

**Church History**  
**Lesson 24 - The Papacy In the Late Middle Ages**

**1. Introduction - The Papacy**

- 1.1. The institution of the Papacy is one of the key theme one must study when looking at the history of the church. Whether one agrees with the theology behind the idea of the papacy or not, the office of the Pope has exerted a major influence on the history of the church, especially from the time of the fall of Rome.
- 1.2. The institution of the papacy really came to the fore in the late middle ages. Interestingly, as we will see, this was the time of the greatest power of the Popes, but also the time of its “Babylonian captivity” under the thumb of French rulers.
  - 1.2.1. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the papacy led an admirable attempt to constitute a perfect society on earth. The church achieved an incomparable power and majesty. Like the Gothic cathedral the medieval church shot upward into the heavens, calling all below it to the glory of God. But like the cathedrals, the papacy reached for the impossible and first cracked, then, in time, crumbled to earth. Shelley, location 3459

**2. The Pope As Supreme Ruler - Innocent III and His Successors**

- 2.1. The foundations for growth in Papal power
  - 2.1.1. In a previous session (Lesson 22) we looked at reforms that reached the papacy because of the changes instituted by Gregory VI and down to Gregory VII during the 11<sup>th</sup> century.
  - 2.1.2. As a result of these reforms, the papacy had grown in power and prestige. They had also helped to correct some of the conflict and abuses that had afflicted the papacy prior to the period of reform.
- 2.2. The rise of Papal power - Innocent III
  - 2.2.1. Innocent III, who reigned as Pope from 8 January 1198 to 16 July 1216, was one of the most powerful and influential Popes in history. During his time the power and prestige of the Papacy was virtually unhindered, and reached heights never seen before.
    - 2.2.1.1. Their choice fell on Lotario de’ Conti di Segni, thirty-seven years old, who under the name of Innocent III became the most powerful pope in the history of Christianity. Ferguson, location 6149
  - 2.2.2. Unlike the reformer Popes of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, Innocent II did not come from a monastic background. Instead, he had specialized in Canon Law - the rules and regulations governing the church and her affairs.
  - 2.2.3. Innocent III had a very exalted view of the office of Pope. In his view the bishop of Rome was not only the head of the church, but also exercised authority over kings and emperors as well. He declared “Just as God established two great luminaries in the heavens, the greater to preside over days, and the lesser to preside over nights, so did he establish two luminaries in the heavens of the universal church.... The greater to preside over souls as over days, and the lesser to preside over bodies as over nights. These are pontifical authority and royal power.” This not only meant that the authority of the Pope was greater than that of the king, but also that the king received his power and authority from the pope. Thus, the bishop of Rome was the

source of all authority, both secular and sacred, and was the greatest authority, both in church and state.

**2.2.3.1.** Innocent III told the princes of Europe that the papacy was like the sun, while kings were like the moon. As the moon received its light from the sun, so kings derived their powers from the pope. The papacy's chief weapons in support of this authority were spiritual penalties. Almost everyone believed in heaven and hell and in the pope's management of the grace to get to one and avoid the other. Shelley, location 3482

**2.2.3.2.** On his consecration, Innocent III preached on the text, "See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jeremiah 1:10), and applied to himself the words, "Who is the faithful servant? I will put him in charge of my household" (cf. Matthew 25:21). Ferguson, location 9052

**2.2.3.3.** As the moon derives its light from the sun and is inferior both in quality and quantity, so the regal power derives the splendor of its dignity from the pontifical authority" (Innocent III, Epistle 1.401). Ferguson, location 9073

**2.2.4.** Pope Innocent III also declared that the Pope was not only the Vicar (representative/mediator) of Peter; he was the Vicar of Christ Himself. To deal with the Pope was in essence to deal with Christ Himself. Thus, the Pope, while lower than God, was greater than any other man - he stood between God and man. This was an important additional step to add power and prestige to the office of Pope.

**2.2.4.1.** In the hands of a strong leader, the papacy could overshadow all secular monarchs. Such a leader was Pope Innocent III (1198–1216), a new type of administrator-pope. Unlike Gregory VII and other earlier reform popes who were monks, Innocent and other great popes of the later twelfth and thirteenth centuries were trained as canon lawyers, experts in church government. Innocent was like Gregory VII, however, in holding an exalted view of his office. "The successor of Peter," he announced, "is the Vicar of Christ: he has been established as a mediator between God and man, below God but beyond man; less than God but more than man; who shall judge all and be judged by no one." Shelley, location 3477

**2.2.4.2.** Instead of "vicar of Peter" (the previous papal title), he preferred "vicar of Christ" (previously used for any bishop or priest but now employed for the first time, it seems, by the pope of himself) as more indicative of his authority, and he based his policies on the powers this title gave. Ferguson, location 9055

**2.2.4.3.** Innocent also applied the words of God to Moses, "I have made you like God to Pharaoh" (Exodus 7:1), to himself as the pope in relation to civil rulers. Ferguson, location 9058

**2.2.4.4.** Innocent saw himself (as he put it at his coronation) as the intermediary "between God and man, under God and over man, less than God but greater than man, judge over all and judged by no one (save the Lord)." Ferguson, location 9059

- 2.2.4.5.** Innocent might be the “servant of the servants of God,” but he also considered himself the *verus imperator* (the true emperor). When the crusaders brought back the supposed seamless robe of Christ, Innocent placed it on his shoulders. Ferguson, location 9064
- 2.2.5.** To back up such claims, the Pope had several major weapons in his arsenal. First, he could excommunicate rulers who tried to defy his authority. To be excommunicated put one outside of the church, and in Roman Catholic theology as it had developed by this time, therefore outside of salvation. Since grace was dispensed and controlled by the Church, to be excommunicated was to be cut off from God’s grace. Furthermore, under current law, when a person was excommunicated they were prevented from participating in many of the day to day affairs of life and from many professions. Finally, those dying in this state were denied Christian burial, and could not be buried in ground consecrated for Christian burial. All of this was obviously a powerful deterrent to open disagreement with the Pope.
- 2.2.5.1.** Thus, the pope’s first weapon in bringing peasants and princes to their knees was the threat of excommunication. He could pronounce their anathema and they would be “set apart” from the church, deprived of the grace essential for salvation. Shelley, location 3485
- 2.2.5.2.** While under excommunication, persons could not act as judge, juror, witness, or attorney. They could not be guardians, executors, or parties to contract. After death they received no Christian burial, and if, by chance, they were buried in consecrated ground, the church had their bodies disinterred and destroyed. Shelley, location 3489
- 2.2.6.** The Pope could also use the power of the interdict. This was a pronouncement that placed not just the ruler but his entire realm as well as being separated from the church. This meant that public worship, including most of the sacraments could not be practiced in the area under the interdict. In essence, every person in the realm had been excommunicated. Even if the ruler did not believe and care about such things, most of his subjects did, and they would not put up with such a state of affairs for long. Nor was this just an idle theory - Innocent III threatened or used the interdict successfully 85 times during his reign! For example, by using the interdict he forced Philip of France to leave his third wife to return to his second wife at Papal command.
- 2.2.6.1.** The second weapon in the papal arsenal was the interdict. While excommunication was aimed at individuals, the interdict fell upon whole nations. It suspended all public worship and, with the exception of baptism and extreme unction, it withdrew the sacraments from the lands of disobedient rulers. Pope Innocent III successfully applied or threatened the interdict 85 times against uncooperative princes. Shelley, location 3492
- 2.2.6.2.** In France, he intervened in the marital life of King Philip Augustus. The king had been widowed and remarried to a Danish princess, but then he had repudiated his second wife and taken a third. Innocent admonished the king to return to his rightful wife, and when Philip refused he placed the entire country under an interdict,

forbidding the celebration of sacraments. Philip called a gathering of nobles and bishops, with the hope that they would support him against the pope. But they took the opposite stance, and Philip was forced to leave his third wife and return to the second. Ferguson, location 6171

### **2.2.6.3.**

**2.2.7.** Innocent III also increased his power in helping Frederick II ascend to the throne. Frederick's mother had feared for her young son's life as rival's vied for power in Germany, and so declared Sicily a fiefdom of papacy, effectively protecting Frederick. When the elector in Germany chose Philip (the brother of the former Emperor Henry VI) to be emperor, some rejected this choice and stated they preferred Otto IV - and they were back by Innocent III. A civil war ensued, but in the end Otto won - and this gave credence to Innocent's claim that he had authority over the emperors. This was furthered when Otto IV rebelled in order to increase his power in Italy at the Popes expense. Innocent then excommunicated Otto and backed young Frederick, who defeated Otto. Frederick then came to Rome for his coronation, giving further credence to Innocent's claims to authority over emperors.

**2.2.7.1.** Henry's widow feared that her infant son, Frederick, would be destroyed by some of those vying for power in Germany, and therefore placed the child under the protection of the pope by declaring the kingdom of Sicily a fiefdom of the papacy. Ferguson, location 6150

**2.2.7.2.** Those who had supported Henry VI and his house of Hohenstaufen elected Henry's brother Philip. But a rival faction elected Otto IV, who soon had the support of Innocent III. It is clear that Philip had been duly elected. But Innocent declared that he was tainted by his brother's crimes, and that in any case the pope has the authority to determine who is the rightful emperor. The temporal power and the spiritual power, he claimed, have both been instituted by God. They are like the moon and the sun. But, just as the moon receives its light from the sun, so does the emperor receive his power from the pope. On this basis, Innocent declared that Otto was the rightful ruler, and a civil war ensued that lasted ten years, and which ended only when Philip was murdered. Ferguson, location 6155

**2.2.7.3.** After he was in undisputed control of the Empire, Otto IV broke with the pope who had supported his claim. Once again the main reason for discord was the emperor's effort to increase his power in Italy, and the pope's refusal to allow him to do so. Ferguson, location 6160

**2.2.7.4.** In retaliation, Innocent excommunicated Otto, declared him deposed, and affirmed that the legitimate emperor was young Frederick. With the pope's support, Frederick crossed the Alps, appeared in Germany, and wrested the imperial crown from his uncle. Ferguson, location 6164

**2.2.7.5.** Thus, while Innocent acknowledged Frederick, the new emperor had tacitly affirmed that the pope had been within his rights in

assuming authority to determine who was the rightful ruler.  
Ferguson, location 6168

**2.2.7.6.** The empire was secured for him when the French defeated Otto IV and his English allies at Bouvines in 1214. Frederick II was crowned emperor in 1220 by Pope Honorius III (1216–27) in St. Peter's basilica after he agreed to make laws against heresy a part of imperial legislation, to uphold the rights of the church, and to go on a Crusade. Ferguson, location 9093

**2.2.8.** In England, John Lackland was reigning in the stead of his brother Richard the Lionhearted. A conflict by two rival claimants to be archbishop of Canterbury was resolved when both claimants appealed to Pope Innocent. He rejected both and chose Stephen Langton instead. John refused this, and Innocent excommunicated him. When John still did not submit, Innocent placed all of England under interdict. He also released all subjects from obedience to John and called for a crusade against him! Philip of France was eager to lead this crusade against his rival. Facing this mounting pressure, John capitulated. To protect himself, he placed England as a fiefdom under the papacy. Innocent accepted this and cancelled the crusade. (However, the nobles - with the support of Stephen Langton archbishop of Canterbury - forced John to sign the Magna Carta. Pope Innocent declared this a usurpation of power - but to no avail.)

**2.2.8.1.** In England, the ruler was John Lackland, brother and heir to Richard the Lionhearted. Ferguson, location 6177

**2.2.8.2.** who was the legitimate archbishop of Canterbury. There were two rival claimants to that see, the most important in England, and both appealed to the pope. Innocent's response was that neither was the legitimate archbishop. Instead, he named Stephen Langton to that post. John Lackland refused to accept the papal decision, and Innocent excommunicated him. When this proved insufficient, Innocent declared John deposed from his throne, released all his subjects from their vows of obedience to him, and called a crusade against him. This was to be under the leadership of Philip Augustus of France, who gladly prepared to obey the pope in this matter. Fearing that many of his subjects were not loyal to him, and that he would not be able to defend his throne, John capitulated and made his entire kingdom a fief of the papacy, as had been done earlier with the kingdom of Sicily. Ferguson, location 6180

**2.2.8.3.** Innocent accepted John's submission, canceled the crusade that Philip of France was preparing, and thereafter became a staunch supporter of his new ally. Thus, when the English nobility, with the support of Stephen Langton, forced John to sign the Magna Carta, limiting the power of the king vis-à-vis the nobility, Innocent declared that this was a usurpation of power. But all his protests were to no avail. Ferguson, location 6186

**2.2.8.4.** When King John (brother of Richard the Lionheart) refused Stephen Langton, Innocent placed England under the interdict, which meant that no sacraments could be performed (a punishment that had originated as an archepiscopal power but extended to a

- papal one), and excommunicated John. Philip II of France threatened to depose John, who then acquiesced and issued a charter of ecclesiastical liberties in 1213 granting free clerical elections, but reserving some rights for himself. Ferguson, location 9108
- 2.2.8.5.** He then went further and placed his realms under papal protection as a papal fief and gave an oath of fealty to Innocent. Ferguson, location 9112
- 2.2.8.6.** Because of the king's debacle at Bouvines, the barons extracted from King John at Runnymede in 1215 the Magna Carta, a basic document restricting the crown's feudal and sovereign rights and so preparing for the development of the liberties of the English people. Ferguson, location 9113
- 2.2.8.7.** The pope put himself on the wrong side of history when he declared that, since John was now a papal vassal, what happened at Runnymede was also rebellion against the pope. Ferguson, location 9116
- 2.2.9.** Innocent also increased papal power by launching "crusades" against purported heretics. For example, he did this with the Albigensians in France. This laid the foundation for the inquisitions which began during his tenure.
- 2.2.9.1.** The Inquisition was an ecclesiastical institution to search out heretics and bring them to punishment. Punishment was based on the laws of Christian emperors in antiquity who—in spite of the church's general teaching against the use of physical force—sometimes punished heretics with death, since heresy was considered the equivalent of witchcraft. Innocent III issued a decretal in 1199 that for the first time equated heresy with the crime of treason under Roman law. Ferguson, location 9771
- 2.2.9.2.** Pope Gregory IX in 1231 approved Emperor Frederick II's introduction of the penalty of burning to death, on the basis that heresy was equivalent to treason. In 1233 he appointed papal inquisitors, primarily Dominicans, to work in southern France. The papal inquisition made the episcopal inquisition of secondary significance. Inquisitorial handbooks were written to guide inquisitors in their questioning of suspects. Ferguson, location 9783
- 2.2.9.3.** Pope Innocent IV in 1252 gave approval to use of the rack in the examination as a way of securing confessions. It was now accepted as official policy that force had precedence over preaching and peaceful persuasion in dealing with heresy. Ferguson, location 9786
- 2.2.9.4.** The defects in the Inquisition are obvious from a modern legal standpoint. The charges and the names of accusers and witnesses were kept secret. Wide powers of arrest and imprisonment were granted. No witnesses were called for the defense, nor was there counsel for the defense. Torture was used. The death penalty was brutally applied. Ferguson, location 9788

- 2.2.10.** During Innocent's reign two great monastic orders were founded: the Franciscans and the Dominicans. These orders would be very powerful in the remainder of the middle ages.
- 2.2.10.1.** But this was not all. It was during Innocent's reign that the two great mendicant orders of the Franciscans and Dominicans were founded, that the Christian kingdoms of Spain joined to defeat the Moors in the battle of Navas de Tolosa, and that the great crusade against the Albigensians took place. In all of these events, Innocent played a leading role. Ferguson, location 6198
- 2.2.11.** Innocent also solidified the practice that it was the Pope - not the local emperors - who should select bishops. We see this in the incident with the archbishop of Canterbury. But Innocent worked for this universally.
- 2.2.12.** Finally, Innocent, who had worked for reformation in church practices, called the Fourth Lateran Council, which gathered in 1215. This was the largest and most important council in the middle ages, and shaped Roman Catholic belief and practice down until the Council of Trent after the Reformation. The Fourth Lateran council confirmed the belief in transubstantiation, condemned both the Waldensians and Albigensians, instituted the inquisition, and decreed the practice of at least yearly confession. It also ordered that all Muslims and Jews in Christian lands had to wear distinctive garments so they could easily be identified and set apart from Christians. Since all of this (and much more) was determined in a span of basically three days, it seems clear that it was really Innocent who brought all of this to pass.
- 2.2.12.1.** The Fourth Lateran Council (the twelfth of the ecumenical councils in Roman reckoning), the largest medieval council (400 bishops and 800 abbots and others), met in 1215. Among other things this important council condemned the Albigensians, made the Inquisition (already introduced by bishops) obligatory on the whole church, approved the language of transubstantiation (although apparently not excluding other interpretations of the Real Presence), and required that confession of sins to a priest and communion be observed at least once a year at Easter (communion had become even less frequent). The council is one of the principal sources of the canon law of the Catholic Church. Ferguson, location 9136
- 2.2.12.2.** Innocent's program for the reformation of the church found expression in the decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council, which gathered in 1215. It was this council that promulgated the doctrine of transubstantiation, which holds that in communion the substance of the body and blood of Christ takes the place of the substance of the bread and wine. This council also condemned the Waldensians, the Albigensians, and the doctrines of Joachim of Fiore. It instituted episcopal inquisition, which meant that every bishop should inquire as to the presence of heresy in his diocese, and destroy it. It determined that no new monastic orders, with new rules, could be founded. It ordered that every cathedral have a school, and that education in such schools be open to the poor. It ordered the clergy to abstain from the theatre, games, hunting, and other such

pastimes. It decreed that all the faithful must confess their sins at least once a year. It forbade the introduction of new relics without papal approval. It required all Jews and Moslems in Christian lands to wear distinctive garments that would set them apart from Christians. And it made it unlawful for priests to charge for the administration of sacraments. Since the council accomplished all this, and more, in only three sessions, each of which lasted a single day, it is clear that most of these measures were not the result of the assembly's deliberation, but that they were rather part of a program that Innocent had determined, and which he had the council approve. Ferguson, location 6201

**2.2.12.3.** In the late twelfth century bishops were expected to make legal inquiry of heretics in their dioceses and hand these over to the secular authorities for punishment. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) confirmed these regulations and threatened excommunication of temporal rulers who failed to rid their territory of heresy. Ferguson, location 9775

**2.2.13.**As can be seen above, the power and prestige of the Papacy reached a high tide under Innocent III. He died in 1216, the year following the Lateran Council. However, the new power of the Papacy that he had established continued for almost a century. Furthermore, much of the continued influence of the Papacy in our modern world finds its roots in the reign of Innocent III.

**2.2.13.1.** Wielding these spiritual weapons, Innocent and his successors in the papal office during the thirteenth century led Christianity to its peak of political and cultural influence. We simply cannot understand the pope's place in our own times without some understanding of these years. Shelley, location 3503

**2.2.13.2.** For all these reasons, it was under Innocent III that Christendom most nearly approached the ideal of being "one flock, under one shepherd"—the pope. Ferguson, location 6212

### **3. The Decline of the Papacy - The Babylonian Captivity**

**3.1.** Confident beginnings - Boniface VIII and the year of Jubilee

**3.1.1.** In 1294, a new Pope was being elected. There was conflict over the type of man needed - one who was a man of the world, able to handle the power politics inevitably facing the Pope, or one who embodied the ideal of the increasingly powerful and popular Franciscan order of monks. Eventually the group preferring the Franciscan ideal prevailed, and Celestine V was elected. He was a true spiritual Franciscan, and he appeared barefoot and riding a donkey as he entered Rome. However, he only ruled five months before abdicating and attempting to retire to a monastery (which was prevented by his successor lest he become a rival Pope).

**3.1.1.1.** Some insisted that the pope should be experienced in worldly matters, a man who understood the intrigues and ambitions of the world; others held to the Franciscan ideal, and sought the election of a candidate embodying it. Finally, the latter group prevailed, and Celestine V was elected. He was a Franciscan of the "spiritual" wing of the order. When he appeared barefooted and riding a



donkey, many thought that the prophecies of Joachim of Fiore were coming true. Now was the age of the Spirit beginning, and the church would be led by the humble and the poor. But Celestine decided to abdicate after a brief pontificate. Ferguson, location 6221

**3.1.2.** Boniface VIII was elected in 1294. He was very different than Celestine, being concerned with canon law. He also made great claims for Papal power during his tenure - though he proved far less successful than Innocent III in backing up his claims.

**3.1.2.1.** Boniface VIII (1294–1303): “Pride Goes before a Fall” Benedict of Gaetani had risen through service in the curia until he was elected pope. The very opposite of his predecessor, Boniface was strong-willed, shrewd, ambitious, an authority in canon law, but also not free of avarice and nepotism. Ferguson, location 10054

**3.1.3.** In 1300, Boniface declared a special year of Jubilee. The official decree announced a “full and copious pardon of all their sins” for all who visited the churches of Paul and Peter during the Holy Year. This proved to be a huge success, as throngs of pilgrims came to Rome to visit the churches and receive pardon for their sins.

**3.1.3.1.** THE FOURTEENTH century appeared to break upon Europe on a triumphant note. On 22 February 1300 Pope Boniface VIII proclaimed a Jubilee—a Holy Year—to celebrate the new centenary of Christ’s birth. It was the first of its kind. The official decree announced “a full and copious pardon of all their sins” for all who reverently visited the churches of St. Peter and St. Paul during the Holy Year. Joyous throngs poured into the Eternal City. Shelley, location 4043

**3.1.3.2.** Two events associated with the year 1300 are notable for the future. Boniface VIII proclaimed the year a Jubilee, providing a plenary (full) indulgence for those who confessed their sins and made a pilgrimage to a basilica in Rome in that year or any succeeding one hundredth year. Ferguson, location 10057

**3.1.3.3.** At the Church of St. Paul, according to one chronicler, generous celebrants kept two priests busy night and day “raking together infinite money.” Shelley, location 4051

**3.1.3.4.** Then came the year 1300, which marked the high point of his papacy. He proclaimed a great year of jubilee, promising plenary indulgence to all who visited the tomb of Saint Peter. Ferguson, location 6603

**3.1.4.** However, even as the year of Jubilee appeared to be a huge success, the seeds for the humbling of Boniface and the Papacy were already sprouting. One of the pilgrims to Rome that year was Dante Aligheri, who was horrified by what he saw as simony of the worst sort. Eventually he would write his highly popular and influential Divine Comedy. In this fictional trip through hell, Boniface is featured in the Eight Circle of hell. Nor was Dante alone in his growing impatience with Papal claims to power.

**3.1.4.1.** One of the pilgrims in that year was Dante Aligheri (1265–1321), a magistrate from Florence, who became indignant at the pope and

- at the bazaar in spiritual goods he observed. Dante saw the Jubilee traffic as the worst form of simony, now extended in meaning to include all sale of spiritual goods. Ferguson, location 10059
- 3.1.4.2.** As a result of his visit to Rome, Dante became anti-papal, and the events of 1300 became the basis of his views expressed in two books. Ferguson, location 10061
- 3.1.5.** However, the biggest problem facing the power of the Papacy was the growing strength of the national rulers. Oddly enough, the success of the Popes over the previous centuries in undermining a universal Western empire now served to undermine their own universal authority. Since there was not a single emperor ruling all of the lands of the West, the various rulers cajoled and warred with one another for power, and this struggle eventually brought to the Papacy some of its darkest days.
- 3.1.5.1.** It was Boniface's political struggles, however, that held the immediate attention of his pontificate. National monarchs had now replaced the emperor as the principal antagonists of the church, and the national states succeeded where the empire had failed in asserting secular power over the church. Ferguson, location 10068
- 3.1.5.2.** During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, new economic and political conditions would challenge the papacy and cause it to lose much of its authority. Nationalism, war, plague, corruption, and invasion would shatter the dreams of the thirteenth century, and open the way for the new order of the Modern Age. Ferguson, location 6466
- 3.1.6.** In 1301, just a year after the Jubilee, Boniface was in conflict with Philip of France. The papal legate had been brought to trial. As a result, Boniface issued the Papal Bull Unum Sanctam in 1302. This Papal Bull is the high water mark of the claims of the Papacy. In it Boniface asserted many familiar themes of earlier teaching: there is one church, outside of which there is no salvation; the relationship between the church and the state under God; that no one may judge the Pope, etc. However, the bull concluded with the now famous words "Furthermore, we declare, state, and define that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman pontiff." This was the baldest assertion of universal Papal power ever.
- 3.1.6.1.** But relations with France grew tense. Philip granted asylum and support to Sciarra Colonna, one of Boniface's bitterest enemies. He further challenged the pope by confiscating ecclesiastical lands, and by offering his sister's hand to the emperor whom Boniface had denounced as a usurper and regicide. Ferguson, location 6606
- 3.1.6.2.** In 1301 the king imprisoned a French bishop on charges of treason. Boniface ordered the official's release and rescinded his earlier concession on taxation of church lands. Shelley, location 4095
- 3.1.6.3.** Several months later Boniface issued Unam sanctam, the most extreme assertion of papal power in all church history. This time Boniface made his meaning unmistakable. "It is altogether necessary," he declared, "for every human being to be subject to the Roman pontiff." Shelley, location 4099

- 3.1.6.4.** The contest between Boniface and Philip was renewed in 1301 when the papal legate was brought to trial. Boniface issued in 1302 the bull *Unam sanctam*, influenced by the political theology of Giles of Rome and James of Viterbo. A noble document if one leaves polemical considerations aside, *Unam sanctam* summarizes the papal theory of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but, like a building often, it was the symbol of an age gone by. Ferguson, location 10074
- 3.1.6.5.** Much of the content of *Unam sanctam* is a synthesis of earlier teaching: There is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church outside of which there is no salvation; there is one body and one Head, whose representative is the pope; there are two swords, one (spiritual) to be used by the church by the hand of the priest and the other (temporal) by the hand of the king under the direction of the priest for the church; no one may judge the pope, and the spiritual power has the right to guide the secular power and judge it when it does not act rightly; and this relationship is ordained by God. Ferguson, location 10078
- 3.1.6.6.** Then at the end of *Unam sanctam* comes the famous conclusion: Furthermore, we declare, state, and define that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman pontiff. Ferguson, location 10082
- 3.1.6.7.** Boniface's response was the bull *Unam Sanctam*, which was quoted in the last chapter as the high point of papal claims to universal power, both ecclesiastical and political. He then convoked the French prelates to a meeting in Rome, there to discuss what was to be done with King Philip. The latter issued a decree forbidding all bishops to leave the kingdom without his permission, under penalty of confiscation of all their property. Ferguson, location 6613
- 3.1.7.** In response, Philip worked with factions in Rome who did not like Boniface and had him kidnapped. Some people rescued the Pope after three days, but he died. Thus, despite his bold claims to papal power, Boniface did not have the success of Innocent III or Gregory VII, but foreshadowed the coming century when the papacy would be under the power of France and her rulers.
- 3.1.7.1.** The king took a more direct approach to limiting the pope's actions. In alliance with the Colonna faction in Rome, he had Boniface kidnapped. The people of Anagni rescued the pope after three days, but he died in Rome a month later. Boniface's claims for the papacy placed him in the succession of Gregory VII and Innocent III, but his failure foreshadowed the diminishing political power of the papacy. Ferguson, location 10089
- 3.1.7.2.** Boniface, now 86, had left the heat of Rome to summer in the foothills of the Apennine mountains at his birthplace, Anagni. Nogaret and some troops he had marshaled broke in on the aged Boniface in his bedroom. Whether they actually manhandled him is in dispute. But certainly they heaped abuse upon him. They kept him prisoner for several days. When the plain people of Anagni

realized what was happening, they rose up and rescued Boniface. Shelley, location 4107

- 3.1.7.3.** Numbed and humiliated, the aged pope died within weeks. Contemporaries said: “He crept in like a fox, reigned like a lion, and died like a dog.” Shelley, location 4110
- 3.1.7.4.** Boniface’s last weapon was that which his predecessors had used against other recalcitrant rulers, excommunication. He gathered his closest advisors in Anagni, his native town, and there prepared a bull of excommunication that was to be issued on September 8. Ferguson, location 6622
- 3.1.7.5.** But the French were aware that the confrontation was reaching its climax. Sciarra Colonna and William Nogaret were in Italy making ready for such an occasion, and, drawing on Philip’s credit with Italian banks, they organized a small armed band. On September 7, the day before the planned sentence of excommunication, they entered Anagni and kidnapped the pope, while his home and those of his relatives were sacked by mobs. Ferguson, location 6624
- 3.1.7.6.** Nogaret’s purpose was to force Boniface to abdicate. But the elderly pope was firm and declared that, if they wished to kill him, “here is my neck, here my head.” Nogaret struck him, and then they humiliated him by forcing him to sit backwards on a horse, and thus parading him through town. Ferguson, location 6627
- 3.1.7.7.** Finally, Boccasini was able to move some of the people, who reacted against the outrage, freed the pope, and expelled the French and their partisans from the city. Ferguson, location 6630
- 3.1.7.8.** But the evil had been done. Back in Rome, Boniface was no longer able to inspire the respect he had commanded earlier. He died shortly after the episode of Anagni. Ferguson, location 6632

### **3.2. The Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy**

- 3.2.1.** In 1305 Clement V was elected Pope. He was a Frenchman, and had been the Archbishop of Bordeaux. Clement was loyal and beholding to the French ruler, and never even set foot in Rome during his Papacy. Instead, he set up his royal court in France. This marked the beginning of what has become known as the Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy. Beginning with Clement, six Popes would all be French, and all would choose to reside in Avignon France rather than Rome. This period lasted for 72 years (which was so close to the 70 years of the Jews exile in Babylon that it led to the popular name given to this whole episode.)
  - 3.2.1.1.** In 1305 the College of Cardinals elected a Frenchman, the Archbishop of Bordeaux, as Pope Clement V. Clement never set foot in Rome, preferring to stay closer to home, where he was always accessible to royal bidding. Shelley, location 4120
  - 3.2.1.2.** Clement’s election marked the start of the 72-year period in church history called—after the long exile of the ancient Jews in Babylon—the Babylonian Captivity of the papacy. Following Clement, six successive popes, all of French origin, chose to reside in a little town called Avignon rather than in Rome. Shelley, location 4123

- 3.2.1.3. Boniface's second successor, Clement V, in 1305 transferred the papal residence to Avignon (1309), a principality ceded to the pope at the Council of Lyons but under French influence. Clement did not consider this move unusual, for other popes had lived elsewhere to avoid the political machinations at Rome, but the popes stayed in Avignon so long (until 1377) and were under such French influence that this nearly seventy-year period came to be known as the Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy. Ferguson, location 10092
      - 3.2.1.4. During his entire reign (1305–1314), Clement V did not visit Rome once. Although the citizenry of Rome insisted on his establishing residence in the city, Philip kept him occupied in France, and therefore under his thumb. Ferguson, location 6644
    - 3.2.2. However, it was more than just that the Popes lived in France during this period that was significant. It was definitely a blow to tradition and to the appearance of universality to have the bishop of Rome living in France. However, it was the reality that these Popes were really often nothing more than puppets of the French kings that was particularly disastrous. They were also often nepotistic and greedy for money and power. This was truly one of the darkest periods of the Papacy.
      - 3.2.2.1. During his pontificate, Clement V named twenty-four cardinals, and all but one were French. Furthermore, several of them were his relatives, thus creating and encouraging the nepotistic practices that would be one of the great ills of the church until the sixteenth century. Ferguson, location 6646
      - 3.2.2.2. In 1309 he had begun residing in Avignon, a papal city at the very borders of France. For nearly seventy years, while still claiming to be bishops of Rome, the popes would generally remain in Avignon. This period, often called the "Avignon Papacy" or the "Babylonian Captivity of the Church," was marked, not only by the absence of the popes from Rome, but also by their willingness to serve as tools of French policy. Ferguson, location 6677
    - 3.2.3. One major example of the corruption of the Popes in this period of time is the horrific episode with the Templar Knights. The Templars, as their name implies, had been founded during the Crusades in relation to the Temple. They were obviously obsolete by this point - but they were also very wealthy. Philip had the Templars in France arrested and tortured until some of them "confessed" that they were actually a secret order opposed to the Christian faith, spit upon the cross in their secret worship rites, were sodomites, etc. Rather than supporting the Templars against this utterly unjust treatment, Clement declared that he was the proper person to judge them. He did order the torture to stop, but in the end, most of the Templar's property and wealth were confiscated and ended up with the French monarch. Moreover, many of the Templars spent the rest of their lives in prison - for crimes they had never committed.
      - 3.2.3.1. The most shameful event of this weak papacy, however, was the arrest and trial of the Templars. This was one of the military orders founded during the crusades, and therefore it had become

- obsolete. But it was also rich and powerful. Ferguson, location 6651
- 3.2.3.2.** Unexpectedly, all the Templars who happened to be in France were arrested. Under torture, some were forced to confess that they were in truth a secret order opposed to the Christian faith, that in their worship they practiced idolatry, cursed Christ, and spit on the cross, and that they were sodomites. Ferguson, location 6656
  - 3.2.3.3.** The Templars hoped that the pope would defend them and protest against the injustice that was being done. But Clement did exactly the opposite. Ferguson, location 6661
  - 3.2.3.4.** When he learned that the supposed confessions had been obtained through torture, he ordered that this be stopped, declaring that he would judge the Templars, and that the civil authorities had no jurisdiction over them. Ferguson, location 6663
  - 3.2.3.5.** Philip and Clement came to an agreement. Instead of trying the Templars for their supposed crimes, the order would be abolished by administrative decision of the pope, and the property it held would be transferred to another military order. Ferguson, location 6669
  - 3.2.3.6.** As to the wealth of the Templars, Philip took, most of it by sending the pope an enormous bill for their trial, and insisting that payment for this bill take precedence over any other disposition of the property of the Templars. Ferguson, location 6671
  - 3.2.3.7.** Many of the Templars spent the rest of their life in prison. Ferguson, location 6673
- 3.2.4.** During this period, the new Papal palace that was built in Avignon rivaled those of secular lords in their luxury. Furthermore, as noted above, nepotism was rampant. One Pope during this period, Gregory XI, was the nephew of Clement VI and had been made a Cardinal when he was only 17 years old! Thus, the hierarchy of the church was being determined, not based on godly character, but on family and political ties, and the “servant of the servants of Christ” lived in luxury while many Christians lived in poverty.
- 3.2.4.1.** the court at Avignon rivaled those of great secular lords in its pomp and luxury. Since this was the time of the plague, many believed that this was divine punishment for the popes’ absence from Rome. Ferguson, location 6692
  - 3.2.4.2.** The next pope was Gregory XI (1370–1378), who had been made a cardinal by his uncle Clement VI when he was seventeen years old. Ferguson, location 6697
- 3.2.5.** In order to pay for this lavish lifestyle (and also the political intrigue common throughout this period), the Popes relied on dubious measures. For example, when a bishopric became vacant, the funds of the diocese had to be sent to Avignon for a year. If the bishopric remained vacant longer than a year, the funds continued to flow to Avignon. Thus, the concern of the Pope became keeping “pastoral” positions unfilled, and to have them become vacant often. Money, rather than caring for the flock, drove every decision. Furthermore, when the bishoprics were actually filled, they were generally sold to the highest bidder. Simony was in full force!

- 3.2.5.1. Since the court at Avignon, and the constant wars and intrigues in which it was involved, required abundant funds, John XXII and his successors devised means to acquire them. When a position was vacant, its income for one year was to be sent to Rome. If the vacancy lasted longer, the income continued going to Avignon. Therefore, the popes had a vested interest in frequent and unfilled vacancies. This did not benefit the pastoral ministry of the church, which was repeatedly interrupted by frequent and prolonged vacancies. Ferguson, location 6720
- 3.2.5.2. To this was added the sale of ecclesiastical posts—the very simony that Gregory VII and other advocates of reform had deplored. Ferguson, location 6723
- 3.2.5.3. To replace these funds and raise new ones the Avignon popes resorted to a host of moneymaking schemes, some old, some new. Shelley, location 4140
- 3.2.5.4. For example, the popes introduced the rule that whenever a bishop was appointed, the first year's income—called an annat—should go to the pope. Shelley, location 4141
- 3.2.5.5. To fill a vacancy popes often transferred a bishop from another city and thus created more annates. Shelley, location 4142
- 3.2.6. As noted above, the Papacy during this period was completely under the domination of the French rulers. This meant that they were not in any sense “neutral” in international affairs, but decidedly sided with the French. Obviously, this led the other European powers to increasingly view the Papacy as a foreign power, or to be identified with France itself. This could only serve to further erode the power and prestige of the Papacy.

#### **4. The Aftermath of the Babylonian Captivity - the Great Schism**

- 4.1. The “Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy” came to an end when the elderly Pope Gregory XI entered Rome in 1377. This ended the period of time when the Papacy resided at Avignon - but not the troubles for the Papacy. Gregory soon died, and turmoil over the selection of the new Pope ensued. Although the College of Cardinals was heavily weighted with Frenchmen, the angry Roman mob ensured that an Italian was chosen as the new Pope. However, the new Pope, Urban VI, wanted to make real reforms among the church leadership, and these were not popular with many of the Cardinals - especially the French Cardinals. Thus when he had only reigned a few months the Cardinals informed the rest of Europe that the people of Rome had forced this choice, and that Urban was actually an apostate - and thus the election was invalid. In response, Urban created a new rival college of Cardinals. The original group of Cardinals then selected a new Pope - Clement VII, who set up his Papacy in Avignon. This period of time became known as the Great Schism, and it lasted for 39 years! Throughout this period there were two Popes and two sets of Cardinals at the same time! Each “Pope” claimed to be the True Vicar of Christ, with all attendant powers.
  - 4.1.1. In 1377 the aged Pope Gregory XI reentered Rome. The joy over the reestablishment of the papacy in the Eternal City was short-lived. Gregory's death within a year required a new papal election. The College of Cardinals, still heavily weighted with Frenchmen, yielded to the clamor of a Roman mob

and chose an Italian. On April 18, Easter Sunday, the new pope, Urban VI, was crowned. All the cardinals were present. The summer months, however, along with Urban's dictatorial ways, brought second thoughts about his selection. In August the cardinals suddenly informed all Europe that the people of Rome had forced the election of an apostate to the chair of Peter and the proceedings were invalid. Shelley, location 4149

- 4.1.2. A month later the "apostate" responded by creating practically a new College of Cardinals. Shelley, location 4154
- 4.1.3. For their part the French cardinals chose from their own number another pope, Clement VII, and announced this fact to the various civil and church authorities. Clement VII moved about Italy and eventually sailed for France and Avignon. Shelley, location 4155
- 4.1.4. Thus, with Urban ruling from Rome and Clement from Avignon the murky chapter in papal history called the Great Schism of the papacy begins. It lasted for 39 years. Each pope had his own College of Cardinals, thereby insuring the papal succession of its own choice. Each pope claimed to be the true Vicar of Christ, with the power to excommunicate those who did not acknowledge him. Shelley, location 4158
- 4.1.5. Under such circumstances, the conclave did not dare elect a French pope. After long deliberation, they chose the archbishop of Bari, an Italian, who took the name of Urban VI. With great pomp, and the participation of all the cardinals, both French and Italian, Urban was crowned on Easter Sunday, 1378. Ferguson, location 6744
- 4.1.6. The crowning of Urban VI seemed to be the beginning of a new age. He was a man of humble origins and austere life, who would clearly undertake the reformation for which so many were calling. But it was also clear that in this he would clash with the many cardinals who were used to luxury, and for whom their office was a means to riches and to the aggrandizement of their families. Ferguson, location 6747
- 4.1.7. In his zeal to put an end to absenteeism, he declared that those bishops who formed part of his court, and therefore were not in their dioceses, were traitors to Christ and guilty of perjury. From the pulpit he thundered against the cardinals' ostentatiousness, and then affirmed that a prelate receiving any gift whatsoever was guilty of simony and should therefore be excommunicated. Ferguson, location 6751
- 4.1.8. Trying to wrest power from the hands of the French, he decided to appoint a vast number of Italian cardinals, so that they would be the majority. And then he committed the indiscretion of announcing his plan to the French before actually implementing it. Ferguson, location 6753
- 4.1.9. An ever-increasing number of cardinals joined the opposition. First the French, and then many of the Italians, fled from Rome and gathered in Anagni. There they declared that they had elected Urban under coercion, and that such an election was not valid. Ferguson, location 6759
- 4.1.10. Urban responded by appointing twenty-six new cardinals from among his staunchest supporters. Ferguson, location 6763
- 4.1.11. Gathered in conclave, the same cardinals—except one—who had elected Urban, and who for some time had served him, elected a new pope whom they declared to be the legitimate successor of Saint Peter. The Italian



cardinals who were present abstained from the election, but did not protest.  
Ferguson, location 6765

- 4.1.12. Thus an unprecedented situation developed. On several earlier occasions there had been more than one claimant to the papacy. But now for the first time there were two popes elected by the same cardinals. Ferguson, location 6768
        - 4.1.13. As soon as he was elected, Clement took arms against Urban, and attacked the city of Rome. Being repulsed, he took up residence in Avignon. The result was that there were now two popes, one in Rome and one in Avignon, each with his court and his college of cardinals, and each seeking the recognition of the various courts in Europe. Ferguson, location 6775
- 4.2. In response, different countries, universities, and monasteries had to decide who was the “real” Pope. France obviously sided with Clement, and Italy with Urban. The Holy Roman Empire in Germany sided with Urban, as did England. However, Scotland sided with Clement. This was obviously a state of chaos.
  - 4.2.1. The proper identity of the true pope was a matter of considerable importance to Christendom. Unfortunately, the only witnesses to the problem— the cardinals—contradicted themselves flatly. Shelley, location 4163
  - 4.2.2. It was left to universities, kings, bishops, dukes, and just about everyone else to decide who was the true Vicar of Christ. Shelley, location 4165
  - 4.2.3. France went with Clement; Italy with Urban. The empire went with Urban; so did England. Scotland went with Clement. But within each country minorities existed. Tumults and riots broke out. Property was burned and crusades were preached. A house divided against itself could not stand. Shelley, location 4167
- 4.3. In 1409, a majority of Cardinals on both sides agreed something had to be done. They met as a general council of the church in Pisa Italy, deposed both current Popes, and elected a new Pope, Alexander V. However, both of the old Popes refused to recognize this, and thus there were now three Popes!
  - 4.3.1. By 1409 a majority of the cardinals from both camps agreed that it was. They met for a general council at Pisa, on the west coast of Italy. They deposed both claimants to the papal chair, and elected a third man, Alexander V. Neither of the two deposed popes, however, would accept the action of the council. So the church now had not two, but three claimants to the chair of Peter. Shelley, location 4173
- 4.4. This situation was finally resolved when the Holy Roman Emperor called for a council of the Church as the city of Constance. This council was one of the largest of its era - even representatives from the Eastern Orthodox church came! By 1417, the council got on of the Popes to step down, deposed the other Popes, and elected a new Pope, Martin V. Benedict XIII of Avignon did not recognize this action, and the Avignon papacy continued until 1437, but it was increasingly ignored. For all intents and purposes the Papacy was now reunited.
  - 4.4.1. Three popes at a time are too many by almost anyone’s standards, especially so when one of the popes preaches a crusade against another and starts selling indulgences to pay for it. Shelley, location 4176
  - 4.4.2. In 1414 the Holy Roman Emperor assembled at the German city of Constance, the most impressive church gathering of this era. Even the Greek Orthodox Church sent representatives. Shelley, location 4178

- 4.4.3.** At length, in 1417, the council got one papal incumbent to step aside, deposed the other two and chose a new Vicar of Christ, Martin V. One of the deposed popes, Benedict XIII of Avignon, clung to his claim, but for all practical purposes, the council in Constance ended the Great Schism. Shelley, location 4185
- 4.5.** This entire episode is obviously one of great embarrassment and difficulty for proponents of the Papacy. To handle it, the Popes who reigned at Avignon during the Schism are generally referred to as antipopes. Attempts are made to trace an unbroken line of succession through this mess, but it is obvious that the entire institution of the Papacy during this whole period was so far from the call to be shepherds of God's flock that it is of little comfort to trace the "correct" line. The Babylonian Captivity and the Great Schism were chaos, and they expose the problems inherent in the doctrine of the Papacy and its claims.
- 4.6.** All of this left many in the Church, and indeed all of Europe, weary and looking for real reform in the church. The question was how and when such reform could take place. Unfortunately, another 150 years would be required for the answer to these questions.

**Next Class: Theological Developments in the Middle Ages**

**Reading: Chapter 31 (The Golden Age of Medieval Christianity - especially the section 'Theological Activity: Scholasticism')**

**Date: January 21????**