

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

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Who Is the Holy Father?

by Richard Bennett

Under the title of Holy Father,¹ Pope Francis is due to visit the United States in September 2015. Thus, we ask the question, “Who truly is the Holy Father?” A Christian’s relationship with the Holy Father is crucial. Thus, Jesus Christ prayed, “Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are” (John 17:11).² Only those who have been placed in Christ Jesus by God’s grace alone have the right and privilege to call Holy God their Father. Nevertheless, the Vatican both teaches a different gospel and, on its website, claims a successive chain of 266 “holy fathers,” or popes, from St. Peter to Pope Francis.

In Christendom, the great visible center of religious life is the Pope and the Vatican. Papal Rome enjoys its apparent worldly pre-eminence and exercises an authoritarian dominion over the political and religious thinking of hundreds of millions. However, the true Kingdom of God in the spiritual body of Christ continues its triumphant growth under the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ by His Spirit. Hidden from the view of the world and not perceptible as an institutional force, the true Church remains the ultimate fact of human history yet to be fully revealed at the Lord’s return. Of these two contemporary entities, the Vatican has, according to the revealed will of God, unhappily proven itself to be the most dominant, as the Pope plays a major part on the stage of world history leading up to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

¹ The Catholic news agency *Zenit* normally calls the Pope the “Holy Father.” In fact for most Catholics the term “Holy Father” usually means the Pope.

² The Lord Jesus uses the term “Holy Father” exclusively in speaking to His Father.

It is critical to appreciate the contemporary context in which the Roman claim to historical-political priority and Church pre-eminence is being reasserted on the world stage. The aggressive regeneration of orthodox Islam in general and ISIS in particular is focusing the Western world back to toward the consideration of religion as a force with which to be reckoned politically. With the Muslims knowing their religion’s history back to Muhammad, it makes sense that the Papacy would republish in 2015 its claim to a religious history allegedly more ancient and potent than Islam.

Moreover, the balance of political power world wide is shifting. Particularly in times of such shifts, the Papacy is ever ready to present what appears to be an established stability in the midst of growing disorder and uncertainty. With the 2015 posting of its unbroken line of popes from Peter to the present Francis, comes the Papacy’s not so subtle reminder of its claim to have been established by God. It is time to set the record straight.

The Beginning of the Official List of Popes

On the Vatican website, the first four claimed popes are the following:³

	Papal Name	Begin Pontificate	End Pontificate	Secular Name	Birth
1	Peter		64 or 67		Bethsaida of Galilee
2	Linus	68	79		Tuscia

³ Vatican Website: <http://w2.vatican.va/content/vatican/en/holy-father.html>, 11 February, 2015.

3	Anacletus or Cletus	80	92	Rome
4	Clement	92	99	Rome

The first four claimed popes are Peter, Linus, Cletus, and Clement. These four are a foundational tradition in the Roman Catholic system. Uncertainty about any one of these undermines the entire tradition. More than uncertainty, serious skepticism about Linus, Cletus, and Clement, however, is warranted, as shown by Richard P. McBrien, who was a well-known Catholic scholar at Notre Dame University. In his book, *Lives of the Popes: The Pontiffs from St. Peter to John Paul II*, McBrien stated the following:

Although Catholic tradition, beginning in the late second and early third centuries, regards St. Peter as the first Bishop of Rome, and, therefore, as the first pope, there is no evidence that Peter was involved in the initial establishment of the Christian community in Rome (indeed, what evidence there is would seem to point in the opposite direction) or that he served as Rome's first bishop. Not until the pontificate of St. Pius I in the middle of the second century (c. 142 – c. 155) did the Roman church have a monoepiscopal structure of government (one bishop as pastoral leader of a diocese). Those whom Catholic tradition lists as Peter's immediate successors (Linus, Anacletus, Clement, *et al.*) did not function as the one bishop of Rome. (The succession lists were passed down by St. Irenaeus of Lyons [died c. 200] and the historian St. Hegesippus [died c. 180], and were attested by Eusebius of Caesarea [died c. 339], often called the "Father of Church History.")

The Roman community seems instead to have had a corporate or collegial form of pastoral leadership. Those counted among the earliest popes, therefore, may very well have been simply the individuals who presided over the local council of elders or presbyter-bishops. Or they may have been the most prominent of the pastoral leaders of the community. In any case, the popes of the first four centuries—that is, until the watershed papacy of Leo I in the middle of the fifth century—functioned with relatively limited authority beyond Rome and its immediate environs.⁴

The statement by McBrien utterly undermines the basic premise of the Vatican. In fact, from the Apostle Paul's

⁴ Richard P. McBrien, *Lives of the Popes: The Pontiffs from St. Peter to John Paul II* (Harper, 2000), 25.

letter to the *Romans*, it is apparent that the pastors, *i.e.* bishops of Rome, faithfully treasured the Gospel of salvation. The spread of the Christian faith during the first three centuries was rapid and extensive. While under persecution, the pastors, *i.e.*, the bishops of Rome, were faithful and zealous in preaching the Gospel of grace. The persecution of Christians ended in AD 313 when Emperor Constantine proclaimed the Edict of Milan.

The Bishop of Rome was first the Successor of Caesar

In AD 330, Emperor Constantine (the Caesar) moved the seat of the Imperial Roman Empire from Rome to Constantinople. By that time, he had decreed Christianity the religion of the Empire in hopes that by means of its acceptance a new unifying strength could be infused into his crumbling empire. Thus, in those early years of the fourth century, the bishops of Rome claimed to be the successor of Caesar; *i.e.*, the rightful heirs to the Caesars. The city that had been the seat of power for the Imperial Roman Empire became the city for the bishop of Rome to exercise his authority. Gradually, other bishops and national monarchs accepted him as successor to Caesar with the same title that Caesar had, "Pontifex Maximus."⁵



On the left is a coin of Caesar Augustus, 27 BC, and on the right, a coin of Pope Leo XIII. They both bear the abbrevi-

ation PONT MAX, for Pontifex Maximus, one of many examples of popes appropriating Caesar's title.⁶ Much later in the early fifth century, was the bishop of Rome called the successor of Peter. Thus, it was Innocent I (401-417 AD) who held that the bishop of Rome as Peter's successor was entitled to exercise Peter's power and prerogatives.⁷ Later again in the fifth century, it was more fully formulated in the teaching of Bishop Leo I (440-461). The Scripture, however, is utterly silent about the Apostle Peter going to Rome. His visits to Samaria, Lydda, Joppa, Caesarea, and Antioch were carefully recorded. But there is simply no mention made of his going to Rome, which is essential to establish the Roman

⁵ Roman emperors held the title Pontifex Maximus signifying that they were the highest *pontifex* or priest in ancient Rome.

⁶ www.badnewsaboutchristianity.com/ad0_emperors.htm, 26 January, 2015.

⁷ Thus it was that four centuries had passed before the claim to be Peter's successor was made.

Catholic position.⁸ Clearly the presupposition that Peter was in Rome as its first bishop is just a tradition. It took hundreds of years before that tradition, and the tradition that Peter had successors in his role of bishop of Rome, was believed.

The Historical Foundation of the Supremacy of the Bishop of Rome

Emperor Justinian I, more than anyone else, was the one to establish the supremacy of the bishop of Rome in the sixth century. He did it in a formal and legal manner, by bringing religious matters under the control of civil law. LeRoy Edwin Froom summarized what happened,

Justinian I (527-565) [was the] greatest of all the rulers of the Eastern Roman Empire. [His] great achievement was the regulation of ecclesiastical and theological matters, crowned by the imperial Decretal Letter seating the bishop of Rome in the churches as the “Head of all the holy churches,” thus laying the legal foundation for papal ecclesiastical supremacy.⁹

Justinian’s decree did not create the “Status of the Bishop of Rome” but rather set a legal foundation for the acquisition of civil ruling power by the bishops of Rome. Soon after Justinian’s decree, the bishops of Rome began to reign like kings. Vitalian, the Bishop of Rome from AD 657-672, was the first to actually be addressed with the title “Pope,” when he was called in Latin, “Papa Vitalianus”; *i.e.*, Pope Vitalian.¹⁰ It took time for the pope of Rome to spread the exercise of his state-given title over the other bishops of Europe. For example, even in northern Italy in AD 800, Claude, the bishop of Turin, did not recognize the bishop of Rome’s authority.¹¹ Quite apart from the work of Justinian to formalize the civil authority of the “bishop of Rome,” the Vatican and its hierarchy itself later perpetrated manifest historical frauds by forged documents such as the *Donation of*

Constantine, purported to be a legal document in which Emperor Constantine bestowed on Sylvester Bishop of Rome (314-335) much of his property and invested him with great spiritual power.¹² The purpose of this fraud was to provide a foundational documentary authentication, albeit entirely false, declaring the ecclesiastical power of the popes during the Dark and Middle ages.

The Popes Grew Strong and Decadent via Civil Power

From the fourth century through the eighth century, much of the growth of papal power was acquired in trade-offs with kings throughout what had been the old Imperial Roman Empire. In the eighth century, when the pope needed defending against the Saracens and the Lombards, the French kings provided it and presented the pope with ruling title to the cities they had won. As a reward, in AD 800, Pope Leo III notably crowned Charlemagne as Emperor. Thus began the Holy Roman Empire, and consequently began turmoil over issues of the legal limits of jurisdiction of the pope on one hand, and the emperor on the other. These issues were traumatically worked out throughout the actual course of history.¹³ In 1203, as head of the state religion, Pope Innocent III began to demand, through his Courts of Inquisition, subjection to the Roman Church’s doctrines and traditions and had them enforced by civil law.

Many on the Vatican’s List of 266 “Holy Fathers” Were Unholy Wicked Men

Honorius reigned from 625 to 638. He was condemned as a heretic by the Sixth Ecumenical Council (680-681). He was also condemned as a heretic by Pope Leo II, as well as by subsequent Roman popes.¹⁴ In 903, Pope Leo V reigned only for one month because Christopher, a cardinal priest of San Damaso, had Leo put in prison and declared himself pope. Then Christopher was overthrown and put in prison by Sergius. Leo was murdered while in prison, and Christopher was murdered while in prison on orders of Sergius.¹⁵ Sergius reigned as Pope Sergius III from 904 to 911. The immoral murderer

⁸ Certainly the Holy Spirit would not have passed over an event so significant and essential. In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul greets many in the Church at Rome but offers no salutation to Peter. The same Apostle Paul, being at Rome in the reign of Emperor Nero, never once mentions Peter in any of his letters written from Rome to the churches and to Timothy, although he does remember very many others who were with him in the city.

⁹ Le Roy Edwin Froom, *The Historical Development of Prophetic Interpretation* (Review and Herald Publishing Assn., 1950), Volume I, 507-508.

¹⁰ <http://www.answers.com/topic/Pope-vitalian>.

¹¹ It was only after Bishop Claude’s death, as the Gospel and the Bible were removed, that this area fell to the Roman bishop’s authority.

¹² A copy of the pretended original document is in Wylie’s *History of Protestantism*, Volume I, Book First, Chapter 3, 11.

¹³ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Hendrickson, 1885) Volume 4, 250-253.

¹⁴ William Webster, *The Church of Rome at the Bar of History* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1995), 63-71. Peter DeRosa, *Vicars of Christ: The Dark Side of the Papacy* (Crown Publishers, 1988), 208-209. De Rosa is a practicing Catholic and a former Catholic priest. See also Catholic theologian Hans Kung, *The Catholic Church: A Short History* (Modern Library Paperback Edition, 2003), 60.

¹⁵ McBrien, 150-151.

Sergius III is number 120 of the Vatican's list of "Holy Fathers." Pope John XII reigned from 955 to 963. "Elected at age eighteen, he led one of the most immoral lives of any pope in history and died of a stroke, allegedly in the bed of a married woman."¹⁶ The notorious Pope John XII is number 131 of the Vatican's list of "Holy Fathers." The dominant Crescentii Family played an important part in the history of making and unmaking of Roman popes from the middle of the tenth through to the eleventh century. Thus, Count Theophylact of Tusculum, in what became the Tusculan political family, began making and unmaking of Roman popes. In fact, for two centuries the status of being pope was an arena of confusion, as the Crescentii and Tusculan families of Italy disputed and fought over it like a possession.

The year 1073 was a turning point from the centuries of gross immorality. Rigorous discipline now became the norm of the Papacy. Reaching above the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of papal minds continued to clutch at total dominion, both ecclesiastical and civil. Pope Gregory VII (also known as Hildebrand) was ambitious beyond all who had preceded him. He was convinced that the reign of the pope was in fact the reign of God on Earth and determined to subject materially all authority and power, both spiritual and temporal, to the "chair of Peter." It was Gregory VII who envisioned what was to become the vast structure of the Papacy. His goal was to be the supreme ruler and judge of all leaders, both Church and State. The supremacy, which he claimed by divine right, demanded sure dominion over both emperors and kings. The material supremacy of such a notion was not won in a day. However, it was Gregory VII's astute grasp of the notion, and his crushing ambition, coupled with the enormous wealth that the Roman Catholic Church by then possessed, which made its implementation possible.

These shrewd enactments began to bear fruit even during Gregory VII's own rule (1073-1085). The Popes following him developed the structures he had established. They continued his projects and strove by deceit, by crusades, and by interdicts to place the world under papal, political control. For two centuries from the time of Gregory VII's reign, the papacy increased in power and glory, always at the price of thousands of destroyed lives, many deposed kings, and princes, along with numerous ruined cities and countless homesteads and farms utterly wasted, all in the name of the religion of Rome. Popes Innocent III (1198-1216) and Boniface VIII (1294-1303) put the final touches to papal triumph of spiritual and temporal power. Pope Innocent III proclaimed a warring crusade against the Albigenses and

offered to all who would engage in it the pardon of all sins to get to Heaven without passing through purgatory. It was a war perpetrated with unimaginable cruelty. Whole villages and towns were indiscriminately butchered; thousands were burned at the stake, while others were subjected to the most hideous torture. The history of these horrendous deeds of cruelty and murder are established by numerous accounts. Pope Boniface VIII was stubborn, ambitious, intelligent, vain, and unscrupulous. He believed deeply that the pope was literally the Vicar of Christ on Earth and that he held extraordinary powers. He is most famous for a statement in his papal bull *Unum Sanctum*, "We declare, say, define, and proclaim to every human creature that they by necessity for salvation are entirely subject to the Roman Pontiff."¹⁷ Seventy-five popes, one after another, from Pope Innocent III to Pope Pius VII, approved of torture, murder, and burning at the stake, and the confiscation of property in the horrific centuries of the Inquisition.¹⁸ Many of those tortured and slain were true Bible believers.

In Recent Times, Popes No Longer Are Obviously Depraved, Yet Are Sinisterly So

While the Papacy no longer has the military might by which to enforce its will, it has in no way renounced its sovereign control over men's minds and bodies, as Catholic law shows. Of necessity, then, to reintroduce coercion of any consequence, there must first be enacted absolute law within the Catholic system. Second, it is necessary to ensnare the civil authorities in such a way that they are again subservient to Catholic purposes. Because the Papal Church is also a civil power, known as the Holy See, it has been able to advance its status by diplomatic agreements called "concordats."¹⁹ Prior to

¹⁷ Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, Revised by Karl Rahner, S. J. (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1957), 469.

¹⁸ Documented details regarding the torture and burning at the stake of the Inquisition are on the video called the "Inquisition" at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rx8PdvOELvY>. And read the article called "The Systematic Murder of Believers: The Untold History of the Inquisition" at <http://www.bereanbeacon.org>.

¹⁹ A concordat is an international contract, which legally binds the nation involved and the Vatican. A concordat also establishes rights such as that of defining doctrine, educating Roman Catholics in the tenants and practice of their faith, an education which touches every area of their lives including their understanding of economics (which is socialist), and negotiating laws regarding church property. Such legal issues are agreed on in civil law between the "Holy See" (as she in her position as a sovereign state is legally called) and the other nation.

¹⁶ McBrien, 435, 157-159; see also DeRosa, 211-215.

1989, the Holy See signed international agreements primarily with European and Latin American countries. Vatican control can be seen very clearly in those nations where concordats have long been established, as for example, in Germany under the extant concordat worked out between Pius XII and Hitler. The Vatican's desire to maintain civil relations with other nations is now greater than ever. From 1950 to 1999, 128 concordats were signed between Rome and various states. In the course of nine years, 43 concordats were signed between the Holy See and other nations. Even nations of the Middle East, Asia, and Africa are entering juridical agreements with Rome. Moreover, the Roman Catholic Church has much influence in national and international laws, particularly in the nations in which she has papal nuncios as ambassadors. At present, she maintains diplomatic relations with 179 countries at embassy level. The political civil power is subordinate to the spiritual control of the Roman Catholic Church and is each individual pope's necessary instrument used to fulfill his aspirations and objectives. Thus, while the wickedness of the popes is no longer overtly shown, it is seen sinisterly in its civil legal power.

Conclusion

Beholding the Father's love by the intimate title of "Father" gives the true believer the deep sense of being loved personally as a child of God. In total contrast, the official law of the Roman Catholic Church speaks of the necessity of submitting one's highest faculties, that of mind and will, not to God the Heavenly Father, but to a so-called Holy Father in Rome. Thus, the official law of the Roman Catholic Church states, "A religious respect of intellect and will, even if not the assent of faith, is to be paid to the teaching which the Supreme Pontiff or the college of bishops enunciate on faith or morals..."²⁰ The Lord Jesus Christ commands, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (*Matthew 22:37*). One cannot serve two sovereigns, for the Lord's command contradicts that of the Pontiff. A man cannot be impartial between two masters who are incompatible and demanding total allegiance. The necessity of a choice arises. So if you are a Catholic, you ought to decide who your Lord is! Then, as we saw, the Lord Jesus gave the command, "call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven" (*Matthew 23:9*). Thus, the Father in Heaven is worthy of worship, and a true believer will speak to God alone the words, "The Holy Father." Nonetheless, the Church of Rome teaches that her pope is called "Holy Father." Pray, therefore, that the Lord God may be gracious to lift the spiritual blindness that

binds Catholic men and women to a system that substitutes the pope for the Lord Jesus Christ! This is no time to presume on the grace of God, but rather to pray urgently for it, until we see the fruits of our prayers. The Apostles Peter and John tell us, "you were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from our fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (*1 Peter 1:18, 19*); "And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (*1 John 2:2*). The Bible clearly states that salvation was Christ's work and His alone: "when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." (*Hebrews 1:3*). The Lord's Glory, the Gospel, and His promises are at stake! "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire" (*Hebrews 12:28, 29*).

²⁰ *The Catholic Code of Canon Law*, Canon 752.