

Good example of the rise of the papacy: from constantine i to the reformation res...

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Introduction

The notoriety of Roman Catholicism across Europe figured prominently throughout history - best manifested by the rise of the papacy, headed by the pope and traditionally based in Rome, Italy. The papacy, which stood as the main governing body of Roman Catholicism, has since become embroiled in key political issues throughout its leadership. Despite its limited role in recent times, the papacy was once a center of political authority in Europe, with its influence greatly sought by European powers beginning from the time of Roman Emperor Constantine I up to the Reformation. This study seeks to outline how the papacy came into political ascendancy in Europe, with the main theme revolving around the role of Roman Catholicism in influencing European politics.

The Patronage of Constantine I

Many emperors who ruled the Roman Empire have persecuted adherents of Roman Catholicism. However, such has changed when Constantine I came into power. In the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312, legend has it that Constantine I saw a miraculous apparition of the words "in hoc signo vinces" (in this sign you will win) in the sky before he and his troops went into battle, which they eventually won. Such has allegedly convinced Constantine I to become a patron of Roman Catholicism by officially accepting it within the Roman Empire through the Edict of Milan and the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea. Constantine I also initiated moves to transfer the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to the new city of Constantinople. The establishment of Constantinople followed the emigration of several Roman

families and transportation of Roman Catholic relics to the new city. While the foregoing may have given life to the fictional Donation of Constantine, which was used by several popes during the time of Constantine I to underline their authority, it nevertheless paved way for the esteemed emperor to donate the Lateran Palace to the papacy and build the Old St. Peter's Basilica. Overall, the endowments Constantine I has given to the papacy has enabled secular figures to interfere with the process of papal succession - a trend that has helped make the papacy an influential figure in European political affairs in the years to come.

The Early Medieval Period: Ostrogoth, Byzantine and Frankish Papacies

The Ostrogoths, which occupied Rome shortly before 500, became influential in the appointment of popes in succession. The Ostrogothic King usually had the final decision over papal appointments, yet in his absence, the decision still comes from pressures arising from elements of the Ostrogothic Kingdom. However, the influence of the Ostrogothic Kingdom in the papal succession did not last long, as the occupation of Rome by Byzantine Emperor Justinian I replaced Ostrogothic influence by that of the Byzantine Empire.

The Byzantine Empire has sealed its influence in the papal succession by requiring the emperor to preside over the confirmation of elected candidates to the papacy. The Byzantine Emperor confirms papal candidates based on the following criteria: they must be part of the apocrisarii - the papal liaisons of the Byzantine Emperor, or must originate from Syria, Sicily, Greece and other Byzantine-occupied areas. Given the territorial concentration of the Byzantine Empire on the Eastern part of Europe, both Western and Eastern

influences infused the papacy that time.

Lombard invaders took over territories surrounding Rome in 756, thus putting the papacy under threat and without the protection of the Byzantine Empire. Stephen II, the pope that time, became well aware of the vulnerability of the papacy against Lombard invaders, thus prompting him to ask for the assistance of Pepin III, king of the Franks. When Pepin III and his troops won against the Lombard invaders, he restored the occupied lands back to the papacy but not to the Byzantine Empire, alongside large surrounding areas in central Italy known as the Donation of Pepin. The lands accumulated by the papacy during the time of Pepin III became part of the so-called Papal States, which lasted until 1870. Frankish influence over the papacy continued under the rule of Charlemagne, the son of Pepin III, when he assisted Popes Adrian I and Leo III. The assistance Charlemagne has rendered to the two popes enabled him to acquire the territorial strongholds of the defeated Lombard invaders and become the new Roman Emperor, which then became the precursor to the Holy Roman Empire.

Saeculum Obscurum

The papacy came under a short period of influence from the Roman noble family Theophylacti, whose power enabled them to take on papal succession by installing their own candidates through marriage and illicit affairs with popes. Said period, termed the Saeculum Obscurum - literally meaning the dark ages, featured vast corruption in the papal succession, alongside turmoil in the papacy associated with the incessant interference by the Theophylacti nobility.

The Investiture Controversy

Towards 1000, the papacy went through an eventual process of reform in its succession process. The Investiture Controversy, which involved questions over papal appointments, became the turning point of the new era for the papacy that time. The Holy Roman Empire, then under Henry IV, and the papacy under Pope Gregory VII tussled against one another over the concern of issuing papal appointments. Despite efforts to resolve the issue, particularly with the Concordat of Worms in 1122, the Investiture Controversy has lasted in the form of civil wars and political frictions between the Holy Roman Empire and the papacy. Yet, such has ultimately resulted to the establishment of the College of Cardinals - a system still in use in present times for election the next pope, as the main institution that would determine the next pope in the event the incumbent one goes out of office. Such has greatly undermined the influence of secular figures in the papal succession.

Political Instability and the Western Schism

In the later years of the medieval period (c. 1200 to 1400), the papacy became mired in another controversy concerning its seat of residence. While the pope also held office as the bishop of Rome, there is no decree stating that he is required to reside in Rome and handle his formal office functions there. Thus, as a matter of course in light of the politically unstable nature of Italy that time, the pope transferred to different places - in the cities of Orvieto, Perugia and Viterbo. The papacy sought to maintain its autonomy from the political troubles Italy has been experiencing during that time, thus

the popes also authorized the handling of official papal functions in the cities where the papacy has transferred, including the College of Cardinals that convened for papal elections wherever incumbent popes have died. In the 1300s, the papacy resided within the city of Avignon in France. In a space of around 70 years, seven popes have lived in Avignon and held official functions there.

The so-called Western Schism proved another challenging era for the papacy. After the papacy resided in Avignon for around 70 years, movements to restore the seat of the papacy to Rome emerged. The death of the last Avignon pope, Gregory XI, served as a trigger for pro-Roman papacy factions to restore the seat of the papacy to Rome. The election of an Italian, Urban VI, to the papacy became a matter of great concern to the cardinals in Avignon, who in turn decided to elect their own pope, Clement VII. Such has caused the papacy to fall under the controversial Western Schism - a period from 1378 to 1417 where the Roman Catholic Church had two seats - one in Rome and in Avignon, with each having their respective sets of cardinals. A third seat, Pisa, emerged in 1409 when the Council of Pisa, which sought to resolve the issue, did not resolve to the resignation of any of the popes in Avignon and Rome, thus making the elected pope in Pisa - Alexander V, a third pope at the time.

Renaissance and the Reformation

The Reformation best characterized the papacy during the Renaissance Period, which involved challenges to certain actions of the Roman Catholic Church that time. The papacy, after coming out of the Western Schism by

returning to Rome, entrenched itself in a series of nepotistic activities and political interests in favor of protecting the Papal States. The non-hereditary nature of the papacy, in contrast to that of other empires that time and characterized by elections via the College of Cardinals, has allowed nepotism to ensue, thus allowing the installation of relatives of the pope to sensitive positions in the papacy, as in the case of the cardinal-nephews. The papacy that time also connived with influential families throughout Italy on official appointments, in turn enabling popes and cardinals to cultivate their patronage to art and architecture reminiscent to that of the Renaissance Period. Revenue generation related to the Papal States has led popes to venture into warfare in favor of territorial expansion, particularly under the rule of Julius II. The constant trend of expenditures related to warfare and infrastructural developments led the papacy to sell indulgences to the Roman Catholic faithful - a gesture seen by figures of the Reformation as highly offensive. Indulgences consist of a purchase of a particular form of penance that releases the bearer from temporal punishment.

The emergence of four Christian traditions characterized the emergence of the Reformation - Lutheran, Presbyterian, Anabaptist and Anglican. The Lutheran tradition, being the first to have triggered the Reformation, came out of the challenge of a monk named Martin Luther that pointed out his argument against the sale of indulgences encapsulated in his Ninety-Five Theses. Luther noted that the papacy possessed enormous wealth that is good enough for it to fund its construction projects, particularly the new St. Peter's Basilica, thus making the sale of indulgences unnecessary and doctrinally immoral. Such challenge led to the excommunication of Luther

from the Roman Catholic Church and his eventual movement to establish Protestantism.

Conclusion

The papacy in Rome grew in prominence throughout its history due to its strategic exposure to secular elements coming from prominent European powers. Politically speaking, Rome has been a strategic area of interest of different European powers due to the positive effect of religious patronage to their dominance. Religion, therefore, is central to the interests of the European powers that took interest in matters pertaining to the papacy, specifically in terms of papal succession and installation of certain people in official positions. One could look at this argument in this wise - that the different kings and emperors of the different European powers that sought to influence the papacy wanted to exploit the Roman Catholic faith as an assertion of their divine right to rule. At the same time however, some of those who held office as popes also cultivated interests related to the expansion of their own material powers. Some popes desired to expand the territorial domains of the Papal States for them to gain more revenues to fund lavish construction projects, while the sale of indulgences also made them more financially powerful even as it caused the emergence of rival faith traditions via the Reformation. Overall, both secular and papal interests made the papacy a highly dominant figure in Western Europe until the Reformation, after which its influence has waned.

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