Thomas Aquinas could still write that ‘the Apostles and their successors are Vicars of God’, and at the Council of Trent in 1562 a daring claim was still voiced that all bishops are Vicars of Christ as much as the pope, though he be the chief.”<sup>xxvii</sup>

### **The Papacy reached its highest power under Innocent III (1198-1216),**

and this quest for power and strength continued with the successors of Innocent until the last of the Hohenstaufen family had been laid to rest. Under Innocent there seemed to be almost no limit to the power of the pope. In a sermon on the anniversary of his consecration, he asserted that:

It was said to me in the prophet, “I have set you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant” (Jeremiah 1:10) ....Others are called to the role of caring, but only Peter is raised to fullness of power. Now therefore you see who is the servant who is set over the household, truly the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the successor of Peter, the Christ of the Lord, the God of Pharaoh; established in the middle between God and man, lower than God but higher than man; less than God, but greater than man; who judges all, and is judged by none.”<sup>xxviii</sup>

The term “Vicar of Christ” became a papal monopoly under Innocent III and did not involve just a struggle over the other bishops around the Mediterranean, but was a term designating power over all the people in both the temporal and spiritual kingdoms. Pope Innocent’s own use of the term, through which we accord him the honor of when the term Vicar of Christ first came to be used in the Roman Catholic Church, saw himself as much then as a political leader as a spiritual leader. We use the following example:

Pope Innocent III in 1209 excommunicated King John of England, in 1212 he declared John deposed as king and asked King Philip of France to invade the British Isles unless England surrendered to Rome. On May 15, 1213 King John signed the British empire over to the Pope of Rome: “John, by the grace of God, King of England, lord of Ireland... We offer and freely grant... to our lord Pope Innocent and to his Catholic successors the whole kingdom of England and the whole realm of Ireland... holding these lands as a feudal subject... and we swear fealty for them to our above-mentioned lord, Pope Innocent. Moreover, in proof of this our perpetual obligation and grant, we will establish... excluding in all respects the Peter’s Pence, that the Roman Church shall receive annually one thousand marks sterling. Pope Innocent III also forced King John to sign the oath of fealty: “I, John, by the grace of God, king of England and Lord of Ireland, from this hour forward, will be faithful (fidelis ero)... to the Roman Church and to my lord, Pope Innocent and to his successors ....

Pope Innocent III was the first pope who succeeded in subjecting the entire West. He is the first pope to write a book on “The Primacy of the Roman Pontiff.” With the development of the primacy in the Middle Ages the papal letters grew enormously in number.” The Roman doctrines of Seven Sacraments, Purgatory, etc., are just about to be introduced.<sup>xxix</sup>

The 1967 edition of the New Catholic Encyclopedia says that “with Innocent III the title ‘Vicar of Christ’ became the exclusive title of the pope and completely superseded the older titles ‘Vicar of St. Peter’, and ‘Vicar of God’, which had enjoyed preeminence before this time” (under article “Vicar of Christ”). The 1909 edition of the same gives a little more detail stating that “Innocent III appeals for his power to remove bishops to the fact that he is Vicar of Christ. He also declares that Christ has given such power only to His Vicar Peter and his successors and states that it is the Roman Pontiff who is ‘the successor of Peter and the Vicar of Jesus Christ.’”<sup>xxx</sup>

The year before Innocent’s death he summoned the representatives of the Church to the Fourth Lateran Synod in 1215. “Never before had such a brilliant church assembly convened. Even the patriarchs of the East took part, either personally or by representatives. All present yielded submissively to this mighty church potentate, who dictated a number of decisions of such a decisive nature that this synod has appropriately been designated as the capstone of the papal structure.”<sup>xxxi</sup>

### **Decline**

Never again was the Papacy to be so potent in so many phases of the life of Europe. After Innocent III a decline set in which slightly less than two centuries later was to bring the See of

Peter to a low that, while not as low as that of the tenth century, was in sad contrast with the purposes cherished for it by the great popes of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

The decline was not immediate. The thirteenth century saw several strong and high-minded Pontiffs, and some of them continued to make their office a force in Christendom. The successor of Innocent, Honorius III (1216-1227) made improvements in the education of the clergy. Boniface VIII (1294-1303) made as great claims for papal authority as were ever promulgated. "In his bull *Unam Sanctam*, issued in 1299, he declared that 'it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff.'"<sup>xxxii</sup>

Yet he too had his setbacks. He was attacked in his own town and taken prisoner because of a strife with Philip the Fair of France. Philip had taxed the church and clergy in his kingdom without the consent of the pope and in the battle which followed Boniface was taken captive.

But before we think of Boniface as an exiled weakling we note the following pronouncement he made in his controversy with Philip IV of France in 1302:

The true faith compels us to believe that there is one holy catholic apostolic Church, and this we firmly believe and plainly confess. And outside of her there is no salvation and no remission of sins ...therefore there is one body of the one and only church, and one head, not two heads, as if the Church were a monster. And this head is Christ and his vicar, Peter and his successor (popes) for the Lord himself said to Peter, "Feed my sheep", John 21:16...If therefore Greeks and anyone else say they are not subject to Peter and his successors, they thereby necessarily confess that they are not of the sheep of Christ... By the words of the gospels we are taught that the two swords, namely, the spiritual authority and the temporal, are in the power of the Church... Whoever denies that the temporal sword is in the power of Peter does not properly understand the word of the Lord when he says: "Put up thy sword unto the sheath", John 18:11... Moreover it is necessary for one sword to be under the other, and the temporal authority to be subjected to the spiritual... We therefore declare, say, and affirm that submission on the part of every man to the bishop of Rome is altogether necessary for his salvation.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Yet there was a leak in papal power here that could not be stopped. "The kings gained more power and there was a resurgence of education and more liberal views in spiritual matters"<sup>xxxiv</sup> says Lovgren, and then states that both of these factors were a result of the Crusades.

Another factor in the weakening of the papacy was that in the 1300's the seat of the papacy was moved to Avignon in southeastern France. (Latourette disputed its location in France, but placed the city under French rule.) By the end of the century this led to two and even three popes claiming the office and came to be known as the "Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy." Some of the popes during this time were good and upright men, but the papacy was in a decline and another Church Council had to be called.

Such a council convened in Constance in 1414 at which time the three popes were deposed and a new one elected. Towards the close of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the papacy degenerated still more. Several successive popes were notorious for their tyranny, worldliness, and gross immorality, with all this wickedness culminating in the reign of Alexander VI (d. 1503).

Through all this the Lord brought to the hearts of many a longing for a thorough reformation of the church.

## Addendum

Jacques Paul Migne (1800-1875)

No single collection of Western philosophical and theological writings is comparable to the *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, the extraordinary achievement of the nineteenth-century ecclesiastical publisher Jacques-Paul Migne. The Patrologia is divided into the *Patrologia Latina* (P.L.) and the *Patrologia Graeco-Latina* (P.G.).

The *Patrologia Latina* covers the works of the Latin Fathers from Tertullian in 200 A.D. to Pope Innocent III in 1216. In 221 volumes it covers most major and minor Latin authors and contains the most influential works of late ancient and early medieval theology, philosophy, history, and literature. The works of a variety of figures are included - Hilary, Ambrose, Jerome, Boethius, Isidore, Bede, Peter Damian, Bernard, Augustine, Peter Lombard and Peter Chrysologus amongst hundreds of others. (taken from Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church)

While this author did not delve directly into the works of Migne, you are most welcome to do so. The complete edition is available at our seminary and now, according to Professor Hartwig, also electronically, for a price. Migne's volumes, 213-217 (P.L.) I believe, would contain the works of Innocent III, under whom the papal state reached its climax.

Giovanni Domenico Mansi (1692-1769)

Mansi was a canonist and archbishop of Lucca. He issued a vast series of publications in which his own part usually did not go beyond annotations (some 90 folio vols. have Mansi's name on their titles). The most celebrated was his edition of the Councils. (taken from Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church)

## Bibliography

- Burn-Murdoch, Hector. *The Development of the Papacy*. London: Faber & Faber Limited. Conway, C.S.P., Rev. Bertrand L. *The Question Box*. Glen Rock, NJ: Paulist Press; 1961. Cross, F.L., ed. *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. London, 1958. Doeswyck D.D., Peter J. *Ecumenicalism and Romanism: Their Origin and Development*. Long Beach, CA: Knights of Christ, Inc. Kelly, JND. *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes*. London: Oxford University Press, 1987. Latourette, Kenneth Scott. *A History of Christianity*. New York: Harper & Row, 1953. Lovgren, Nils. *A Church History*. Rock Island, IL: Augustana Book Concern, 1906. Morris, Collin. *The Papal Monarchy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, 426-433, 568-576. Tanis, Edward J. *What Rome Teaches*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Co., 1909. "Donation of Constantine." *The Split between Roman Catholicism and Christ*. New York: Lutheran Press. *The World Book Encyclopedia*. Chicago, 1994, "Rome, Ancient." Ullmann, Walter. *A Short History of the Papacy of the Middle Ages*. London: Methuen, 1972. *The Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages*. London: Methuen, 1962.

---

<sup>i</sup> Rev. Bertrand L. Conway, C.S.P., *The Question Box* (Glen Rock, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1961) 107.

<sup>ii</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1953) 131.

- 
- <sup>iii</sup> Peter J. Doeswyck D.D., *Ecumenicalism and Romanism: The Origin and Development* (Long Beach, CA: Knights of Christ, Inc.) 91.
- <sup>iv</sup> JND Kelly, *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes* (London: Oxford University Press, 1987) 43.
- <sup>v</sup> Peter J. Doeswyck D.D., *Ecumenicalism and Romanism: Their Origin and Development* (Long Beach, CA: Knights of Christ, Inc.) 94.
- <sup>vi</sup> Kenneth Scott LaTourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1953) 184-185.
- <sup>vii</sup> Peter J. Doeswyck D.D., *Ecumenicalism and Romanism: Their Origin and Development* (Long Beach, CA: Knights of Christ, Inc.) 93.
- <sup>viii</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19.
- <sup>ix</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.
- <sup>x</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.
- <sup>xi</sup> Nils Lovgren, *A Church History* (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Book Concern, 1906) 49.
- <sup>xii</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Peter J. Doeswyck D.D., *Ecumenicalism and Romanism: Their Origin and Development* (Long Beach, CA: Knights of Christ, Inc.) 18.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Kenneth Scott LaTourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1953) 286.
- <sup>xv</sup> Peter J. Doeswyck D.D., *Ecumenicalism and Romanism: Their Origin and Development* (Long Beach, CA: Knights of Christ, Inc.) 36.
- <sup>xvi</sup> *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1909 ed., "Donation of Constantine."
- <sup>xvii</sup> Hector Burn-Murdoch, *The Development of the Papacy* (London: Faber & Faber Limited) 301.
- <sup>xviii</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.
- <sup>xix</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.
- <sup>xx</sup> Peter J. Doeswyck D.D., *Ecumenicalism and Romanism: Their Origin and Development* (Long Beach, CA: Knights of Christ, Inc.) 87.
- <sup>xxi</sup> *Ibid.*, 95
- <sup>xxii</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-88.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Walter Ullmann, *The Growth of Papal Government in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen, 1962) 428.
- <sup>xxv</sup> *Ibid.*, 430.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> *Ibid.*, 390-391.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Hector Burn-Murdoch, *The Development of the Papacy*, (London: Methuen, 1962) 428.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Collin Morris, *The Papal Monarchy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) "The Western Church from 1050 to 1250," 431.
- <sup>xxix</sup> Peter J. Doeswyck D.D., *Ecumenicalism and Romanism: Their Origin and Development* (Long Beach, CA: Knights of Christ, Inc.) 97-98.
- <sup>xxx</sup> *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1909 ed., "Vicar of Christ."
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Nils Lovgren, *A Church History* (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Book Concern, 1906) 110.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1953) 487.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Edward J. Tannis, *What Rome Teaches* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954) 20-21.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Nils Lovgren, *A Church History* (Rock Island, IL: Augustana Book Concern, 1906) 113.