

## A Forged Bogus Document

The institutional Church didn't crumble when the Western Roman Empire collapsed. In fact, the fall of Rome only enhanced the Church's power. After the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, the Church became the primary institution of civilization in western Europe. As the Germanic invaders divided the West into smaller "Christian" kingdoms, the bishop of Rome took on the status previously enjoyed by the western Roman emperor. He was now better known as simply "the Pope," and he had become one of the most powerful persons in the West.

As the centuries rolled by, the Roman Catholic Church continued to grow in wealth and in power. Rome remained the principle city of western Europe, but now its chief income came from the Church. Thousands of pilgrims traveled each year to see St. Peter's cathedral in Rome and to look down at the bones of Peter. The good "Christians" of Rome milked these pilgrims for as much as they could. All over Rome, Christians were selling pieces of the cross, bones of saints, and other relics.

In accordance with the Constantinian Hybrid, the Pope now normally ruled in two different capacities. He was the earthly prince of Rome, and he was also the universal bishop of the Roman Catholic Church. In order to justify the Pope's earthly powers, in 750 a papal cleric created a forged legal document that purported to be a donation of earthly kingship from Constantine to the bishop of Rome and all his successors. The donation was to last until the end of the world. This fraudulent document, know as the *Donation of Constantine*, fooled just about everyone in medieval Europe. This bogus document read in part:

"Because our imperial power is earthly, we [i.e., Constantine] have decided to honor reverently His most holy Roman Church, and to exalt the most holy See of blessed Peter in glory above our own Empire and earthly throne, ascribing to it power and glorious majesty and strength and Imperial honor...

...behold, we give to the most holy Pontiff, our father Sylvester, the universal Pope, not only the above mentioned palace, but also the City of Rome and all the provinces, districts and cities of Italy and the Western regions."

So the Pope was claiming not only the secular rulership of Rome, but the rulership of all of Italy and the "Western regions" as well.

(The Kingdom That Turned the World Upside Down by David W. Bercot, Amberson, Pennsylvania: Scroll Publishing Company, 2003, 207-208)