



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

Church History – Part One (100-1500 AD)

Lesson 30 – The Growing Power of the Roman Catholic Church

As the older monasteries grew in power and wealth and influence, some protested against such a luxurious lifestyle by emphasizing poverty and the practice of gaining a livelihood by begging. Peter Waldo gave up his life as a merchant and became a poor traveling preacher. Others joined him and became known as Waldensians. The organized church did not approve of them, and they were forced by persecution to live in remote valleys in the regions of the Alps. This group continued its separate existence until the time of the Reformation when many of them became Protestants.

Another group similar to the Waldensians was founded by Francis of Assisi, who is known today as Saint Francis. He was a merchant who gave away everything he had and devoted himself to a life of poverty. For a time, he lived as a hermit dressed in rags. But in the year 1209 AD he learned from the example of Jesus that he should go to where poor people were and preach to them. He gathered some followers who became known as Franciscans. They went to Rome to gain recognition and authorization from the pope for their work. Pope Innocent III gave his approval, and the Franciscans grew in number and influence. Francis was concerned that this success would lead to a pursuit of wealth and so he made a will that forbade his followers from possessing anything. Francis died on October 3, 1226, but the Franciscans lived on and tried to continue in the ways he taught.

Dominic was another man who went to Rome with his followers to establish a new order of monks. His followers became known as Dominicans. In contrast to Francis, who stressed simplicity without much Bible study, Dominic was concerned about suppressing heresies by means of orthodox teaching and Bible study. Since Pope Innocent III would not allow another monastic order, the Dominicans followed the existing order of Augustine. Like the Franciscans, the Dominicans were a mendicant order. That is, they lived by begging and spent their time in preaching. As time went on, the Franciscans also became interested in the study of theology.

As the influence of the Franciscans and Dominicans grew, their emphasis on begging and poverty diminished, and they began to involve themselves in the development of universities. Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas were Dominicans who taught in universities. Alexander of Hales, a Franciscan, taught at the University of Paris. Both groups were interested in bringing their versions of Christianity to non-Christians, such as Jews and Muslims. William of Tripoli and Vincent Ferrer were two Dominicans who worked among the

Muslims in Spain. John of Montecorvino was a Franciscan who went east to Persia, Ethiopia, India, and he even reached Beijing in China in 1294 AD.

After Francis and Dominic were no longer living, their orders no longer opposed to the ownership of property. Pope Gregory IX declared in 1230 AD that the will of St. Francis was not binding. But a number of Franciscans wanted to retain the original standard of absolute poverty. They also began to follow the peculiar teachings of Joachim of Fiore, who determined that the age of the Son would end and that the age of the Holy Spirit would begin in 1260 AD. But one of their leaders, St. Bonaventure, was able to steer them back into the favor of the Roman hierarchy.

Even after the Concordat of Worms in 1122 AD, there were clashes between the pope and the emperor. The emperors tried to impose their wills on the church, but the emperor's choices as pope were not always accepted. Emperor Frederick Barbarossa (1152-1190 AD) wanted Calixtus III as pope, but Calixtus resigned because of a lack of support and Alexander III (1159-1181 AD) became pope. When Emperor Frederick died, his son Henry VI became emperor. But when he wanted to control the papacy, Pope Celestine III excommunicated him. In 1198 AD the cardinals elected Innocent III as pope, even though he was only thirty-seven years old. His rule was from 1198 to 1216 AD. He is generally considered the most powerful pope in the history of the Roman Catholic Church.

After Henry VI died unexpectedly, there was a contest between Philip, Henry's brother, and Otto IV. Pope Innocent III asserted that God had established two authorities on earth: the papacy is like the sun, and the empire is like the moon. In his opinion, the pope had the authority to determine who the emperor should be. Innocent III supported Otto IV, and Otto IV became the undisputed Holy Roman Emperor.

But Emperor Otto IV tried to take away some of the papal lands in Italy. Pope Innocent III retaliated by excommunicating Otto IV and replacing him as emperor with Frederick II. Notice that the pope was exercising authority over both church and state. Innocent III also insisted that King Philip Augustus of France return to a wife he had abandoned. When the king refused, the pope forbade the celebration of the sacraments throughout the whole kingdom of France. When the French king's subjects sided with the pope rather than with him, he returned to the wife he had rejected. The pope got his way.

Pope Innocent III also quarreled with King John of England as to who was the rightful archbishop of Canterbury. When the king did not like the pope's choice, the pope excommunicated him and ordered his subjects no longer to regard John as king. The king of England also gave in to the pope's demands. In Spain, Innocent III also involved himself in the affairs of state. In fact, he claimed that all lands taken from unbelievers rightfully belonged to the papacy.

A number of important events happened during the reign of Pope Innocent III. The Franciscans and the Dominicans obtained power. The Moors in Spain were driven back. The

Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 AD (which was controlled by the pope) condemned the Waldensians and declared transubstantiation to be an official doctrine and a matter of faith. This doctrine claimed that the priest had the power to change the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper into Christ's body and blood. The inquisition was instituted, which gave church leaders the authority to hunt for heresies and destroy heretics. Jews and Muslims in Christian lands were ordered to wear distinctive clothing so that they would not be thought of as Christians. Each church member was also ordered to confess sins to the priest at least once a year.

During the reign of Pope Innocent III and his immediate successors, the pope assumed power over almost all of Europe. After Pope Gregory X supported Rudolf of Hapsburg as the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, the new emperor declared that the pope was the rightful and independent ruler of the Papal States. In other words, the pope was not only the alleged head of the Christian Church on earth, but he was also the absolute ruler of a good share of earthly real estate.

The Franciscans and the Dominicans gained such influence in church affairs that a Dominican became Pope Innocent V in 1276 AD and a Franciscan became Pope Nicholas IV, who ruled from 1288 to 1292 AD. The next pope was also a Franciscan who promised to bring some humility to the papacy. But he abdicated after a short time in power. The pope who replaced him was Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303 AD), who dared to issue a doctrinal statement (called *Unam Sanctam*) that included these words: "One sword must be under the other, and temporal authority must be subject to the spiritual... Therefore, if earthly power strays from the right path it is to be judged by the spiritual... But if the supreme spiritual authority strays, it can only be judged by God, and not by humans... We further declare, affirm, and define that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that all human creatures be under the Roman pontiff" (Gonzalez: *The Story of Christianity*, Part 1, p. 311).

By such claims the papacy was proving that it was the little horn with a big mouth spoken of by Daniel, the prophet, and the man of sin foretold by the apostle Paul, namely, the one **"who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself he is God"** (2 Thessalonians 2:4). Anyone who claims that salvation is dependent on obedience to him is truly the Antichrist, for it is only Jesus Himself who can truly say that **"whoever believes in Him (Jesus) should not perish but have everlasting life"** (John 3:16).

Questions:

1. What was the outcome of Peter Waldo's emphasis on poverty?
2. In what way did Francis of Assisi escape the fate of Peter Waldo?
3. What was the chief concern of Dominic and the Dominicans?
4. What was the peculiar teaching of Joachim of Fiore?
5. Why were the emperor and the pope always quarreling with each other?

6. How did Pope Innocent III try to establish his power over all governments?
7. Which decisions of the Council of 1215 went beyond Scripture?
8. How does the writing known as *Unam Sanctam* show that the pope is the Antichrist?

