

# The Church May Be Ruled Without Pope and Cardinals

*Jan Hus*

Reformed · Late Medieval · Treatise

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## INTRODUCTION

Written in 1413 while Hus was already under papal excommunication and a year before he would be burned at Constance, these pages take up a defense drafted by eight theologians of the Prague curia and dismantle it point by point. The fifth chapter, excerpted here, argues that neither pope nor college of cardinals belongs to the church by divine necessity — the church governed itself for three centuries after the Ascension, and can do so again. Hus builds his case through Gregory the Great and the Gospels rather than through appeals to reform sentiment, laying groundwork that Luther would draw on directly a century later. Expect close scholastic argument turned to polemical ends, patient in its distinctions and unsparing in its conclusions.

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The fifth point is this: "for the government of the church throughout the whole world, there ought always to be cardinals as the manifest and true successors in the office of Peter, the prince of the apostles, and of Christ's other apostles." Here that word "ought" does not mean opportuneness — *opportunitas* — on the side of God who rules the church, and who is able to rule the church scattered throughout the world, without such successors, nor does it mean fitness on the side of the church which can be properly ruled by holy priests, even if those twelve cardinals were removed; just as it was ruled for three hundred years and more after Christ's ascension, unless perhaps it be said that that word "ought" means necessity, a thing which the Saviour indicated when he said: "It must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh," Matt. 18 : 7. For these words the Saviour spoke after his rebuke of his disciples who asked who was the greatest among them, when he commanded them, saying: "Verily I say unto you, except ye turn and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven," Matt. 18 : 3. And, that they might not offend by pride those who believed in Christ, he added: "Whoso shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea," Matt. 18 : 6.

Commenting on these words, St. Gregory, Pastoral Rule 1 : 2 [Nic. Fathers, 2d Ser.. 12 : 2], says: "Pastors, perverse in their lives, impugn in their morals what they preach in words. Therefore, it happens when a pastor walks along steep places, the flock follows him to the precipice " ; because, when

laymen have learned the sayings of prelates, they are perverted by their works. "Hence, it is written by the prophet: 'Wicked priests are the cause of the people's downfall/ and of these the Lord said through the prophet: 'They are made to be a stumbling-block of iniquity to the house of Israel ' [Hosea 5:8]. For indeed no one does more injury in the church than he who acts perversely and yet has the name and order of sanctity. For no one dares to oppose and refute such a delinquent, and his guilt is greatly extended, becoming an example, when the sinner is honored on account of the reverence paid to his order. For the unworthy would flee the dangers of such a burden of guilt if they would carefully consider the meaning of the truth, namely, ' Whoso shall cause one of these little ones who believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hung about his neck, and he should be sunk in the depth of the sea,' Matt. 18 : 6. By ' a great millstone ' is meant the treadmill and sorrow of the secular life; and by the 'depth of the sea' is meant utmost damnation. He, therefore, who, led along by the appearance of sanctity, destroys others either by word or example, would truly be far better off if his worldly acts under an external cloak bound such an one to death, rather than that the ministries of his sacred office performed in guilt should show to others that he was changeable, because, doubtless, if he was the only one to fall, a more tolerable pain of hell would torment him."

That Holy Pope knew the conditions and dangers incident to a prelate's life and especially incident to the position of the Roman pontiff , inasmuch as his sin of commission and omission would be a scandal to the whole Christian people. For it is said goodness in a pope is like salt for all, and badness in him inures to the damnation of persons without number, Disl. 40, Si Papa [Friedberg, 1 : 146]. If, therefore, the pope and the cardinals by pompous equipages, resplendence of dress, exquisite and wonderful furnishings, by excessive anxiety to heap up benefices or money, and by the manifest ambition for honor in greater measure than secular laymen — if they offend those who believe in Christ — how is it that they always and necessarily continue to be essential " for the government of the universal church as manifest and true successors in the office of Peter and Christ's other apostles"? Never was the office of the apostles other than one of following Christ in good living and in teaching the church, baptizing men, healing the sick, casting out devils, offering up the sacrifice of Christ's body and everywhere exercising the power connected with their office for the perfecting of the church. If, therefore, the pope and his cardinals exercise that office, then the pope holds the office of Peter. But, if he with the cardinals falls away from it, who doubts that he falls away from the true vicariate of Christ and his apostles?

By the same method of proof the sixth point is set forth which is: " there are not to be found or given [by God] on earth other such successors than the pope, the present head, and the college of cardinals, the present body of the Roman church." On this point I note in the first place that Christ is a most sufficient head as he proved during three hundred years or more, when his church prospered and his law was most efficient for the closing of ecclesiastical cases, the end for which God gave his law. For Christ and his law did not fail for the governing of the church, seeing devoted priests ministered this law unto the people, who followed the judgment of holy doctors, which judgment they issued by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as is clear from the cases of St. Augustine, St. Jerome, St. Gregory and St. Ambrose, who were given after the apostles' death to the church to teach her. Hence, it is not to be doubted that St. Augustine was more profitable to the church than many popes, and in matters of doctrine much more profitable than all the cardinals, from the first cardinals down to those now in office.

For, in the government of the church, he knew the Scriptures of Christ better than they and also defined the nature of the catholic faith better by clearing the church of heretical errors and correcting them. Why, therefore, were those four doctors not true vicars of the apostles and their manifest successors, nay, even more true and reliable, so far as the people go, than any modern pope with his cardinals who shine before the people neither by virtue of a holy life nor by doctrine? Therefore, do I boldly assert that, if in any point these four doctors agree, the pope and his cardinals may not lawfully declare the opposite as the faith of the people. And the same is true of other saints, such as John Chrysostom, John of Damascus and Dionysius the Areopagite, who, taught by the Holy Spirit, illuminated the church of Christ by their knowledge and piety.

Against this point it is argued chiefly in this way: God is omnipotent, therefore, God may give other true successors of the apostles than are the pope and the cardinals. Therefore, other true successors of the apostles can be found or given who are not the pope or the cardinals. Hence that [sixth] point is false and the first consequence is proved. For, if God is not able to give other true successors, than are the pope and the cardinals, it follows that the power of Caesar, a man and not God, in setting up the pope and cardinals limited God's power, a thing which is false. Hence the consequence is proven, for Constantine, the Caesar, three hundred years after Christ, instituted the pope; because the Roman pontiff was an associate of other pontiffs until the donation of Caesar by whose authority the pope began to rule as head. Hence the Decretum, Dist. 96 : 14 [Friedberg, 1 : 342 sq.],<sup>1</sup> which out of reverence we cannot deny, thus speaks: "The emperor Constantine on the fourth day after his baptism conferred on the pontiff the grant — privilegium — of the Roman church that the pontiffs might have headship in all the earth, as judges over the king." In this grant, this among other things is read: "We have bestowed upon him power and ability and imperial honor, seeing that he is thus to hold the government over the four sees, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem and Constantinople, and is the highest ruler over all priests in the whole world," etc. See how the institution and pre-eminence of the pope emanated from Caesar's power, which, however, cannot limit God's power. For this reason later pontiffs, fearing that they might lose their pre-eminence, sought confirmation from other Caesars, as the Decretum, Dist. 63 [Friedberg, 1 : 244], says: "I, Lewis, Roman emperor, Augustus, do decree and bestow by this our act of confirmation upon thee, blessed Peter, prince of the apostles, and through thee upon thy vicar, Lord Pascal, supreme pontiff, and upon thy successors forever, even as by our [your] predecessors ye have up to this time held in our [your] power and gift alone and controlled the Roman state."

But there need be no anxiety over this grant of words when Caesar says: "I, Lewis, concede unto thee, blessed Peter." Never did Peter, who at that time was already in possession of the kingdom of heaven, stand in need of civil possession over Rome, and never was Lewis greater than Peter and more truly in possession than Peter. Would that Peter, if it had been God's will, had said: I do not accept thy grant because, when I was Roman bishop, I had already forsaken all and did not crave from Nero dominion over Rome; nor do I stand in need of it. And I see that it greatly hurts my descendants, for it hinders them in the preaching of the Gospel and in salutary prayer and in the performance of God's counsels and commandments and makes many of them proud and arrogant. Since, therefore, the good — optimus — God is able to take away the grant — privilegium — made by those emperors and to bring His church back to a state where pontiffs are on a parity, even as it was before the donation — it follows, that God

is able to give to His church other true successors than the pope and the cardinals that they may minister even as did the holy apostles.

But against this the objection is brought: "The pope has this very appointment from the Lord," as the Decretum states, Dist. 22 [Friedberg, 1 : 73], where Pope Anacletus says: "The holy Roman church obtained the primacy not from the apostles but from the Lord himself." From this it follows, that the pope was not appointed to his high office by the emperor or man but immediately by God. And this is clear [22] 2, 3 from the submission rendered by kings and also from the testimony of doctors where they treat of the pope's authority.

As for the first statement, it is to be laid down that that pope, Anacletus, understood by the holy Roman church not the basilica of stone or wood, but St. Peter and St. Paul, and the other saints who dwelt in that place. For this reason, in this same decretal, he says, that Peter and Paul were associates in the city of Rome, wherefore it is said figuratively that he obtained the primacy.

In regard to the second statement it is to be laid down that he is speaking about the primacy over men from God's standpoint, by virtue of the primacy of virtues and in view of the edification of the church and not about a primacy of temporal riches or human glory — a primacy which the apostles of Christ spurned. It is thus clear how weak the argumentation is: namely, the Roman church obtained the primacy not from the apostles, but from the Lord himself. For this reason every Roman pontiff ought to have pre-eminence in the matter of mundane glory and have secular rule, when, in fact, it ought rather to follow from the Decretum that the Roman pontiff is charged with serving the people not by ruling for his own ends, or suspending the people, but by praying emciently for the people, as according to the Decretum [Friedberg, 1 : 74] Paul did, Romans 1:8. He says: "A prayer may be poured out for all to the Lord of all the saints, and in these words Paul, most blessed, promised the Romans over his own signature, 'God is my witness whom I serve in my spirit, in the Gospel of his Son, how unceasingly I make mention of you always in my prayers.'" From this decretal it is seen that Pope Anacletus did not intend to affirm that he himself was to have civil rule over all others or hold a primacy of government over all other persons of the church militant. Because, in thus seeking his own glory he would show most clearly the mark of antichrist. John 5 : 41 sqq. Yea, even Boniface VIII, in his bull TJnam sanctam, did not dare expressly to affirm this, for then he alone would have borne witness that he was the most holy man and, in this case, the faithful as well as unbelievers might appositely object against him: "Thou bearest witness of thyself; thy witness is not true" [John 5 : 31].

Therefore, the Roman pontiffs have become involved in this difficulty by reason of the dotation and exaltation derived from Caesar, because, when the emperor asks them, whether, in the matter of government, they excel all mortals living, in power, primacy and dignity, they have to admit it to be so, for otherwise, as they say, no one is under obligation to believe that they are popes. But Peter and Paul did not make any such statement about themselves, for they did not have any power given them by Caesar. For this reason, Paul truly and humbly made this confession concerning himself: "I am least of all the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle," I Cor. 15 : 9. On this account, therefore, the Roman pontiff would not make such a profession if the imperial dignity were not in the way. Wherefore, the conclusion holds that from God direct and not from a man — who is not God — or from a mere man, does the pope hold the excellency of his rank. But he should make himself deserving of that rank by an humble demeanor and without pomp. And if Caesar's dignity exalts the pope in the eyes of the world when he is without humility and a holy life, how can this exaltation fit in with the life and glory of Christ, when antichrist is exalted in the same worldly way?

As for the second point — the subjection of the kingdoms — it is said that at first it was rendered without the pope's seeking, but arose out of fear of the emperor's command, according to which all peoples did not owe subjection to him, that he should have secular rule over them, and therefore that subjection does not argue for the necessity that a Roman pontiff and his cardinals govern until the end of time.

Thirdly, concerning the testimony of the doctors who treat of the pope's power, it is alleged, that all who thus magnify the pope's power and say that he can do without guilt whatsoever he wills and that nobody has the right to ask why he does this or that — all these are mendacious rhetoricians, leading the people of our Lord Jesus Christ astray. Nor ought such to be believed except as their words are

founded in Scripture. For thus the great doctor, Augustine, often asserted of himself that he ought to be believed only so far as he had grounded himself in Scripture. It is evident, that God may give other successors of the apostles than the pope and the cardinals, just as he was able to give others in the place of the pontiffs of the old law, the scribes and the Pharisees with their traditions. And to these, who did not keep God's law, the Lord said: "I say unto you, the kingdom of heaven shall be taken away from you and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof," Matt. 21 : 43. These words the Saviour spoke to the priests when they alone bore sentence against themselves in that they said: "He will miserably destroy those wicked men and will let out the vineyard to other husbandmen who shall render him the fruits in their seasons." How, therefore, is the hand of the Lord shortened that He is not able to cast out the pope and the cardinals and appoint others in their places who, though they have no titles, will build up the church as the Lord did with the apostles?

Likewise all bishops of Christ's church, who follow Christ in their lives, they are true vicars of the apostles and they are not pope or cardinals. Therefore, other true successors of the apostles can be found and given besides the pope and the cardinals. The consequence is given with the minor premise, and the first part of it is clear from Decretum, 21, in novo [Friedberg, 1 : 69, 70], where Pope Anacletus says that "the rest of the apostles, by reason of an equal fellowship [with Christ], received with Peter honor and authority." And later on he says: "When they were deceased, bishops arose in their places." And here the Gloss says, Argumentum, that "every bishop is equal in apostolic power by virtue of his ordination and the ground of his consecration." The same is clear from Decretum, 24 : 1, Loquitur ad Petrum [Friedberg, 1 : 971], where Cyprian, the bishop and martyr, says that "after his resurrection Christ conferred on all the apostles equal power." This also appears from what Jerome says, Dist. 95, Olim [Friedberg, 1 : 332]: "The same person formerly was both presbyter and bishop, before rivalries had been started by the insinuation of the devil, and before it was said amongst the people, 'I am of Paul and I of Apollos.' "

Likewise, all archbishops, patriarchs and bishops, at the council of Pisa who recognized, determined and condemned Pope Gregory XII, as a heretic, these were and now are true successors of the apostles, and these are other persons than the pope and cardinals. Hence the sixth point is false. The consequence follows together with the part spoken of above. And the doctors did not dare to deny the first part.

Likewise, it should be evangelical wisdom that all priests are consecrated and guided directly by the one and only pontiff, our Lord Jesus Christ. For this was so at the time of the apostles, when the church grew, and this statement accords with Scripture. Therefore, God is able to bring his church back to its pristine state by taking away the government from the pope and cardinals. And so it stands that others besides these may be vicars of the apostles.

Likewise the designation of the power and the office, "minister of the church," is indicated lest he wander away, into forbidden ground, but no other one is indicated save the one whom Christ appointed. For, since Christ is almighty, omniscient, and all-merciful, it is clear that reason requires that he ordain finally and unchangeably, and more especially in view of the fact that in the primitive church the harvest was larger, and God ordained more copiously different kinds of ministers as laborers in the harvest. But then he only ordained deacons and presbyters and the presbyter and the bishop was the same person,

as says Jerome and as appears from Paul's epistles to Timothy and Titus. From these Jerome draws the conclusion in his letter to the presbyter Evagrius, Dist. 93, Legimus [Friedberg, 1 : 328], when he says: "What does the bishop do, except ordain, that the presbyter does not do ? Nor is the church of the city of Rome one thing, and the church of the whole world another. And the church of Gaul and of Britain and Africa and Persia and the Orient and India and all the barbarous nations adore one Christ and observe one rule of truth. If authority is sought, the world is greater than the city. Wherever there may be a bishop, either at Rome, Constantinople or Alexandria, the bishop is of the same merit and of the same priesthood. The power of riches and the lowliness of poverty make the bishop either higher or lower. Besides," he says, " all are successors of the apostles." So we see that the pope and his cardinals are not the only successors of Christ.

The same is made to appear by Bede who, commenting on Luke 10 : 1 [Com. on Luke, Migne's ed., 92 : 461], "The Lord hath appointed seventy-two others," says: "There is no one who doubts that just as the twelve apostles prefigured the class of bishops, so these seventy-two the class of presbyters and bore the mark of the second order of the priesthood."<sup>2</sup> From the things already said it is shown that others than the pope and cardinals may be given and found as true successors of the apostles. Inasmuch, therefore, as by Christ's appointment in the days of the apostles, two orders of the clergy sufficed for his church, that is, the deacon and the priest, as the saints say, and also the Decretum, 93, Dominus Noster [Friedberg, 1 : 329], where it runs: "The Lord chose apostles, disciples, bishops and presbyters, and the apostles appointed for themselves after the Lord's ascension deacons to be ministers of their episcopate and of the church,"<sup>1</sup> — why should it be wondered at if God almighty, putting the pope and his cardinals to death and giving them also eternal life — in case they merit it — should allow His church throughout the whole world to wage war with these same orders now as originally, namely, without the cardinals, and should ordain that the church should be ruled again as she was ruled by His own indestructible law, by giving bishops and priests who, by evangelizing and prayer and the exemplification of good lives, would diligently feed Christ's sheep. For this office alone was given to Peter by Christ, as appears in John 21.

Hence Augustine notes, Ep. 141, ad Paulinum [Migne's ed., xxxiii : 635], how in the apostolic passage, Eph. 4 : 11, the office of pastor and the office of teacher are joined. "Pastors," he says, "and teachers whom thou hast appointed to discern above all the truth, are, I think, the same, and not the pastors one and the teachers another. And so, as he had spoken previously of pastors, he added teachers that pastors might understand that teaching — doctrina — belonged to their office. And, therefore, he did not say, 'some pastors and some teachers' — the form of speech used in the former part of the preceding verse — but 'some pastors and teachers/ as if one office were embraced under the two words: ' some,' he said, 'pastors and teachers.'"

Hence, if that which is superfluous be taken away, it would appear what pope, cardinal or bishop would remain a true shepherd out of the treasury of the Lord, and perhaps more would be found useless thieves and robbers rather than true vicars of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But against what has been said the objection is brought, that, if the pope and cardinals are not the true and manifest successors of the apostles, then for the same reason others are not, inasmuch as the power of discrimination cannot be based upon the fact that they may be clad in sheep's clothing, and yet may be inwardly ravening wolves, as stated, Matt. 7 : 15. Here it becomes us to consider the two sects of the clergy, namely, the clergy of Christ and the clergy of antichrist. Christ's clergy rests in its head, Christ, and in his laws; but antichrist's clergy leans wholly or chiefly on human laws and the laws of antichrist, and yet it is clothed upon like the clergy of Christ and the church with the design that the people may be led astray by its simulation. And so it is fitting that these two things which are so contrary to each other obey two contrary heads with their laws. The outward evidence teaches the class to which the members belong. Indeed, it is established that the clergy of the church falls away into two parts and for this reason laymen cannot help but waver who are borne along by those who are so different from Christ in opinion and in life.

But these parts may be commonly best discerned from the fact that the clergy of antichrist is zealously intent upon human traditions and rights which savor of pride and the greed of this world, and that it wishes to live ostentatiously and in pleasure and in a way contrary to Christ, wholly neglecting the imitation of the Lord Jesus Christ in its living. But Christ's clergy labors diligently for Christ's laws and his rights, whereby spiritual good is acquired that it may be shown, and it flees pride and the pleasure of this world, and seeks to live in conformity with Christ, giving itself up most zealously, following the Lord Jesus Christ. Nor is it right for the faithful to doubt that this part is the true clergy, and the other part is the false. And although in the absence of revelation, the pilgrim is not able clearly and with certainty to determine who the holy pastor really is, nevertheless we ought to decide by his works, which are conformed to Christ's law, that he is such a pastor.

If, however, the pilgrim sees him living at variance with Christ, to what other judgment can he come than that he is antichrist's vicar, for Christ says: "Ye shall know them by their fruits," Matt. 7 : 16, and "He that is not with me is against me," Matt. 12 : 30. Here the Glossa ordinaria says: "He that is not with me" — that is, does works dissimilar to mine — "he is against me. " If, therefore, a prelate is proud, lives in luxury, follows after greed, is impatient, does not feed the sheep, but oppresses and scatters them, is he not antichrist? Hence men may easily recognize the wicked by their outward works which are contrary to Christ; but the good cannot be so known because hypocrisy may lurk in them.

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