

INTRODUCTION

The Pope of Rome is the best known and most influential moral and religious leader in the world. Pick up the paper, turn on the T.V., and there he is. Every government in the world has to deal with him somehow. Love him or hate him, there is no denying his importance. It's this way today, and it's been this way since Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in the 4th century.

In all that time, there have been wonder-working saints, lecherous murderers, and many, many, mediocrities on the Papal throne—every kind of human being imaginable. Most books about the Popes have either tried to whitewash every sin any Pope has committed, or else to make them all out to be anti-Christ. On this emotional topic, writers seem to have left very little middle ground.

But the truth is that there have been obviously good and obviously evil Popes, controversial Popes and forgotten Popes. In this book, they will all have their day in court. One by one, each Pope will be profiled, and their rich history, with all its pageantry, intrigue, holiness, and crime, will be unveiled. Formosus was so hated by his successor, the corrupt Stephen VI, that his rotting corpse was disinterred and subjected to a court trial. St. Leo the Great frightened Attila the Hun into sparing Rome, while St. Gregory the Great banished the plague from the Eternal City by holding a procession. St. Leo III crowned Charlemagne Emperor by surprise on Christmas Day, but John XII (himself the son of a Pope) was killed by his mistress' lover, and died in her arms. John Paul II raised the popularity of the Papacy to incredible heights, played a huge role in bringing down Communism—and exorcised the Devil from a girl during a public audience.

The history of the Popes is the history of Christianity, still the dominant religion in Europe and the Americas. Understanding the Papacy in its historical setting is key to understanding the modern world.

Unfortunately, this is a difficult task for the modern English speaker. A major problem is cultural. In Great Britain, as in much of northern Europe, the secular authorities threw off Papal control of their churches during the Protestant revolt of the 16th century. Hatred of the Papacy and of still-Catholic nations became a part of the British national religion; from England this hatred was exported to and became part of the foundation of the United States, Anglo-Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. In the English-speaking world, Catholicism was worse than an enemy: it was a defeated enemy. On the one hand, this attitude produced the much written-of "Black Legend" school of history, wherein anything the Spanish ever did was evil. On the other, it produced in popular

histories an ingrained view of the Papacy which veered from suspicion and contempt to pure loathing.

In the United States, this was further aggravated by the perception of Catholics as “foreigners.” One remembers the elegant quatrain coined by a Klansman in 1920’s Michigan:

I’d rather be a Klansman, in robes of snowy white,
 than be a Roman Catholic, in robes as black as night.
 For a Klansman is an American, and America is his home,
 But a Catholic owes allegiance to the Dago Pope of Rome.

In a word, Catholicism, since the Reformation, has been, to a greater or lesser degree, the enemy in English-speaking lands, despite the great numbers of Catholics who have made their homes in such places since the 19th century. Thus anti-Catholicism becomes the one form of bigotry still acceptable in polite society.

In the sphere of history writing, this means that it is often as hard to find a fair portrayal of things Catholic in American books written today as it was to find even-handed treatment of Capitalism in Soviet-era Russian histories. Thus we have the “Popes-can-do-no-good” school of history.

A second genre of writing about Popes is that of people—priests or lay—who, although of Catholic origins, echo slavishly the wildest charges of anti-Catholics. These are able to claim some extra knowledge of the topic because of their supposed faith.

As erroneous as the first two schools is that of well-intentioned Catholics who, in their zeal to defend their Church, whitewash the worst of Popes in the manner mentioned above.

On a purely ideological level, moreover, the Papacy is out of step with the deepest belief of the past two centuries: the cult of change. “Change is good,” we repeat as a mantra. But the role of the Popes from the beginning has been that of conservator or preservationist. The Coronation Oath of the Popes, administered since the Renaissance, declares that the new Pontiff vows “[t]o change nothing of the received tradition, and nothing thereof, I have found before me guarded by my God-pleasing predecessors, to encroach, to alter, or to permit any innovation therein; To the contrary: with glowing affection as their truly faithful student and successor, to reverently safeguard the passed-on good, with my whole strength and utmost effort....” This shows a mentality entirely different from that of most of us.

The reason for this mindset is to be found in the very notion of Catholic tradition. The Church teaches that Divine Revelation, that body of knowledge necessary to be believed if one is to be saved (such

doctrines as the Trinity, the Incarnation, Transubstantiation, and so forth), ceased with the death of St. John the Evangelist, about A.D. 104. These teachings are considered to be factual things, as true of themselves as the laws of science—or more so. The Pope’s primary mission is to safeguard this deposit of Faith from change, which would be error; when doctrinal disputes arise, he must determine what the Church has always taught on the matter. While many are under the impression that “Papal Infallibility” and “defining dogma” mean that the Pope can alter or originate doctrines as he pleases, the reality is just the opposite. These terms actually mean that, when the Pope speaks at the highest level of his authority, the Holy Ghost will prevent him from defining untruths. Thus, before the Immaculate Conception or the Assumption of the Virgin Mary could be defined, the Pope of the day had to be satisfied that, despite later denials by prominent theologians (including, in the case of the Immaculate Conception, St. Thomas Aquinas), the teachings had been held by the earliest Christians.

It is this wildly different concept of truth which has most often led modern Popes into conflict with the media and governments of our age. As guardians rather than owners of the Church’s doctrines, the Popes are simply unable to alter the Church’s stand on such topics as abortion, contraception, divorce, or women’s ordination. This inability to change doctrine has not merely brought them conflict in our day; where many modern women demand the right to abort their children, in times past certain monarchs and noblemen similarly wished barren wives killed or put aside in favor of fertile ones. New Queens were easy to obtain—not so Princes. Many a Pope ran into conflict over this question.

Another important part of the Papal conservatorship is that of safeguarding the Sacraments—in the Catholic view as necessary to salvation as right belief—and the various liturgies which embody them. J.R.R. Tolkien, for one, understood this very clearly. As he informs his son on p. 339 of his *Collected Letters*:

I myself am convinced by the Petrine [Papal] claims, nor looking around the world does there seem much doubt which (if Christianity is true) is the True Church, the temple of the Spirit dying but living, corrupt but holy, self-reforming and re-arising. But for me that Church of which the Pope is the acknowledged head on earth has as chief claim that it is the one that has (and still does) ever defended the Blessed Sacrament, and given it most honor, and put it (as Christ plainly intended) in the prime place. “Feed my sheep” was His last charge to St. Peter; and since His words are always first to be understood literally, I suppose them to refer primarily to the Bread of Life. It was against this that the W. European revolt (or Reformation) was really launched—“the blasphemous fable of the Mass”—and faith/works a mere red herring.

JRRT's historical conception of the Papacy was reflected, oddly enough, in his *Lord of the Rings*, by the figure of Gandalf, the great wizard. He belongs to not one of the nations of Middle Earth, and in a very real sense he is leader of all the free and faithful. This is so because his power is magical rather than temporal, just as the Pope's is sacramental. To one character's statement "there is no purpose higher in the world as it now stands than the good of Gondor," Gandalf replies, "the rule of no realm is mine, neither Gondor nor any other, great or small. But all worthy things that are in peril as the world now stands, those are my care...[f]or I also am a steward." Thus might Boniface VIII have spoken to French King Philip the Fair, or Gregory VII to Emperor Henry IV, or Innocent III to King John. Gandalf also reminds one of the Fisher-King in the Grail legends, who himself is a symbol of Peter-in-the-Boat, one of the earliest logos of the Papacy.

Of course, this ideal view certainly did not and does not apply to all Popes, by any means. As stewards or vicars of Christ, they have often failed. Infallibility does not, in Catholic teaching, protect most Papal statements, nor any Papal actions (save beatification and canonization of saints). It will prevent a Pope from defining heresy as dogma. But beyond that, the Pope is prisoner of his personality, his upbringing, and his circumstances, as are we all. It is interesting to note that before Vatican II, each night before retiring the reigning Pontiff went to confession and signed a renunciation of any liturgical mistakes he might have made during the day's numerous ceremonies. This last was essential if any of his clerical flock were not to seize on such an error as a precedent for his own Masses.

Since the Pope's flock lives in the world, and since the most pressing outside influence on any individual is that of his government, from the time of Constantine Popes have been concerned with politics. Of course, before Catholicism became legal there were such questions as whether the faithful could serve in the Imperial legions. But for the most part, Papal concern with civil rule was primarily in terms of being martyred under it.

With legalization, however, came responsibility. In a period when land meant power, property and then temporal sovereignty were seen as essential if the Papacy was to pursue an independent course in dealing with the great ones of this world. But these things had also the effect of sometimes diverting the Popes from or even blinding them to their spiritual duties. Yet, at least as often, temporal power has allowed them to exercise their spiritual interests freely in the face of powerful and unfriendly potentates.

All of this background is essential for a fair evaluation of the Popes we are going to meet. It is manifestly unfair to judge any religious leader

by one's own spiritual views or lack thereof. If the Dalai Lama does not impose Jewish or Muslim Dietary laws on his flock, we cannot blame him; for that matter, we ought not to be upset with the Islamic Caliphs for permitting polygamy, enjoined in the Koran. Indeed, if either had done differently, we would have to say he was a poor Buddhist or Muslim. Unless we are willing to claim that our own religion is right and that of the leader under discussion wrong (as un-modern a view as one could have), we can only judge him according to how well he safeguards his own faith, however odd it might appear to us.

So it is with the Popes. If we are to be fair with them, the only evaluation we can make of each of them is whether they did well by the Church's own lights. If, in pursuit of this, many have done things which outrage our sensibilities, it should be borne in mind that our society allows many things which would have done the same for them.

It ought to be noted that there is a tremendous paradox at work in the Papacy. For in it we see flawed human beings attempting to exercise a position which Catholics believe partakes of and demands spiritual perfection. This creates an unending internal conflict. As Bela Lugosi observed of people at large in *Glen or Glenda?*, "[O]ne does wrong because he is right, another does right because he is wrong." Some of the holiest Popes have made horrible decisions; some of the worst have, often unwittingly, done wonderful things.

This paradox continues unto our own day. As noted earlier, John Paul II was an internationally known figure. Due to his trips, his role in the fall of Communism, and the activities of Vatican delegations, the Holy See has never, perhaps, loomed so large in foreign affairs since the end of World War II.

Within the Church, however, the Papacy has probably never wielded so little control since the French Revolution. As exemplified by former Archbishop Weakland of Milwaukee's rejection of Roman attempts to preserve his cathedral from radical interior alteration, and by former Cardinal Mahony of Los Angeles' discounting of Vatican regulations limiting the use of lay distributors of communion, many, if not most, Bishops today are "titularists;" accepting Papal authority in theory, they deny it in practice—as was seen by the attempts of so many of them to impede Benedict's *Summorum Pontificum*; the Tridentine Mass is still far from being freely available to all and used as an example for the new liturgy, as the Pope clearly mandated.

There are, of course, historical reasons for this. One is the auto-demolition of Vatican control over dioceses initiated by Paul VI and continued by Benedict XVI—but there is another. Just as in Medieval Europe, similar situations developed when Bishops who were wealthy feudal lords—reflecting the civil power structure of the day—had the

power to snap their fingers at the Pope. Today, reflecting the patterns of control in contemporary society, Bishops of larger dioceses are in effect CEO's of major corporations. Some, such as Chicago or Los Angeles, are, in terms of disposable income, much bigger operations than the Vatican. Add to these two the widespread unbelief of Catholicism among the clergy and corresponding ignorance of it among the laity, and it would be hard to see how things can be other than they are.

Whether this is a good or bad thing depends largely upon one's point of view. But it is important to remember, as we shall see in the lives of the Popes, that the Church has known such times before, and doubtless will again. By the same token she will doubtless know further periods of revival and strength. At her heart lies what she considers to be a mystery: the change of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. It must surprise no one that her cyclical history, with its themes of death and resurrection, is likewise a mystery.

The famed 1950s-60s television psychic Criswell, as un-Papal a man as one is ever likely to meet, was wont to say, "We are all lighted candles in a darkened room, weary travelers on the road of life." It is the contention of the Catholic Church that she and her Popes continue the work of Christ, that she is the Mystical Body of Christ; through this body alone, she maintains, can such travelers find the way to Salvation. To Catholics, she is "the light that shineth in darkness," although the darkness does not comprehend it. To her enemies she is the most successful means of enslaving the mind of humanity that there has ever been. Whichever the reader believes, we will show the Popes as they were and are: wielders of great power on the one hand, and weary fellow travelers of us all on the other.

A NOTE ON ORAL TRADITION AND MIRACLES

Prior to the liberation of the Church by Constantine in 312, Church records are very sketchy. The reasons for this are not hard to figure out; the ongoing persecutions by Roman Imperial authorities led both to intense secrecy on the part of Christians and the destruction of many written records. Thus, unwritten tradition is an important witness to the history of the earliest Popes.

Such tradition is often disregarded by modern historians, due in no small part to their own biases. Take, for example, the case of St. Dionysius the Areopagite. Traditionally, this Athenian disciple of St. Paul was regarded both as the author of a number of theological treatises, such as *The Divine Hierarchies*, and as first Bishop, successively, of Athens and Paris. From the time of Martin Luther, however, both his authorship and his episcopate have been challenged. So universal among

scholars has this challenge become that *DH*'s author is invariably referred to as the "Pseudo-Areopagite." It is taken for granted that the writings attached to the name "must" have been written in the 2nd century, because of their "theological complexity."

The problem with this view is that it presumes a number of "facts not in evidence," as Perry Mason was wont to say. The major presumption here is that Christian doctrine was not in fact taught by Christ and the Apostles, but rather, as according to H.G. Wells, it was a simple ethical notion to which a religion later accreted. But we know from the writings of such as Philo of Alexandria that the Jews of the Roman world held quite a complex theology indeed, which is to a degree reflected in the Gospel of St. John. So the argument against St. Dionysius having been unable to write complex theological tracts purely because he was a contemporary of Christ is a bit specious. Moreover, when the writings bearing his name first appear in our records, they are already attributed to him. The idea that people would accept such an attribution without some kind of evidence is a tad difficult to swallow. In any case, since the folk of the second century lived so much closer to the events of the Apostolic era than we do, we might as well accept their version of the facts, unless we are provided with substantial evidence to the contrary. At this late date, such evidence, if it exists, is highly unlikely to surface.

So, in this study, we shall accept the given account at face value. Not only are there no really compelling arguments to the contrary (save, perhaps, our own opinions), but succeeding generations took them as truth, and these in turn affected their own behavior. If we are to get inside the heads of the various characters we shall examine, we must follow their example.

So too with accounts of the miraculous. The standard approach is to look at a saint or a relic's supposed wonder-working capabilities, and then declare that "since such things *can't* happen, the event *must* have been otherwise." But this sort of reasoning backward is extremely unhelpful to our understanding. On the one hand, acceptance of the miraculous and of apparitions of Christ, the Virgin, and the saints certainly *were* accepted by the vast majority of Christians, and so affected the conduct of history. On the other hand, as the work of Joan Carroll Cruz and others shows, such events have been recorded down to our own time; many are impossible to disprove. Here too, for both reasons, we shall take the accepted accounts as given. Hence, there will be no "traditionally," "supposedly," or any of the other adjectives with which writers on these topics surround them. Accept or reject them if you will, but on the same basis that you might any historical account—and always remembering that they have indeed had an objective measurable effect on generations who followed.

CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

Subjectively speaking, there are many Christs. There is the noble ethical teacher of H.G. Wells's imagination, earlier referred to; there is the seventh incarnation of the god Vishnu, beloved of Westernizing Hindus; there is the blasphemer of Talmudic fable; there is the non-material Christ Principle of the Christian Scientists; there is the great, non-sacramentalizing Jesus of the Protestants; and then there is the Christ of the Catholics.

It is the latter with whom we have to deal in this book. Today, many Catholic scholars enjoy pitting against each other "the Christ of Faith" and the "Jesus of history." Pleasurable for them as this pastime may be, it does not aid us in our present goal because, as we shall see, it is not the conception of Christ which has informed the Papacy. Even as one may not understand the Caliphate without understanding how the Caliphs saw Mohammed, so too with Christ and the Popes. One may deny the divine inspiration of the Koran—but such a denial does not help in comprehending Islam.

The discovery of a fragment of the Gospel of St. Mark amongst the Dead Sea Scrolls goes far to shoring up the historicity of the Gospel accounts of Jesus. Since the library at Qumran whence these scrolls were taken was sealed in A.D. 70, it means that this Gospel at least was in wide circulation throughout Palestine during the lifetime of Christ's contemporaries. (Since the Essenes who ran Qumran as a secluded monastery were not among the most up-to-date of their contemporaries, the presence of a Gospel in their midst is worth noting, for all that they were certainly not Christians). What is important to understand is that the Gospel of St. Mark was abroad when there were still many folk who could refute it were its historical accuracy dubious. Amongst other things, this fact calls into question the conclusions of the whole Biblical criticism industry which has grown up since the 19th century.

In any case, the significance of the Popes to their followers is that they are *Vicars of Christ*, visible heads of the Church on Earth. Now a vicar is a representative, a viceroy. Just as the Governor-General of Canada is a stand-in for that country's Queen, Elizabeth II, so too is the Pope seen to be merely a stand-in, a steward, for Jesus Christ, held to be the *invisible* head of the Church. So who, in the Catholic conception, is He?

For starters, Jesus is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Obviously, much ink has been spent trying to explain what this means. But in a nutshell, God is seen as a triune being, made up of three separate persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The Father eternally begets the Son, and the Holy Ghost eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son.

None is subordinate to the others, and are one God, not three: indivisible and yet distinct Persons. For God, all things are *now*, hence Christ's comment in the Gospel that "before Abraham was, I *am*." This in turn harkens back to God's self-description in the Old Testament that "I am Who am." Notice of the triune nature of God is seen as far back as Genesis, where God says "let *Us* make man in *Our* image."

Catholics believe that the Second Person of the Holy Trinity entered time (and so, history) by incarnating in the womb of a virgin, which act was accomplished by said virgin's being "overshadowed" by the Holy Ghost. This was done in order to repair the damage done by the Fall of Adam and Eve. Said Fall darkened human nature, made Man incapable of entering heaven, weakened his will, and darkened his intellect. In order to serve as a worthy vessel for the God-Man's appearance in our world, Mary, the Virgin chosen for this role by God "from all eternity," was conceived without Original Sin, the quality that prevented human union with God after death. This occurrence is called "the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary." It is indicated in the Gospel of St. Luke, wherein the Archangel Gabriel hails Mary as "full of grace," a salutation which could not be given to any other human of the time, carrying, as they all did, the sin of Adam on their souls.

In His Incarnation, Christ acquired human nature, and became a man "like us in all things save sin." The link between His Divine and human natures is called the "hypostatic union." While He possessed two Wills corresponding to each of His natures, He nevertheless was and is one Person.

After His birth, accompanied by various signs and wonders, His mother and foster father took Him into Egypt to avoid Herod's executioners. Returning with His parents when He was three years old, His early life was spent in obscurity, save for the incident at the Temple in Jerusalem, where He demonstrated His perfect knowledge of the Scriptures and the Law to the Priests, doctors, and scribes. He reappears at the age of thirty, shortly after the death of St. Joseph, His foster father.

Christ's ministry over the next three years is the main subject of the Gospels. In the course of it He gathered about Him a band of Twelve Apostles, who became the first Bishops, and seventy disciples, who were the first lay-folk. At the Last Supper He ordained His Apostles, giving them the power to change wine into His blood, and bread into His flesh. Ever since, this has been the central rite of His Church, of which He said, "Unless a man eat My Body and drink My Blood, he shall not have life in him."

The next day He was crucified by the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, at the behest of the Jewish High Priest, Caiaphas. On the Cross, Jesus offered expiation for all the sins of mankind by His own Divine

death, His sacrifice of Himself; this act was united with the changing of bread and wine into His Flesh and Blood—hence the description of the Mass as a Sacrifice.

When He died, He descended into the “Limbo of the Just,” wherein were all those virtuous folk who had died under the Old Law; bringing Himself directly to them, He liberated them from their intermediate state. On Easter Sunday He rose again, bringing the Just of the Old Testament with Him. The following forty days He spent with His disciples, organizing and counseling the infant Church, and bestowing on her the seven Sacraments. Having chosen St. Peter to lead the Apostles before His Crucifixion, He made him the first Pope. The forty days concluded, He ascended into Heaven, after first commissioning His Apostles to baptize, to absolve sins, and to “make disciples of all nations.” With Him went the liberated souls of the Old Law. He promised that He would be with the Church always, even to the end of time. Not least of the ways He would do this would be through the Sacraments, particularly through the Eucharist. Further, the Comforter would be sent to them. A few days later, in accord with Christ’s promise, the Holy Ghost descended upon the Apostles and disciples, and gave them the grace and power they would need to spread the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, throughout the world. St. Peter and his successors in the Papacy would direct the Church’s efforts until the end of time, when Christ would return and take up the Church’s leadership directly.

Whether one believes all of this or not, the fact remains that this is the view of Christ held by the Catholic Church; this is the Invisible Head of the Church Whom the Popes and their subjects have tried to follow and emulate. Their success or lack thereof is the body of this book.

ST. PETER **(32-67)**

Called the “Prince of the Apostles,” and originally named Simon, Peter was born in Bethsaida, a town on the northern end of Lake Genesareth. His father was called Jona, and his brother was the Apostle St. Andrew; St. Philip, another Apostle, came from the same town. At the beginning of Christ’s ministry, Simon Bar-Jona was living with his wife and mother-in-law at the his home in Capharnaum. There, owning his own boat, he pursued the comfortable career of lake fisherman, and may be considered to have been comfortably Middle Class.

His bourgeois existence was disturbed initially by meeting St. John the Baptist, who was preaching repentance and the imminent coming of the Messiah. Together with his brother Andrew he joined the ranks of St. John’s disciples, going with them to Bethania, on the eastern side of

the Jordan River. Accosted by messengers of the Sanhedrin, who demanded to know who this Messiah was, St. John pointed to Jesus of Nazareth, his first cousin, who was passing by. "Behold the Lamb of God," he said. Andrew and another of John's band went to interview Jesus that day.

Upon his return, Andrew informed Simon that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, and brought his brother to Him. They took up with Jesus, following him to Galilee for the marriage feast at Cana, on to Jerusalem and Judea, back through Samaria, returning at last to Galilee. There Simon and Andrew returned to their fishing.

But the adventure was far from over. Working the nets with James and John, the sons of Zebedee, the two brothers were accosted again by Jesus, who said, "Come ye after me, and I will make ye to be fishers of men." From then on, these four Apostles stayed with their Master. He soon after preached the Sermon on the Mount, cured the son of the centurion at Capharnaum, and then did the same for Simon's mother-in-law. Shortly after this, the college of twelve was filled, and Christ began His ministry in earnest.

In the four Gospel accounts, Simon is shown to be headstrong and fiery, but with a streak of cowardice. Although he is not Jesus' favorite (that would be John, son of Zebedee), nor given charge of the money (that office is reserved to Judas Iscariot), he soon emerges as the leader of the twelve. He often speaks to Jesus on behalf of them, and then again is given instructions for all of them by Jesus.

Finally, when Jesus and the Apostles are encamped by Caesarea Philippi, His ministry reaches a sort of crisis point. All sorts of expectations have been raised, and there are as many different views of who Jesus is as there are groups in Palestine. To the Sadducees, who have abandoned most Jewish doctrines but nevertheless provide most of the Temple priesthood and leadership, he is a rebel and a rival for power. To the Pharisees, who retain all points of the Jewish faith, but have added to it their own notions, he is a critic with whom they nevertheless have something in common (He will eat with them—a Near Eastern recognition of unity—but not with the Sadducees). To the Zealots and others He is believed to be a leader who will eject the Romans from Palestine and retake the throne of His ancestor, David, from the Herodian usurpers. Some believe Him to be a prophet, in true Old Testament style. Still others hold him to be a blasphemer and Sabbath-breaker. On this particular occasion, Jesus demands of the Apostles, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?"

The Apostles answer, "Some John the Baptist, and others Elias, and others Jeremias, or one of the Prophets." Jesus replies, "But who do you say that I am?" As has become customary, Simon answers on behalf of

all the Twelve. “Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus then says, “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona: because flesh and blood have not revealed it to thee, but My Father who is in heaven. And I say to thee: That Thou art Peter [*Kipha*, a rock]; and upon this rock [*Kipha*] I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, it shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven.” (Matthew 16:13-20; Mark, 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21).

This passage from the Gospel is really the charter of the Papacy. As far as Catholics and some others are concerned, this is where our story really begins, for Jesus makes Peter the head of His Church, and Peter’s successors will rule it until the end of time. They claim that Jesus’ remarks cannot refer either to Jesus Himself or to Peter’s declaration of Faith, but that the name change means clearly that it is Peter himself upon whom the Church is to be built. They point out that the talk about keys and binding and loosing were Hebrew legal terms referring to the passing of jurisdiction from a lord to his steward. Obviously, any number of non-Catholic critics have devised ingenious alternative explanations for this episode and its wording; but the Catholic view has at least simplicity on its side. In any case, it is the Catholic understanding which has shaped the Papal office.

Peter’s actions immediately following his elevation were not particularly inspiring. At the Last Supper, he assures Jesus that he will follow Him unto death; Jesus answers that Peter will deny Him before the cock crows thrice—a prophecy fulfilled. In the garden he falls asleep with the others while Jesus endures His agony there. After letting his anger have full rein by cutting off the ear of the High Priest’s servant, he then flees with the other Apostles. While Jesus is being questioned and tortured, Peter warms himself by the fire and does indeed make the promised threefold betrayal, for which he mourns the rest of his life. In so doing, he shows how far subsequent Popes will be able to fall from their high calling.

But in Peter’s case, he rapidly recovers himself from his fall (a recovery not always to be shared by his successors). When the women discover the empty tomb, the angel they encounter sends a special message to Peter. Jesus appears to Peter before the other Apostles the first day after His resurrection, and then at Lake Genesareth gives him a special commission to defend and feed His flock. After Christ’s Ascension into heaven, Peter is left in charge of the others.

Coming down from Mt. Olivet after the Ascension with the other Apostles and disciples, Peter immediately acts as leader. He organizes the elevation of Matthias in Judas’ place; after the descent of the Holy

Ghost at Pentecost, he gives the first sermon to the multitude. His preaching on the life, death, and resurrection of Christ brings about the conversion of many. He takes the lead in miraculous activities as well, when he goes up with John and cures a lame man at the Beautiful Gate. Preaching at the Temple's Porch of Solomon, he attracts still more converts.

Dragged before the Sanhedrin, Peter masterfully defends the Christians against all charges, and himself judges Ananias and Sapphira. The sick are brought near him so that his shadow might fall upon and heal them.

Peter's activity soon goes beyond Jerusalem, as he preaches throughout Judea and Galilee. After Philip the Deacon converted a large number of Samaritans, Peter and John went there to organize and bestow the Holy Ghost upon them. Shortly after, he judged Simon Magus, who attempted to buy the spiritual powers of the Church for himself (although Simon himself died in an attempt to fly, many others throughout history have likewise tried to bribe the hierarchy—some with success, hence the word *simony* to describe this particular sin).

While persecution of the Christians had continued all this time, it subsided after their chief enforcer, Saul of Tarsus, left to persecute the Christian community that had sprung up in Damascus, Syria.

Freed from immediate worry by Saul's departure, Peter evangelized the Palestinian coastal plain. In Lydda (Lod), he cured a man of palsy; in Joppa (Yafa), he raised a girl from the dead; and in Caesarea, he converted the Roman centurion Cornelius, the first named gentile convert, and his family. Fresh from this experience, he returned to Jerusalem to find the Jewish Christians demanding to know why he had entered the house of and eaten the food of gentiles. Peter replied with an account of the vision he had had at Joppa, wherein he was told to accept the gentiles. Both Apostles and people at Jerusalem accepted his defense.

Three years after his conversion experience on the road to Damascus, Paul of Tarsus returned to Jerusalem to confer with Peter, thus acknowledging his need for approval from the head of the Apostolic College.

But this period of tranquility was not to last. In 42 A.D., Herod Agrippa I assumed the Judean throne, and immediately began persecuting the Christians. The new king had James the Great, visiting from his apostolate in Spain, beheaded. He then imprisoned Peter and intended to execute him. But Peter was freed from his chains by an angel, fleeing to the house of the mother of a disciple, John Mark. A number of Christians were praying there; Peter told them to tell James

the Less (cousin of Jesus and first Bishop of Jerusalem) what had happened, and then escaped the city.

He next set up his headquarters in Antioch, capital of Syria and third largest city of the Empire. It is for this reason that he is considered founder of the Patriarchate of Antioch (a title today claimed by five prelates of as many rites—Melkite Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Syrian Catholic, Syrian Orthodox, and Maronite). From there Peter made many missionary journeys and interacted with Paul.

But while Peter, James, and John worked with Jews, Paul worked with gentiles. The question of whether or not gentiles must first be converted to Judaism and accept circumcision and the dietary laws became a burning issue. A council was held of the remaining Apostles and other bishops, and these gathered about 51 A.D. at Jerusalem, in what is numbered as the first Ecumenical Council of the Church. Peter, who at first had favored freeing gentile converts of Jewish customs, was persuaded to re-impose the Jewish ways on newcomers. Paul, whose work was primarily with gentiles, opposed him. Knowing the necessity of winning Peter to his position, Paul at length persuaded Peter to return to his own original teaching. The Council of Jerusalem liberated gentile converts from circumcision and the rest. The Church was well on its way to a complete break from Judaism.

Some time after the Council, Peter left for Rome, capital of the Empire. From this time, the headship of the universal Church has been bound up with the Bishops of Rome. With him was his disciple Mark. Peter was Mark's primary source for his Gospel; in time, he would be sent by his teacher to Alexandria, Egypt, second city of the Empire. Thus the three churchmen who claim the title of Patriarch of Alexandria (Greek Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, and Coptic Catholic) are all called "Successor of St. Mark," as the Pope is called "Successor of St. Peter."

During his time in Rome, Peter wrote his two Epistles, worked among the converts of the city, and was reunited with Paul. During the 25 years he spent in the city, Peter converted many among the older families of the Roman nobility. In the catacomb of St. Priscilla, located under a villa garden of the patrician Acilii Gabrilliones family on the Salarian Way, Peter instructed neophytes in the Faith. Another friendly noble, Pudens, opened his house (on the site of which is today a church dedicated to St. Pudentiana, his daughter) for worship to the Christians.

But, as always, persecution dogged the infant Church. At a time when divorce was common, the Church forbade it; open sexuality of all kinds was more or less encouraged by the authorities, and the Church insisted that it belonged solely within marriage. Infanticide was widespread, and the Church condemned it. The State declared that all gods were more or less true, and the Christians said there was but One

who might be worshipped. The Emperor claimed divine honors, but the Christians refused to give them. To make matters worse, the central act of the Christian religion, the consumption of bread and wine transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, was kept strictly secret—this was the famed *disciplina arcani* (“discipline of the sacred mystery”). But garbled accounts of what went on during the secret ceremonies emerged, and imperial officials, angered by the other dissenting elements of the Christian lifestyle, seized upon them happily—for were the Christians not cannibals?

Under this pretext, the Emperor Nero, seeking a scapegoat for his own mismanagement, made Christianity illegal throughout the Empire. Thus began the first general persecution.

When the order came down, Peter decided to flee the city. But as he made his way out of Rome, he encountered Christ Himself on His way in. “Where are you going, Lord?,” he asked in surprise, “*Quo vadis, Domine?*” “To Rome, Peter,” came the reply, “to be crucified again.” Mindful of his cowardice in Jerusalem, the first Pope sadly returned to the city.

As he feared, Peter was among the first wave of arrests, as was Paul. They were held in the Mamertine prison; the chains which held Peter, along with those which bound him in Jerusalem, are venerated in a church at the location today. The two were ordered executed. As a Roman citizen, Paul was beheaded. But Peter was merely a Judean, and so was to be crucified. But feeling himself unworthy of dying in precisely the same manner as the Lord he had denied, he asked to be crucified upside down. His request was granted, and he died in Nero’s gardens on the Vatican Hill.

Interred in a nearby catacomb on the same small mount, his tomb soon became a place of pilgrimage. At first semi-secret, it was marked by Emperor Constantine with a huge basilica, itself replaced with the masterpiece we see today in the 16th century. From the time of the basilica’s construction, the Popes have said their major Masses over their first predecessor’s tomb.

Paul, buried outside the walls of the city, on the Ostia Way, similarly had a basilica erected over his tomb. Early on, the skull of Peter was placed there also. During the early 20th century, Peter’s headless skeleton was brought out of his tomb; the skull from St. Paul’s fitted it perfectly.

As the first Pope, St. Peter established the pattern for all his successors. As with many of them, he sinned through omission and cowardice, and occasionally through his hot-headedness. Despite Divine favor, he remained all too human. But this first and best of Popes overcame all of that, sustained his flock around the known world, and at

the end, died for it. In his first Epistle, he laid down the basic foundation of the Church's social teaching which has come down through the centuries:

Be ye subject to every human creature for God's sake: whether it be the king as excelling;

Or to governors as sent by him the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of the good:

For so is the will of God, that by doing well you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:

As free, and not as making liberty a cloak for malice, but as the servants of God.

Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

Despite the hatred of the Emperors and their civil servants for the Christians, this remained their program, as evidenced by the prayers for the Emperor in the earliest liturgies, and by the service of Christians in the army and civil service. When ordered to burn incense to the Emperor or his gods, they refused, and often paid with their lives. But in the end, as we shall see, they had the victory.

In the Latin Catholic calendar, Ss. Peter and Paul are honored on June 29, a holy day of obligation in many countries. Until 1970, the same calendar boasted three other feasts for St. Peter: his chains were honored on August 1, his chair at Rome on January 18, and his chair at Antioch on February 22. The Byzantine and Syrian rites honor him on January 16, and the Armenians on the Fifth Sunday after Pentecost.

ST. LINUS **(67-76)**

Linus came from Volterra, in Tuscany. Son of one Herculanius, his father ordered him to Rome. There he heard St. Peter preach the Gospel, and became a fervent Christian. His virtues, knowledge and zeal induced St. Peter to consecrate him bishop and choose him as a companion for his apostolic travels. St. Peter, when he went to Jerusalem to preside at first council, left Linus in Rome as his vicar. He was one of those in Rome saluted by St. Paul in 2 Timothy 4:21. Returning to Rome, St. Peter entrusted to Linus an important mission in Gaul, centering on Besançon. There the bishop made numerous converts by virtue of his eloquent preaching.

But a little after the persecution of Nero broke out, Linus returned to Rome in order to help Ss. Peter and Paul. When they were imprisoned, he replaced them in governing the Church, and was chosen by St. Peter as his successor (the only Pope to be so selected). He accompanied St.