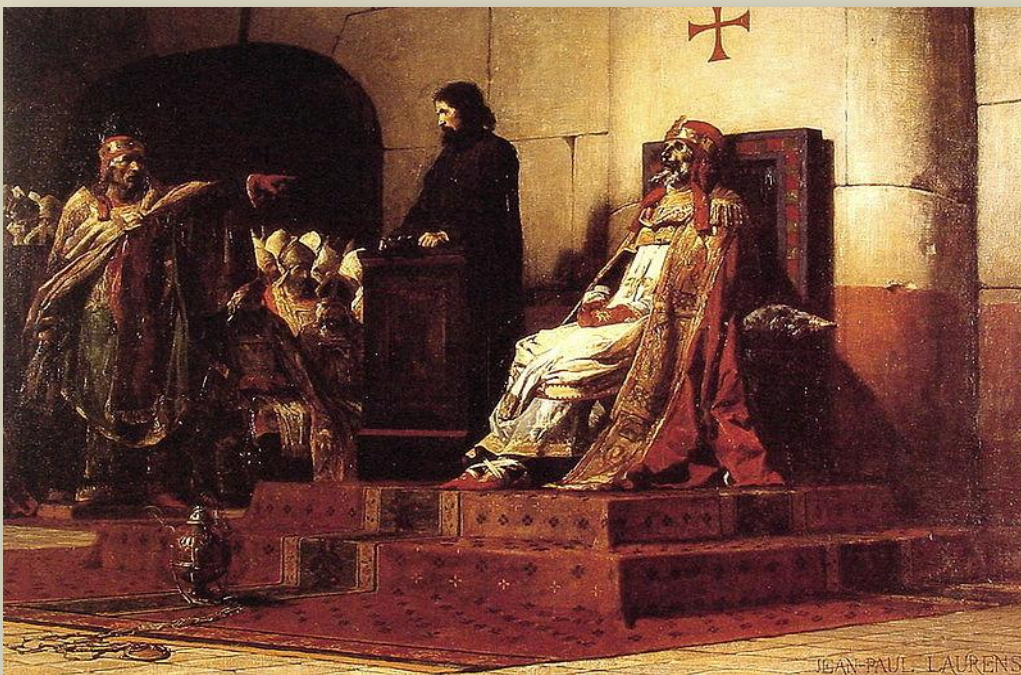


The Bad Popes and Schisms

Catholics may be asked about the bad Popes and it is true that there were a few. The only reason we know about them is because the Catholic Church has preserved all of her history. What is remarkable is that these bad Popes never changed any dogmas of the Church thus fulfilling Christ's promise that the gates of hell would not prevail against His Church. Patrick Madrid, in his book, *Pope Fiction* offers this summary:

"Clearly, Christ entrusted the role of Apostle to weak, even at times wicked men, but does that fact somehow disqualify them from fulfilling the purpose for which He called them? Of course not. God's grace is more powerful than man's sin, and the same is true when it comes to the papacy.....Yes, there have been some wicked popes. Corruptions, immorality, even murder, were sins committed by some bishops of Rome. But what does that prove, except that they, like the Apostles, were not always faithful to the graces God gave them? This is true of all of us, to one extent or another. The fact that there have been bad popes -- and that's a fact no Catholic disputes -- does not disprove the doctrine of the papacy..... The fact is, most of the popes have been good -- even heroically good -- men. They have been, on the whole, good examples of Christian virtue and perseverance in the apostolate. That fact is very easily forgotten by critics of the papacy."



One of the most bizarre events in the history of the Papacy occurred under Pope Stephen VI (896-897), who had his predecessor Pope Formosus exhumed and put on trial. The three fingers of his right hand used for blessings were cut off and his body was thrown in the Tiber River only to be retrieved by a monk and subsequently re-buried.

The picture above is an accurate portrayal of the trial of Pope Formosus whose skeletal remains were clothed with full Papal vestments. The mock trial was presided over by Pope Stephen VI. A deacon, the future Pope Sergius III, answered the charges on behalf of the deceased Formosus who was found guilty of perjury, of having coveted the papal throne, and of having violated the canon law of that time forbidding bishops to move from one diocese to another. Pope Stephen's participation can only be explained by a hysterical hatred of Pope Formosus.

Pope Stephen's conduct did not go unpunished. A few months later the outraged supporters of Formosus, encouraged by the reports of miracles in his name and attributing an earthquake that almost destroyed the Lateran Basilica to the sins of Pope Stephen, rose in rebellion, deposed Stephen, stripped him of his papal insignia and threw him into prison where he was afterwards strangled by an unknown assailant.

Pope Sergius III



Sergius III was Pope from 904-911. Historians are divided over the accuracy of the accounts of his papacy. The following is taken from the well respected *Oxford Dictionary of Popes*.

As a deacon, Sergius took part in the “cadaver synod” of Pope Formosus acting as his voice and answering the charges against him. Seven years after the “trial” Sergius would become Pope.

Following the death of Pope Stephen VI, Pope Romanus was elected but lived only four months and then his successor Pope Theodore II lived only twenty days.

Pope John IX was elected Pope and immediately annulled the “cadaver synod’s” sentence on Pope Formosus and recognized all of Pope Formosus’s ordinations as valid. In the year 900 John IX died and Pope Benedict IV was elected and served as Pope until his death in 903.

Pope Leo V was then elected but only held the papacy for thirty days when a coup took place and a priest named Christopher overthrew Pope Leo V and had him put in prison and declared himself to be Pope. (He is what is known as an anti-pope).

Christopher’s reign lasted only four months when early in 904 Sergius moved on Rome with an armed force, seized power and was installed as Pope. A few months later Pope Sergius had both Leo and Christopher strangled in prison.

Sergius then reaffirmed the “cadaver synod” decrees and invalidated all ordinations of priests and bishops made by Pope Formosus.

At this time Rome was ruled by the noble family of Theophylact and his wife Theodora. Pope Sergius III enjoyed such intimacy with the ruling family that he was reputed to have had a son, the future Pope John XI, by Theodora’s fifteen year old daughter Marozia.

Pope John XII

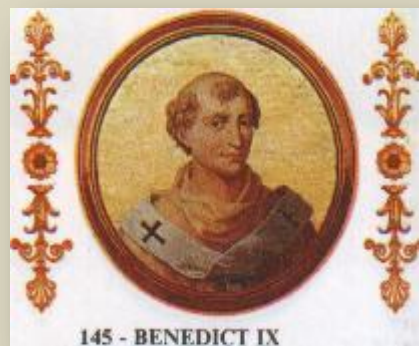


Born in 937 he was named Pope in 955 at the age of 18 by Roman nobles. According to the Catholic Encyclopedia he was a coarse, immoral man, whose life was such that the Lateran Palace, at that time the residence of the Pope, was spoken of as a brothel, and the moral corruption in Rome became the subject of general disgust among the people.

On November 6, 962 a synod composed of fifty Italian and German bishops was convened in St. Peter's; John was accused of sacrilege, simony, perjury, murder, adultery, and incest, and was summoned in writing to defend himself. Refusing to recognize the synod, John pronounced sentence of excommunication against all participators in the assembly, should they elect in his place another pope.

John died on May 14, 964, eight days after he had been, according to rumor, stricken by paralysis in the act of adultery.

Pope Benedict IX held the chair of Peter during the years 1032-1048



One of the youngest popes at age twenty, he was the only man to have been Pope on more than one occasion and the only man ever to have sold the papacy. He is called by the Catholic Encyclopedia, "A disgrace to the chair of Peter."

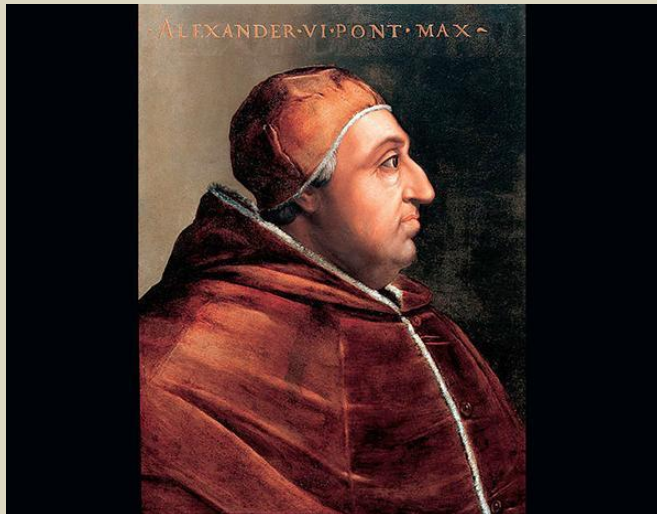
During an insurrection in the city he fled Rome and the Crescentian family succeeded in getting their local bishop installed as Pope Sylvester III. Benedict promptly excommunicated him and his second term as Pope lasted only two months when, desiring to marry, he resigned and his godfather, after giving Pope Benedict a large sum of money, was elected as Pope Gregory VI.

Popes Benedict, Sylvester and Gregory were ordered to appear before a synod by King Henry III but Benedict failed to show and was formally deposed along with the other two Popes. King Henry III then had Pope Clement II installed as the new Pope but only eight months later, Clement died and Benedict, assisted by bribery, was once again elected Pope in November 1047.

King Henry III forcibly ejected Benedict and installed Damasus II on the papal throne in July 1048.

It is believed that Benedict died repenting of his sins in a monastery in 1056

Pope Alexander VI



Ordained to the priesthood in 1468, he fathered four children with his mistress between 1474 and 1482.

Historians of his day wrote that he bribed several cardinals over to his side to be elected Pope in August of 1492. A week after his coronation he appointed his son Caesar, now eighteen years old, bishop of several sees and a year later Caesar was appointed a cardinal.

He died in August of 1503 and the rapid decomposition and swollen appearance of his corpse gave rise to the familiar suspicion of poison. Although never proven, the tale ran that he had drunk by mistake a poisoned cup of wine which he had prepared for his host.

Pope Joan



Painting
of Pope
Joan from
1402

The Legion of Pope Joan is of unknown origin. Even Protestants after the Reformation recognized this as a fable. Nonetheless you will hear anti-Catholics say that Pope Joan was in fact a real Pope.

To read about Pope Joan go [HERE](#)

In 2009 a movie was made about Pope Joan. To view the trailer of the movie go [HERE](#)

The Conclave

After the Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity in 313, Popes were often, but not always, selected by the Emperor and then ratified by the clergy. In 1271 the election of Gregory X took two years and nine months. The personal loyalties of the cardinals were so divided that they could not reach an agreement on a new Pope. The laity in Rome took matters into their own hands and literally locked them up in one room and refusing them food they forced the cardinals into a decision and thus the conclave was born. This new method became law under Pope Gregory X in 1274.

Anti-Pope

The word anti-pope doesn't mean that the person was evil it simply means that he was not validly elected. One of the anti-popes was Hippolytus who is known to us today as Saint Hippolytus. Because some men were anti-popes more than once it is commonly held that there were 42 anti-popes.

To see the list of Popes and anti-popes go [HERE](#)

THE TWO SCHISMS

The Eastern Schism occurred in 1084 and was a revolt against the Primacy of Peter and the authority of the Church by the Greek Emperors and the Byzantine Catholics. Many of the Eastern Orthodox Churches returned to accept the authority of Rome but many did not. The cause of the schism is complex.

You can read about the Eastern Schism [HERE](#)

The Great Western Schism lasted forty years from 1378 - 1417. In 1378 an Italian was elected Pope Urban VI. The cardinals in France refused to accept him, declared his election void, and named Clement VII as pope. Pope Clement withdrew to Avignon France, while Pope Urban VI remained in Rome. Some Catholic countries recognized Urban, while other Catholic countries accepted Clement as Pope. The spectacle of two rival popes each holding himself out as the only true successor of St. Peter, continued for almost forty years. When the "popes" died they were replaced by other "popes."

The schism was finally healed at the Council of Constance 1414-1418. By this time there were three men claiming to be the valid Pope. The true Pope, Gregory XII agreed to resign to end the schism. The other two dismissed their claim to the Papacy and Martin V was then elected Pope.

Recommend books: *Pope Fiction* by Patrick Madrid

The Oxford Dictionary of Popes by J.N.D.Kelly

Next Topic: Papal Infallibility