

SANGUIS IN MANIBUS VESTRIS

Blood on Thy Hands

A History of the Roman Catholic Church

Volume Two: The Record

“Your hands are full of blood. Wash you, be clean.”

Isaiah 1:15–16

Every claim in this book is weighed and labelled:

ESTABLISHED • PLAUSIBLE • POSSIBLE • LEGEND • FABRICATION

Carlos Coronado Bonilla

Blood on Thy Hands: A History of the Roman Catholic Church. Volume Two: The Record

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INTRODUCTION

THE HISTORY BEHIND THE HISTORY

A PAINTING ON THE WALL

IN the Vatican, in the suite of rooms that Raphael and his pupils decorated for the popes of the early sixteenth century, there is a great hall called the Hall of Constantine. On one of its walls, painted in the 1520s by Raphael's workshop, a scene unfolds in the old basilica of St Peter. The emperor Constantine, in armour, kneels before a pope enthroned beneath a canopy, and offers him a small golden figure: a statue of the goddess Roma, the city of Rome itself. Bishops and courtiers stand around them. The picture is called *The Donation of Constantine*.

When that painting was made, the document it illustrates had been proved a forgery for eighty years. A Roman scholar, Lorenzo Valla, had demonstrated in 1440 that the *Constitutum Constantini*, the supposed grant by which the first Christian emperor gave the pope the city of Rome and the lands of the West, could not have been written in the fourth century. It was written about four hundred years after Constantine was dead. Valla's treatise was well known among the scholars of the papal court, and it had been printed in 1517. The popes painted the forgery on their walls anyway.

That painting is a fitting door into this volume. Volume One told the lives of the 267 popes. Volume Two tells the history of the institution they led: not what one pope or another did, but what the Church did, over centuries, as a power in the world. Much of it is a history of great things, of hospitals and universities, of charity and scholarship and art. Much of it is not. This volume is concerned above all with the second kind: the forgeries on which papal power was built, the wars fought in the name of Christ, the inquisitions, the persecution of the Jews, the conquest of the Americas and the enslavement of Africans, the alliances with dictators, the abuse of children and women in the Church's care,

and the long cover-ups.

WHY BEGIN WITH A FORGERY

I chose to open this volume with a deep study of the Donation of Constantine, for three reasons.

First, it is the clearest case. In most of the history that follows, honest historians disagree about numbers, motives, and blame. About the Donation there is no disagreement left. Every serious historian, Catholic and non-Catholic, agrees that it is a forgery. The Catholic Church itself has accepted this for centuries. It is therefore a case where we can watch, without any doubt about the facts, how a false document was made, how it was used, how it was exposed, and how the institution that profited from it responded.

Second, it was foundational. The Donation was not a curiosity. For six hundred years it was cited by popes, canon lawyers, and theologians as proof that the pope held authority not only over the Church but over the city of Rome, over Italy, and over the western half of the Roman world, and that emperors and kings held their power in some sense from him. It was copied into the Church's law books. It was used in the quarrel that split the Eastern and Western churches in 1054. Its logic lay behind the popes' claim to grant islands and kingdoms to Christian rulers, and, at the end of that line, behind the bulls that divided the newly discovered lands of the world between Portugal and Spain. A study of the Donation is a study of how an idea of power was born.

Third, it teaches a method. The man who exposed the Donation, Lorenzo Valla, did it by asking simple questions. Who wrote this, and when? Does its language belong to the age it claims? Does it mention things that did not yet exist? Is it confirmed by any other source? Is it consistent with what we know happened? Those are the questions this whole volume asks of every claim, about the Church and about its enemies. The history of the Vatican has been distorted from both sides: by the Church's own forgeries and legends, and by its enemies' inventions. Valla's method is the cure for both.

"Ah, the woe and the misery of it, there are still four hundred in the city, high and low, of every rank and sex, nay, even clerics, so strongly accused that they may be arrested at any hour.... A week ago a maiden of nineteen was executed, of whom it is everywhere said that she was the fairest in the whole city, and was held by everybody a girl of singular modesty and purity.... And thus many are put to death for renouncing God and being at the witch-dances, against whom nobody has ever else spoken a word. To conclude this wretched matter, there are children of three and four years, to the number of three hundred, who are said to have had intercourse with the Devil. I have seen put to death children of seven, promising students of ten, twelve, fourteen, and fifteen."¹³

Among those executed in Würzburg was the prince-bishop's own nephew, a young nobleman, who was tried and executed in 1629.

Bamberg (1626–1632)

In Bamberg, the neighbouring prince-bishopric, the hunt under Johann Georg Fuchs von Dornheim and his suffragan bishop Friedrich Förner killed some six hundred people, among them Johannes Junius, his wife, and several other burgomasters and councillors of the city. The *Druddenhaus*, the witch-house, was built for the purpose, with its own cells and torture chamber. Some of the accused escaped and appealed to the emperor, who intervened in 1630–1631; the hunt ended in 1632, when the Swedish army invaded Franconia in the Thirty Years' War and the prince-bishop fled.¹⁴

Elsewhere

Other Catholic ecclesiastical territories saw major hunts: the prince-abbey of Fulda under Balthasar von Dernbach (around 1603–1606), the prince-provostship of Ellwangen (around 1611–1618, some four hundred executions), the electorates of Mainz and Cologne. In the city of Cologne in 1627, Katharina Henot, the city's postmistress, a respected businesswoman, was accused, tortured, and burned. In 2012, the city council of Cologne formally rehabilitated her and other victims of the

13. The chancellor of the prince-bishop of Würzburg to a friend (August 1629), trans. Burr, *Translations and Reprints*, vol. 3, no. 4 (1897).

14. Britta Gehm, *Die Hexenverfolgung im Hochstift Bamberg* (2000); Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts*.

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