

The Papacy And The Civil Power –

Chapter IX. Argument of Archbishop

Kenrick



Peter Richard Kenrick (1806 – 1896) Archbishop of St. Louis

Continued from [The Papacy And The Civil Power – Chapter VIII. Pope's Temporal Power Not Divine.](#)

Same Power conferred on all the Apostles.—Roman Church not the First Established.—Ancient Churches Equal.—Leo I. Great and Ambitious. His Interviews with Attila and Genseric.—Persecution of Priscillian.—Rival Popes.—Belisarius seized Rome, and made Vigilius Pope.—Pope Silverius put to Death.—Vigilius and Justinian.—The “Three Chapters.”—Popes elected with Emperor’s Consent.—Gregory I.

IT has been already seen that Archbishop Kenrick has treated the question of the pope’s temporal power with more fairness than is common among its defenders. This was to have been expected on account of his superior learning, and was alike due to the intelligence of the age and to his own Christian character. He does not grope about like a blind man—as many of the papal writers do—amidst the fabulous obscurity of the early centuries, to hunt for inferences which have nothing but the imagination to support them, and so torture them that they may appear like facts. Nor does he pretend— as Pope Pius IX. and the Jesuits do —that the temporal power was divinely conferred on Peter; that it is “of necessity,” and, therefore, has always existed since Christ established his Church. Yet even he, with all his acknowledged sagacity, has not entirely escaped the Jesuit snare; for, after telling us that the disciples had “no dominion over the least spot of earth,” and that Peter had none “of the appendages of royalty” given him, he proceeds immediately to say that “he had powers of a supernatural order, for the government of men in order to salvation.” (“The Primacy of the Apostolic See,” by Kenrick. part ii., ch. i., p. 225.)

The critic might justly say that the distinguished archbishop has here fallen

into what the lawyers call a *non sequitur*; for it is by no means a legitimate inference to say that, because Christ left Peter without temporal dominion, therefore he conferred supernatural powers of government upon him. Our present inquiries, however, are of a more serious and important character. What idea he intended to convey by "powers of a supernatural order" is not clear. Such power must, necessarily, exceed all natural power, and can only exist miraculously. Its possessor must be able to alter the laws of nature. Was it, therefore, given to Peter to be exercised in spirituals alone? or in temporals also? or in spirituals of so comprehensive a nature as to include temporals?

In whatsoever degree it was conferred, it was the power to work miracles; and, as such, was possessed by all the other apostles equally with Peter. When Christ ordained the twelve, and sent them forth to preach, he gave them all "power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils." (Mark iii., 15. The Douay and Protestant versions agree in this rendering.) And as they went through the towns of Galilee, they perplexed Herod the tetrarch by "healing everywhere." (Luke ix., 6.) And "many wonders and signs were done by the apostles" on the day of Pentecost. (Acts ii., 43.) Peter healed the impotent man in the temple. (Acts iii., 7.) And Philip worked miracles in Samaria. (Acts viii., 6.) And when Paul and Barnabas went into Iconium, Paul caused the lame man of Lystra to leap up and walk. (Acts xiv., 10.) "And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul" at Ephesus. (Acts xix., 11.)

And other evidences abundantly show that miraculous gifts were conferred upon all the apostles. Then, if, by the fact of imparting supernatural powers, Christ designed that they should be employed "for the government of men in order to salvation," there was no special designation of Peter for that purpose, any more than the other apostles. They were all equal in the possession of the power; and, as whatever authority they had must have arisen out of it, they were equal in authority also. To select Peter, therefore, as the sole custodian of the supernatural power, in illustration of the authority of the pope over temporals, is, to say the least of it, an evasion of the question. That he had such power is not denied by any except those who reject revelation. But that it was given him for interference with the temporal affairs of government is shown by no part of the divine record; nor can it be inferred from what was done by him or any other of the apostles in their ministry. If Christ had designed such interference, he would have indicated it by some example of his own; and if he had intended to establish a Church at Rome, founded alone upon Peter, and with a distinct organization, to be maintained by supernatural power, he would have conferred such power alone upon Peter, and not upon the other apostles also. If the possession of supernatural power gave authority to establish the Church, and this power was possessed by all the apostles alike, then the churches at Jerusalem, at Antioch, and other places in Asia, which preceded that at Rome, antedated the Roman Church in the possession of the power to govern men in order to salvation. And then, also, the churches established by Paul at Corinth, and Ephesus, and other places, stood upon a precise equality, as it regards authority and jurisdiction, with that at Rome, even if it be conceded that the latter was established by Peter. Christ gave to neither of them precedence over the other, nor over any other of the apostles.

Whether either of them, in establishing a church, intended to transfer to it the supernatural power which he possessed, to be preserved throughout all time, their records do not instruct us. But that either one transferred more of such power than another, or that Peter was the only one who transferred any at all, is a proposition which may be dogmatically asserted, as it is, but cannot be maintained by argument. Therefore, when Christ said, "Upon this rock I will build my Church," he meant to declare himself to be the rock upon which each and all the apostolic churches should be founded, with the authority he conferred upon all the apostles as the origin of their unity. The unity designed by him was in the beginning, and "the beginning proceeds from unity" in him, says the eloquent Cyprian, one of the foremost of "the fathers," and a martyr of the third century. Therefore, he continues, "Assuredly the rest of the apostles were also the same as Peter, endowed with a like partnership both of honor and power;" and "the episcopate is one, each part of which is held *by each, for the whole*." ("The Writings of Cyprian, " vol. i., pp. 280, 281. "Antenicene Christian Library," vol. viii.)

Archbishop Kenrick does not argue his proposition; he merely states it. But it is easy to see that its logical result is this: that if the supernatural power includes authority over temporals, because they are embraced in spirituals, then the temporal power was conferred in the act of conferring the spiritual, and existed alike, from necessity, in all the apostolic churches. Inasmuch, therefore, as had just stated that the temporal power of the pope was not divinely conferred, and undoubtedly means that the supernatural was, his consistency can be maintained in no other way than by setting him down as emphatic authority against the whole Jesuit theory of the temporal "patrimony of Peter."

It is of no consequence to inquire here how long the supernatural power conferred upon the apostles continued to be possessed by their successors, in the work of spreading the Gospel—whether it ceased with those who came directly in contact with them, or with John, the last survivor. For if, at the beginning, the power was equally possessed by all the apostles, and not by Peter alone to the exclusion of the others, it would be absurd and illogical to say that it survived to a single church alone, or to the bishop of a single church. That would bring about a unity not founded upon Christ, but upon the supernatural power of one apostle—not a unity of affection, but of compulsion—for none but those who argue falsely will insist that the apostles changed their relations to each other after the Crucifixion, or that they designed that the churches they established upon principles of equality should have that equality either destroyed or disturbed. It is sufficient to know now that even the pope, with infallibility to aid him, has no supernatural power; that he cannot set aside a single law of nature, or perform any other miraculous act. Whatever supposed miracles are now attracting the notice and exciting the devotion of the faithful are attributed to the "Mother of God," not to the pope.

And therefore, upon the hypothesis of Archbishop Kenrick, if all the right which the papacy has to interfere with temporals arose out of the supernatural power conferred on Peter; and if the pope now possesses no supernatural power, Peter is left without a successor in the temporal order!

And that is the end of the controversy, until that power shall be re-conferred. That the world will be better off without conceding it to the pope, is abundantly proven by the fact that the freer the modern nations have been from the papal influences, the more rapidly have they progressed; and still more clearly by the additional fact, that since the load of papal oppression has been removed from the States of the Church, Rome is beginning to assume a dignity and importance which she has not known for centuries.

The frank admissions of Archbishop Kenrick in relation to the destitute condition of the Apostle Peter, and his entire want of dominion, leave those who defend the divine foundation of the temporal power without anything to rest their theory on. They will not pretend that anything done by Christ was improperly done. The Church would pronounce them heretics if they were not ready to concede that the Christianity he established, and the Church he founded by apostolic agency, were necessarily possessed of the utmost perfection. If, then, Christ established a perfect system of Christianity, and founded a perfect church, and sent forth Peter and the other disciples "without scrip or staff," with no "dominion" over any part of earth, and without "wealth, or any of the appendages of royalty," to extend the influence of religion and enlarge the borders of the Church, is it not an impeachment of the Divine plan to say, as they do, that temporal power, and large wealth, and the appendages of royalty are necessary to the propagation of the Gospel? The apostles, without any power or dominion, did the work of the Master well and faithfully, and sought after neither at the hands of governments or individuals. But when those who ought to have followed in their footsteps turned away after temporal dominion, they set up their wisdom above that of God, they substituted their pride for the apostolic humility, and checked the progress of Christianity by blocking up the avenues to religious truth, and the highways of the world's advancement.

Demonstration of this is found in a long array of facts connected with the origin and growth of the temporal power. History abundantly proves that this power has been employed by ambitious popes for their own personal advancement; and that it has been so unblushingly used in violation of the teachings of Christ and his apostles, that many of them have made it equally, if not more, heretical to deny its existence as to deny the divinity of the Saviour! Peter lived all his life without dominion, and at his death, says Archbishop Kenrick, "bequeathed to his successors no inheritance but the labors and dangers of his office;" ("The Primacy," etc., by Kenrick, p. 525.) and yet the present pope is convulsing the world with intense excitement by continually asserting that Christ conferred temporal dominion and royal authority on Peter; that he, as Peter's successor, is entitled to the same dominion by inheritance; and that those who have taken it away, as well as those who deny the legitimacy of his claim, have sinned against heaven and are accursed of God! Why should he mourn so sadly, and his supporters grieve so much, at the loss of that which, as Archbishop Kenrick shows, has been added by others since the death of Peter? Has Christianity so changed since then that it needs the aid of external force and temporal power to sustain it?

But, notwithstanding these admissions, so candidly and frankly made by

Archbishop Kenrick, he falls, at last, into the same course of reasoning so common among the supporters of the papacy; and finds, in the circumstances recorded by him, enough to satisfy his own mind that when the popes did come into possession of their temporal power it was legitimately obtained, and without any usurpation. Yet he has not, and could not, tell *the time* of this important event. He readily concedes that the document so frequently referred to by the Jesuits as the donation of Constantine is "supposititious;" (Based primarily on surmise rather than adequate evidence.) yet concludes, with De Maistre, that, notwithstanding this, Constantine did make a donation of some kind, the nature and extent of which, however, he does not attempt to explain; for the manifest reason, that he could not. The most that he can say of it is based upon the authority of the infidel Voltaire, who said that the Church of St. John, in Rome, was presented with a large revenue and lands in Cambria, and that other emperors, subsequent to Constantine, increased this patrimony. But Voltaire expressly says that this was not given to the pope, but was a mere donation of property to the Church—to a particular church in Rome; and it could not, therefore, have been any part of the papal patrimony out of which it was possible for the temporal power to have arisen.

It is, undoubtedly, true that the pope, as the head of the Church in Rome, did have a certain amount of authority necessary to enable him to see that the property of the Church there, and of those within that jurisdiction, was properly taken care of and managed. In the aggregate this property was, even then, very considerable, and yielded a large revenue. Archbishop Kenrick says, upon the authority of Fleury, that it included "some houses and farms, not only in Italy, but likewise in Sicily, Africa, and Greece." But this authority could not have been anything more than what was necessary to protect the use and enjoyment of this estate—the mere authority of ownership, under the civil law, just as is now secured to all the churches in the United States. The wealth yielded by it was attended with influence, but not necessarily such as pertains to the temporal power claimed by the popes. It was, doubtless, such as large possessions have produced in every age; for, in this respect, it is not probable that society has ever undergone much change.

The power acquired by the possession of property is of a very different kind from that involved in the control of governments and the management of public affairs. Archbishop Kenrick thinks that, in the case of the popes, it was such that, after Constantine removed the capital of the empire from Rome to Constantinople, "the Bishop of Rome" was left "in a position almost independent; the pontifical chair being no longer overshadowed by the imperial throne." ("The Primacy," etc., by Kenrick, p. 256.) In proof of this, he does not cite any grant or concession to the pope, but merely a reply of Pope Leo the Great to the Emperor Marcian, when he excused himself from attending a general council, on the ground that his absence from Rome would endanger the public peace, stating that "temporal necessity does not allow me to leave Rome."

But the learned archbishop strangely overlooked several important facts which, fairly interpreted, do not support his conclusions. In the first place, we have seen that Constantine never resided at Rome, and therefore the removal of the capital to Constantinople could not have made the pontifical

chair any the less overshadowed than it had been before. In the second place, we have also seen that when Constantine conquered Rome from Maxentius he made no change in the government. Nor did he make any when he removed the capital, other than to divide the empire into four parts, leaving Rome under the government of prefects, who represented the imperial power. This temporal power was not shared by the popes during his life. In the third place, we have also seen, upon the authority of Eusebius, that he had become dissatisfied with the bishops and clergy on account of disgraceful quarrels, and had, by imperial edict, confined them "to their proper law," that is, to their ecclesiastical functions; a fact which forbids the idea that he conferred temporal power upon the pope, when he knew that thereby he would violate his own edict. In the fourth place, he became in the end so greatly dissatisfied with the orthodox clergy, that he never united, by baptism, with the Roman Church, but "banished many Catholic bishops." ("Encyclopaedia Americana," art. Constantine.)

And still further, one hundred years had elapsed from the death of Constantine to the beginning of the pontificate of Leo the Great, during which time so many changes had occurred in the empire, under the government of more than a dozen emperors, that the condition of affairs created by Constantine could not be properly inferred from anything said by Leo to Marcian. The intervening years were too numerous, and the multitude of events too varied.

But a true understanding of the pontificate of Leo I. will show that, although he made extraordinary and almost superhuman efforts to grasp power which did not properly belong to the papacy, for the purpose of bringing all the other churches into obedience to that at Rome, yet that what he did in that direction was based exclusively upon his claim of spiritual supremacy, and not upon his possession of temporal power, either as conferred by grant from the empire, or as included in the spiritual. Any such claim as the latter, then asserted by him, would have brought him in open collision with the emperor—a result which, ambitious as he was, he was extremely and studiously anxious to avoid. Yet, at the same time, it is not to be disputed that Leo went as far as he dared to attach temporal supremacy to the spiritual "patrimony of Peter;" and if he failed, it was owing more to the firmness with which the Emperor Marcian retained possession of the imperial power than to the want of skill, tact, and ambition on the part of the pope; for the acknowledged possession of all which qualities he has been placed upon the calendar of Roman saints, and has won the title of Great.

He complained that the Patriarch of Constantinople had asserted rights as belonging to that see, which he insisted did not exist; and in a letter to Marcian begged him "to make use of his authority to keep the patriarch in order, and hinder him from encroaching upon the rights of other bishops;" ("Eccl. Hist.," by Du Pin, vol. iv., p. 96.) which conclusively proves that, even in reference to such spiritual jurisdiction as involved the obedience of other churches and bishops, he recognized himself as dependent on the emperor. When he wrote to the bishops he assumed an imperial air, and expressed himself in words of imperial authority; but when he addressed the emperor he exhibited the deference of inferiority.

The first Council of Nice, in the year 325, had fixed the time for the celebration of Easter, making it a matter of religious faith; yet Pope Leo I., more than a hundred years after, finding a controversy upon the subject still going on among Christians, wrote to the Emperor Marcian, beseeching him "to command" that steps be taken to bring about uniformity. (*Ibid.*, p. 99.) He also wrote to the empress, exhorting her to use her authority to bring some monks to submit to the Council of Chalcedon, which was held during his pontificate and was one of the ecumenical councils. (*Ibid.*) He had no power to restore Juvenal, Bishop of Jerusalem, to his see, after he had been expelled; and when it was done by the emperor, thanked him for it. ("Eccl. Hist.," by Du Pin, vol. iv., p. 99.) When disturbances existed in the Church of Alexandria, and both the contesting parties had addressed him on the subject, not having authority to quiet them, he appealed to the Emperor Leo to do so, and not to suffer heretics to thrust themselves into the government of the Church. (*Ibid.*, p. 102.) He also solicited the same emperor to send orthodox bishops to Alexandria, and to restore the bishops of Egypt, who had been driven out by the heretics. (*Ibid.*, p. 103.) When the emperor, of his own accord, removed an heretical bishop of the see of Alexandria, Pope Leo congratulated him upon the act, and requested the appointment of an orthodox bishop in his-place. (*Ibid.*, p. 104.)

Can there be any room to doubt, in the light of these facts, gathered from the work of a distinguished Roman Catholic historian, about the relations existing between the Emperors Marcian and Leo and Pope Leo I.? That his condition was one of dependence, is left beyond controversy; and dependence, too, to such an extent as precludes all possibility of his having possessed any temporal power over the affairs of Rome or any other part of the empire, or any authority even in spiritual matters beyond the local jurisdiction of the Church of Rome, and that only in the same sense and to the same extent as was possessed by other bishops ill the local jurisdiction of their several churches.

That Pope Leo I. was a great man and a great pope, nobody ought to question. He was so immeasurably above other popes immediately before and after him, that he is entitled to a prominent place in history. That he was also ambitious, is an accepted fact. But we should keep in mind the difference between the ambition to govern the world, and the power to do it: the one is a sentiment, the other a fact. He, undoubtedly, claimed that, as the successor of Peter at Rome, he was endowed with divine authority to govern all the churches of the world in spiritual things, because the Roman Church was the only one founded on Peter, and, therefore, was "the mother and mistress" of them all.

And that he would have stretched this authority so far as to have included temporals, but for the decisive stand taken by the emperors, is equally undoubted; for he went so far as to foreshadow the extraordinary pretensions which other popes attempted to justify, several centuries afterward, by the authority of the "False Decretals," which, as is well understood, were forged for the express purpose of supporting the temporal power. He brought the bishops and clergy so submissively at his feet, that, upon the reading of one of his letters in the Council of Chalcedon, in the year 451, the members

exclaimed, "Accursed be he that admits not that Peter has spoken by the mouth of Leo!" He was the first pope whose eloquent preaching stirred the people of Rome; and in the ecclesiastical world he reached a far higher degree of distinction than any of his predecessors. (*)

* Milman's "Latin Christianity," vol. i., ch. iv.; Reichel's "See of Rome," pp. 33, 93, 145. These Protestant authorities speak of him in high terms; but Cormenin, a Roman Catholic (vol. i., p. 83), censures both his ambition and his intolerance.

And if, in investigating the question of his temporal power, we were to confine ourselves to his claim and acts of spiritual supremacy alone, we might readily fall into the error of supposing that he was really a temporal prince. Whereas, the truth is, that he was not so in any proper sense; though one can well imagine that, as by far the greatest man in Rome, he must have been deferred to by the Roman people in all matters concerning the peace and welfare of the city; and more especially so, as he was a native of Rome and immediately and personally identified with its fortunes.

Thus, when Attila marched his army upon the city, and the whole population was thrown into consternation for fear he would ravage it, as he had done Pavia and Milan, the Senate was assembled to consider what measures of defense should be adopted. It was decided to send "an honorable embassy to Attila" with the view of obtaining pacific terms; and, by common consent, it was agreed that Pope Leo should be at the head of it, not merely because he was pope, but on account of his eminent ability. He occupied no such relation to the temporal affairs of the city as made him their especial guardian and protector, but, at the solicitation of the imperial authority and the Senate, accepted the position and went out to meet the terrible prince who had acquired the reputation of being "the scourge of God," and "enemy of mankind." He did not go as a temporal ruler, but at the solicitation of the civil authorities, representing the empire, in whose hands all the temporal power was lodged. He went as an ambassador, attended by Avienus and Trigetius, "two of the greatest men of the empire," and several senators.

At the point where the Mincio discharges itself into the Po near Mantua, an audience was granted to the embassy by Attila, which resulted in the withdrawal of his army beyond the Danube, and the safety of the city. It is represented by the papal writers, upon the authority of Baronius, who borrowed it from "a writer of the eighth century," that this result was brought about because "Attila saw two venerable personages, supposed to be the apostles St. Peter and St. Paul, standing on the side of the pope while he spoke; ("Lives of the Saints," by Buttler, vol. iv., p. 69.) as if it were produced by the special interposition of Providence. But this story is scarcely worthy of credit, because of the fact, if no other, that Attila was utterly insensible to all such influences and appearances. It was, undoubtedly, owing to the irresistible eloquence of Leo, to whom, on this account, and beyond all question, belong all the honor and glory of the achievement.

History records no more magnificent triumph, none which exhibits higher

personal qualities on the part of the chief actor. The speech of Leo, says Maimbourg, was "so fine and judicious, so forcible and moving," that Attila "was immediately softened," and from having been "a ravening wolf, as he was before, he became gentle as a lamb, and immediately granted him the peace he desired." ("Historical and Critical Dictionary," by Bayle, art. Leo I., vol. iii., p. 758 (B); second edition.)

There was nothing supernatural about this; no indication of any direct Providential interference through the agency of Peter's successor. And the additional story of an old man with a drawn sword having been seen by Attila in a vision, and his having been terrified by his threats, is still more unworthy of belief. Leo's reputation needs no such fictitious aid, no such monkish inventions; and is rather impaired than benefited by this and the foolish tale of his having cut off his hand, and its miraculous restoration, in answer to his prayers! (See Maimbourg, quoted by Baylve, vol. iii.)

Yet, great as his triumph over Attila was, there is satisfactory proof that there was nothing supernatural about it, in the fact that he was unable to achieve a like one over Genseric, when he afterward advanced upon Rome. Although his influence was then sufficient to cause three of the principal churches, including that of St. Peter, to be exempted from the general pillage, ("Historical and Critical Dictionary," by Bayle.) yet the city was otherwise subjected to terrible devastation. Everything that he did, on both these occasions, was consistent with distinguished citizenship merely; and was most appropriately performed by him as, personally, the greatest of living bishops—greater by far than any emperor who occupied the throne during his pontificate.

But high and distinguishing as were the qualities which rendered Pope Leo I. the most conspicuous man of his age, there is another aspect in which his character is to be viewed, which, while it exhibits his thorough devotion to the papacy, leaves a blot upon his reputation which no adulation can gloss over. And it proves also that the temporal power in Rome was not lodged in his hands, but in those of the emperor; behind whom, in this particular instance, it is found very convenient to shelter him from that just measure of indignation which is inherited by his persecuting and vindictive spirit.

An old law of the empire, enacted to please former persecuting popes, provided *for punishing heretics with death*; (*) but it had remained for a long time unexecuted, as the other emperors, imitating the example of Constantine, had been content to banish them merely. Priscillian, however, was put to death for heresy under this law, during the pontificate of Leo I., and he specially approved of and justified the bloody deed and all its accompanying horrors.

* It will appear at the proper place that a similar law was enacted in England when the papal power was supreme in that country.

The venerable Gnostic was imprisoned, bound with cords and chains, by the cruel and heartless monks, who were the mere tools and mercenaries of the pope. They "made his limbs crack under the pressure of his chains, and

plunged both of his feet into a heated brazier." They "tore from him his hair and the skin of his skull, they burned with hot iron all parts of his body, and poured upon his wounds boiling oil and melted lead, and at last plunged into his entrails a rod heated in the fire," from which, of course, after the most intense and excruciating agony, he expired. (Cormenin, vol. i., p. 86.) Although it is pretended that no pope ever directly sanctioned the shedding of blood on account of heresy, and the supporters of the papacy always throw the censure of such cruelty upon the secular authorities, yet Leo I. did approve and justify this horrid deed, and then endeavored to escape the consequences by charging it to the laws of the empire, which, if he had been a temporal prince in Rome, as is now asserted, he could have executed or suspended at his pleasure.(*)

The letter of this great pope, approving the infliction of the death penalty upon Priscillian, is referred to by three Roman Catholic historians. It is here given, that the reader may see the sentiments of the papacy, expressed by one of the greatest of the *infallible* (!) popes, in reference to the best method of disposing of heretics!

According to Cormenin, it was thus: "My lord, the rigor and severity of your justice against this heretic and his disciples have been of great aid to the clemency of the Church. We have heretofore been content with the mildness of the judgments which the bishops delivered in accordance with the canons, and we did not desire bloody executions; now, however, we have learned that it is necessary to be aided and sustained by the severe constitutions of the emperors; for the fear of religious punishment frequently makes heretics recur to a spiritual remedy, which can cure their souls from a mortal malady by a true conversion. —CORMENIN, vol. i., p. 86.

Maimbourg represents him as having praised the Emperor Maximus for the deed, and as saying:

"That the rigor and severity of his justice against that heresiarch (leader of heresy), and his disciples, whom this prince put to death, were a great assistance to the clemency of the Church. For though the Church contents herself with that leniency of judgment, which the bishops exercise according to the canons, against obstinate heretics, and admits of no bloody executions, it is, however, much aided and supported by the severe constitutions of the emperors, since the fear of so rigorous a punishment sometimes makes heretics have recourse to the spiritual remedy, to cure the mortal disease of their heresy by a sincere conversion."—BAYLE, vol. iii., p. 758 (A). Du Pin says that Leo, referring to the Priscillianists, said:

"That the magistrates themselves have had so great an hatred for that detestable sect, that they have used the severity of the laws against them, punishing the author and principal abettors with death. And that not without reason, because they saw that all laws, divine and human, would be subverted, and the civil society disturbed, if such persons, who divulged so detestable errors, were suffered to live. That this severity had been used a long time together with the leniency of the Church, because though the Church, being contented with the judgment of her bishops, avoids all sanguinary punishments, yet it is helped by the edicts of princes, which cause them that fear temporal penalties to have recourse sometimes to spiritual remedies."—Du PIN's *Eccl. Hist.*, vol. iv., p. 93.

The offense of Priscillian was that he adopted the doctrines of Manichaeus, who,

being a Persian, sought to coalesce the doctrines of the Persian magi with the Christian system. His execution was abhorred by the bishops of Gaul and Italy, who, unlike the pope, "had not yet learned that giving over heretics to be punished by the magistrates was either an act of piety or justice."—MACLAINE'S *Mosheim's Eccl. Hist.*, vol. i., p. 129.

For this act of approval, he must stand at the bar of the nineteenth century equally culpable as the civil authorities of the empire, and more so for the detestable sentiments in which it was expressed. But the fact that Priscillian was executed by the civil authorities settles, beyond all controversy, that Leo I., great and all-powerful as he was in spiritual affairs, did not possess any temporal power, even in Rome. And Archbishop Kenrick honestly concedes this when he says, "Although the Bishop of Rome was not yet a temporal prince, yet this spiritual power was surrounded with so great secular influence that he almost ranked as a prince;" (Kenrick, part ii., ch. i., p. 257.) manifestly, because of his high personal qualities, his great eloquence, and the energy of his will.

Yet the archbishop, immediately after making this concession, would have it to be implied that the popes did possess some temporal power, by the statement of the fact that, in the year 484, Pope Felix II. "complained to the Emperor Zeno that the laws of nations had been violated by the injurious treatment of his legates." (*Ibid.*) But this proves nothing to the purpose. It had long been the custom of the Christian nations to receive the legates of the pope, and to treat them with that degree of respect to which the Roman Church was entitled, so long as their missions were confined to spiritual matters. But none of them had yet been so reduced to obedience as to submit, without murmur, to the direct interference of the pope, either by legates or otherwise, with their secular affairs. Even in Spain, which was more under the influence of the pope than any other nation, his authority was restricted to matters concerning the Church.

The relations between the Emperor Zeno and Pope Felix II. were those of sovereign and subject. During the pontificate of Simplicius — immediately preceding that of Felix—Zeno became emperor, upon the death of the Emperor Leo. But a revolt was stirred up against him by Basilicus, who succeeded in driving him from the throne and taking possession of it. He expelled the orthodox and put heterodox prelates into their places, in which he was resisted by the Patriarch of Constantinople. Pope Simplicius approved the course of the patriarch at first; but afterward, with the hope of excluding Timotheus from the see of Alexandria on account of the rivalry between them, he advised him to resist Zeno, the legitimate emperor, and support the cause of Basilicus, the heretical usurper, thus giving his official support to heresy, and his sanction to an act of open revolt against the throne! The patriarch followed his advice to the extent of making war upon the supporters of Timotheus, and the empire was thrown into such commotion that Zeno was enabled with his army to retake possession of the throne by the expulsion of Basilicus.

This embarrassed the pope for a time; but, with true papal adroitness, he endeavored to restore himself to the good opinion of Zeno by taking his side.

He had no conscientious scruples about changing from one side to the other, provided he always found himself in concert with the strongest party. Zeno was not at all averse to the reconciliation, because, in the confused and unsettled condition of affairs, he needed the assistance of the pope to keep the empire in his hands. And an incident soon transpired showing that the pope did not intend to forfeit the protection of the emperor by any act invading the imperial jurisdiction. Each was playing the part of a skillful politician; power, and nothing else, being the stake they played for.

Upon the death of Timotheus, the priests of Alexandria elected his successor, without consulting either the emperor or the pope; the latter at that time, as Bishop of Rome, having no recognized jurisdiction over the Church at Alexandria. Zeno, incensed at this election, expelled the new bishop from his see, who in revenge appealed to Pope Simplicius, hoping to obtain his intervention in his favor. Probably the pope, in order to increase his own importance and authority, might have decided the appeal, but he was given to understand by the emperor that it was an affair beyond his jurisdiction, and he submitted to the necessity of non-interference, and left the emperor to have his own way, even upon this ecclesiastical matter, of so much importance as the appointment of a bishop over the Alexandrian Christians.

At the commencement of the pontificate of Felix II. this expelled bishop was at Rome, and so played upon the prejudices of the pope against Constantinople as to induce him to send legates to the emperor to protest against the protection given to heretics there. These legates, being engaged in what Zeno considered an insolent mission, were arrested by his orders, thrown into prison, and threatened with death. But they had an equal appreciation with the pope of the advantages of being on the strong side, and obtained their freedom by recognizing as the legitimate Bishop of Alexandria the heretic against whom Pope Felix had protested. When they returned to Rome, they were deposed and excommunicated. Failing then to bring the Patriarch of Constantinople over to his side, Pope Felix issued a bull of excommunication against him, and addressed to the emperor the letter mentioned by Archbishop Kenrick, complaining of the treatment of his legates. All this was done by virtue of his spiritual authority alone. But even in that aspect of it, nothing was accomplished by it, for all his pretensions were treated with scorn by the emperor, with whom he had no inclination to come into direct collision.

Although he had much to be proud of, and exercised plenary powers in all the ecclesiastic affairs at Rome; whenever he came in conflict with the emperor, even in reference to the domestic affairs of that city, he was reduced to the condition of a subject, and laid no claim to any temporal power whatever. And thus it is certain that at the close of the pontificate of Felix II., in the year 492, the Pope of Rome neither had, nor claimed to have, any temporal power, as a part of "the patrimony of Peter," or derived in any other way. He was a mere bishop, like the bishops of Alexandria, Corinth, and other places, and his powers were limited to the administration of spiritual affairs. In temporal matters he was as much subject to the emperor and the laws of the empire as any of the inferior clergy or the people.

The struggle, however, for the acquisition of temporal power went on all the

time, with results varying according to circumstances. The strong popes gained upon the weak emperors; but when the latter were courageous enough to assert and maintain the authority of the empire, the papacy was dwarfed into the narrowest proportions. The Church, in the mean time, was left to drift along into whatsoever currents the interest and ambition of the contending factions carried it, and the cause of genuine Christianity was made subordinate to political rivalries, and would have expired if God had not preserved, even in Rome, faithful guardians to shelter and preserve it.

The century which elapsed between the pontificate of Felix II. and that of Gregory I.—embracing the reigns of fifteen popes—contributed but little toward conferring temporal power upon the Bishop of Rome. The emperors continued to maintain their ascendancy, although the angry controversies between the Eastern and Western Christians kept up a perpetual strife between Rome and Constantinople, in which some of the popes proved themselves the superiors of the emperors in the management of public affairs. There was no relaxation of their efforts to consummate the policy of Pope Leo I. by bringing all the existing governments into subjection to the papacy. On the contrary, this became a ruling and controlling passion, which never underwent abatement, except when policy and expediency dictated it, and then only to make the final triumph more sure. In the year 498, two popes were elected—one at Constantinople, and the other at Rome. Neither being disposed to give up his pretensions, it was submitted to the judgment of King Theodoric, at Ravenna, to decide between them (Cormenin, vol. i., p. 97.) —a fact which proves that worldly policy, far more than the influence of the Holy Ghost, was allowed to settle the important question as to who should be the successor of Peter and God's Vicar on earth!

Pope Symmachus, in whose favor the king decided, while he made no claim of temporal power as against the emperor, did assert a spiritual jurisdiction over the world; which, if it had been conceded to him, would have absorbed the temporal power. He told the Emperor Anastasius that he was superior to all the princes of earth, because they governed human affairs, while he disposed of "*the goods of heaven*;" (Cormenin, vol. i., p.97.) a pretense precisely like that now set up by Pope Pius IX., that the ecclesiastical, being above the temporal and civil authority, has the divine right to dictate its policy and govern the world!

By the year 529, priestly ambition had become almost universal, and, as a natural consequence, popes were elected by intrigue and the most corrupt means. In that year Boniface II. was elected by one party, and a rival pope by an other party, at Rome. But Boniface triumphed over his rival, and had the satisfaction of anathematizing him after death had removed him out of the way. To prevent the recurrence of such an event, he convened a council in the Church of St. Peter at Rome, and had a decree passed allowing him to designate his successor! Having secured this extraordinary power, in violation of the universal practice of the Church, he appointed one whom he required the bishops to recognize "by oath and in writing!" This was, of course, infallibly done — without the possibility of error! But another council was soon after convened, and this decree was set aside, when Boniface cast his own infallible (!) bull into the flames. (*Ibid*)

At his death, "the Holy See, being set up at auction," was obtained by John II., who "*paid enormous sums to his competitors, and obtained the pontifical tiara.*" (*Ibid*) The senators, who then had a voice in the election, sold their votes openly, and the general corruption was shameless and disgusting. So little respect had one pope for another, that Pope Agapetus, the successor of Felix II., burned in public the bull of anathema which Pope Boniface had published against his rival; and thus one infallible pope condemned another!

Pope Agapetus was not much influenced by the prevailing ambition, and was disposed, both by precept and example, to arrest the evils of the times. He submitted, as a dutiful subject, to the Emperor Justinian in temporal affairs, and to the councils of the Church in spiritual, seemingly endowed with a commendable degree of Christian humility. On account of this, he never reached, on the records of church history, a higher eminence than to be known as a man of sincerity and of more integrity than most of the popes of that age.

At his death the scenes attending the election of his successor were disgracefully corrupt. Says Cormanin: "Priests sold their suffrages; cabals struggled, raised upon their competitors, and carried off the partisans of their adversaries; and at length victory remained with the richest, the most skillful, or the most corrupt." (Cormanin, vol. i., p. 110.) This same author also says that Silverius bought the pontificate from King Theodatus; (*Ibid.*) but Du Pin, while admitting that Anastasius affirmed this to be true, is disposed to doubt it, and to follow Liberatus, "an author more ancient and more credible than Anastasius," who supposed that the election of Silverius was regular and canonical. (Du Pin, vol. v., p. 46.) Be this as it may, it is unquestionably true that Theodatus desired to secure a pope devoted to his interest, that he might the more readily prevent Belisarius from marching his army upon Rome; and whether he sold the pontificate to Silverius or he was canonically elected, it cannot be doubted that the king assented to it with the understanding that he should have the assistance of the pope. But Belisarius entered Rome with an army of one hundred and fifty thousand Goths, and Silverius either did or "was suspected to hold correspondence" with him; thus betraying the king and turning over the city to these terrible enemies. (*Ibid.*)

If Belisarius thus enjoyed the fruits of the pope's treason, he was not disposed to leave the traitor unpunished. He therefore deposed Silverius, and elevated Vigilius to the pontificate. This infallible pope caused the deposed but equally infallible Silverius to be banished to a desert island, under charge of executioners, who put him to death by the slow process of starvation! (Du Pin, vol. v., p. 47.)

Yet, notwithstanding all this, Vigilius was recognized by a General Council and "acknowledged for a lawful pope," says Du Pin, "without proceeding to a new election, or even confirming that which had been made. (*Ibid.*) His name, as also that of Silverius, who has been made a saint—is found in every published list of the popes; and, strange as it may now seem, one of the ecumenical councils of the Church—the second of Constantinople—was held under his pontificate, and received all its authority and validity from his official approval, as the infallible successor of Peter! (*)

* The history of this General Council and of the pontificate of Vigilius is most instructive to the student of ecclesiastical history. The chief points of controversy in the Church, at that time, arose out of what were called "The Three Chapters," that is, the Nestorian heresy contained in the writings of Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrus—a letter of Ibas, Bishop of Edessa, and the works of Theodore, Bishop of Mopsuesta. These were condemned by the Emperor Justinian; but Pope Vigilius rejected his edict and excommunicated Theodorus of Cesarea, its author. The council was convened to settle the controversy. It condemned "The Three Chapters," but not their authors, having decided "that the works of an author could be justly censured without condemning him personally!" Vigilius refused, at first, to approve this condemnation, and was banished. "Nevertheless," says Du Pin, "not being guided by zeal for the truth, but by his own caprice or interest, he quickly condemned them after an authentic manner, that he might return into Italy."—*History of the Catholic Church*, by Noethen, p. 265; *Lives of the Saints*, by Butler, vols. iv., v., vi., p. 608; *Ecclesiastical History*, by Du Pin, vol. v., p. 47. For history of this council, see Du Pin, vol. v., p. 135.

He was made pope November 20th, 537, and the death of Silverius did not occur until June 20th, 538. Yet Butler says: "Vigilius was an ambitious intruder, and a schismatic, as long as St. Silverius lived; but after his death became lawful pope by the ratification or consent of the Roman Church, and from that time renounced the errors and commerce of the heretics," (Butler's " *Lives of the Saints*," vols. iv., V., vi., p. 608.) a method of covering up the heresy and tergiversations (subterfuge) of a pope neither ingenious nor plausible.

His fierce contest with the Emperor Justinian about the Three Chapters led to his being summoned to Constantinople by the emperor, when he was arrested and held in custody. On his return to Rome after his release, he died, as some have supposed, by poison; when Pelagius I., by order of Justinian, and without waiting for the formality of an election, clothed himself with the pontifical mantle and declared himself pope! When he reached Rome, the clergy and people refused to recognize him, and charged him with the murder of Vigilius. With the assistance, however, of the temporal authority of the emperor, he maintained himself on the chair of Peter for nearly four years. This combination of facts gives but little support to the pretense that popes are always elected by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and still less to the doctrine of papal infallibility and temporal power.

In the year 566, two bishops of Burgundy were convicted, by a provincial synod, of adultery, rape, and murder, and were expelled from their sees. They appealed to Pope John III., as spiritual head of the Roman Church, and he restored them. (Cormenin, vol. i., p. 120.) Such examples could not do otherwise than lead to many abuses and extortions, as well as to great assumption of pontifical authority. The latter was carried to such an extent, that some of the popes declared themselves the dispensers of a fourth part of the property of the Church, in order that thereby they might become the distributors of large rewards to their dependents and friends. By these means they were so rapidly becoming the rivals of princes, that the latter resolved upon resisting, with more firmness, their efforts to acquire absolute independence and superiority. The emperor, therefore, decreed that his consent should be necessary to the valid elections of the bishops of Rome,

Ravenna, and Milan. This decree was in force at the election of Pope Gregory I., in the year 590. Gregory—from humility, it is said—wrote to the emperor to induce him not to confirm his election; a circumstance which excludes all possibility of there having been any temporal power possessed by the popes up to the close of the sixth century.

The popes, unquestionably, struggled hard to acquire it, but without success. Their ambition was unbounded; and such was the character of the most of them that they would have adopted any means to obtain their end; yet they were held in inferiority by the strength of the imperial power, and compelled to remain subjects. By their machinations, and the perpetual schisms they engendered, they succeeded, in the end, in sundering all the bonds of affection and alliance between the Eastern and the Western Christians. They had to await the rise of more powerful allies in the West—of Pepin and Charlemagne—before they could break the ties of their allegiance to the empire. But they succeeded in this also, by the infliction of terrible blows upon the true prosperity of the Church.

If the peaceful diffusion of the Gospel had been their sole object, and the Christian spirit of charity and toleration had occupied their minds, their personal struggles with each other, and their numerous controversies about heresy, would have been attended with far less disastrous results, and would not have given rise to so much cruelty and persecution. But other and more unworthy motives prevailed, temporal ambition took the place of the higher Christian virtues, and whatever they did was centered in the groveling object of acquiring earthly power. The government of the world became the great prize for which the combatants contended, on both sides, and the cause of Christianity was only saved from final and complete overthrow by the sheltering protection of Providence, and the courage of the few pious and devoted men, who, in spite of all the prevailing corruption, preserved their own Christian integrity and the teachings of the apostolic fathers.

Continued in [Chapter X. Constantine Part 1.](#)