

The Centered Power of Rome in the 6th-9th Centuries

Kathy L. McFarland

Professor Michael Mitchell, Jr.

DLP CHHI 301

22 November 2008

Kathy L. McFarland
Professor Mitchell
DLP CHHI 301
22 November 2008

The Centered Power of Rome in the 6th-9th Centuries

Rome was in a vast political vacuum by the end of the fifth century, with many small, barbarian kingdoms competing for the ruling power of the once great empire. Two barbarian groups, the Ostagoths, displaced from the north of the Black Sea, and the Lombards, championed by the Byzantines to replace them, were mingled within the Roman culture. The once barbaric Visigoth Monarchy was known as the “defenders of the church” for their abandonment of the heresy of Arianism, and flourished in Spain. The Franks with King Clovis’ leadership aimed to assimilate with old Roman culture rather than replace it with the new Merovingian dynasty, and powers waxed and waned at the sporadic warfare as power changed hands. It was in this crucial time of turbulent and chaotic power exchanges between barbarian tribes that eventually led to the Papacy rising up and establishing power centered in Rome in the 6th to 9th centuries.

But first, the seed of faith had to have room to grow and order itself, without threat of trampling in the midst of chaos and war. As the constant shifting of powers between barbaric conflicts raged on, rural Ireland remained free of their control. Saint Patrick came to Ireland as a missionary, and participated in a magical battle with pagan druids at Tara; Patrick’s prayers overpowered the spells of his opponents, converting King Laoghaire and his followers to Christianity.¹ The resulting monasteries grew throughout the Celtic lands, and came to play an important role in the lives of Christians in the periods between the 5th and 10th centuries. It was the monastery traditions that set the standard of Benedictine Rule for mainstream Catholicism.

¹ Jonathan Hill, *Zondervan Handbook to the History of Christianity*, (Oxford: Lion Publishing Plc, 2006).

This began the forward movement of ordered Christian faith, as it slowly progressed from the countryside of Ireland, throughout the fallen empire of Rome and outside its old borders, taking hold of converts as it crawled toward Imperial Rome and the Papacy that had begun in the days of the healthy Roman Empire.

The Papacy had always been important to Christians. Rome was the place of Peter's and Paul's martyrdom according to tradition, and the early church placed great faith in the belief that Christian religion was passed down from Christ through His Apostles.² The stability of the Papacy stood strong in the progressing turmoil after the fall of Rome, as the barbarians wrestled the Byzantines for control.

There were five established seats of patriarchal authority in Rome, Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch and Constantinople, but four of those seats were in the eastern half of the empire. As the Eastern and Western Christian halves became culturally and politically distinct, Rome became more theological important to the West, as the only apostolic for westerners.³

One of the most important bishops of the fourth century was Damasus I, who first referred to Rome as 'the apostolic see' and to himself as *pontifex maximus*, a title reserved previously for only the emperor.⁴ Damasus traced his authority as the bishop of Rome as established by Jesus Christ. His ideas influenced his successor, Siricius, who took the title 'Pope'. By AD 495, the Pope (Gelasius I) was being hailed in Rome as the 'Vicar of Christ'. The power of the papacy was founded, and the political control of the Roman Catholic Church soon followed. The case for supremacy over the church organization was implemented, and a

² Marvin Perry, et al, *Western Civilization: Ideas, Politics, and Society*, Eighth. Vol. 1., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007.)

³ Hill, *History*.

⁴ Ibid

demand for all other powers to subordinate to Peter's rock as the champion of true Christianity expected.⁵ The weak emperors of Milan failed to govern Rome, and the bishops were ready to fill the vacuum of power with the Church authority; after all, they were elevated to the status of God's representative on earth.

Gregory the Great became pope in AD 590, and with his succession, came reform, scholarship, and even more enhancement to the standing of the papacy. At the core of his reform was the ideal that the Church should be independent from lay interference, and stand apart from the state.⁶ Gregory was also famous for the mission he sent to England that was led by a monk named Augustine (not the great theologian), and was the first step on the establishment of the Church of England.

The Church's possessed great hordes of land and money, and by AD 741, owned considerable areas of land in Italy. Pope Zacharias (AD 741 to 752) was a king among kings and ruler of 'the Republic of St. Peter'. His successor, Pope Hadrian I, began issuing coins (AD 781) with his name and image, and allied the papacy to the Frankish kings.

Roman Catholic Christianity was becoming established throughout Europe through its monasteries, which was administered at the orders of the Pope. Rome's authority, however, was not always followed blindly. Arguments often arose about how important it was to obey Rome among Celtic Christians in Ireland, and the debates between the haircuts of the monks and Easter dates became a sore point with them. Eventually, their Celtic customs were gradually replaced by Roman ones, and by the eighth century, Ireland was fully integrated into the greater Catholic Church. The power of the Papacy increased slowly but steadily, contributing to its dominance in Western Europe until the Reformation because of Rome's perceived authority over Christianity.

⁵ Perry, *Western Civilization*.

⁶ J. M. Roberts., *History of the World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

While Roman Catholic Christianity gave order to the faithful, it might have been at great cost to believers. It has been suggested that its corrupt system of falsehood and idolatry identifies it as a masterpiece of Satan, rather than the kingdom of the Son of God. In fact, Cardinal Manning speaks of the secretive union of Christianity and Pagan religion that the Roman Empire made with the “barbarian hordes”, which incorporated the pagan rites with Christianity in a truce; the barbarians kept their pagan religious practices in exchange for relinquishing their power to the Pope.⁷ Charges are also made that Rome established a political system of foreign despotism through deals made with pagan Rome; in other words, both the spiritual and political realm of Rome was made formed from the pagan religions of the barbarians, and it was them under the control of Satan, rather than Jesus Christ, that established the Roman Catholic Church.⁸ T. W. Medhurst impeaches the Roman Catholic Church by pointing out that true Christianity was preached by the Apostles, and that truth was not adopted by the Church.⁹ Rather, Satan went forth and preached “another Gospel” which Paul spoke as perverting the Gospel of Christ in 2 Corinthians 11:3.¹⁰ Therefore, those who adhere to the order and rule of the Roman Catholic Church are bending their knees to the delusion of Satan, and conducting false worship and dishonoring the Truth expressed in the Word of God.

John Calvin later on addressed the mark of a church, and offered that a degree of failure or diversity on matters is permitted providing that a church teaches the Word of God and administers sacraments properly.¹¹ It is key these points that are blamed upon the Roman powers

⁷ Rev. J. M. Foster, *Rome, The Antagonist of the Nation*. Vol. II, chap. XXII in *The Fundamentals*, by R.A. Torrey, (Los Angeles: Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917).

⁸ Ibid

⁹ T.W. Medhurst, *Is Romanism Christianity?* Vol. II, chap. XXI in *The Fundamentals*, by A.C. Torrey, (Los Angeles: Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917).

¹⁰ Holy Bible. *The King James Study Bible*,. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1988).

¹¹ McGrath, Alister E. *The Christian Theology Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995.

that corrupt the expression of the Word of God with false teachings and use pagan rites their celebration of sacraments; thus, a charge of Satanic control easily leveled by faithful believers that reject tradition and hold the Word of God to be the inerrant authority of faith.

Whether the Roman Catholic Church is the church of Satan or their false claims of being redeemer of mankind through their presence and representation of Christ are believed or not, several points are easily discerned. If the Roman Catholic Church had not assumed power within the vacuum created by warring barbarians, peace would not have ensued, and the Christian faith become confused with different tribes setting different standards. Also, it was the Roman Catholic Church which created a stable environment with great financial resources to help the people through direct distributions to the poor and the rescue of prisoners who had been kidnapped by the rebels. While power of the papacy eventually brought corruption and abuse, it initially provided a survival platform for the people who were dying of starvation and the poverties of war. The Roman Catholic Church and its tremendous power brought civilized life to bear upon its subjects, and provided an outreach mission to spread their doctrines across the land. The power centered in Rome in the 6th to 9th centuries, changed the practice of faith among Christians forever, and ushered in an era of reformation as the fights against the Roman Catholic Church began.

Bibliography

Foster, Rev. J. M. *Rome, The Antagonist of the Nation*. Vol. II, chap. XXII in *The Fundamentals*, by R.A. Torrey. Los Angeles: Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917.

Hill, Jonathan. *Zondervan Handbook to the History of Christianity*. Oxford: Lion Publishing Plc, 2006.

Holy Bible. *The King James Study Bible*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1988.

McGrath, Alister E. *The Christian Theology Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995.

Medhurst, T.W. *Is Romanism Christianity?* Vol. II, chap. XXI in *The Fundamentals*, by A.C. Torrey. Los Angeles: Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1917.

Perry, Marvin, et al. *Western Civilization: Ideas, Politics, and Society*. Eighth. Vol. 1. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007.

Roberts, J.M. *History of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.