

The Late Medieval Church

Sources

E. R. Chamberlin, *The Bad Popes* (2003)

L. Elliott Binns, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Medieval Papacy* (1934)

Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 6

I. Abuses in the Church

A. General corruption

B. Sacerdotalism

1. Necessity of a priestly hierarchy for salvation
2. Highlighted unworthiness of priests & bishops: “If gold rust, what will iron do?” (Chaucer)

C. Issues Relating to Penance

1. Necessitates purgatory, a place to finish paying temporal penalty for sin
 - a. Christ’s atonement pays *eternal* penalty
 - b. Works of contrition pay *temporal* penalty
2. Indulgences
 - a. Drawn from “treasury of merit” of Christ and the saints
 - b. May be dispensed in return for meritorious service (e.g., going on a Crusade)
 - c. Giving a monetary gift becomes “buying an indulgence”
 - d. Grossly abused but used for profit-making: “Nets to catch silver”
 - e. Financially corrupt & theologically erroneous

II. Decline of the Papacy

A. Boniface VIII

1. Clash with Philip IV of France
 - a. Royal sovereignty vs. clerical immunity (taxation, civil justice system)
 - b. French resistance to tithes to pope
 - c. Papal Bull *Unam Sanctum*: “For every human being, it is altogether necessary for salvation to be subject to the Roman Pontiff.”
2. Escaped arrest by Philip but died humiliated

B. Avignon Papacy (1305-78)

1. Election of a French pope and a move to Avignon, near France
2. “Babylonian captivity of the church” (Petrarch)
3. “Banker popes”; shrewd financiers who pressed for all payments to Rome; began to use indulgences as a system for income
4. Eroded papal reputation

C. Great Papal Schism (1378-1415)

1. Italian Urban VI elected under Roman pressure in 1378
2. Split
 - a. Urban’s reform—and unpleasant personality—caused French cardinals to go back to Avignon and elect a new pope
 - b. Urban chose new cardinals and two papal courts resulted

D. Conciliar Movement

1. Initially a response to Great Schism: A council the only means of healing the schism
2. Theory: A council is superior to popes & only a council can solve the problems facing the church

3. Council of Pisa (1409): Ill-planned disaster—three popes result
 4. Council of Constance (1414-18): Threefold purpose—
 - a. Heal the Great Schism: Successful (Martin V becomes pope of a united church)
 - b. Deal with heresy in Bohemia: Burned John Huss, but sparked uprising
 - c. Reform abuses: Abysmal failure
 5. Conciliar movement collapsed because of opposition of papacy
- III. The “Renaissance Papacy” (1447-1534)
- A. Nature
1. Popes conformed to the spirit of the Renaissance—Capable men but worldly
 2. Era of corruption, secular values w/ a religious veneer
 - a. Bribery
 - b. Simony—selling of church offices
 - c. Pluralism (holding more than one office) and absenteeism
 - d. Nepotism—“spoils system” of placing family members in high positions, including “nephews” of popes
 3. Three goals of Renaissance popes
 - a. Recover papal supremacy over the church
 - b. Inject papacy into Renaissance politics
 - c. Patronize the arts
- B. Representative Popes
1. Alexander VI (1492-1503)
 - a. “Borgia pope”—Most depraved pope in history, perhaps: “Nero among the popes” (Schaff)
 - b. Children Cesare and Lucretia
 - c. Leading opponent of Savonarola of Florence
 2. Julius II (1503-13)
 - a. “Warrior pope”: Involved in Renaissance politics
 - b. Laid foundation for St. Peter’s Basilica
 - c. Commissioned Michelangelo for Sistine Chapel & other works
 3. Leo X (1513-21)
 - a. “Medici pope”: “God has given us the papacy let us enjoy it.”
 - b. He “would have been an excellent pope had he only been a little bit religious.”
 - c. Height of Renaissance art & achievement at Rome
 - d. Completely unprepared for Luther and the Reformation