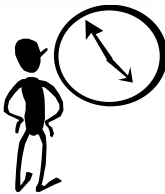


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### Time of Assembly



#### **Sunday:**

Bible Study	9:00 a.m.
Worship	10:00 a.m.
Worship	5:00 p.m.
(every other week)	

#### **Wednesday:**

Bible Study	6:30 p. m.
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## The Development of Papal Power

By Andy Sochor

The pope is arguably the most influential religious figure in the world today. Yet there was a time when the one who occupied this office was even more powerful than the current pope. He would not only be the highest-ranking member of the Roman Catholic Church, but he would also hold a position of political power, even to the degree that he could appoint and depose kings. How did this happen?

When we began our study, we noticed that Jesus promised to build His church, and it was established on the day of Pentecost following His ascension to Heaven (Matthew 16:18-19; Acts 2:1-47). Not only did He establish His church, but He was also “*the head of the church*” (Ephesians 5:23). Paul stated this while Jesus was in heaven; therefore, we know that while He is in heaven, He is still the head of His church.

We also saw in our study that the great apostasy following the time of the apostles began with changes to the organization of the church. The New Testament describes elders as the overseers in local congregations (Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:2). They were accountable to “*the Chief Shepherd*” (I Peter 5:4), which was Christ. Yet the plurality of elders in a local church, as was described in the New Testament, was gradually changed to one elder/bishop being over the other elders. Eventually, one man would oversee a plurality of churches. As time went on, a larger hierarchy developed.

In the previous lesson, we looked at the Roman Emperor Constantine, who is regarded as the first “Christian” Emperor due to his alleged conversion to Christianity. This brought peace to the church, which was certainly a blessing. Unfortunately, it also led to a close union between the church and the state. This allowed the leaders of the church to become more powerful and influential. It would just be a matter of time until the political union between the church and the Roman Empire

would lead to the church embracing the same structure as the state. Yet rather than calling the head of the church an emperor, he would be known as a pope.

## **What Led to the First Pope**

In an earlier lesson, we noticed how Paul warned about “the apostasy” that was coming (II Thessalonians 2:3). He described this “*man of lawlessness*” as one “*who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God*” (II Thessalonians 2:3-4). The “*man of lawlessness*” was not referring to a specific individual; instead, it was about the attitude that would develop among those who were in positions of leadership in the church. Rather than being content to “*shepherd the flock of God among [them]*” (I Peter 5:2), they sought to oversee multiple congregations, wider regions, and eventually the other bishops or “*patriarchs*” who exercised similar control over various churches. The “*man of lawlessness*” is not the pope, but it was the personification of the attitude that led to one man being recognized as the earthly head of the universal church.

As a hierarchy developed among churches, the bishops of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople, and Rome became known as “*patriarchs*” (Church History, John D. Cox, p. 39). As political power in the Roman Empire was concentrated in Rome and Constantinople (Emperor Constantine moved the capital from Rome to Constantinople in 330 AD), the bishops from those cities vied for control over the church. John the Faster, the patriarch of Constantinople, assumed the title of “*Universal Bishop*” or “*Ecumenical Patriarch*” in 588 AD. The “*pope*” in Rome contested this. In 606 AD, the Roman Emperor gave this title to Boniface III, the pope of Rome at the time.

The Emperor of Rome conferred upon the pope of Rome the title of the head of the universal church. Yet the power and authority of this office would not be limited to the “*church*” (i.e. the Roman Catholic Church). Eventually, the pope would possess greater political power than the Emperor and would take the place of the Emperors as rulers of Italy; his recognition by the Roman Emperor in 606 AD marks what we typically call the “*official*” beginning of the Roman Catholic Church. However, as we have noticed in our study, this was not an abrupt change. It had been developing gradually over time. When Paul warned the brethren in Thessalonica about this “*man of lawlessness*,” he said, “*For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work*,” but would later “*be revealed*” (II Thessalonians 2:7-8). What started as a gradual slide into apostasy resulted in the formation of the Roman Catholic Church, led by the pope, which is nothing like the church Jesus established that we can read about in the New Testament.

## **The Political Power of the Papacy**

During the time of Charlemagne, the popes assumed the power of crowning the kings of Europe. When Henry IV of Germany opposed Pope Gregory and tried to convince the bishops of the Holy Roman Empire to depose him, Gregory responded by absolving Henry's subjects from allegiance to him, essentially taking his kingdom away

from him. Henry was forced to travel to the pope's palace and beg for forgiveness. Later, Pope Innocent III deposed the King of England, who had opposed him. Today, the pope does not have this type of political power. However, the office of the papacy can still exert political influence throughout the world.

## What Catholics Believe about the Pope

Catholics believe that the apostle Peter was the first pope. Jesus said, *"I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven"* (Matthew 16:18-19). Catholics believe this statement shows that Jesus was designating Peter as the head of the church and transferring authority to him, and that "whatever official prerogatives were conferred on Peter were not to cease at his death, but were handed down to his successors from generation to generation" [Archbishop James Cardinal Gibbons, as cited in Church History, John D. Cox, p. 44]. They believe there is an unbroken line of successors from Peter to the present day.

They also believe that the pope is not a mere man but is the "Vicar of Christ," which means he is standing in the place of Christ on earth. Remember what we noticed about Paul's warning regarding the "man of lawlessness" and that he "takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God" (II Thessalonians 2:3-4), which is an apt description of this claim regarding the pope. They believe the pope has "so great authority and power that he can modify, explain or interpret even divine laws" [The Converted Catholic Magazine, January 1946, as cited in Church History, John D. Cox, p. 44]. This means that if the pope teaches something different from what the Bible teaches, his supposed authority to "modify" divine law means that his opinion overrules Scripture. Yet Paul said, *"If we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed"* (Galatians 1:8). No one has any right to teach a doctrine that is contrary to what the apostles originally taught, not even the pope.

## Peter Was Not the First Pope

On the claim that Peter was the first pope, a brief study of a few New Testament passages proves this claim is false. Consider the following:

1. The pope may permit men to bow down before him, yet Peter refused to do this (Acts 10:25-26).
2. The Catholic Church says that the pope (along with other church leaders) cannot be married. Yet Peter was married (Matthew 8:14; I Corinthians 9:5).
3. The Catholic Church holds to the doctrine of "papal infallibility," which means that the pope cannot err in his teaching. Yet we already noticed that anyone who teaches anything contrary to what was originally revealed by the apostles, which the pope does, stands condemned (Galatians 1:8). Even Peter had to be publicly rebuked by

Paul because “*he stood condemned*” over his treatment of his Gentile brethren, and in doing so was “*not straightforward about the truth of the gospel*” (Galatians 2:11-14).

Besides all of this, the passage that is often thought to be describing Peter receiving authority as head of the church is misunderstood by Catholics. Jesus said, “*I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church...*” (Matthew 16:18). The “rock” upon which Jesus would build His church was not Peter, but what Peter confessed: “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*” (Matthew 16:16). Jesus used a play on words. He contrasted Peter (Greek: *petros*, which means a stone) with the rock (Greek: *petra*, which means a large mass of rock) upon which He would build His church. Jesus' identity as the Christ, the Son of the living God, is the bedrock (*petra*) upon which His church would be built. Building upon a small stone (*petros*) would be insufficient.

## Summary

Jesus' plan for His church included a plurality of elders overseeing the local congregation among them (I Peter 5:2; Acts 14:23). Yet apostasy would lead many down the path to where there was one man who ruled over the universal church, and eventually even exerted political power over kings. Yet all of this is based upon a faulty premise. Jesus, not Peter, was the rock upon which the church would be built. Even while He is in heaven at the right hand of God, Christ is still head over His church (Ephesians 1:22-23). We are not to follow the direction of the pope or any other man; instead, we are to humbly submit to the will of Christ that has been revealed in His word.

## Does John the Baptist Prove that Fetuses Know Good and Evil?

By Terry Wane Benton

While it is true that John the Baptist, while yet unborn (what people call the fetus stage), leaped in his mother's womb when Mary came and greeted Elizabeth (Luke 1:41), it is not true that this means that all infants are aware of sin or aware of Jesus, Mary, and what Jesus will mean for them. It does nothing to prove that this means all babies are aware of why a man in funny garments is dunking them or sprinkling water on them and wanting to have their sins removed.

In the case of John leaping in the womb in the presence of Jesus' mother, it would be a sign from God that John and Jesus would bring great joy to the world in their future programs of adulthood. It is not a sign that all babies are aware of sin and that they are excited about Jesus. John as an unborn child gave a strong kick at this moment and this was likely a providential reminder from God to Elizabeth that her baby had the assistance of the Holy Spirit even then (Luke 1:15). So, this “leap” was a sign of the Holy Spirit, not a proof that all babies are aware of sin, Jesus, and coming redemption even in the womb. Without the Holy Spirit's special sign, John would not have kicked at this moment and if he did, it would mean nothing about what he was aware of in that moment, especially not aware of the implication of Jesus.

God told Moses that little children today “*have no knowledge of good and evil*”

(Deuteronomy 1:39). To imply that John knew that Mary was bringing the good Savior and He would conquer evil and sin in the world is to imply that he and all unborn are knowledgeable of good and evil. That means that they know God was wrong in His statement to Moses. No! God is not wrong about babies not knowing good and evil. In John's case, the Holy Spirit was especially involved in making a reminder to Elizabeth surface to her attention.

Again, the Holy Spirit testifies that there is a time, even for the Messiah-Child, when there is no awareness of good and evil. Isaiah 7:15-16 says concerning the virgin's child,

*"Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings"* (NKJV).

In other words, this child would be like all human children. He was in a human state of "not knowing" and therefore not refusing or choosing good and evil. To say that John the Baptist in his unborn state knew what even Mary's baby would have yet to grow to know is to say that John was the exception to the rule, and that shows that you cannot use John as proof of anything about babies.

The practice of force-dunking babies is falsely justified by implying from John's case that they can believe in Jesus even as a man in strange garments is dunking them or sprinkling them and saying strange ritualistic words as they do this to these babies. If John was aware of Jesus, the text does not say it or actually imply it. What it shows is that the Holy Spirit was already with John and urged the kick at the moment to remind Elizabeth of great things ahead for her child and through Mary's child. That is all that proves. It proves nothing about how scriptural it is to force-dunk all babies.

Who is to be baptized? Jesus said it works this way! Preach the gospel, let the gospel bring about belief, and let the believer be baptized (Mark 16:15-16). There are no exceptions to this. Baptism is always and only to convicted, penitent believers. Every case of "households" being baptized was after that household first heard the word, understood their need for Jesus, and expressed their own desire to be united with Jesus in baptism. Not one exception!

Baptism is not forced upon anyone, and no person was ever baptized who did not first believe. Infants have no knowledge of good and evil and have no guilt that needs to be removed, and there is no benefit they get from being force-dunked or sprinkled in some ritual of men. When they grow and come of age to know good and evil and come to know guilt and what Jesus can mean toward the removal of sin and guilt, then they will let you know like all others, "*what hinders me from being baptized?*" (Acts 8:36). The answer will always be, "**If you believe you may!**" John's kick is not proof that children already know and is no proof that force-dunking is what needs to be done while they can't know to refuse evil and choose good.

Do not let the doctrines and traditions of men trump the clear teaching of God's word, the Scriptures.