

CHAPTER 13 : THE PAPACY AND THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

Our chief enemy is Satan. It is his desire to receive all the glory and all the submission that properly belongs to Christ. He is the ultimate Anti-Christ. That is, he is the ultimate one who would like to sit in the place of Christ. Right before the Second Advent of Christ, he will personally come on earth and seek this honor for himself. But before this time in history, Satan works through human agents. In the Christian era he has had two chief agents that represent him on earth, who seek to sit in the place of Christ. We see this aspect of *two* chief agents in the Sea Beast and the Land Beast described in Revelation chapter 13. We also see it in the Beast and False Prophet described in Revelation chapter 19. Accordingly, over the course of the Romish Papacy's history, we find that the Papacy has tended to work in conjunction with a great political power, which has helped it to maintain its own power. As long as the Western Roman empire survived, this political partner of the Papacy was the nominally Christian Roman emperor. But after its collapse, the Papacy came to rely on the King of the Franks, as we have seen in a previous chapter. Charlemagne, the most powerful King of the Franks in Frankish history, became the first Holy Roman Emperor. For centuries the Holy Roman Emperor and the Pope worked together to dominate Christendom.

The relationship between the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor solidified in 800 AD, when at Mass on Christmas day in Rome, Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne emperor, a title that had been out of use in the West since the abdication of Romulus Augustulus in 476. Now the Papacy had implicit authority to crown the one who would be emperor. And the Holy Roman Empire (or *Reich*) had the responsibility to protect the Papacy. Indeed, it was the result of Charlemagne having defended the Pope against the rebellious inhabitants of Rome which initiated the notion of the *Reich* being the protector of the church. The Pope's crowning of Charlemagne as emperor in 800 set the pattern that later emperors would follow.

Although partners, we should not imagine relations between these partners were always smooth. Indeed, given the power hungry ambitions of both parties, there was continual jockeying for power and internecine strife. Nevertheless, the partnership survived as a matter of necessity for both. Each helped to legitimate the other.

The partnership became ever more tense as the Papacy increased its claim to authority over time. At the time of Pope Gregory the Great- pope from 590 to 604 AD- Gregory impressed upon men's minds to a degree unprecedented up to that time the fact that the "See of Peter" (i.e., the Papacy) was the one supreme, decisive authority in the Catholic Church. Even so, Gregory admitted the separate and independent authority of the emperor in the secular realm. But this balance of power began to shift in 800 AD when Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne emperor. Now the Papacy's authority implicitly preceded that of the emperor. The spiritual Supremacy was thus achieved in the seventh century, the temporal sovereignty was attained in the eighth; it wanted only the pontifical supremacy – sometimes, although improperly, styled the temporal supremacy to make the Pope supreme over kings, as he had already become over peoples and

bishops, and to vest in him a jurisdiction that has not its like on earth – a jurisdiction that is unique, inasmuch as it arrogates all powers, absorbs all rights, and spurns all limits. Destined, before terminating its career, to crush beneath its iron foot thrones and nations, and masking an ambition as astute as Lucifer's with a dissimulation as profound, this power advanced at first with noiseless steps, and stole upon the world as night steals upon it; but as it neared the goal its strides grew longer and swifter, till at last it vaulted over the throne of monarchs into the seat of God. Let's then consider this progression in power of the Papacy in relation to its partner, the Holy Roman Emperor.

Following the reign of Charlemagne, there was a split of the Frankish realm in the Treaty of Verdun in 843, continuing the Carolingian dynasty independently in three sections. The eastern part fell to Louis the German, who was followed by several leaders until the death of Louis IV, called "the Child", the last Carolingian in the eastern part. The leaders of Alamannia, Bavaria, Frankia and Saxonia elected Conrad I of the Franks, not a Carolingian, as their leader in 911. His successor, Henry I the Fowler (r. 919-936), a Saxon, achieved the acceptance of a separate Eastern Empire by the West Frankish (still ruled by the Carolingians) in 921, calling himself *rex Francorum orientalium* (king of the East Franks). Heinrich designated his son Otto to be his successor, who was elected king in 936. His later crowning as Emperor Otto I (later called "the Great") in 962 would mark an important step, since from then on the Empire -- and not the West-Frankish kingdom that was the other remainder of the Frankish kingdoms -- would have the blessing of the Pope. Otto had gained much of his power earlier, when, in 955, the Magyars were defeated in the Battle of Lechfeld. In contemporary and later writings, the crowning would be referred to as *translatio imperii*, the transfer of the Empire from the Romans to a new Empire. The German emperors thus thought of themselves as being in direct succession of those of the Roman empire; this is why they initially called themselves *Augustus*.

At this time, the eastern kingdom was not so much "German" as rather a "confederation" of the old Germanic tribes of the Bavarians, Alamanns, Franks and Saxons. This changed after Henry II died in 1024 without any children. Conrad II, first of the Salian Dynasty, was then elected king in 1024 only after some debate. How exactly the king was chosen thus seems to be a complicated conglomeration of personal influence, tribal quarrels, inheritance, and acclamation by those leaders that would eventually become the collegiate of Electors.

It was now the year 1073. The Papal chair was filled by perhaps the greatest of all the Popes, Gregory VII, the noted Hildebrand. Daring and ambitious beyond all who had preceded, and beyond most of those who have followed him on the Papal throne, Gregory fully grasped the potential of Papal power. He held that the reign of the Pope was but another name for the reign of God, and he resolved never to rest till that idea had been realized in the subjection of all authority and power, spiritual and temporal, to the chair of Peter. "When he drew out," says Janus, "the whole system of Papal omnipotence in twenty-seven theses in his 'Dictatus,' these theses were partly mere repetitions or corollaries of the Isidorian decretals; partly he and his friends sought to give them the appearance of tradition and antiquity by new fictions." We may take the following as

samples. The eleventh maxim says, "the Pope's name is the chief name in the world;" the twelfth teaches that "it is lawful for him to depose emperors;" the eighteenth affirms that "his decision is to be withstood by none, but he alone may annul those of all men." The nineteenth declares that "he can be judged by no one." The twenty-fifth vests in him the absolute power of deposing and restoring bishops, and the twenty-seventh the power of annulling the allegiance of subjects. Such was the gage that Gregory flung down to the kings and nations of the world – we say of the world, for the pontifical supremacy embraces all who dwell upon the earth.

Now began the war between the miter and the empire; Gregory's object in this war being to wrest from the Holy Roman emperors the power of appointing the bishops and the clergy generally, and to assume into his own sole and irresponsible hands the whole of that intellectual and spiritual machinery by which Christendom was governed. The strife was a bloody one. The miter, though sustaining occasional reverses, continued nevertheless to gain steadily upon the empire. The spirit of the times helped the priesthood in their struggle with the civil power. The age was superstitious to the core, and though in no wise spiritual, it was very thoroughly ecclesiastical. The Crusades, too, broke the spirit and drained the wealth of the princes, while the growing power and augmenting riches of the clergy cast the balance ever more and more against the State.

For a brief space Gregory VII tasted in his own case the luxury of wielding this more than mortal power. There came a gleam through the awful darkness of the tempest he had raised – not final victory, which was yet a century distant, but its presage. He had the satisfaction of seeing the emperor, Henry IV of Germany – whom he had smitten with excommunication – barefooted, and in raiment of sackcloth, waiting three days and nights at the castle-gates of Canossa, amid the winter drifts, suing for forgiveness from the Pope. But it was for a moment only that Hildebrand stood on this dazzling pinnacle. The fortune of war very quickly turned. Henry, the man whom the Pope had so sorely humiliated, became victor in his turn. Gregory died, an exile, on the promontory of Salerno; but his successors espoused his project, and strove by wiles, by arms, and by anathemas, to reduce the world under the scepter of the Papal power. For well-nigh two dismal centuries the conflict was maintained. How truly melancholy the record of these times! It exhibits to our sorrowing gaze many a stricken field, many an empty throne, many a city sacked, many a spot deluged with blood!

But through all this confusion and misery the idea of Gregory was perseveringly pursued, till at last it was realized, and the miter was beheld triumphant over the empire. It was the fortune or the calamity of Innocent III (1198-1216) to celebrate this great victory. Now it was that the pontifical supremacy reached its full development. One man, one will again governed the world. It is with a sort of stupefied awe that we look back to the thirteenth century, and see in the foreground of the receding storm this Colossus, uprearing itself in the person of Innocent III, on its head all the miters of the Church, and in its hand all the scepters of the State. "In each of the three leading objects which Rome has pursued," says Hallam – "independent sovereignty, supremacy over the Christian Church, control over the princes of the earth it was the fortune of this pontiff to conquer." "Rome," he says again, "inspired during this age all the terror of her ancient name; she was once more

mistress of the world, and kings were her vassals." She had fought a great fight, and now she celebrated an unequalled triumph. Innocent appointed all bishops; he summoned to his tribunal all causes, from the gravest affairs of mighty kingdoms to the private concerns of the humble citizen. He claimed all kingdoms as his fiefs, all monarchs as his vassals; and launched with unsparing hand the bolts of excommunication against all who withstood his pontifical will. Hildebrand's idea was now fully realized. The pontifical supremacy was beheld in its plenitude – the plenitude of spiritual power, and that of temporal power. It was the noon of the Papacy; but the noon of the Papacy was the midnight of the world.

The grandeur which the Papacy now enjoyed, and the jurisdiction it wielded, have received dogmatic expression, and one or two selections will enable it to paint itself as it was seen in its noon. Pope Innocent III affirmed "that the pontifical authority so much exceeded the royal power as the sun doth the moon." Nor could he find words fitly to describe his own formidable functions, save those of Jehovah to his prophet Jeremiah: "See, I have set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down." "The Church my spouse," we find the same Pope saying, "is not married to me without bringing me something. She hath given me a dowry of a price beyond all price, the plenitude of spiritual things, and the extent of things temporal; the greatness and abundance of both. She hath given me the miter in token of things spiritual, the crown in token of the temporal; the miter for the priesthood, and the crown for the kingdom; making me the lieutenant of him who hath written upon his vesture, and on his thigh, 'the King of kings and the Lord of lords.' I enjoy alone the plenitude of power, that others may say of me, next to God, 'and out of his fullness have we received.'" "We declare," says Boniface VIII (1294-1303), in his bull *Unam Sanctam*, "define, pronounce it to be necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff." This subjection is declared in the bull to extend to all affairs. "One sword," says the Pope, "must be under another, and the temporal authority must be subject to the spiritual power; whence, if the earthly power go astray, it must be judged by the spiritual." Such are a few of the "great words" which were heard to issue from the Vatican Mount, that new Sinai, which, like the old, encompassed by fiery terrors, had upreared itself in the midst of the astonished and affrighted nations of Christendom.

What a contrast between the first and the last estate of the pastors of the Roman Church! – between the humility and poverty of the first century, and the splendor and power in which the thirteenth saw them enthroned!

There is something here out of the ordinary course. We have no desire to detract from the worldly wisdom of the Popes; they were, in that respect, the ablest race of rulers the world ever saw. Their enterprise soared as high above the vastest scheme of other potentates and conquerors, as their ostensible means of achieving it fell below theirs. To build such a fabric of dominion upon the Gospel, every line of which repudiates and condemns it! to impose it upon the world without an army and without a fleet! to bow the necks not of ignorant peoples only, but of mighty potentates to it! nay, to persuade the latter to assist in establishing a power which they could hardly but foresee would clash themselves! to pursue this scheme through a succession of centuries without once meeting any serious check or repulse – for of the 130 Popes between Boniface III (606),

who, in partnership with Phocas, laid the foundations of the Papal grandeur, and Gregory VII, who realized it, onward through other two centuries to Innocent III (1216) and Boniface VIII (1303), who at last put the top-stone upon it, not one lost an inch of ground which his predecessor had gained! – to do all this is, we repeat, something out of the ordinary course. There is nothing like it again in the whole history of the world. This success, continued through many centuries, was audaciously interpreted into a proof of the divinity of the Papacy. Behold, it has been said, when the throne of Caesar was overturned, how the chair of Peter stood erect! Behold, when the barbarous nations rushed like a torrent into Italy, overwhelming laws, extinguishing knowledge, and dissolving society itself, how the ark of the Church rode in safety on the flood! Behold, when the victorious hosts of the Saracen approached the gates of Italy, how they were turned back! Behold, when the miter waged its great contest with the empire, how it triumphed! Behold, when the Reformation broke out, and it seemed as if the kingdom of the Pope was numbered and finished, how three centuries have been added to its sway! Behold, in fine, when revolution broke out in France, and swept like a whirlwind over Europe, bearing down thrones and dynasties, how the bark of Peter outlived the storm, and rode triumphant above the waves that engulfed apparently stronger structures! Is not this the Church of which Christ said, "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it?"

What else do the words of Cardinal Baronius mean? Boasting of a supposed donation of the kingdom of Hungary to the Roman See by Stephen, he says, "It fell out by a wonderful providence of God, that at the very time when the Roman Church might appear ready to fall and perish, even then distant kings approach the Apostolic See, which they acknowledge and venerate as the only temple of the universe, the sanctuary of piety, the pillar of truth, the immovable rock. Behold, kings – not from the East, as of old they came to the cradle of Christ, but from the North – led by faith, they humbly approach the cottage of the fisher, the Church of Rome herself, offering not only gifts out of their treasures, but bringing even kingdoms to her, and asking kingdoms from her. Whoso is wise, and will record these things, even he shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord."

But the success of the Papacy, when closely examined, is not so surprising as it looks. It cannot be justly pronounced legitimate, or fairly won. Rome has ever been swimming with the tide. The evils and passions of society, which a true benefactress would have made it her business to cure – at least, to alleviate – Rome has studied rather to foster into strength, that she might be borne to power on the foul current which she herself had created. Amid battles, bloodshed, and confusion, has her path lain. The edicts of subservient Councils, the forgeries of hireling priests, the arms of craven monarchs, and the thunderbolts of excommunication have never been wanting to open her path. Exploits won by weapons of this sort are what her historians delight to chronicle. These are the victories that constitute her glory! And then, there remains yet another and great deduction from the apparent grandeur of her success, in that, after all, it is the success of only a few – a caste – the clergy. For although, during her early career, the Roman Church rendered certain important services to society – of which it will delight us to make mention in fitting place when she grew to maturity, and was able to develop her real genius, it was felt and acknowledged by all that her principles implied the ruin of all

interests save her own, and that there was room in the world for none but herself. If her march, as shown in history down to the fourteenth century, is ever onwards, it is not less true that behind, on her path, lie the wrecks of nations, and the ashes of truth.

Nor can we help observing that the career of Rome, with all the fictitious brilliance that encompasses it, is utterly eclipsed when placed beside the silent and sublime progress of the Gospel. The latter we see winning its way over mighty obstacles solely by the force and sweetness of its own truth. It touches the deep wounds of society only to heal them. It speaks not to awaken but to hush the rough voice of strife and war. It enlightens, purifies, and blesses men wherever it comes, and it does all this so gently and unboastingly! Reviled, it reviles not again. For curses it returns blessings. It unsheathes no sword; it spills no blood. Cast into chains, its victories are as many as when free, and more glorious; dragged to the stake and burned, from the ashes of the martyr there start up a thousand confessors, to speed on its career and swell the glory of its triumph. Compared with this how different has been the career of Rome! – as different, in fact, as the thunder-cloud which comes onward, mantling the skies in gloom and scathing the earth with fiery bolts, is different from the morning descending from the mountain-tops, scattering around it the silvery light, and awakening at its presence songs of joy.

Meantime the power of the Holy Roman Empire was at its pinnacle in the centuries preceding the fourteenth century as well, albeit an authority subordinate to that of the Papacy. One notable emperor was Frederick I "Barbarossa" (king 1152, emperor 1155-1190), who first called the Empire "holy", with which he intended to address mainly law and legislation. Also, under Barbarossa, the idea of the "Romanness" of the Empire culminated again, which seemed to be an attempt to justify the emperor's power independently of the now strengthened Pope. In order to solve the problem that the emperor was (after the Investiture Controversy) no longer as able to use the church as a mechanism to maintain power, the emperors increasingly lent land to *ministerialia*, formerly unfree service men, which Frederick hoped would be more reliable than local dukes. Initially used mainly for war services, this new class of people would form the basis for the later knights, another basis of imperial power.

Frederick II was crowned emperor in 1220. He risked conflict with the Pope when he claimed power over Rome; astonishingly to many, he managed to claim Jerusalem in a Crusade in 1228 while still under the Pope's ban. While Frederick brought the mythical idea of the Empire to a last highpoint, he was also the one to initiate the major steps that led to its disintegration. On the one hand, he concentrated on establishing a -- for the times -- extraordinarily modern state in Sicily, with public services, finances, and jurisdiction. On the other hand, Frederick was the emperor who granted major powers to the German dukes in two far-reaching privileges that would never be reclaimed by the central power. In the 1220 *Confoederatio cum principibus ecclesiasticis*, Frederick basically gave up a number of *regalia* in favor of the bishops, among them tariffs, coining, and fortification. The 1232 *Statutum in favorem principum* mostly extended these privileges to the other (non-clerical) territories. Although many of these privileges had existed earlier, they were now granted globally, and once and for all, to allow the German dukes to maintain order north of the Alps while Frederick wanted to concentrate

on his homelands in Italy. The 1232 document marked the first time that the German dukes were called *domini terrae*, owners of their lands, a remarkable change in terminology as well.

After the death of Frederick II in 1250, none of the dynasties worthy of producing the king proved able to do so, and the leading dukes elected several competing kings until 1273. The difficulties in electing the king eventually led to the emergence of a fixed collegiate of electors, the *Kurfürsten*, whose composition and procedures were fixed in the Golden Bull of 1356. This development maybe symbolizes best the emerging duality between *Kaiser und Reich*, emperor and realm, who were no longer considered identical. This is also revealed in the way the later kings attempted to sustain their power. While earlier, the Empire's strength and finances greatly relied on the Empire's own lands, the so-called *Reichsgut*, which always belonged to the respective king (and included many Imperial Cities), its relevance faded after the 13th century (even though some fractions of it did remain until the Empire's end in 1806). Instead, the *Reichsgut* was increasingly pawned to lokal dukes, sometimes to raise money for the Empire, but more frequently as a reward for faithful duty or in an attempt to civilize stubborn dukes. It seems that the direct governance of the *Reichsgut* no longer matched the needs of either the king or the dukes.

While the Holy Roman Empire nominally existed as an entity until 1806, its power was greatly diminished after the thirteenth century. And, as we shall consider in another chapter, the power of the Papacy likewise would soon diminish from its exalted estate.

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The on-line resources of Historicism Research Foundation at <http://www.historicism.net/> also proved invaluable for my understanding of Biblical prophecy. Biblical prophecy concerning Christian church history, especially as revealed in the book of Revelation, serves as the foundation upon which all church histories should be based.