

The Folly of the Late-Renaissance Papacy

The days of the secreted and persecuted church during the 2nd and 3rd centuries were long gone when the Roman Empire fell in the late 5th century. The Latin church found itself increasingly needed in secular affairs and seduced by them. By the Renaissance period of the 15th century, the millennium had long let loose the siren's cry of secular power, national politics, and a host of other factors. This led to the formation of the Papal States, the rise of a courtly Roman Curia comprised mainly of lay nobility, a complex means of funding the increasing "empire" of the Church, and a culture of corruption, moral laxity, and an obscuring of the lines between the holy and the secular. In the mix there were saintly popes and popes with, shall we say, other foci, aspirations, and intentions. The church was unknowingly on what the historian Barbara Tuchman would famously call "the march of folly." The march reached its zenith in the last six popes before the Protestant Reformation(s). The folly of the papacy and the Roman Curia, pursuing secular goals at the expense of its spiritual mission, bewilderingly ignored the growing outrage and distrust of common people seeking some assurance of salvation – which they found in the theological focus of the Augustinian monk, Martin Luther. The papal/curial folly gave birth to the Reformation(s).

How did it happen? That is a tale too long to tell in a sitting. Rather here are some "snippets" of the milieu leading up to and surrounding the last days of a united Christendom in the West.

Investiture Controversy – Politics of Church and State



Perhaps no single narrative describes the manner in which the secular mixed into the religious as this power struggle between king and pope. While important issues are at hand, the wielding of power is always personal and potentially pernicious. The Investiture Controversy was the most significant conflict between Church and state in medieval Europe. In the 11th and 12th centuries, a series of Popes challenged the authority of European monarchies over control of appointments, or investitures, of church officials such as bishops and abbots.

After the decline of the Roman Empire, and prior to the Investiture Controversy, while theoretically a task of the Church, investiture was in practice performed by members of the religious nobility. As western Europe fell into the feudal age, the connection of the episcopates, monasteries, and abbeys, with the Church and Pope in Rome evaporated. Even the connection between kings and their nobility was weakened. Power and protection were local, under the eye of the feudal lord and the labyrinth of alliances and promises of the ruling nobility who held the land and, hence, the wealth.

Since a substantial amount of wealth and land was usually associated with the office of a bishop or abbot, the sale of these Church offices (a practice known as simony) was an important source of income for the church. For leaders among the nobility, who themselves owned the land and by charity allowed the building of churches, it was about consolidating power and control. Since bishops and abbots were themselves usually part of the ruling nobility, due to their literate administrative resources or due to a familial relationship, younger sons of the nobility would often be appointed bishops, as their older siblings inherited the titles. It was beneficial for a ruler or nobleman to appoint (or in turn sell the office to) someone who would be loyal, as priests who were outside the ruling nobility did not inherit, nor earn substantial wealth, might be swayed by greed and power – or more specifically greed and power not in the noble family interest.

The crisis began when a group within the church, members of the Gregorian Reform, decided to rebel against the practice of simony by forcefully taking the power of investiture from the ruling secular power, i.e. the Holy Roman Emperor and placing that power wholly within control of the Church. The Gregorian reformers knew this would not be possible so long as the emperor maintained the de-facto ability to appoint the pope, so their first step was to forcibly gain the papacy from the control of the emperor. An opportunity came in 1056 when Henry IV became German king and Holy Roman Emperor (HRE) at six years of age. The Gregorian reformers seized the opportunity to take the papacy by moral force while he was still a child and could not react. In 1059 a church council in Rome declared, with *In Nomine Domini*, that leaders of the nobility would have no part in the selection of popes and created the College of Cardinals as a body of electors made up entirely of church officials. Once Rome regained control of the election of the pope it was ready to attack the practice of investiture and simony on a broad front.

By 1075, Henry IV was no longer a child, and he continued to appoint his own bishops. When the pope reasserted that such power resided only in the Holy See, Henry sent Gregory VII a letter in which he withdrew his imperial support of Gregory as pope in no uncertain terms: the letter was headed "Henry, king not through usurpation but through the holy ordination of God,

to Hildebrand, at present not pope but false monk.” The letter called for the election of a new pope. The letter ends, “I, Henry, king by the grace of God, with all of my Bishops, say to you, come down, come down, and be damned throughout the ages.”

Henry IV installed his personal chaplain, Tedald, as Bishop of Milan; unfortunately, another priest of Milan, Atto, had already been chosen in Rome by the pope. In 1076 Pope Gregory responded by excommunicating Henry, removing him from the Church and declaring him deposed as German king and HRE.

Enforcing these declarations was a different matter, but the advantage gradually came to be on the side of Pope Gregory. German princes and the aristocracy were happy to hear of the king's deposition. They used religious reasons to continue the rebellion started at the First Battle of Langensalza in 1075, and for seizure of royal holdings. Aristocrats claimed local lordships over peasants and property, built forts, which had previously been outlawed, and built up localized fiefdoms to secure their autonomy from the empire.



Thus, because of these combining factors, Henry IV had no choice but to back down, needing time to marshal his forces to fight the rebellion. In 1077 he traveled to Canossa in northern Italy to meet the Pope and apologize in person. As penance for his sins, he dramatically wore a hairshirt and stood in the snow barefoot in the middle of winter. Gregory required that he kneel in the snow. Gregory lifted the excommunication, but the German aristocrats, whose rebellion became known as the Great Saxon Revolt, were not so willing to give up their opportunity. They elected a rival king. But Henry was far from done.

Henry IV then proclaimed antipope Clement III to be Pope. In 1081 Henry IV captured and killed the rival king, and in the same year he invaded Rome with the intent of forcibly removing Gregory VII and installing anti-pope Clement. Gregory VII called on his allies, the Normans in southern Italy, and they rescued him from the Germans in 1085. The Normans sacked Rome in the process, and when the citizens of Rome rose up against Gregory he was forced to flee south with the Normans. He died soon thereafter.

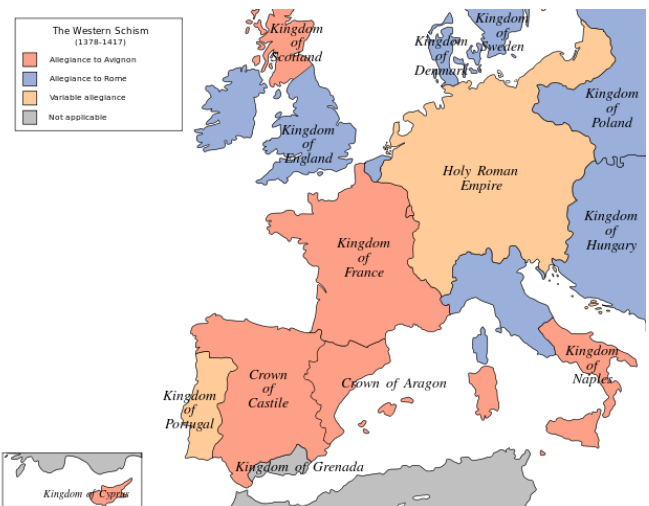
The Investiture Controversy continued for several decades as each succeeding Pope tried to diminish imperial power by stirring up revolt in Germany. These revolts were gradually successful. Henry IV was succeeded upon his death in 1106 by his son Henry V, who had rebelled against his father in favor of the papacy, and who had made his father renounce the legality of his antipopes before he died. Nevertheless, Henry V chose one more antipope, Gregory VIII for which he was excommunicated by Rome. Later, Henry V renounced some of the rights of investiture with the Concordat of Worms, abandoned anti-pope Gregory, and was received back into communion and recognized as legitimate Holy Roman Emperor as a result.

To the side of all this, a similar controversy was active in England. Problematically, the pope needed support of the English King Henry I against the German Henry and thus downplayed the English practice of investiture. Eventually, this too was settled in the Concordat of London (1107). The Concordat suggested a compromise that was taken up in the Concordat of Worms. In England, as in Germany, a distinction was being made in the king's chancery between the secular and ecclesiastical powers of the prelates (Bishops, Abbots, etc.). Employing the distinction, Henry I gave up his right to invest his bishops and abbots and reserved the custom of requiring them to come and do homage directly from his hand for the “temporalities” (the landed properties tied to the episcopate). This required the bishop to swear homage and feudal vassalage in a ceremony like any secular vassal.

This will be in effect for almost 450 years when the age of the Reformation(s) arrives.

The Avignon Schism – politics within the Church

By the start of the 14th century, the papacy was firmly ensconced in the mix of European politics. Pope Boniface VIII famously claimed all spiritual and temporal power, i.e., all kings ruled at the good pleasure and grace of the pope. It was an age of expanding national powers and the decline of the Holy Roman Empire. Pope Urban locked horns with Phillip IV of France. Phillip was a major proponent of separation of church and state, immediately taking the initiative to remove all priests from civil positions and to tax them as citizens of the realm. Boniface excommunicated Phillip who responded by decreeing



laws prohibiting the export of gold, silver, precious stones, or food from France to the Papal States. These measures had the effect of blocking a main source of papal revenue. Philip also banished from France the papal agents who were raising funds for a new crusade in the Middle East. When Pope Boniface formally issued *Unam Sanctum*, declaring all kings subject to the pope, that was the last straw. A key supporter and counselor of King Phillip, Guillaume de Nogaret, aided by the Roman Colonna family, lead a small army and surprised Pope Boniface at the papal retreat in Anagni (central Italy). The pope was arrested, seemingly beaten and nearly executed, but was released from captivity after three days. He died on 11 October 1303. The counselor reported Boniface died by suicide from “gnawing through his own arm” and bashing his skull into a wall. Tensions were high when the papal conclave meet. They elected Benedict XI a friend of the French court – except that he excommunicated Nogaret for his role at Anagni and in the death of Boniface. Rumor has it that Nogaret arranged the poisoning of Benedict who died in late 1304.

The papal enclave meet in Rome and were deadlocked for months. In June, 1305 they finally elected Clement V, a Frenchman, as pope. Clement declined to move to Rome, remaining in France, and in 1309 moved his court to the papal enclave at Avignon. Thus started the “Avignon Papacy.” A total of seven popes reigned at Avignon; all were French, and they increasingly fell under the influence of the French Crown. Finally, on September 13, 1376, Gregory XI abandoned Avignon and moved his court to Rome (arriving on January 17, 1377), officially ending the Avignon Papacy.

Move the clock ahead. After Pope Gregory XI died (in 1378), a mob surrounded the papal conclave – meeting in Rome – to demand a Roman pope, but there was no native born Roman who was a serious option. The cardinals elected Bartolomeo Prignano, the Archbishop of Bari in Southern Italy, who took the name Urban VI; he was originally from Naples. Urban had been a respected administrator in the papal chancery at Avignon, but as pope he proved suspicious, reformist, and prone to violent outbursts of temper. Many of the cardinals who had elected him soon regretted their decision.

Immediately following his election, Urban began preaching to the cardinals of the Roman Curia, insisting that the business of the Curia should be carried on without gratuities and gifts, forbidding the cardinals to accept annuities from rulers and other lay persons, condemning the luxury of their lives and retinues, and the multiplication of benefices and bishoprics in their hands. Nor would he move the papacy back to Avignon, thus alienating King Charles V of France.

The French cardinals, their life of luxury threatened and saying no to the reform most needed in the Church, took action. This portion of the College of Cardinals claimed the election of Urban invalid because of threat of the Roman mob, voted to excommunicate Urban, and voted to elect a French priest as “Clement VII.” Thus began the Western Schism. Clement is known as an anti-pope and “ruled” from Avignon.

The period from 1378 to 1417, when there were rival claimants to the title of pope, is referred to as the “Western Schism.” Parties within the Roman Church were divided in their allegiance – mainly along national lines – among the various claimants to the office of pope. The Council of Constance finally resolved the controversy in 1417 when the election of Pope Martin V was accepted by all.

Stirring Among the People – Lollards and Hussites

In the years well before the 16th century Protestant Reformation in Germany, things were already afoot in England and Czech lands of the Holy Roman Empire.



John Wycliffe (1320-1384) was most often noted for his early translation of the Latin Vulgate scripture into English. Working with several others, they produced the “Wycliffe Bible” which, although unauthorized, proved quite popular. The church was said to disapprove his project of translation and that frustrations drove him to ignore the church for Wycliffe believed that studying the Bible was more important than listening to it read by the clergy.

But it was in the milieu of church-state relationships that Wycliffe first came upon the radar screen. Already a scholar at Oxford and just recently denied the chair of a college – promised by a lay Don, but when the time came a religious Don was in charge and assigned the chair elsewhere since the college in question was for the ordination of priests. This seems to have sparked an already latent issue in the relationship of church and state. In 1372 he was part of a commission which the English government sent to Bruges to discuss with the representatives of Gregory XI, and, if possible settle, a number of points in dispute between the king and the pope. The conference came to no satisfactory conclusion, but it appears to mark the beginning of the alliance between Wycliffe and the anti-clerical party headed by John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, the king's son.

Soon after his return from Bruges Wycliffe began to express his ideas in tracts and longer works. In his first book, concerned with the government of God and the Ten Commandments, he attacked the temporal rule of the clergy: in temporal things the

king is above the pope. He also challenged the collection of *annates* (the whole of the first year's profits of a benefice which were generally given to the papal treasury) and the use of indulgences as a form of simony. And that was just his first tract.

In the context where state-church-money intersect his assertion to the temporal primacy of the king was no more true or fair than assertions of the spiritual primacy over temporal rulers. His was another voice in the investiture controversies and its underlying play of power, money, and control. Yet he had his points. One of his demands was that the Franciscans actually live the vow of poverty – a topic at the time that was ripping factious holes with the Franciscan Order. In 1377 he was summonsed to appear before the Bishop of London to make an account of himself. Accompanied by John of Gaunt (the king's son) and four mendicant friars (who held destitution was the nature of the vow), Wycliffe appeared and so began a long march toward the formal declaration of heresy.

The heresy charges probably had their root in Wycliffe's king-pope debate, but his theological positions, also the context of tracts and books, were in fact considered heresy. Included was a belief in "double" predestination – one is born with heaven or hell already decided; he was John Calvin 200 years before Calvin was Calvin. For Wycliffe, the "Church" is the totality of those who are predestined to blessedness. It includes the Church triumphant in heaven, those in purgatory, and the "Church militant" on earth. No one who is eternally lost has part in it. There is one universal Church, and outside of it there is no salvation. Its head is Christ. No pope may say that he is the head, for he cannot say that he is elect or even a member of the Church. Later in life Wycliffe wrote against the Catholic teaching of the Real Presence, specifically transubstantiation – this coming from his philosophical training as a nominalist. His own position is not really clear: best guess, it was something akin to the later Lutheran consubstantiation. It was at this point that Wycliffe lost any support among the Franciscans (who were minor actors on this stage at best).

But by this point, there were plenty of learned and lay people who supported him: *the Lollards*. The terms Lollard, Lollardi or Loller was the popular derogatory nickname given to those without an academic background, educated if at all only in English, who were reputed to follow the teachings of John Wycliffe in particular, and were certainly considerably energized by the translation of the Bible into the English language. By the mid-15th century, the term lollard had come to mean a heretic in general.

The Lollards had no central belief system and no official doctrine. Likewise, being a decentralized movement, neither had they nor proposed any singular authority. Believing the Catholic Church to be corrupted in many ways, the Lollards looked to Scripture as the basis for their religious ideas. The closest one can come to a "common" belief was (a) the Catholic Church was irredeemably corrupt and (b) "The Twelve Conclusions" of the Lollards posted them on the doors of Westminster Hall and St. Paul's Church in February 1395. This document later grew into "Thirty Seven Articles against Corruptions in the Church."

The first Conclusion rejects the acquisition of temporal wealth by Church leaders as accumulating wealth leads them away from religious concerns and toward greed. The fourth Conclusion holds forth Wycliffe's position on the Eucharist. The sixth Conclusion states that officials of the Church should not concern themselves with secular matters when they hold a position of power within the Church because this constitutes a conflict of interest between matters of the spirit and matters of the State. The eighth Conclusion points out the ludicrousness, in the minds of Lollards, of the reverence that is directed toward images in the Church – a return to the iconoclastic disputes of the 8th century. The Lollards believed that expensive church artwork was seen as an excess; they believed effort should be placed on helping the needy and preaching rather than working on expensive decorations.

Believing in a lay priesthood, the Lollards challenged the Church's authority to invest or deny the divine authority to make a man a priest. Denying any special status to the priesthood, Lollards thought confession to a priest was unnecessary since according to them priests did not have the ability to forgive sins. Lollards challenged the practice of clerical celibacy and believed priests should not hold government positions as such temporal matters would likely interfere with their spiritual mission. Believing that more attention should be given to the message of the scriptures rather than to ceremony and worship, the Lollards denounced things such as exorcism, pilgrimages, and blessings, believing these led to an emphasis on Church ritual rather than the Bible.

Remember this is the late 14th century. The Protestant Reformation is still 130-140 years away.



John Huss (Jan Hus) and the Hussites. The knowledge of Wycliffe and the Lollards reached deep into the Holy Roman Empire and found a home among Jan Hus, was a Czech priest, philosopher, reformer, and academic master at Charles University in Prague. It was there that he came into possession of the banned works of John Wycliffe which Hus translated into the Czech language. 1408, Pope Gregory XII warned Archbishop Zajic of Prague that the Church in Rome had been informed of Wycliffe's heresies and of King Wenceslaus' sympathies for non-conformists. In response, the king and University ordered all of Wycliffe's writings surrendered to the archdiocesan chancery for correction. Hus obeyed, declaring that he condemned the errors in those writings. Yet at the same time, disavowing himself of the theological errors, Hus tried to reform the church by delineating the moral failings of clergy, bishops, and

even the papacy from his pulpit. Archbishop Zajíc tolerated this, and even appointed Hus as preacher to the clergy's biennial synod.

All this took place in the midst of the Western Schism. King Wenceslaus' sympathies were with the pope in Avignon because he believed it was with the anti-pope that the King stood the better chance of becoming Holy Roman Emperor. However, he also directed Charles University to remain neutral in such things. For reasons not clear, Wenceslaus made decisions about the structure of the university that led to the en masse departure of about 10,000 thousand foreign doctors, masters, and students. These academics dispersed across Europe and carried with them rumors of Hus, now Regent of the university, and the King's sympathy with Wycliffe. And in the time their whispers were true.

The king and Hus openly declared for the anti-pope Alexander V. Archbishop Zajíc did the same under pressure from the King at Hus' insistence. The archbishop then filed charges against all Wycliffites with the anti-pope. On 20 December 1409, Alexander V issued a papal bull that empowered the archbishop to proceed against Wycliffism in Prague. All copies of Wycliffe's writings were to be surrendered and his doctrines repudiated, and free preaching discontinued. After the publication of the bull in 1410, Hus appealed to Alexander V, but in vain. The Wycliffe books and valuable manuscripts were burned, and Hus and his adherents were excommunicated by Alexander V.

By this time, Hus's ideas had become widely accepted in Bohemia, and there was broad resentment against the Church hierarchy. The attack on Hus by the Pope and Archbishop caused riots in parts of Bohemia. Wenceslaus and his government took the side of Hus, and the power of his adherents increased from day to day. Hus continued to preach in the imperial Chapel. The churches of the city were put under the ban, and the interdict was pronounced against Prague. To protect the city, Hus left and went into the countryside, where he continued to preach and write.

Alexander and Zajíc died. The new anti-pope, John XXIII (yes, John the 23rd), launched a crusade against the Pope and his allies in Naples. Needing money in 1411 the antipope authorized the preaching of indulgences to raise funds to finance the war efforts. Hus returned to Prague and in his preaching asserted that no Pope or bishop had the right to take up the sword in the name of the Church; he should pray for his enemies and bless those that curse him; man obtains forgiveness of sins by true repentance, not money.

1412 was a turbulent year in Prague. Several lay people were beheaded for denouncing the sale of indulgences; the university issued 45 theses condemning Hus and his followers whose positions were those of Wycliff. Despite attempts by King Wenceslaus to reconcile all parties, Hus was condemned as a heretic by the direction of antipope John XXIII and burned at the stake on July 6, 1415.

Responding with horror to the execution of Hus, the people of Bohemia moved even more rapidly away from Papal teachings, spurring an announced crusade against them. The Western Schism ended with the election of Pope Martin V who issued a Papal bull that all supporters of reformers like Hus and Wycliffe be slaughtered. The crusaders lost, as did the second and third crusades that followed. A century later, at the beginning of the Protestant Reformation as much as ninety percent of the Czech lands still followed Hussite teachings.

To some, Hus's efforts were predominantly designed to rid the Church of its ethical abuses, rather than a campaign of sweeping theological change. To others, the seeds of the reformation are clear in Hus's and Wycliffe's writings. In explaining the plight of the average Christian in Bohemia, Hus wrote, "One pays for confession, for mass, for the sacrament, for indulgences, for churching a woman, for a blessing, for burials, for funeral services and prayers. The very last penny which an old woman has hidden in her bundle for fear of thieves or robbery will not be saved. The villainous priest will grab it."

Nearly six centuries later in 1999, Pope John Paul II expressed "deep regret for the cruel death inflicted" on Hus. Cardinal Miloslav Vlk of the Czech Republic was instrumental in crafting John Paul II's statement.

Conciliarism and Gallicanism: Papacy and Church Councils

As we seen, there was widespread dissatisfaction at many levels within the Church, much directed at a particular pope and/or his College of Cardinals due to a long list of behaviors that were anything but holy or Christ-like. But what about the bishops? Often held in tension between the pope and their kings/nobility, was there a reaction from these successors of the apostles?

Conciliarism was a reform movement in the 14th-, 15th- and 16th-century Catholic Church which held that supreme authority in the Church resided with an Ecumenical council, apart from, or even against, the pope. The movement emerged in response to the Great Western Schism between rival popes in Rome and Avignon. The movement had its intellectual origins earlier in the Middle Ages among canonists (church lawyers) and theologians. Conciliar theory has its roots and foundations in both history and theology, arguing that many of the most important decisions of the Catholic Church have been made through conciliar means, beginning with the First Council of Nicaea (325). Conciliarism also drew on corporate theories of the church, which allowed the head to be restrained or judged by the members when his actions threatened the welfare of the whole ecclesial body. The canonists and theologians who advocated conciliarism wanted to unify, defend and reform the institution.

The matter of **Gallicanism** was a bit different. This proposed that the French church, from history, had always enjoyed a quasi-independence from the papacy. The French bishops held that St. Gregory the Great (590-604) pointed out the Gallican Church to his envoy Augustine, the Apostle of England, as one of those whose customs he might accept as of equal stability with those of the Roman Church or of any other whatsoever. But the reality is that during the Merovingian dynasty in France (457-754), the church in France gave the same deference to the Holy See as did all the churches. The idea of Gallicanism arose again as the calls to unify, defend, and reform the church rose.

Papal Folly

Hopefully, the description above, however limited, gives the reader an idea of an institution increasingly secular and humanistic, often more institutionally concerned with power and politics, and less so with the working *ad majorem Dei gloriam*. Individually and locally the church was filled with holy people, priests, religious, and bishops, but the tide of papal folly and the emergence of Europe out of the Middle Ages into the Renaissance was a tsunami that would only accelerate the “march of folly.”

The six popes highlighted below were the ones occupying the Chair of Peter in the 50 years preceding the Protestant Reformations that swept through Europe in the 16th century. They were the last pontiffs over a united western Christianity.

Sixtus IV (1471-1484) – Murder in a Cathedral



Born Francesco della Rovere into a modest town near Savona, Italy, he is best remembered as the pope for whom the Sistine Chapel is named. He entered the Franciscans in his 20s, was Minister General of the Order at age 50, and was noted for his lack of concern for worldly things and had even written learned treatises entitled *On the Blood of Christ* and *On the Power of God*. At age 53 he was appointed Cardinal because of his reputation for sanctity. Four years later when Pope Paul II unexpectedly died at age 54, Cardinal Rovere was elected pope, largely via the backroom machinations of Cardinal Borgia (*later Alexander VI*). If you are known by the company you keep, people wondered what would be known about this new pope.

For one he was a family man. Sixtus took nepotism to a new art form using all the power at his disposal to enrich his relatives with high office, papal territories, and exceptional marriages to titled lands. The first two appointments was the designation of two nephews as Cardinals – he later elevated four other nephews to the “red hat.” Another relative was Prefect of Rome; others were governors of Papal States.

Sixtus also perfected a practice of favoring potential political allies with episcopal appointments for their children. The Archbishop of Lisbon was eight; the Archbishop of Milan was eleven. In case you are wondering, didn’t these positions require priests? Yes they did, and both young men (children) were no where near the canonical age for ordination.

Under the influence of Rome, his family and who-knows-what-else, the former friar seems to have become unbalanced as unbridled extravagance became a fixture of the papal court. Although licentiousness was present in the court before Sixtus’ time, he did nothing to arrest it. Some of the papal banquets were described as where “none of the allurements of love was lacking.”

On the bright side, he did restore the Vatican Library, reopened the Academy of Rome, renovated old St. Peter’s, and reopened hospitals, fallen bridges, and funded a flourishing of humanistic arts in the eternal city. All of this cost money. And this is money in addition to the war he conducted against the city-states of Florence and Ferrara, as well as the on-going campaign against the Colonna family of Rome. But what history most questions is Sixtus’ involvement in the **Pazzi Conspiracy**.

The Pazzi conspiracy was a plot by members of the Pazzi family, the Salviati family – papal bankers – and others to displace the de’ Medici family as rulers of Renaissance Florence. On 26 April 1478 there was an attempt to assassinate Lorenzo de’ Medici and his brother Giuliano de’ Medici. The basis of it was centered on land, money, trade and banking rights.

Pope Sixtus IV was an enemy of the Medici. He had purchased from Milan the lordship of Imola, a stronghold on the border between Papal and Tuscan territory that Lorenzo de’ Medici wanted for Florence. The purchase was financed by the Pazzi bank, even though Francesco de’ Pazzi had promised Lorenzo they would not aid the Pope. As a reward, Sixtus IV granted the Pazzi monopoly at the alum mines at Tolfa — alum being essential in dyeing for the textile trade that was central to the Florentine economy. Sixtus assigned to the Pazzi bank lucrative rights to manage Papal revenues. Sixtus appointed his nephew as the new governor of Imola and Francesco Salviati as archbishop of Pisa, a city that was a former commercial rival but now subject to Florence. Lorenzo had refused to permit Salviati to enter Pisa because of the challenge such an ecclesiastical position offered to his own government in Florence.

Riario, Salviati and Pazzi put together a plan to assassinate the Medici brothers. Pope Sixtus was approached for his support. He made a very carefully worded statement in which he said that in the terms of his holy office he was unable to sanction

killing. He made it clear that it would be of great benefit to the papacy to have the Medici removed from their position of power in Florence, and that he would deal kindly with anyone who did this. He instructed the men to do what they deemed necessary to achieve this aim, and said that he would give them whatever support he could including stationing 600 papal troops outside Florence.

The assassination attempt occurred during high Mass at the Cathedral. Lorenzo was wounded but survived; Giuliano was killed. Archbishop Salviati had positioned himself in the Florence government chambers to announce the takeover of Florence in the wake of the assassinations. When things went awry he was trapped and eventually killed by the crowds. The Pazzi family members were summarily executed by the crowds. Lorenzo de' Medici was able to protect and save the pope's nephew Riario.

The Pope's reaction was to place Florence under interdict, forbidding Mass and communion, for the execution of the Salviati archbishop. Sixtus enlisted the traditional Papal military arm, the King of Naples, Ferdinand I, to attack Florence. In the end Florence withstood the assault, the Medici family gained more power in Florence, and Pazzi family members were banished from Florence and saw their banking business collapse.

The last years of his pontificate were marked by a series of envoys from the King of France, Louis XI, the envoy of the Holy Roman Empire, and virtually every significant country pleading for reform of the Roman Curia, the College of Cardinals, and a whole host of practices whose only purpose was to raise monies for the pope while leaving the true work of the Church in disarray.

Even if he had ignored internal reform, he could have easily forbade the "host of practices." But the march of folly generally limits vision. A few months later Sixtus was dead. The Colonna family plundered Rome in the aftermath. Sixtus was buried unlamented.

Innocent VIII (1484-1492) – The Malleable Pope



This pope began life as Giovanni Battista Cibo of a well-to-do Genoese family. He was perhaps the poster boy for misspent youth. His escapades were notorious, and he fathered a son and a daughter outside marriage. Were it that young Giovanni experienced a conversion of heart, but with few prospects but tremendous family connections, the priesthood and an ecclesial career seemed to be his best career option. In Rome he became a priest in the retinue of Cardinal Calandrini, half-brother to Pope Nicholas V (1447–55). The influence of his friends procured for him, from Pope Paul II (1464–71), the bishopric of Savona, and in 1473, with the support of Giuliano Della Rovere, later Pope Julius II, he was made cardinal by Pope Sixtus IV, who appreciated his malleable nature.

Cardinal Cibo was noted as a rather dim and mediocre person, a spectator on the sidelines in the papal elections at the death of Sixtus IV. The two leading candidates – each to become pope at

later dates (Alexander VI and Julius II) – blocked each other's chances. The compromise candidate seemed to be Cardinal Barbo of Venice, widely noted for his character, strict principles, and intention to reform the papal curia and College of Cardinals. When Barbo came with a few votes of election, the unassuming Cardinal Cibo became the candidate supported jointly as the alternative to reform. The former playboy took over the Chair of Peter as Pope Innocent VIII.

Chiefly distinguished by his extraordinary indulgence on his son Franceschetto who by all accounts was the new poster boy for misspent youth. In all other matters he seems to take his directions from his patron, Cardinal Rovere (the future Julius II). Cardinal Rovere moved into the Vatican within two months of Innocent's election, promoting his own family to "Captain-General" of the Church, Prefect of Rome, and other endowed positions. The other promoter of Innocent's election, Cardinal Borja, remained in charge of the papal curia, the administrative offices of the Vatican.

Having publically acknowledged Franceschetto as his illegitimate son, Innocent arranged his son's marriage to a daughter of Lorenzo de' Medici (Florence – murder in the cathedral episode). The wedding took place in the Vatican and was so extravagant that it required mortgaging of the papal tiara and other treasures to pay for the opulence. Two years later an equally outlandish wedding was celebrated for his daughter married to a Genoese merchant.

Meanwhile, the business of the Vatican went on undisturbed under Cardinal Borgia. Some of the "low points" included establishing a bureau for the sale of favors and pardons (150 ducats to Innocent, any remainder to Franceschetto – who had a very expensive lifestyle to maintain); pardons for capital crimes including murder; the arrest of high officials of the papal courts for selling forged papal bulls custom made to the buyers specifications; granting exceptions to cardinals and bishops that they need not live in nor visit their diocese – yet they could continue to collect the benefices and pensions. The degradation of the College of Cardinals was epic in this period.

Innocent appointed Franceschetto's new brother-in-law, Giovanni de' Medici, as Cardinal and Archbishop of Pisa. Sadly, this was not Giovanni's first ecclesial appointment. He received the tonsure at seven, at age eight appointed Abbott of a local

monastery, at age 11 was named *ad commendam* of the Benedictine Abbey of Monte Casino, and now at the ripe old age of 16 was elevated to Cardinal. Giovanni would become Pope Leo X.

At his elevation to Cardinal his father Lorenzo de' Medici wrote him an impassioned letter to act so as to honor the Church and Holy See, be of service to Florence and the Medici family, and avoid the evil of the College of Cardinals: "If the Cardinals were as they ought to be, the whole world would be better for it, for they would always elect a good Pope and thus secure the peace of Christendom." And there lay the crux of the problem: problematic men were cardinals who elected problematic popes from their own ranks. It was folly.

In this same time period, Innocent was overwhelmed by the intrigues and complexity of "foreign policy." On one hand, his own papal states were frequently in revolt attempting to rid themselves of the onerous and oppressive papal taxes. Within the city of Rome, the Orsini and Colonna families were constantly scheming against papal control. The city states of Italy – Florence, Venice, Milan, Naples, Genoa, Ferrara, and more – were ever at war and every shifting alliances. The powers of France, Aragon, Castille, England, Hungary, the Holy Roman Empire, and the Ottoman Empire swirled around. And the pope needed more money to counter all these external threats.

In 1492, increasingly ill, he summonsed the College of Cardinals to his bedside, asked forgiveness for his inadequacy and begged them to choose a better successor – one who would bring peace, hope, and holiness to the Church. His successor has been described as being "as close to the prince of darkness as human beings are likely to come" – Alexander VI. Apart from administrative excellence and finesse in foreign diplomacy, the Catholic Encyclopedia is hard pressed to say much about him. It does say that Alexander was skilled in raising money "in ways that were more than dubious."

Alexander VI (1492-1503) – A Depraved Papacy



He is one of the most controversial of the Renaissance popes, and his Italianized Valencian surname, Borgia, became a byword for libertinism and nepotism, which are traditionally considered as characterizing his papacy. It has been noted that this was one pope for whom there are no apologists.

At the time of his election as pope, the Spaniard Rodrigo Borja (Italianized as "Borgia") had been in Rome 35 years as Cardinal and Vice-Chancellor of the papal curia and Vatican offices. His character, habits, lack of principles, uses of power, methods of enrichment, mistresses and seven children were all well known in the College of Cardinals. His election causes the cry from the young Cardinal Lorenzo (later Leo X), "Flee, we are in the clutches of a wolf." Surely the pot calls the kettle, black.

Having lost the last two papal election, Borgia was elected the old-fashioned way – he bought it.

While some historians question the veracity of this claim, when one looks at the well know habits before and after, this account is consistent. It also explains how he was able to secure the vote of his opponent Cardinal Sforza of Milan. Accounts of the time have Alexander boasting of the "acquisition," as good sense and business, when in fact, it would be simony.

Alexander was a skilled and knowledgeable cleric. His understanding of Scripture and Canon Law was unsurpassed, his administrative skills unparalleled, and in contrast to the preceding pontificate, Alexander adhered initially to strict administration of justice and orderly government. Before long, however, he began endowing his relatives at the church's and at his neighbors' expense. But then he was no stranger to nepotism.

After the election of his uncle as Pope Callixtus III, Borgia was ordained deacon and created Cardinal-Deacon of San Nicola in Carcere at the age of twenty-five in 1456. The following year, he was appointed vice-chancellor of the Holy Roman Church a job he held for 35 years. At age 38, he was ordained to the priesthood and, at age 40 he was consecrated bishop and appointed Cardinal-Bishop of Albano. Having served in the Roman Curia under five popes – Calixtus III, Pius II, Paul II, Sixtus IV and Innocent VIII – Rodrigo Borgia acquired considerable administrative experience, influence and wealth.

He mastered the art of nepotism – and where other popes have promoted nephews and nieces, Alexander's concern was for his children. Before becoming cardinal, Borgia fathered four children of uncertain parentage. At the time they were hidden from public knowledge. The year before he became cardinal, he took up a long time affair with a mistress Giovanna (Vanozza) dei Cattani. It was said that she was the daughter of a former mistress from his early days in Rome. Giovanna she bore him four children whom he openly acknowledged as his own.



Before his elevation to the papacy Cardinal Borgia's passion for Giovanna somewhat diminished, and she subsequently led a very retired life. Her place in his affections was filled by the beautiful Giulia Farnese (Giulia Bella), wife of an Orsini, but his love for his children by Giovanna remained as strong as ever and proved, indeed, the determining factor of his whole career. He lavished vast sums on them and lauded them with every honor.

The vast majority of Alexander's energy was not directed at the much-needed religious reform, rather he attended to political alliances via his seven children. Alexander arranged marriages that secured alliances with France, England, Spain, Hungary, Venice, Milan, and Rome. He is an ancestor of virtually all royal houses of Europe.

Most of the history of his pontificate is spent describing the political intrigues with, for, against Spain, France, and all the smaller players show on the map. It was complicated, shifting, and all consuming. The biggest threat on the horizon was France under the rule of Charles VIII. It was a threat to the Papal states as a political entity, to the pope personally as the French bishops wanted to excommunicate Alexander for the sin of simony associated with his election as pope, to privileges and positions of his children, and to the way of Roman curial life as the French position was one of reform. Alexander responded with armies headed by his son Cesare (who proved to be a capable general and strategist, militarily and politically) and by changing the marriage of his daughter Lucrezia, many years married to Giovanni Sforza of a powerful Milan family (...and yes this is the famous Lucrezia Borgia of history and scandal). Alexander needed her to be wed to Alfonso, whom it seemed Lucrezia had already taken as a lover, and Alfonso was the heir to the throne of Naples. This was needed in order to secure the alliance to ward off all the above threats (Naples was the key to the formation of the Holy League which stood against the machinations of France).

Pope Alexander trumped up a charge that Giovanni was unable to consummate the marriage – a charge hotly contested – but under enormous political and financial pressure – Giovanni was forced to give way but at least he was allowed to keep the very substantial dowry. By the way, Giovanni had already fathered children before his marriage to Lucrezia. While this is a small detail of “the way things were” it also is an example of the milder things that were the hallmarks of Alexander's papacy. Even the sacraments of the Church were but tools of the trade to accomplish secular power.

A historical note: the reputation of Lucrezia is completely rooted in rumors by Alexander's opponents. Nonetheless, her name is now associated with deadly inter-family and political intrigue of the highest order. So deadly, that Buffalo Bill Cody used a Springfield Model 1866, caliber .50-70 rifle, nicknamed Lucrezia Borgia, to shoot buffalo for feeding the track workers employed by Kansas Pacific Railroad during the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad. You did not really need to know this, but it is interesting.

But it was this intrigue and details attending it that the toxic cocktail of Italian politics, nepotism, a crescendo of rumors about the depraved Borgia family – including the pope – lead to the murder of Alexander's oldest son found floating in the Tiber. There were no lack of suspects, but the investigation abruptly ended one week later. Alexander suffered a moral crisis in which he viewed the murder as God's judgment upon him and his papacy. He resolved to amend his life and reform the church He wrote, “We will begin the reform with ourselves and so proceed through all levels of the Church until the whole work is accomplished.” He appointed a commission, made initial attempts, even drafted a papal bull calling for a Council to enact reforms from top to bottom, but in the remaining 6 year of his pontificate he never could gain a critical mass of support and he was continually distracted by the quagmire of European politics.

In the meantime, the papal treasury was exhausted, the Dominican Savonarola of Florence was denouncing clerical corruption, despotic rule and the exploitation of the poor – and Savonarola's message was finding resonance across Italy. In the end he was excommunicated by Alexander and burned at the stake by the leaders of Florence. Savonarolan religious ideas found a reception elsewhere. In Germany and Switzerland, the early Protestant reformers, most notably Martin Luther himself, read some of the friar's writings and praised him as a martyr and forerunner whose ideas on faith and grace anticipated Luther's own doctrine of justification by faith alone. In France many of his works were translated and published and Savonarola came to be regarded as a precursor of evangelical, or Huguenot reform. Within the Dominican Order Savonarola was repackaged as an innocuous, purely devotional figure until Phillip Neri, founder of the Oratorians, a Florentine who had been educated by the San Marco Dominicans, defended Savonarola's memory.

The needed reforms of the Church languished and in 1503 Alexander died of what was likely malaria (although rumors of poison were ever present).

The papal master of ceremonies, Burchard, neither antagonist nor apologist for Alexander kept a diary of the pontificate. It is a toneless tale of continuous violence, murders in churches, bodies in the Tiber, fighting between factions, burnings, lootings, arrests, tortures and executions, scandal, sexual excess, money, more money, and even more money, and in the end an exhausted treasury. The descriptions of Alexander's enemies are far worse than the diary. There is little in the way of religious matters that are memorable during this pontificate.

Pope Pius III (less than a month) – Cardinal Piccolomini was elected Pope Pius III on 22 September 1503. He named himself Pius III after his uncle Pius II. This selection can be seen as a compromise between factions, Borgia and della Rovere, picking a frail cardinal with long experience in the Curia over the kin of either Sixtus IV or Alexander VI. Pius announced that his would be a pontificate of reform. Pius died 26 days later of an infection from a sore on his leg, or, as some have alleged, of poison administered at the instigation of the governor of Siena. Either way, the College of Cardinals was called again to elect a pope.

Julius II (1503-1513) The Warrior Pope

The 10 years of his pontificate was marked by an active foreign policy, ambitious building projects, and patronage for the arts. He was nephew to Pope Sixtus IV and he hated Pope Alexander and the Borgia family.

Cardinal della Rovere said on the day of his election as Julius II said: “I will not live in the same rooms as the Borgias lived. He desecrated the Holy Church as none before. He usurped the papal power by the devil's aid, and I forbid under the pain of excommunication anyone to speak or think of Borgia again. His name and memory must be forgotten. It must be crossed out of every document and memorial. His reign must be obliterated. All paintings made of the Borgias or for them must be covered over with black crepe. All the tombs of the Borgias must be opened and their bodies sent back to where they belong – to Spain.” The Borgias' apartments remained sealed until the 19th century.



To recount the primary accomplishments of Pope Julius is to simply tell a version of the story of Pope Alexander VI – save that Julius only had one illegitimate child, a daughter Felice. He did not involve her in the games of thrones. His energies were spent consolidating control and security for the Papal States, plotting against France, and becoming a patron to the arts.

Pius commissioned the destruction and rebuilding of St. Peter's Basilica, plus Michelangelo's decoration of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. And he began the campaign of selling indulgences to finance it all.

In December 1503, Julius issued a dispensation allowing Henry VIII of England to marry Catherine of Aragon. Catherine had previously been briefly married to Henry's brother Prince Arthur, who had died, but maintained that she had remained a virgin for the six months of the marriage. Some twenty years later, when Henry was in love with Anne Boleyn, he sought to have his marriage annulled, claiming that the dispensation should never have been issued. The refusal of Pope Clement VII to grant the annulment led to the English Reformation.

On a positive note, at least where pageantry is concerned, in 1506 Julius founded the Swiss Guard to provide a constant corps of soldiers to protect the Pope.

Forced by a promise he made at his election and the threat of the French army allied with powerful Italian forces, Julius convened a Fifth Council of the Lateran to be held at Rome in 1512. It was meant to be a reform council, but in the end, even though continued by Leo X, proved to be nothing of note.

We are now at the threshold of the Protestant Reformation.

The Fifth Lateran Council (1512-1517) – A Last Chance



This council was summoned by Pope Julius II by the bull *Sacrosanctae Romanae Ecclesiae*, issued at Rome on 18 July 1511, after several schismatic cardinals, officially supported by Louis XII, king of France, had assembled a quasi-council at Pisa. Twice postponed, the council held its first session in Rome at the Lateran, the first ranking church in Rome, on 10 May 1512.

In the history of the Church the hour was late, and there were many who recognized it as such, with an urgency close to despair. Three months earlier, the Dean of St. Paul's in London, John Colet, a scholar and theologian, preaching to a convention of clergy on the need for reform, had cried, “never did the state of the Church more need your endeavors!” In all the rushing after revenues, he said, in “the breathless race from benefice to benefice,” in covetousness and corruption, the dignity of priests was dishonored, the laity scandalized, the face of the Church marred, her influence destroyed, worse than by the invasion of heresies because when worldliness absorbs the clergy, “the root of all spiritual life is extinguished.” This was indeed the problem.

Egidio of Viterbo, General of the Augustinians, who gave the opening oration at the Lateran Council in the presence of the Pope, saw Divine Providence in the very recent defeat of papal forces at Ravenna on Easter Sunday morning. He did not

hesitate to use it in words of unmistakable challenge to the pope glowering from the throne. The defeat showed, said Egidio, the vanity of relying on worldly weapons and it summoned the Church to resume her true weapons, “piety, religion, probity and prayer,” the armor of faith and the sword of light. In her present condition the Church had been lying on the ground “like the dead leaves of a tree in winter. When has there been among the people a greater neglect and greater contempt for the sacred, for the sacraments and for the holy commandments? When has our religion and faith been more open to the derision even of the lowest classes? When, O Sorrow, has there been a more disastrous split in the Church? When has war been more dangerous, the enemy more powerful, armies more cruel? . . . Do you see the slaughter? Do you see the destruction, and the battlefield buried under piles of the slain? Do you see that in this year the earth has drunk more blood than water, more gore than rain? Do you see that as much Christian strength lies in the grave as would be enough to wage war against the enemies of the faith?” Egidio closed with calling the Council as the long-awaited harbinger of reform.

Pope Julius died, and the Council was continued under the pontificate of Leo X. The Council indeed acknowledged the multitude of abuses and provided for their correction in a Bull of 1514. This covered as usual the “nefarious pest” of simony, the holding of multiple benefices, the appointment of incompetent or unsuitable abbots, bishops and vicars, neglect of the divine office, the unchaste lives of clerics and even the practice of *ad commendam* (collection of multiple benefices from the control of a patron, esp. the pope), which was henceforth to be granted only in exceptional circumstances. Cardinals as a special class were ordered to abstain from pomp and luxury, from serving as partisan advocates of princes, from enriching their relatives from the revenues of the Church, from plural benefices and absenteeism. They were enjoined to adopt sober living, perform divine office, visit their titular church and town at least once a year and donate to it the maintenance of at least one priest, provide suitable clerics for the offices in their charge and obey further rules for the proper ordering of their households. It is a picture of what was wrong at every level.

Yet, for all its solemnity, five years' labors, and many sincere and earnest speakers, the Fifth Lateran was not to achieve reform. Subsequent decrees, more concerned with silencing criticism than with reform, indicated that the scolding of preachers had begun to hurt. Henceforth preachers were forbidden to prophesy or predict the coming of Anti-Christ or the end of the world. They were to keep to the Gospels and abstain from scandalous denunciation of the faults of bishops and other prelates and the wrongdoing of their superiors, and refrain from mentioning names. Censorship of printed books –was another measure intended to stop attacks on clerics holding offices of “dignity and trust.” Few if any of the Council's decrees ever left paper. A serious effort to put them into practice might have made an impression, but none was made.

Leo X (1513-1521) – The Protestant Break



Born Giovanni di Lorenzo de' Medici, he was the second son of Lorenzo the Magnificent of Florence. Early in his pontificate he oversaw the majority of and the closing sessions of the Fifth Council of the Lateran but failed sufficiently to implement the reforms agreed. He is probably best remembered for granting indulgences for those who donated to reconstruct St. Peter's Basilica, which practice was challenged by Martin Luther's 95 Theses. He seems not to have taken seriously the array of demands for church reform that would quickly grow into the Protestant Reformation. His Papal Bull of 1520, *Exsurge Domine*, simply condemned Luther on a number of areas and made ongoing engagement difficult.

Made a cardinal at age 13. Elected pope at age 37. By the way, he was not a priest. Last non-ordained man to be elected pope! When he became pope, Leo X is reported to have said to his brother Giuliano: “Since God has given us the Papacy, let us enjoy it.” There is some question

whether the remark is authentic but none that it is perfectly characteristic. Leo's principle was to enjoy life. If Julius was a warrior, the new Pope was a hedonist, the only similarity between them being that their primary interests were equally secular. All the care of Lorenzo the Magnificent for the education and advancement of the cleverest of his sons had produced a cultivated bon vivant devoted to fostering art and culture and the gratification of his tastes, with as little concern for cost as if the source of funds were some self-filling magic cornucopias. One of the great spenders of his time, undoubtedly the most profligate who ever sat on the papal throne, Leo was much admired for his largesse by his Renaissance constituents, who dubbed his reign the Golden Age. It was golden for the coins that rained into their pockets from commissions, continuous festivities and entertainment, the rebuilding of St. Peter's and city improvement. Since the money to pay for these came from no magic source but from ever-more extortionate and unscrupulous levies by papal agents, the effect, added to other embittering discontents, was to bring Leo's reign to culmination as the last of united Christianity under the Roman See.

Leo's lively interest in art and literature, to say nothing of his natural liberality, his alleged nepotism, his political ambitions and necessities, and his immoderate personal luxury, exhausted within two years the hard savings of Julius II, and precipitated a financial crisis from which he never emerged, and which was a direct cause of most of what, from a papal point of view, were calamities of his pontificate.

He sold cardinals' hats. He sold membership in the "Knights of Peter". He borrowed large sums from bankers, curials, princes and Jews. These sums, together with the considerable amounts accruing from indulgences, jubilees, and special fees, vanished as quickly as they were received. Then the pope resorted to pawning palace furniture, table plate, jewels, even statues of the apostles. Several banking firms and many individual creditors were ruined by the death of Leo.

The "start of the Reformation" – if you take it as 1517 when Martin Luther read his Ninety-Five Theses on the topic of indulgences in the church courtyard at Wittenberg – happened in the middle of Leo's reign. In hindsight it was a tipping point for the Church. It is not clear that its importance was understood by the pontiff. He was concerned, like his predecessors, with Italian and European politics, and his patronage of the arts.

At the end of his pontificate in 1523, bankruptcy was looming, the fires of the Reformation were raging, and the focus of the Vatican was squarely in Italy.

Adrian VI (9 months) – The Outsider



From the Netherlands, he was the last non-Italian pope until PII. In the conclave after the death of the Medici Pope Leo X, Leo's cousin, Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, was the leading figure. With Spanish and French cardinals in a deadlock, the absent Adrian was proposed as a compromise and on 9 January 1522 he was elected by an almost unanimous vote. Adrian had never been to Italy and actually inquired where he could hire lodging for his stay in Rome as pope. He was sure to be dismissed and hated by the people of Rome.

What did he face? I think the Catholic Encyclopedia sums it all nicely writing that his tasks were: "To extirpate inveterate abuses; to reform a court which thrived on corruption, and detested the very name of reform; to hold in leash young and warlike princes, ready to bound at each other's throats; to stem the rising torrent of revolt in Germany; to save Christendom from the Turks, who from Belgrade now threatened Hungary, and if Rhodes fell would be masters of the Mediterranean-- these were herculean labours for one who was in his sixty-third year, had never

seen Italy, and was sure to be despised by the Romans as a barbarian."

In his reaction to the early stages of the Lutheran revolt, Adrian VI did not completely understand the gravity of the situation and allowed intermediaries to demand punishment for Luther even though he believed Rome and Roman Curia were the source of the problems and needed reform.

Clement VII (1523-1534) – The Sack of Rome and Loss of England



Pope Leo X's cousin, Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, got his chance to wear the papal tiara at the unexpected death of Pope Adrian IV only nine months into the papacy. He was the nephew of Lorenzo Medici ("the Magnificent") of Florence and the son of the Medici murdered in the Pazzi Conspiracy.

Clement quickly got himself between the "rock and the hard place" of political intrigue between the Spanish Holy Roman Emperor (HRE), Charles V, and the French King, Francis I. This led to the rise of an party within the Curia and the College of Cardinals that strongly supported HRE Charles V. Meanwhile Pope Clement wavered but leaned towards support of Francis I of France. But due to the political wavering of the pope, intrigue within the Roman Colonna family, the rise of enmity against the Medici family in general, and ecclesial politics, Rome found itself filled with mercenaries. When their leader, Charles III, Duke of Bourbon, was killed the unpaid

soldiers' ravages Rome starting on May 6, 1527. This was known as the "Sack of Rome." The many incidents of murder, rape, and vandalism that followed ended the splendors of Renaissance Rome forever. Clement VII, who had displayed no more resolution in his military conduct than in his political conduct, was shortly afterwards (6 June) obliged to surrender himself together with the Castel Sant'Angelo, where he had taken refuge. He agreed to pay a ransom of 400,000 ducati in exchange for his life. Clement was kept as a prisoner in Castel Sant'Angelo for another few months. After having bought off some Imperial officers, he escaped disguised as a peddler and took shelter in Orvieto and then in Viterbo. He came back to a depopulated and devastated Rome only in October 1528. He also returned completely dependent upon HRE Charles V.

Meanwhile in England... English King, Henry VIII wanted an heir and had been married to Catherine of Aragon, aunt to HRE Charles V. By the late 1520s, Henry wanted to have his marriage to Catherine annulled. The royal couple had not produced a male heir who survived into adulthood, and Henry wanted a son to secure the Tudor dynasty. Henry claimed that this



lack of a male heir was because his marriage was “blighted in the eyes of God”. Catherine had been his brother's widow, and it was therefore against Biblical teachings for Henry to have married her. Indeed, a special dispensation from Pope Julius II had been needed to allow the wedding in the first place. Henry argued that this had been wrong and that his marriage had never been valid.

In 1527 Henry asked Pope Clement to annul the marriage, but the Pope refused. According to canon law, the Pope cannot annul a marriage on the basis of a canonical impediment previously dispensed. Clement also feared the wrath of Catherine's nephew, Charles V, whose own troops were, in part, responsible for the episode earlier that year that included the sack of Rome. In the matter of the annulment, no progress seemed possible: the Pope seemed more afraid of Emperor Charles V than of Henry. Many people close to Henry VIII wished simply to ignore the Pope; but in October 1530 a meeting of clergy and lawyers advised that the English Parliament could not empower the Archbishop of Canterbury to act against the Pope's prohibition.

Ultimately, Henry divorced Catherine and married Anne Boleyn in 1533. The Archbishop of Canterbury had died, and Henry persuaded Pope Clement to appoint Father Thomas Cranmer, a friend of the Boleyn family, as his successor as Archbishop of Canterbury. The Pope granted the papal bulls necessary for Cranmer's promotion to Canterbury, as Henry had personally financed them.

Archbishop Cranmer granted the annulment, blessed the marriage, and Pope Clement responded by excommunicating King Henry, Anne Boleyn, and Archbishop Cranmer. Consequently, in England, in the same year, the *Act of First Fruits and Tenths* transferred the taxes on ecclesiastical income from the Pope to the English Crown. The *Peter's Pence Act* outlawed the annual payment by landowners of one penny to the Pope. This act also reiterated that England had “no superior under God, but only your Grace” and that Henry's “imperial crown” had been diminished by “the unreasonable and uncharitable usurpations and exactions” of the Pope. Ultimately Henry led the English Parliament to pass the *Act of Supremacy* (1534) that established the independent Church of England and breaking from the Catholic Church.

Such was the March of Folly leading up the Protestant Reformations.