Lesson XIV (1978-1979)

THE RENAISSANCE #5--THE RENAISSANCE POPES (Con.)

Prayer
Scripture: Jeremiah 5:30,31; 6:13-15
Hymn: 349 "Before Jehovah's Awful Throne"

The Renaissance popes were an important factor in the rise of the Protestant Reformation.

INNOCENT VIII (1484-1492)

Wild confusion raged in Rome at the death of Pope Sixtus IV (1471-1484). Nobles and cardinals barricaded their homes as mobs pillaged. Peace was restored by the rival families of Orsini and Colonna withdrawing from the city for a month. The conclave of 1484 to elect a new pope was one of the most shameful in history. Twenty-four cardinals participated--twenty-one were Italians. They adopted a protocol signed by every cardinal that if elected pope he would give each cardinal a guaranteed monthly income if his income from benefices fell below an agreed amount. A crusade would be conducted against the Turks. No one could be appointed cardinal before he was thirty; the college of cardinals was to be limited to twenty-four and the pontiff could elevate only one relative to the cardinalate.

Rodrigo Borgia offered large bribes for votes but when Cardinal Barbo received ten votes and seemed sure of election, Borgia and Julian Rovere renounced their claims and spent the night going from cell to cell securing promises of benefices in return for votes. They secured promises from all but six, and Cardinal Cibo became Pope Innocent VIII (1484-1492). Lorenzo Cibo was born in Genoa in 1402 and had been made a cardinal by Sixtus IV in 1478. He maintained peace with the courts of Italy but in Rome crime, clerical dissipation and curial venality were rampant. The general of the Augustinians remarked: "In darkness Innocent was elected, in darkness he lives, and in darkness he will die." Women were carried off in the night and the dead were found on the streets in the morning. Jerome Riario, the favorite of Sixtus IV, was murdered in 1488. A piece of the true cross was stolen from S. Maria in Trastavere. Ecclesiastical offices were for sale to the highest bidder. New offices were created to be a new source of money. Papal secretaries sold forged letters.

Innocent VIII was said to have begotten sixteen children, all by married women. One of his sons was married to the daughter of Lorenzo the Magnificent in the Vatican. A granddaughter was married in the Vatican to the marquis of Finale. At banquets the pope sat at the table with ladies contrary to accepted custom. Another granddaughter was married to Duke Louis of Aragon.

Innocent VIII reversed the policy of Sixtus and made Lorenzo the Magnificent an intimate adviser.

The historian of this period, Infessura, recorded that Innocent issued a decree permitting concubinage in Rome both to clergy and laity. He reported that most of the clergy kept concubines or mistresses. Another diarist recorded that there were in Rome 6,800 listed public courtesans in addition to those whose names were not recorded.

The lives of the cardinals were scandalous. They lived in luxury, owning stables, kennels, and falcons. Cardinal Sforza was
noted for his wealth and the chase. Cardinal Julian laughed at celibacy and had three daughters. Cardinal Borgia was the leader of faity in Rome and his children were conspicuous at all occasions. A number of the cardinals were notorious gamblers, losing fortunes in a single night; most notorious of the gamblers were Cardinal Raphael and Cardinal Balue.

Innocent made a cardinal of Lorenzo Cibo, the son of his illegitimate brother. He also made a cardinal of Giovanni de' Medici, son of Lorenzo the Magnificent—he would afterwards become Pope Leo X.

Innocent received a large annual sum from the Sultan Bajazet, for keeping his brother and rival, Djem, in prison. The Sultan also made him a present of the head of the lance that pierced the side of Jesus. It was received by a royal procession with fountains flowing wine for the populace; it was placed in St. Peter's near the handkerchief of St. Veronica.

Innocent called for a crusade to exterminate the Waldenses in 1407 and issued another bull against witches in Germany in 1408. When the Moors were expelled from Granada in 1492 Rome celebrated with masses and a bull fight arranged by Cardinal Borgia.

Innocent in his last sickness was nursed with a woman's milk. When the cardinals found his large fortune hidden in drawers and chests even before he died, he ordered 48,000 ducats of the 1,200,000 he distributed among his relatives.

POPE ALEXANDER VI--BORGIA (1492-1503)

Alexander VI has the distinction of being the most corrupt of the Renaissance popes. Under him the papacy was completely secularized. He was noted for the keen insight with which he increased papal political power. He is most often remembered for his attempts to build papal authority and to increase papal territory by advantageous marriages for his illegitimate children and his skillful maneuvering to place his illegitimate sons in powerful positions. One biographer of the popes wrote of Alexander VI that "from the moment he received priestly consecration to the end of his life, he was a slave to the demon of sensuality." Another historian declared him the worst of all popes and one whose "crimes were sufficient to upset any human society."

Before becoming pope he was Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia, nephew of Pope Calixtus III. Pope Pius II had rebuked him for his licentious banquets at Siena. By bribery he had helped secure the election of Pope Innocent VIII. At the death of Innocent VIII twenty-three cardinals met in the Sistine Chapel. The leading candidates were Borgia and Julian Rovere. Openly and without a blush the papacy was up for sale to the highest bidder. Julian Rovere had the backing of the king of France who deposited 200,000 ducats in a Roman bank and 100,000 in Genoa to be used to secure the papacy. Borgia could not outbid him in money but he out-manipulated him by promises of benefices. He was able to bribe all but five of the cardinals.

When elected pope, Rodrigo Borgia was already the father of a number of children by his favorite mistress, Vanozza dei Catana, and had had a number of children by other women. He was sixty-one years of age and had been a cardinal for thirty-seven years. Calixtus III had heaped on him a multitude of ecclesiastical offices, including archbishop of Valencia, the vice-chancellorship, and had made him heir of his personal fortune. His palace was one of the most splendid of the day, noted for its tapestries, carpets, and vessels of gold and silver. A contemporary wrote that he attracted women more powerfully
than a magnet attracted iron.

The outstanding feature of his pontificate was his passion for advancing the fortunes of his children, but doing so in a way that enhanced his own position. He acknowledged five children by Vanozza dei Cantarini. He provided well for children by several other women. His favorite mistress after becoming pope was Julia Farnese, sister of Cardinal Farnese, by whom he had other children. The gayeties, escapades, marriages, and the positions conferred on these children were among the most notable events of the day. Several daughters were given lavish weddings in the Vatican.

Lucrezia Borgia had twice been betrothed to noble Spaniards before her father became pope. He sought higher alliances for her. She had been born in the Vatican where Julia Farnese ruled as her father's mistress. Lucrezia was known for her beauty, her love of fun, and her laughter. She was the leader of a gay and lively circle. There were rumors on the streets of incest with both her father and her brother, Cesare Borgia. She was married to Giovani Sforza, seignor of Pesaro and heir of the powerful Sforza ruler of Milan. The wedding was celebrated in the Vatican. Eleven cardinals attended and entertainment lasted until five in the morning. Dancing and obscene comedies were performed before pope and cardinals.

When this union was no longer useful from a political point of view it was dissolved and Lucrezia was married to Duke Alfonso of Bisceglia, son of Alfonso II of Naples. This husband was murdered—most probably by her brother, Cesare Borgia. Then she was married to Duke Alfonso I of Ferrara in hopes of giving the pope control of the Romagna—she was only twenty-one at this marriage. The formal ceremony was followed with nights of dancing and theatrical plays. Nineteen cardinals were in attendance and all church bells were rung. Lucrezia herself danced before the pope. A bull-fight was held in St. Peter's square with Cesare as matador. It took 150 rules to carry her trousseau and other baggage. The pope heaped on her a fortune in jewels. Lucrezia never returned to Rome. She won the respect of the court of her husband, living a quiet and domestic life until her death at forty in 1519. Her son was Hercules, who reigned in Ferrara until 1559. He was husband of the princess, Renee, who welcomed John Calvin and Clement Marot to her court.

Alexander's fondest hopes centered on Cesare Borgia whose crimes, impieties, and intrigues filled the annals of Rome. He was declared eligible for ordination at the age of six and was made primate and bishop of Pamplona by Pope Innocent VIII. On the day of Alexander's coronation as pope he made Cesare who was then sixteen, archbishop of Valencia. His father made him a cardinal in 1493 when he was eighteen. Alexander used Cesare to build up a political principality in Romagna, a part of the States of the Church that had given the pope much trouble. The pope induced Cesare to renounce the cardinalate and gave him a dispensation to abandon the clerical estate. Cesare was sent to France to arrange an alliance of Duke Louis of Orleans with the pope. The duke was allowed to divorce his wife, Joanne, the sister of King Charles VIII, and to marry Anne of Brittany, thus gaining the territory of Brittany. A cardinal's hat was given to one of the duke's favorites. The duke invaded Italy to help the pope break up the League of Venice. The duke took Milan and claimed Naples. Cesare became duke of Romagna and by trickery murdered the rulers of all the cities that challenged his rule.

When King Charles of France invaded Italy defeating the allies of the pope, the preacher, Savonarola of Florence, declared it was punishment from God on the wicked house of the pope. The pope ordered
the preacher to be silent. When Savonarola continued to denounce the sins of the pope and his family, Alexander VI excommunicated Savonarola, opening the way for the preacher's enemies to seize and burn him.

On King Charles' march through Italy to take Naples when he came to Rome he demanded that the pope surrender to him S. Angelo. Pope Alexander send the king a message that if he attacked Rome the pope would take his place on the walls surrounded by the most sacred relics of Rome. The king marched on to Naples without taking Rome.

The favors that Pope Alexander heaped on one of his sons, the Duke of Gandia, aroused the jealousy of Cesare. The Duke was found murdered after the brothers parted on the way home from a supper. It was understood that Cesare had arranged the murder.

The new century opened with the pope proclaiming a grand Jubilee. A multitude of offices were created and put up for sale. Twelve cardinalates were sold at extravagant prices. Two cardinals died and Cesare confiscated their estates. Cardinal Orsini was imprisoned and died mysteriously—it was thought he was poisoned by Alexander.

Two years before the pope's death Cesare held one of his most notorious orgies in the Vatican. Fifty courtiers danced before the pope and Cesare and their women. They danced first with clothes on and then nude. Jewels, nuts and other prizes were thrown for the nude women to pick up from the ground.

Pope and son were taken ill after an entertainment given by Cardinal Hadrian. The suspicion was that the food had been poisoned. The pope lingered for almost a week. He rallied enough to play cards with some of the cardinals. In his last moments he was given extreme unction.

It was Pope Alexander who canonized Anselm. He promoted the cult of St. Anna, mother of Mary. He proclaimed that he himself was under the special protection of Mary and that on several occasions she had saved him from death. In a papal bull Alexander divided the world discovered by Columbus between Portugal and Spain.

In the midst of mounting criticisms of the pope and his family Alexander ordered a censorship of the press—no volume was to be published without episcopal sanction.

Defenders of Pope Alexander VI have declared that despite the scandals of his personal life he left the Church's teaching unharmed—never did he teach heresy and never did he issue any decree contrary to the morals and faith of the church. The papal office is so far exalted above the personality of its occupants that it cannot lose its dignity by the unworthiness of its occupants.