

The Great Controversy Series

06 The Establishment of the Papacy

The church in Rome played an important role in Christianity from a very early date. Rome was the capital of the empire. Because it was in the city which carried that atmosphere of authority, it was natural that in people's minds the church in Rome carried an importance. By the time we get to the second century, as best we can tell the church in Rome was the largest church of Christianity. Rome's location put the city on the crossroads of the empire. People from all over the empire were there. If there was an event or situation, wherever it may be in the empire, it interested the church members of Rome, many who were immigrants.

Peter and Paul were martyred at Rome. Neither Peter nor Paul established the church at Rome. But in time Peter and Paul began to be seen as the founders of the church. The emperor Constantine gave to Rome an atmosphere of the apostles by making shrines to Peter and Paul. This gave to the church of Rome a large authority as if the decisions and doctrines and traditions of the Roman church came from Peter and Paul.

In the beginning, the Roman church leadership did not reside in one man but led by elders. This also changed with time and the bishop played a large and central role and obedience to him was expected. When a problem or question came up, the decisions that came from the bishop of Rome carried great weight, not just in Rome but elsewhere.

As an example, in Asia Minor, that is Anatolia, the believers would celebrate the 14th of Nisan as a holiday. Jesus Christ was killed on the 14th of Nisan according to the Hebrew calendar. This date was the Passover. Because many Christians came from a Jewish background, it was natural that they would recognize the day. Passover was celebrated on the 14th of Nisan no matter what day of the week that that fell on. The holiday that the Christians in Anatolia celebrated was called Easter and this holiday coincided with the Passover of the Jews.

The tradition of the church of Rome was to celebrate Easter on the first Sunday following the Passover. In the year that Jesus died, He rose from the dead on Sunday, that is, Nisan 16. This meant that most of the time, the Roman church did not celebrate Easter on Nisan 16. They didn't celebrate 14 Nisan.

This controversy was very tense between the two church regions. Victor, the bishop of Rome (189-198) made church meetings in Rome, Palestine and other places and established the Roman tradition in these regions. The Anatolian churches did not conform to this. Then Victor excommunicated all the churches who did not accept the tradition of the church of Rome. Of course he did not have authority to do this and there was a large protest against it. But the church of Rome had begun to exert power, authority and influence outside of its own church to a degree that no other church could do.

In a previous sermon we saw that Constantine held clergy exempt from some taxes and responsibilities. At the same time, church leaders began to play a larger role in society. For most of

the 4th century the bishops sat as judges in civil court cases when both sides agreed to it. Now they exerting authority not only inside the church but outside as well.

Furthermore, as the church was recognized as a corporate entity, it could own property. The church leaders began managers of donated money, land and property. With money earned from these sources the church leader's salary, church construction and maintenance and help to the poor was provided. The esteem of the church leaders rose in society. The church bishop was a leader and benefactor not only in church but in society.

Another great change took place in the time of Constantine. A controversy arose among church leaders. Church leaders appealed to the emperor to make a decision among them. Among those controversies was the following. In the time of the persecution of Diocletian, some bishops apostatized by denying their faith or surrendering the scriptures to the authorities. When the persecution ceased some of them repented and returned to the church. Some of those believers who had remained faithful did not accept the traitors as valid church leaders. They said, "the Holy Spirit is not given in the churches of these leaders. We are the true church." There was a charismatic leader named Donatus and his group was called Donatists. The Donatists were against a bishop named Caecilian. The Donatists said, "Caecilian cannot be a leader because one of the bishops who ordained him had apostatized. An apostate bishop cannot perform a valid ordination." When Constantine arrived on the scene Caecilian and his church in general were accepted by the other churches. The Donatists appealed to the Emperor for a decision.

When Christianity appeals to the government for a decision, religion and state unite. So now the head of the church was not Jesus Christ but the emperor. Constantine gave authority to the bishop of Rome Mitiades for a decision. We see here two precedents. The church appealed to the state to solve its internal problems. The state gave authority to the church of Rome to make decisions for other churches. The prestige of the Roman Church became even greater. (The information in the above paragraphs is based on Williston Walker *A History of the Christian Church* 4th edition. T & T Clark, Edinburgh, s. 151, 75-77, 184, 131.)

In symbolic prophecy a woman represents God's people. In the Old and New Testaments God's relationship with His people is described with marriage. In symbolic prophecy, a church which is separated from God and in relationship with the kings of the earth is portrayed as a prostitute and an adulteress.

Revelation 17:1-2 Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, ² "with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication."

In Constantine's time(312-337) Christianity became the emperor's religion. A little later in the time of emperor Theodosian's time (379-395) Christianity became the formal religion of the empire. The bishop of Rome up to this point had not become the highest authority in Christianity. There were other important churches and church leaders. In Rome there were still western emperors. Up until

this time the church of Rome and her pope were not at the head of the Christianity. But in the political world great events would change this situation.

The Huns, who were Turks, pushed the Germanic tribes into Europe. The most important of the tribes that came were these: the Almani, the Visigoths, the Sueve, the Vandals, the Heruli, the Burgundians, the Ostrogoths, the Franks, the Anglo-Saxons, and the Lombards. The invading tribes began to divide up the weakening Roman Empire. The tribes formed kingdoms and some became Christian by their faith was Arian. Arius (250-336) was a bishop in Alexandria. According to the Arian belief there was a time when Jesus Christ came into being and He was not equal with God but lower. In general, in the Christian world and in the Roman church, the view was predominate that Jesus Christ was equal with the Father and did not have a beginning.

In 476 the Heruli king Odoacer removed the last of the western emperors in Rome. Odoacer was Arian and was against the power and doctrine of the Roman church. Later, the Arian Ostrogoth king Theodoric I killed Odoacer and occupied Rome. Up to this point in time the church of Rome could not take the place of the fallen emperors, none of the European kingdoms recognized the bishop of Rome as the head of the universal church. In the following century, two kings would change this situation. The first was Clovis who established the Frankish kingdom. The second was the eastern emperor Justinian.

“Of all the Barbarian kings, Clovis was the only one to be converted to the Catholicism. (J. Pirenne, *Historia Universal* (Ed. Exito, Barcelona 1961 I p. 445. The quotation comes from Alberto Treiyer *Apocalypse Seals and Trumpets Distinctive Messages* 2005, p. 97. ISBN 9780965007627.) Clovis drove the Arian Visigoths from Gaul in the year 508. Gaul included what is now France, Luksemburg, Belgium, much of Switzerland, northern Italy and parts of Holland. In the same year he established Paris as his capital. Later he added some of the western parts of Germany to his territory. Many of his people became Catholic and he established a close alliance with the Catholic church. This alliance would last for 1290 years until the French Revolution

In the year 506 when Clovis began to war against the Visigoths he did search for a justification. He said, “The fact that these Arians are masters of a part of Gaul causes me a great regret. Let us go, and with God’s help, to meet them and take away from them the country they are occupying.” (F. Dahn, *Pueblos Germanicos y Romanos*, G. Oncken’de *Historia Universal* XI, s. 27. Quoted from Alberto Treiyer *Apocalypse Seals and Trumpets Distinctive Messages* 2005, p. 100. ISBN 9780965007627). It was like a crusade. In the conquered lands, the Latin people mixed with the Germanic Franks and a new people group came into being. Catholics and pagans were no longer seen as enemies and thus marriages between them became widespread. Many people became Catholic with a true conversion.

Justinian who was the emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire in Constantinople wanted to reconquer the western territories of the empire. In order to do this he needed the cooperation of the pope and he bestowed on him religious and civil authority. In the 533 Justinian in a letter to the pope wrote his intention to establish, “Unite all the priests of the East and subject them to the See of your Holiness.” In that letter he described the pope as the “head of all the Holy Churches.”

In the year 534 Justinian sent his general Belisarius to North Africa and by conquering the Arian Vandals he set the Catholics free. In the year 538 Belisarius drove the Arian Ostrogoths from the city of Rome. At last there was no king in Rome. The papacy was exercising both religious and civil authority without hindrance. Thus in 538 the papacy began its supremacy in Europe.

Let's look again at the scriptures we looked at last time written by the prophet Daniel and add a few to it.

Daniel 7:23-25 " Thus he said: 'The fourth beast shall be A fourth kingdom on earth, Which shall be different from all *other* kingdoms, And shall devour the whole earth, Trample it and break it in pieces. ²⁴ The ten horns *are* ten kings *Who* shall arise from this kingdom. And another shall rise after them; He shall be different from the first *ones*, And shall subdue three kings. ²⁵ He shall speak *pompous* words against the Most High, Shall persecute the saints of the Most High, And shall intend to change times and law. Then *the saints* shall be given into his hand For a time and times and half a time.

In this last sentence is a time frame that attracts our attention. We will give details on it in a later sermon but let's look at it briefly. In symbolic prophecy if we count a day for a year (Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6) how long is 3 and a half years? In the Bible in the story of Noah, a month is counted as 30 days. If we use that and count a prophetic year as 360 days, then 3 and ½ years is 1260 days. If one day is a year, what will it be?

If we take 1260 years and add it to the date of 538 which is the establishment of the papacy, we come to 1798, In 1798 in the French Revolution, the pope was taken captive and his power was temporarily curtailed. As I said, we will look at these things more carefully.

The Bible foretold the rise of the papacy centuries before. The verses of Paul that foretold the corruption of Christianity were these:

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

If these topics are interesting they are not pleasant. But we can say this: These prophecies show that the Old and New Testament's foretelling power. Why do I trust these books? They do what no other book can do: they explain the future in a detailed fashion. How can it be? Because the Bible is the book that God preserves. And you too can trust it.