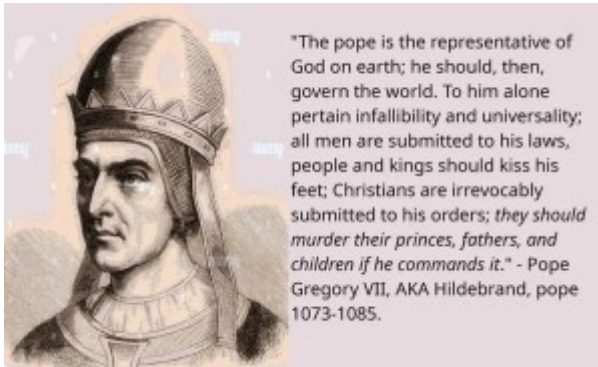


# The Papacy And The Civil Power –

## Chapter XIII. The False Decretals Part

### 1



Continued from [Chapter XII. The Ninth Century.](#)

**False Decretals**, a 9th-century collection of ecclesiastical legislation containing some forged documents. The principal aim of the forgers was to free the Roman Catholic church from interference by the state and to maintain the independence of the bishops against the encroachments of the archbishops, who were attempting to extend their power. (Source [Britannica.com](#))

The False Decretals.—Nicholas I. governed by Them.—His Character. Adrian II.—John VIII.—John XII.—Benedict IX.—Three Popes at Same Time.—German Emperors create Popes.—Leo IX.—Hildebrand.—He becomes Pope as Gregory VII.—Principles established by Him. His Quarrel with Philip of France.—His Bull against Henry IV.—He adopts the False Decretals.—Pius IX. does the Same.—Gregory VII. stirs up Revolt in Germany.—The Emperor Henry IV. in Rome.—Death of Gregory VII.—His Successors maintain his Policy.—Urban II.—Calixtus II.—Adrian IV. grants Ireland to England.—The Gratian Decretals.—They authorize Physical Compulsion and Torture.—Arnold of Brescia burned by Adrian IV.—Alexander III. and Victor IV.—Alexander III. releases the Subjects of Frederick Barbarossa from their Allegiance.—His Character.—Submission of Frederick.—The Third Lateran Council.—Decree authorizing Waldenses and Albigenses to be put to Death.—The Thirteenth Century.—Innocent III.—His Ambition and Usurpation.—His Claim of Divine Power.—He releases the Subjects of Otto from their Allegiance.—His Bull to put the Vaudois to Death.—The Inquisition.—Boniface VIII.—His Bull *Unam Sanctam*.—He caused a New Body of False Decretals to be composed.—Opposition of the Gallican Church.

WE shall leave our investigations incomplete, and our task unfinished, without further notice of the False Decretals and their contribution to the growth of the temporal power, inasmuch as the principles derived from them still remain a part of the canon law of Rome—those of the Encyclical and Syllabus of Pius IX. being taken in part from them—and as the present struggles of the papacy and its Jesuit supporters are designed for the purpose of reviving and enforcing them wheresoever they can obtain the power to do so.

Although there were many good and pious Christians among the early popes and clergy of Rome, yet there was enough in the vicious habits of many of those

who constituted the priesthood, at the time when these Decretals are alleged to have been dated, to justify the assignment of them to the popes whose names they bear. Many of them yielded to the influence of the example of Pope Victor, and the effect was apparent in their ambition and that of the clergy, which existed to such a degree that religion was almost entirely neglected, except in the mere ceremonial requirements of the Church. We have the authority of Eusebius—who is quoted by all Roman Catholic ecclesiastical authors as reliable authority—for the condition of the priesthood in his time. There is no other author whose history covers the times to which he refers, and as a leading prelate, and a member of the celebrated Council of Nice, he had ample opportunity for ascertaining the true condition of affairs. He says:

“But some that appeared to be our pastors, *deserting the law of piety*, were inflamed against each other with mutual strifes, only accumulating quarrels and threats, rivalry, hostility, and hatred to each other, only anxious to assert the government as a kind of sovereignty for themselves.” (\*)

\* “Eccl. Hist.,” by Eusebius, bk. viii., ch. i. At another place, in his “Book of Martyrs,” when speaking of the prelates of the Church, Eusebius says that he had “thought proper to pass by” other events than those related by him—that is, “particularly the circumstances of the different heads of the churches, who, from being shepherds of the reasonable flocks of Christ that did not govern in a lawful and becoming manner, were condemned, by divine justice, as unworthy of such a charge..... Moreover, the ambitions aspirings of many to office, and the injudicious and unlawful ordinations that took place, the divisions among the confessors themselves, the great schisms and difficulties industriously fomented by the factious among the new members against the relics of the Church, devising one innovation after another, and unmercifully thrusting them into the midst of all these calamities, heaping up affliction upon affliction; all this, I say, I have resolved to pass by, judging it foreign to my purpose, wishing, as I said in the beginning, to shun and avoid giving an account of them.”—*Book of Martyrs*, ch. xii., pp. 374, 375.

And it is said by Cormenin that Marcellinus—who was pope in the year 304, and has been canonized as a saint even abjured the Christian religion, in order thereby to escape the persecution of the Emperor Diocletian! (Cormenin, vol. i., p. 48.) Even if these things were not true to the extent alleged, they were sufficiently so, beyond all question, to have had an injurious influence upon the cause of true piety, and to have placed the affairs of the Church in an unsettled and precarious condition, the precise extent of which it is now exceedingly difficult to ascertain. And this accounts, in a large measure, for the pertinacity with which these False Decretals have been assigned to those times.

Their authors well understood, at the date of their origin, and their defenders understand now, how easy it is to make history, and to make it acceptable to credulous minds, especially where there is no precise detail of facts to expose their falsehoods and assumptions. By all Roman Catholics who accept the teachings of the Church uninquiringly, these Decretals are regarded yet as true and genuine, because they have been put forth and endorsed by infallible popes, and because they are so instructed by their

bishops and priests; while the bishops and priests deliberately employ them as the means of continuing their hierarchical power and authority, and thus gratifying their inordinate ambition.

Mosheim, after pointing out how different the ecclesiastical system of the ninth century was from that which prevailed in the ancient Church, says that the popes found it "necessary to produce the authority of ancient deeds to stop the mouths of such as were disposed to set bounds to their usurpations;" and he then proceeds:

"The bishops of Rome were aware of this; and as those means were deemed the most lawful that tended best to the accomplishment of their purposes, they employed some of their most ingenious and zealous partisans in *forging* conventions, acts of councils, epistles, and the like records, by which it might appear that in the first ages of the Church the Roman pontiffs were clothed with the same spiritual majesty and supreme authority which they now assumed.

Among these fictitious supports of the papal dignity the famous Decretal Epistles, as they are called, said to have been written by the pontiffs of the primitive time, deserve chiefly to be stigmatized. They were the production of an obscure writer, who fraudulently prefixed to them the name of Isidore, Bishop of Seville, to make the world believe that they had been collected by this illustrious and learned prelate. Some of them had appeared in the eighth century, but they were now entirely drawn from their obscurity, and produced, with an air of ostentation and triumph, to demonstrate the supremacy of the Roman pontiffs.

The decisions of a certain Roman Council, which is said to have been holden during the pontificate of Sylvester, were likewise alleged in behalf of the same cause; but this council had not been heard of before the present century, and the accounts now given of it proceeded from the same source with the Decretals, and were equally authentic. Be that as it may, the decrees of this pretended council contributed much to enrich and aggrandize the Roman pontiffs, and exalt them above all human authority and jurisdiction." (Maclaine's "Mosheim's Church History," part ii., ch. ii., p. 216.)

Dean Milman, one of the most learned and reliable authors of the present times, says: "The False Decretals do not merely assert the supremacy of the popes—the dignity and privileges of the Bishop of Rome—they comprehend the whole dogmatic system and discipline of the Church, the whole hierarchy from the highest to the lowest degree, their sanctity and immunities, their persecutions, their disputes, their right of appeal to Rome.... But for the too manifest design, the aggrandizement of the see of Rome and the aggrandizement of the whole clergy in subordination to the see of Rome; but for the monstrous ignorance of history, which betrays itself in glaring anachronisms, and in the utter confusion of the order of events and the lives of distinguished men—the former awakening keen and jealous suspicion, the latter making the detection of the spuriousness of the whole easy, clear, irrefragable—the False Decretals might still have maintained their place in ecclesiastical history. They are now given up by all; not a voice is raised in their favor; the utmost that is done by those who cannot suppress all

regret at their explosion is to palliate the guilt of the forger, to call in question or to weaken the influence which they had in their own day, and throughout the later history of Christianity." ("Latin Christianity," by Milman, vol. iii., pp. 59, 60.)

That they are now, and have been for many years, regarded as forgeries by candid Roman Catholics, even among the ultramontanes, is undoubtedly true. Marchetti says: "Learned men of great piety have declared against these false collections, which Cardinal Bona frankly calls a *pious fraud*."

"Baronius does not as frankly regard them as a fraud; nevertheless, he would not use them in his 'Ecclesiastical Annals,' lest it should be believed that the Roman Church needed suspicious documents to establish her rights."

Marchetti also says: "We may conjecture that Isidore gathered the decretals of ancient popes which the persecutions of the first centuries had not permitted to be collected, and that, animated by a desire to transmit the collection to posterity, he made such haste that he overlooked some faults and chronological errors, which were afterward corrected by a more exact criticism." (Apud Abbe Guettee, in his late work on "The Papacy," p. 258 (note). )

While they are here rejected as false, or, at least, as suspicious, there is an evident disinclination to give them up. Yet Fleury, the great Roman Catholic historian, is too frank to participate in the imposture or to exhibit any such inconsistency. He thus disposes of them:

"The subject-matter of these letters reveals their spuriousness. They speak of archbishops, primates, patriarchs, as as if these titles had existed from the birth of the Church. They forbid the holding of any council, even a provincial one, without permission from the pope, and represent appeals to Rome as habitual. Frequent complaint is therein made of usurpations of the temporalities of the Church. We find there this maxim, *that bishops falling into sin may, after having done penance, exercise their functions as before*. Finally, the principal subject of these Decretals is that of complaints against bishops; there is scarcely one that does not speak of them and give rules to make them difficult. And Isidore makes it very apparent in his preface that he had this matter deeply at heart." ("Eccl. Hist.," by Fleury, liv., xliv.; apud Guettee, p. 260 (note).)

The purpose and immediate effect of the False Decretals were shown in the last chapter, in the encyclicals, decrees, and letters of Pope Nicholas I. It was during his pontificate that they took" their place in the jurisprudence of Latin Christendom," ("Latin Christianity," by Milinai, vol. iii., p. 58.) by becoming an essential part of" the law of the Church." He introduced them at Rome with true pontifical audacity, and the whole history of his pontificate shows that he regarded them as contributing material aid to his ambition. He did not hesitate to employ them, most unblushingly, as a justification for his outrageous blasphemies and usurpations. (\*)

\* "Soon after receiving the new implements forged in the *Isidorian workshop* (about 863 or 864), Nicholas met the doubts of the Frankish bishops with the assurance

that the Roman Church had long preserved all those documents with honor in her archives, and that every writing of a pope, even if not part of the Dionysian collection of canons, was binding on the whole Church."—*The Pope and the Council*, by "Janus," p.80. See, also, *Church of France*, by Jervis, vol. i., p. 34. D'Aguesseau says that these Decretals may be "more correctly styled the body of the pope's law than of the law of the Church." *Apud Jervis, Church of France*, vol. i., p. 36 (note).

Now, when it is remembered that he did not—become pope till the year 858; that previous to that time nothing of the kind had been known to exist at Rome; and that the assumption of all—absorbing supremacy was based upon these palpable forgeries, he must be a bold man, and greatly insensible to shame, who will, in this enlightened and inquiring age, attempt to excuse or palliate his conduct. Even during his pontifical reign, powerful as he became, the French, or Gallican, bishops were not subdued by his threats of anathema and excommunication.

After the Synod of Metz, in France, had sustained the claims of Lothaire to his kingdom, which Nicholas was endeavoring to wrest from him, he tore up its decrees, pronounced it to be "an assembly of brigands and robbers," and "declared the French prelates to be deprived of episcopal power." He excommunicated and anathematized all who opposed the measures of his grasping ambition. But Gonthier, Metropolitan of Cologne; Teutgard, Archbishop of Treves; John of Ravenna, and "a great number of other bishops," addressed him a letter, wherein they called him "infamous," "a greedy robber," "the murderer of Christians," "iniquitous and cruel priest," "sanguinary wolf," "cowardly tyrant," "the most infamous of the ministers of the temple of God," "shameless cockatrice," "venomous serpent," "dog," and by other names equally expressive of indignation and contempt; and concluded in these words:

#### **BISHOPS DENOUNCE NICHOLAS I.**

"We doubt neither thy venom nor thy bite; we have resolved with our brethren to tear thy sacrilegious decretals, thy impious bulls, and will leave thee to growl forth thy powerless thunders. Thou darest to accuse of impiety those who refuse from love to the faith to submit to thy sacrilegious laws! Thou who castest discord among Christians; thou who violatest evangelical peace, that immortal mark which Christ has placed upon the forehead of his Church; thou, execrable pontiff, who spits upon the book of thy God, thou darest to call us impious! How, then, wilt thou call the clergy which bends before thy power, those unworthy priests vomited forth from hell, and whose forehead is of wax, their heart of steel, and their sides are formed of the wine of Sodom and Gomorrah! Go to, these ministers are well made to crawl under thy abominable pride, in thy Rome, frightful Babylon, which thou callest the holy city, eternal and infallible! Go to, *thy cohort of priests, soiled with adulteries, incests, rapes, and assassinations*, is well worthy to form *thy infamous court*; for Rome is the residence of demons, and *thou, pope, thou art its Satan*." (Cormenin, vol. i., p. 241.)

These bold and defiant words go to prove that there was, for a time at least, formidable opposition to the ambitious intrigues of the popes. The French and German clergy were so far removed from the neighborhood of Rome that they

were slow to become the mere slaves of papal dictation. They looked rather to their own sovereigns for protection—which soon brought them all, sovereigns and subjects, under the pope's censure and excommunication. And thus arose, out of these Decretals, that abhorrent and dangerous doctrine which so disgraced the Middle Ages, by which the popes claimed the power to release the subject from his allegiance to any disobedient prince, and to put any of the kingdoms under interdict, on account of matters merely temporal, and in no way concerning the faith of the Church.

An instance of this kind occurred under the pontificate of Adrian II., the immediate successor of Nicholas I. (\*)

\* Pope Adrian II. was a married man. His wife's name was Stephanina. He had a daughter, who was stolen away by the son of another prelate!—CORMENIN, vol. i., p. 250; MILMAN, vol. iii., p. 67.

When Lothaire, King of Lorraine, died, he left no rightful heir to his kingdom; and a claim to it was set up by his brother Louis, who prevailed upon Adrian to espouse his cause and to interfere in his behalf by the employment of his pontifical authority. The pope wrote to the lords of Lorraine, not requesting merely, but commanding them to support the pretensions of Louis. He irreverently and impiously made this command "in the name of Christ," and threatened all the metropolitans, dukes, and counts with excommunication in the event of their disobedience. He told them that, if they did not obey him, they should "be struck by the arms which God has placed in our [his] hands for the defense of this prince;" (Cormenin, vol. i., p. 255; Milman, vol. iii., p. 71.) thus perverting the religious functions of his office by using them to accomplish ends entirely worldly.

Charles the Bald, in the mean time, seized upon the dominions of Lothaire, and was crowned King of Lorraine with the consent of the people, and by the bishops of the kingdom. Pope Adrian was greatly incensed. He declared that all who should assist Charles in his diabolical usurpation "would fall under anathema, and be given up to the companions of the devil." He told the bishops of Lorraine that by the coronation of Charles "they were preparing him for hell." (Milman, vol. iii., p. 71.)

While he did not accomplish anything by this impertinent intermeddling with the affairs of a government over which he had no legal control, yet he exhibited the purpose to interpose his pontifical power between Charles and his subjects, and thus to make himself master of their temporal affairs. That he did it under the claim of authority assumed by previous popes, and affirmed by the False Decretals, there is no reason to doubt. Milman says, "He quoted against the king the irrefragable authority of passages from the pseudo-Isidorian Decretals" that is, from the pretended letters of Popes Lucius and Stephen. (*Ibid.*, p. 76.)

## **ADRIAN II. STIRS UP REVOLT IN FRANCE.**

And thus these miserable forgeries began early to bear their natural fruit. So strongly did Adrian rely upon them to sustain his presumptuous demands,

that he ventured to censure Charles for having dared to insult his pontifical authority, and for not having prostrated himself at the feet of his legates! His letter to him concludes thus: "Impious king, we order thee to retire from the kingdom of Lorraine, and to surrender it to the Emperor Louis. If thou refusest submission to our will, we will ourselves go into France to excommunicate thee, and drive thee from thy wicked throne." (Cormenin, vol. i., p. 257.)

Finding Charles unmoved by his threats, Adrian sent legates into France to excite Carloman, the king's son, to revolt against his father—a favorite mode of procedure with the popes of that age, and which they tried to justify to themselves and the world upon the ground that the good of the Church required it, and therefore that God approved it. Carloman willingly entered into the papal plans; but he was arrested by Charles before they were carried into execution, and severely punished. Charles then sent the pope's legates back to Rome, accompanied by his own ambassadors, who bore a letter from Hinemar, Archbishop of Rheims, on his own behalf and that of the French bishops, in which Adrian was severely censured, and given to understand, in plain and most emphatic terms, that neither his anathemas nor excommunications would prevent Charles from holding on to the kingdom of Lorraine. At this the pope became perfectly infuriated, and immediately wrote to Charles, calling him an "execrable prince," ordering him to surrender Lorraine to Carloman, whose treason he had already excited, and informing him that if he did not, he would send his legate into his "accursed kingdom" to deal with him as he should think proper. He commanded the French lords not to take up arms in defense of their king, the French bishops not to obey his orders—all "under the penalty of excommunication and eternal damnation."

Charles now became irritated "by the audacity and insolence of this letter," and instructed Archbishop Hinemar to give the pope to understand, in unmistakable terms, and without further equivocation, that he would no longer submit to this unwarrantable interference with the domestic affairs of France. Among other things, Hinemar's letter in behalf of the king contained these strong words:

"We are established by God sovereign over the people, and are armed with a twofold sword, to strike the wicked and defend the good." Bold as the pope was, and secure as he felt himself to be, in that ignorant and superstitious age, under the protection of the False Decretals, he now became alarmed at the intrepidity of the King of France. He knew that Hinemar had counseled the king to separate France from Italy, on account, mainly, of the controversy between the pope and the Gallican Christians, and he greatly dreaded this result, on account of the fact that the withdrawal of French protection would expose Rome to powerful and vindictive enemies in other directions. He was anxious to hold on to France by means of the alliance formed by his predecessors with Pepin and Charlemagne, and govern its kings, at least to the extent of being able to employ their military strength in defense of the papacy; but finding Charles not disposed to bow before him, either his courage failed him, or he resolved upon practicing such duplicity as other popes besides him have well understood how to employ. In this art he was a perfect adept. Consequently, he intermediately retracted everything he had

said against Charles in a letter which, as a specimen of papal insincerity and hypocrisy, has scarcely a parallel.

It shows how unreliable has been the judgment of at least one of the great popes about the duty which men owe to God. What it is one day it is not the next, accordingly as the pope's views of temporal policy may change, or as the papacy is the gainer or the loser! Here is what he said to the king:

"Prince Charles, we have been apprised by virtuous persons that you are the most zealous protector of churches in the world; that there exists not in your immense kingdom any bishopric or monastery on which you have not heaped wealth, and we know that you honor the see of St. Peter, and that you desire to spread your liberality on his vicar, and to defend him against all his enemies.

"We consequently retract our former decisions, recognizing that you have acted with justice in punishing a guilty son and a prelatial (prelate) debauchee, and in causing yourself to be declared sovereign of Lorraine and Burgundy. We renew to you the assurance that we, the clergy, the people, and the nobility of Rome, wait with impatience for the day on which you shall be declared king, patrician, emperor, and defender of the Church. *We, however, beseech you to keep this letter a secret from your nephew Louis.*" (Cormenin, vol. i., p. 259.)

Thus we see how these False Decretals became a part of the canon law of Rome, how they were expressly prepared in aid of papal ambition, and how unblushingly they were employed to justify perfidious popes in assuming, as one of their official prerogatives derived from Peter, the right to dictate the temporal policy of governments, to make and unmake kings, and to require universal obedience; such obedience as should be prescribed by an ecclesiastical hierarchy raised above all human laws, entitled to commit the highest crimes, and to perpetrate all sorts of wrongs with impunity and without responsibility to any tribunals except those which were the mere passive and submissive tools of the papal will.

True, the blow aimed by Adrian II. at the rights of the French king recoiled upon his own head, and taught him that the Gallican Christians, under the lead of Hincmar, were not as easily reduced to obedience as were those of Italy, upon whose necks he had already planted his pontifical heel. But his immediate successor, John VIII., endeavored to recover from the effects of this recoil, and to regain the ground he had lost by recognizing the refractory Charles as the legitimate sovereign of Lorraine and Burgundy. This he resolved to do, if possible, by imitating the perfidious policy of Adrian; so as to bring Charles, by flattery, into the meshes of his pontifical net—a result which he well understood could not be accomplished by threats. Accordingly, he offered to make him "the protector of the Holy See," and for that purpose invited him to Rome. Charles could not resist the temptation, and, upon going to Rome, was crowned emperor by the pope, who, true to the papal policy, took care to say to him, as he placed the crown upon his brow, "Do not forget, prince, that *the popes have the right to create emperors!*" (*Ibid.*, vol. i., p. 260.)



Charles was overcome by his ambition, and by accepting the crown upon these conditions reduced the empire over which he presided to the humiliating condition of a fief to the Holy See, and gave his sanction to the custom of crowning emperors by the popes; and, in the end, to the recognition of their authority over all the governments and temporal affairs of Europe. With what complacency such examples as this are referred to by the papal writers in proof of the pope's supremacy! An agreement between kings and popes that they shall jointly govern all mankind is held up to the world as a part of the law of God! Shall this example of the ninth century be repeated in the nineteenth? Or shall those who are now seeking to repeat it be rebuked by the voice of popular indignation, which shall ring in their ears so long as they shall live?

But the end sought for was only reached by slow degrees and by gradual usurpations. It took many years of severe struggle on the part of the popes to consummate it, by the abolition of the old and the introduction of the new ecclesiastical system founded upon the pseudo-Isidorian Decretals. It required the combined intellect, courage, and unbending will of the three great popes, Gregory VII., Alexander III., and Innocent III., to do what all the other popes were unable to accomplish; that is, to elevate the papacy above all the nations, and place emperors and kings at their feet.

The author of "The Pope and the Council"—a book that deserves careful study, not merely because of the great ability it displays, but because it is written by a Roman Catholic, though opposed to papal infallibility—thus speaks of the times following immediately after the pontificates of Nicholas I., Adrian II., and John VIII.:

"Nearly three centuries passed before the seed sown produced its full harvest. For almost two hundred years, from the death of Nicholas I. to the time of Leo IX., the Roman See was in a condition which did not allow of any systematic acquisition and enforcement of new or extended rights. For above sixty years (883–955) the Roman Church was enslaved and degraded, while the Apostolic See became the prey and the plaything of rival factions of the nobles, and for a long time of ambitious and profligate women. It was only renovated for a brief interval (997–1003) in the persons of Gregory V. and Sylvester II., by the influence of the Saxon emperor. Then the papacy sunk back into utter confusion and moral impotence; the Tuscan counts made it hereditary in their family; again and again dissolute boys, like John XII. (\*) and Benedict IX., (#) occupied and disgraced the apostolic throne, which was now bought and sold like a piece of merchandise; and at last three popes fought for the tiara, until the Emperor Henry III. put an end to the scandal by elevating a German bishop to the see of Rome." ("The Pope and the Council," by "Janus," pp. 80, 81.)

\* John XII. was made pope A.D. 956, when he did not exceed eighteen years of age, and some authors represent him as only twelve. He was exceedingly dissolute, and was accused of incest with his own mother! Baronius, the great annalist, calls him "an abortion."—CORMENIN, vol. i., p. 292.

# Benedict IX. became pope A.D. 1033, at twelve years of age. He was driven from

Rome; and Sylvester III. was made pope A.D. 1044. Sylvester was driven out by Benedict, at the end of about three months, when the latter again mounted the pontifical throne. He then sold the tiara, for fifteen thousand pounds of gold, to John XX., who entered upon the pontificate A.D. 1045. Benedict soon dissipated the money, when he retook the "chair of Peter" from John— thus making three "vicars" at the same time! They finally agreed to hold their orgies together, and "filled Rome with adultery, robbery, and murder," and finally united in selling the pontificate to Gregory VI., and concluded the bargain "on the very altar of Christ itself!" Clement II. succeeded Gregory VI., when Benedict IX., "at the head of a troop of brigands," again seized the throne. The emperor then made Damasus II. pope; and Benedict, getting rid of him by poison in a few days, once more placed the tiara upon his brow. The Emperor of Germany then put an end to these disgraceful scenes by giving the pontificate to Leo IX.—*Ibid.*, pp. 328, etc.

The emperor having, by virtue of his temporal sovereignty over the empire (including Italy), obtained this recognized authority over the popes, they became, from necessity, more subject to Teutonic than to the Frankish influences by which they had been directed from the time of their alliance with Pepin and Charlemagne. The Saxon and Salique emperors had by that time placed Germany in the very front rank of the nations; and although the German people were devoted, from education and habit, to the Roman Catholic religion, even then they gave occasional evidences of that natural love of freedom which has since enabled them to reach a condition of superiority over the Latin races, and to assert principles which have become essential to all the advancing and progressive governments of the world. The emperors protected the popes of their own creation with strong hands; and but for this, it is almost certain that the Church at Rome would have been overwhelmed by Italian corruption, and have sunk out of sight. ("Hist. of the Popes," by Ranke, p. 23.)

After the Emperor Henry III. had placed Leo IX., a German, in the pontifical chair, in preference to an Italian, it became well understood by all the aspirants for that position that, in whatsoever manner selected, no pope could be recognized as such without his consent. He swayed his temporal scepter over all parts of the empire, including the city of Rome. But this condition of affairs was submitted to by the Italians from necessity, not choice; and influences designed to counteract it were readily contrived. Among those most conspicuous in these counter-movements was the celebrated Hildebrand, afterward Pope Gregory VII., who employed all his acknowledged ability in the endeavor to persuade even the German popes that it was beneath their dignity to accept the tiara from a temporal prince. His ambition led him to abandon his cloistered life, that he might put himself into a position ultimately to become pope, and by these means he hoped to lay the foundation of that system of measures out of which subsequently arose, under his skillful management, that vast pontifical power which he wielded with so much success over emperors, kings, and peoples. For more than a quarter of a century before he became pope—passing through the reigns of eight popes—Hildebrand exercised a larger share of influence at Rome than any other man, not a pope, had ever done before. This commanding position was owing to his great courage, superior talents, and unbending will all of which were employed to gratify his inordinate ambition.

His leading and most cherished object was to overthrow the power of the emperors and establish the papal supremacy, not only at Rome, but elsewhere throughout the world. While Henry III. lived, he practiced his intrigues with great caution; but at his death, when Henry IV. became emperor, at five years of age, he took advantage of his minority, and more openly and daringly avowed his purpose. Although the popes Leo IX., Victor II., Stephen IX., Nicholas II., and Alexander II. all held their positions with the consent of these emperors, yet none of them was able to conduct the affairs of the Church upon any other policy than that dictated by Hildebrand, before whom they were all dwarfed into comparative insignificance. And when he himself became pope as Gregory VII., he had laid his plans so skillfully, that, while also compelled to obtain the assent of Henry IV. to his pontifical ordination, he had very clearly marked out his way to ultimate success.

He took his place at once in the very front rank of the leading men of his age. Like some giant oak which overshadows all the lesser trees of the forest, he rose to an immense height above all around him, and so impressed all Europe by the superiority of his intellect, that it required centuries to get rid of the influences of his pontificate. No man in history has received more fulsome praise or more violent censure; and while this is not the place to inquire which of these he most deserved, it cannot be denied that among all his other qualities none distinguished him so much as his ambition—his desire to make the papacy the governing and controlling power of the whole world, in both spiritual and temporal affairs. In this aspect of his character alone is it now proposed to view him.

Gregory VII. commenced his pontificate by asserting the right to dispose of kingdoms, in imitation of the example set by Pope Gregory I., nearly four hundred years before. He granted to the Count of Champagne, in consideration of large sums of money, the right to conquer the kingdom of Arragon; and authorized him and other lords to seize upon the territory held by the Saracens and erect it into an independent kingdom, subordinate to the papacy. He quarreled with Philip, King of France, and threatened him with anathema if he refused to obey him. He concerted measures to force all the bishops and priests of the Church to the practice of celibacy, so that, separated from all family and domestic influences, they might constitute a great army, thoroughly and entirely devoted to the papacy. He roused up all the superstitious populations of Europe to undertake a holy war, by marching to Palestine and wresting it from the hands of the infidel; and failed to execute this purpose only because he feared the power of the Emperor of Germany, who opposed it. He took from the King of France the power of investing bishops, and excommunicated him for his resistance to his will. He directed the bishops of France to put the whole kingdom under interdict, and to tell the king, if he persisted in his refusal to obey him, that "the thunders of St. Peter will strike him, as God before struck Satan." He summoned Henry IV. to appear before a council in Rome, under penalty of anathema, in case of disobedience; and when Henry threatened him in turn, he issued his bull of excommunication against him not because of his want of devotion to the faith of the Church, but on account of their differences upon questions merely temporal.

In this celebrated bull he appealed to the "holy mother of God, St. Paul, and all the saints in heaven," to witness his sincerity, and then declared: "But since I have reached this throne by your grace, I believe that it is your will that Christian people should obey me, by virtue of the power which you [St. Peter] have transmitted to me of binding and loosing in heaven and on earth. Thus, for the safety of the Church, and in the name of God all-powerful, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, I prohibit Henry, who by reason of an unheard of pride has elevated himself against us, from governing the kingdoms of Germany and Italy. I free all Christians from the oaths which they have taken to him, and I prohibit all from serving him as king; for he who would oppose our authority deserves to lose his crown, his liberty, and his life. I burden Henry, then, with anathema and malediction; I devote him to the execration of men, and I deliver up his soul to Satan, in order that the people may know that the sovereign pontiff is the rock upon which the Son of the living God has built his Church, and that the gates of hell shall never prevail against it." (Cormenin, vol. i., p. 370; "See of Rome in the Middle Ages," by Reichel, p. 208; "Latin Christianity," by Milman, vol. iii., pp. 437, 438.)

Gregory, far too bold for disguise, does not here pretend, as do many of the modern papists, that his right to interfere in the domestic affairs of Germany, so far as to dethrone the emperor and release all his subjects from their allegiance to him, was derived from the consent of the nations or from any human authority. He placed it upon the ground where the present pope and all his hierarchy understand it to rest; that is, upon the power to bind and loose—the power of the keys—as derived directly from God. In this sense he regarded it as a power sufficiently great and omnipotent to absorb all other power upon earth, by the possession of which, as the successor of Peter, he had the right to make and unmake kings, to construct and reconstruct governments, to wrest from those who disobeyed him all the territory held by them, and to bestow it upon those who would hold it in subjection to his authority, and to do any and everything, no matter what, necessary to put the whole world under his feet. He had deliberately formed the purpose of creating an absolute and universal monarchy in the Church, and a no less extensive and despotic civil monarchy which should overshadow all existing nations, and had the courage to declare that he was acting in obedience to the commands of God, who had given him, as his earthly vicar, full power over all mankind, so that he could open or close the gates of heaven or of hell to them at his pleasure. He desired to bind all the people of every nation by a bond of allegiance to the Roman pontiffs, as the successors of Peter, so that all the contests in which nations or men should become involved should be settled at Rome, where the sole power of arbitrament and decision should exist. (Maclaine's Mosheim, part ii., bch. ii., p. 269.)

And the ground upon which he rested this enormous claim of authority shows that he had no other idea in his mind than that it rightfully belonged to him as the head of the Roman Catholic Church. He placed his right to command Philip of France expressly upon the ground that both that country and the soul of the king "were under the dominion of St. Peter," by virtue of his right "to bind and loose, in heaven and upon earth," well knowing, as he did, that the popes were indebted for all their dignity and dominion to the French

princes, Pepin, Charlemagne, and their successors.

He pretended that Saxony was held as a fief in subjection to the papacy, because Charlemagne had given it as a pious offering to St. Peter. He maintained that Spain was the property of the Apostolic See; and that he had the right, by virtue of divine appointment, to exact homage of the Emperor of Germany, and the Kings of England, Hungary, Denmark, Poland, Russia, and all the powers and principalities of Europe, and to release their subjects from their allegiance in case of refusal, because they were all held in the same right. (Maclaine's Mosheim, part ii., chap. ii., p. 270.) Therefore, when he found that there were many refractory bishops who were unwilling to be drawn away from the support of their own kings, he endeavored to incite them to disobedience and revolt, by such letters as the following, which he addressed to the Bishop of Metz:

"As for those who maintain that kings cannot be legitimately deposed by popes, I refer them to the words and the example of the fathers; and they will learn that St. Peter said, 'Be ye always ready to punish the guilty, whatever their rank.' Let them consider the motives which induced Pope Zachary to depose King Childeric, and to free all the Franks from their oath of fidelity. Let them learn that St. Gregory in his Decretals [A.D. 590-604] not only excommunicated the lords and kings who opposed the execution of his orders, but that he even deprived them of their power. Let them not forget that St. Ambrose himself drove from the temple the Emperor Theodosius, calling him a profane man, sacrilegious, and a murderer.

"Perhaps these miserable slaves of kings would maintain that God, when he said to St. Peter, 'Feed my lambs,' excepted princes; but we will demonstrate that Christ, in giving to the apostle power to bind and loose men, *excepted no one*. The Holy See has absolute power over all spiritual things: why should it not also rule temporal affairs? God reigns in the heavens; *his vicar should reign over all the earth*. These senseless wretches, however, maintain that the royal is above the episcopal dignity. Are they, then, ignorant that the name of king was invented by human pride, and that the title of bishop was instituted by Christ? St. Ambrose affirms that the episcopate is superior to royalty, as gold is superior to a viler metal." (Cormenin, vol. i., p. 371; Milman's "Latin Christianity," vol. iii., p. 445.)

Here we have an example of the manner in which precedent may be made an apology for the most flagrant usurpation. Without pretense of authority for the construction he gave to the words of Christ when he conferred the power to bind and loose upon the apostles, except that derived from the examples of Popes Gregory I. and Zachary, the bold ambition of Gregory VII. prompted him to declare that this was sufficient for his purpose. He reached this conclusion manifestly because he regarded all popes, both good and bad, as infallible, and therefore incapable of error. In the same way the whole system of papal supremacy is built up: *one pope proving the existence of his enormous spiritual and temporal power by another!*

Thus, after the pontificate of Gregory VII. had ended, Alexander III. added him to the list of examples; and then Innocent III. added Alexander; and Boniface VIII. added Innocent; and now, in the nineteenth century, and in the

face of all its progress, when the list is brought down to Pius IX., he invokes, in support of the doctrines of the Encyclical and Syllabus of 1864, the examples of all his "illustrious predecessors!"

Gregory VII. carried his interference in the affairs of Germany further than merely issuing papal bulls against Henry IV. He succeeded in stirring up revolt against him among the German nobles, who elevated Rudolph, Duke of Suabia, to the imperial throne, in opposition to Henry. The pope issued a decree in favor of Rudolph, again declaring Henry dispossessed of the crown, invoking upon his head the thunders of heaven, and declaring Rudolph "the lawful king of the Teutonic States." Then, addressing St. Peter and St. Paul, he said:

"Now, blessed St. Peter and St. Paul, let the world know, by giving victory to Rudolph, that you can bind and loose in heaven; that you can give or take away empires, kingdoms, principalities, duchies, marquisates, countships, and the goods of all men; finally, that you take from the unworthy and bestow on the good, the pontificate, primacies, archbishoprics, and bishoprics. Let the people know that you judge spiritual things, and that you have an absolute power over temporal affairs; that you can curb the demons who are the counselors of princes, and annihilate kings and the powerful of the earth. Display, then, your greatness and your power, and let the world now tremble before the redoubtable orders of your Church. Cause especially the sword of your justice promptly to strike the head of the criminal Henry, in order that all Christians may learn that he has been stricken by your will." (Cormenin, vol. i., p. 375.)

Notwithstanding this solemn appeal to Heaven—this impious invocation of the apostles in favor of his political intrigues in Germany—the prayer of the pope was not heard, the empire of Germany was not taken from its legitimate possessor, and the world did not tremble before the thunders of the Vatican! The pride of Henry, which had been sorely wounded by his former humiliation by Gregory, became excited; and the slumbering energies of the German people became aroused at this insolent attempt to place them at the feet of the papacy. Henry raised a large army, overthrew Rudolph—who lost his life in battle—marched to Rome, convened a council of German ecclesiastics and nobles, deposed Gregory, and placed the Metropolitan of Ravenna upon the pontifical throne, under the name of Clement III. (*Ibid.*; "Hist. of the Catholic Church," by Noethen, p. 340.)

After many varying fortunes, Gregory was enabled to drive the anti-pope Clement from the throne, but he soon sunk under the tremendous load which pressed upon him, and in the year 1085 died, uttering these words: "No, my hatred is implacable. I curse the pretended Emperor Henry, the anti-pope Guibert, and the reprobates who sustain them. I absolve and bless *the simple who believe that a pope has power to bind and loose.*" (Cormenin, vol. i., p. 377.)

#### **WHATEVER THE POPE COMMANDS IS RIGHT.**

One other explanation by Gregory VII. of the principles upon which he acted will enable the reader to form a just appreciation of his character and

ambition. It is given by Cormanin in these words:

“‘God is a spirit,’ says Gregory; ‘he rules matter; thus *the spiritual is above the temporal power*. The pope is the representative of God on earth; he should, then, govern the world. To him alone pertain infallibility and universality; all men are submitted to his laws, and he can only be judged by God; he ought to wear imperial ornaments; people and kings should kiss his feet; Christians are irrevocably submitted to his orders; *they should murder their princes, fathers, and children if he commands it*; no council can be declared universal without the orders of the pope; no book can be received as canonical without his authority; finally, no good or evil exists but in what he has condemned or approved.’ (Cormanin, vol. i., p. 377.)

Thus understanding the principles of this great pope, we are the better enabled to press our inquiries one step further, in order to understand the source of these principles, and the method adopted by him to justify and enforce them. And here, again, the exhaustive work of “Janus” comes to our assistance. This author says:

“Gregory collected about him by degrees the right men for elaborating his system of Church law. Anselm of Lucca, nephew of Pope Alexander II., compiled the most important and comprehensive work, at his command, between 1080 and 1086. Aiselm may be called the founder of the new Gregorian system of Church law, first, by extracting and putting into convenient working shape everything in the Isidorian forgeries serviceable for the papal absolutism; next, by altering the law of the Church, through a tissue of fresh inventions and interpolations, in accordance with the requirements of his party and the standpoint of Gregory.

Then came Deusdedit, whom Gregory made a cardinal, with some more inventions. At the same time Bonizo compiled his work, the main object of which was to exalt the papal prerogatives. The forty propositions or titles of this part of his work correspond entirely to Gregory’s ‘Dictatus,’ and the materials supplied by Anselin and Deusdedit.” (“Janus,” pp. 82, 83.)

This same author then goes on to show how, by these old and new forgeries, all based upon the pseudo- Isidorian Decretals, authority was found to justify every claim set up by the pope; how the pretended decrees of the popes were put in the place of the canons of councils, to supply all existing deficiencies; how they were made to justify the claim of Gregory of the right to give or take away kingdoms at his pleasure; how the bishops were made gods, so that no human tribunal could judge them; how even the lower clergy were made higher and more powerful than secular monarchs; and how Deusdedit, one of the forgers, falsely attributed to Boniface, the Apostle of Germany, the abominable sentiment that, “Even if a pope is so bad that he drags down whole nations to hell with him in troops, nobody can rebuke him; for he who judges all can be judged of no man: the only exception is in case of his swerving from the faith.” (“Janus,” p. 92.)

The main object of Gregory, and of all these forgeries, was to bring the Church to the point of recognizing the doctrine of papal infallibility as absolutely necessary to salvation. To accomplish this it was indispensable

that the pope should, individually and personally, absorb all the powers of the Church, so that his decrees should become the law for the government of all Christians, without the aid or consent of either general or provincial councils. In the earlier ages general councils had always been assembled whenever it was necessary to settle questions of faith or discipline, and the canon law of the Church was rightfully composed only of their enactments.

Previous to the pontificate of Gregory there had been eight of these. The Council of Nice, in the year 325, condemned Arianism. The first of Constantinople, in 381, condemned the heresy of Macedonius. The Council of Ephesus, in 431, condemned the heresy of Nestorius. The Council of Chalcedon, in 451, condemned the heresy of Eutyches. The second of Constantinople, in 553, acted upon the disagreements between the Eastern and Western Christians. The third of Constantinople, in 682, condemned the Monothelite heresy. The second Council of Nice, in 757, condemned the Iconoclast heresy. And the fourth Council of Constantinople, in 869, deposed the Patriarch Photius, and restored Ignatius to his see.

None of these councils would have been held, or would have been necessary, if the doctrine of papal infallibility had prevailed in the apostolic times, or for centuries afterward. But Gregory was not satisfied with this old order of things—with the principles which prevailed before the Church of Rome was contaminated by the influence of papal ambition. Like those secular despots who governed their nations by laws of their own creation, without asking the assent of lords, nobles, or people, he resolved upon governing the Church without the consent of bishops, clergy, or laymen; in other words, to put himself in the place of God, as the sole dispenser of all spiritual and temporal authority. He loved absolutism because it gave him power, and he exercised power so as to make papal absolutism complete and universal. Therefore, he was the first pope who attempted the degradation of civil potentates, the first who “lifted the sacerdotal lance against the royal diadem.” (“Var. of Popery,” by Edgar, p. 217.)

And it should excite no surprise when we find him appealing “to the first forged document that came to hand as a solid proof” (“Janus,” p. 114.) of the lawfulness of his usurpations; or that he set up the false pretense that Charlemagne had made all France and Saxony tributary to the Holy See, and declared that there were documents in proof of it preserved in the archives of St. Peter’s! (*Ibid.*)

Great as he was, he had that bad ambition which has so often left its blighting influence upon the world, and which prompts its possessor to justify the means by the end in view. By the impious employment of sacred things to bring about mere temporal results, he left an example the influence of which has not yet died away at Rome. And, if his pontificate may yet be justly referred to as one of exceeding brilliancy and splendor, and if he may be pointed out as one of the cherished saints of the Church, to be loved and imitated by the faithful, the “truth of history” assigns this position to him only because the world judges by results, not details.

If we look only at the luster which rested upon the brow of the pagan Caesar, we are dazzled by its splendor; yet if we pause to inquire how he won the



diadem, we almost hear the groans of the multitude of victims who were crushed beneath his heel. So, if we search accurately the history of this papal Caesar, we shall find him reaching his lofty eminence by trampling the most holy and sacrethings under his feet, by giving way to the promptings of an unholy and unjust ambition, and by setting such an example as led to the corruption of subsequent popes, and the demoralization of nearly the entire clergy.

The successors of Gregory VII. not only adopted his principles, but followed his example, so far as they were permitted by surrounding circumstances to do so. Urban II. (1088–1099) incited a crusade against the infidels in Palestine by holding out “the spoils” of victory as an inducement. Calixtus II. (1118–1124) gave to a monk the authority to subjugate the Church of England to the court of Rome, and of re-establishing his authority in France. Innocent II. (1130–1143) hurled his anathemas at the head of Arnold of Brescia because he preached against the effeminate and corrupt lives of the priests and monks. Adrian IV. (1154–1159) excommunicated the King of Sicily, and granted the crown of Ireland to the King of England. (\*)

\* A feeble effort has been recently made to break the force of this important fact by a flat denial. The Rev. Father Burke, an Irish priest of great eloquence, in reply to a statement made by Mr. Froude, solemnly and fearlessly asserts “that Pope Adrian never issued any such document,” basing this positive statement mainly upon the ground that it was not heard of until about twenty years after its alleged date.—*Ireland’s Case stated, in Reply to Mr. Froude*, by Burke, lect. i., p. 36.

Bold affirmation of this sort may serve the purpose of a popular lecture, especially when delivered to an excited and sympathizing audience, but it amounts to very little against the weight of historic evidence. To say nothing of the numerous Protestant authorities in support of this grant, it is well attested by Roman Catholic historians. Lingard admits it, and states that it was read to a synod of Irish bishops, and afterward caused Roderic, King of Connaught, to hold his crown under the English king as long as he was faithful to him and paid tribute. He also shows that, in 1175, this grant was confirmed by Pope Alexander III., which last grant Father Burke also tries to prove a forgery.—*History of England*, by Lingard, vol. ii., p. 94.

The Rev. Father Thebaud, a Jesuit, is the author of a very instructive work, published in 1873, entitled “The Irish Race in the Past and the Present,” in which he speaks of the grant of Adrian without denying it. He says it was not known to Pope Clement III. (1187–1191). He admits that when Henry II. sent his army into Ireland, the Irish people or clans and their chieftains acknowledged his authority, but thinks they did not do it in the feudal sense, claiming for them, what is probably true, that their pledge “to do homage” to the English king did not deprive them of their right to live in the Pale if they chose, and to be governed by the Brehon law (pp. 138–145).

A “History of Ireland” was published only a few years ago (1868), written by Miss M. F. Cusack, “Nun of Kenmare,” in which the existence of Adrian’s grant is spoken of as an undoubted fact. It is said that it was made by the pope because he was an Englishman. The author subjoins the original bull in a note, wherein she says, “There can be no reasonable doubt of the authenticity of this document.” She further says that it was published by Baronius, from the “Codex Vaticanus,” and

annexed to a brief addressed by Pope John XXII. (1316-1334) to Edward II.; also that John of Salisbury states in his "Metalogicus" that he obtained the bull from Adrian (p. 275, n. 6).

All these things were done *in the name of religion*, by its perversion to uses never contemplated by Christ or the apostles. The character of St. Peter was wholly changed; instead of being a minister of peace and love, sent forth without staff or scrip to preach the Gospel, he was transformed into a temporal prince, ambitiously striving after the conquest and subjugation of the world!

The Gratian Decretals made their appearance about the middle of the twelfth century. ("Janus," p. 115.) These were issued from Bologna, then renowned for having the best law school in Europe, and were put forth under the sanction of the highest ecclesiastical authority. They too, like their predecessors, were full of forgeries—all designed to promote the cause of papal absolutism. "Janus" says of them:

"In this work the Isidoian forgeries were combined with those of the Gregorian writers, Deusdedit, Anselm, Gregory of Pavia, and with Gratian's own additions. His work displaced all the older collections of canon law, and became the manual and repertory, not for canonists only, but for the scholastic theologians, who, for the most part, derived all their knowledge of fathers and councils from it. No book has ever come near it in its influence in the Church, although there is scarcely another so choke-full of gross errors, both intentional and unintentional.... All these fabrications—the rich harvest of three centuries—Gratian inserted, in good faith, into his collection; but he also added, knowingly and deliberately, a number of fresh corruptions, all in the spirit and interest of the papal system." (Janus," p.116.)

A brief enumeration of a few of the principles, which by these new forgeries of Gratian became a part of the canon law of the Roman Church, will serve to illustrate still further the manner in which the papal system has grown. A system of religious persecution was elaborated. *Protection was given by the Church to homicides and murderers, when the acts were done in behalf of the papal cause.* It was made not only lawful, but a duty, to "constrain men to goodness, and therefore to faith, and to what was then reckoned matter of faith, by all means of physical compulsion, and particularly to torture and execute heretics, and confiscate their property." It was provided that whosoever should kill an excommunicated person out of zeal to the Church was by no means a murderer; because all who are declared "bad" by the Church authorities "are not only to be scourged, but executed." All who "dared to disobey a papal command, or speak against a papal decision or doctrine," were made heretics.

The pope was placed upon an equality with Christ; these Decretals declaring that, "as Christ submitted to the law on earth, though in truth he was its Lord, so *the pope is high above all laws of the Church, and can dispose of them as he will, since they derive all their force from him alone.*" (Ibid., pp.119–121.)

If the reader has kept in mind the principles embodied in the false Isidorian Decretals, as well as those of the Gregorian code, and will add to them these equally flagrant forgeries of Gratian, he will be able to comprehend what was meant by the canon law of the Roman Catholic Church about the middle of the twelfth century, *and what is still meant by it!* It took more than a thousand years, from the close of the apostolic era, for these principles to grow and expand into the wonderful proportions they had then acquired; and even then the popes were indebted to the basest and most palpable forgeries for their existence.

Continued in [Chapter XIII. The False Decretals Part 2](#)