

# 10 The Rise of the Papacy

## Who's in Charge?

Read the following conversation and decide which person is in charge.

**Meg:** *It's getting late. We'd better decide what we're gonna do.*

**Charlie:** *I don't really care where we go.*

**Missy:** *I thought we already decided. Let's do what we'd planned earlier—go to the game.*

**Pedro:** *Well, whatever ...*

**Missy:** *Look. The longer we stand here, the greater the chances are that we'll miss the Tigers' first big touchdown! Let's go cheer on the team.*

**Meg:** *I'm not so sure. Brrr! It feels like the bottom has dropped out of the thermometer!*

**Missy:** *Oh, come on, Meg! It's not cold! It's brisk! Perfect football weather, right?*

**Pedro:** *I guess so. What do you think, Charlie?*

**Missy:** *Charlie thinks we should go to the game. Right, Charlie? Come on! Let's go!*

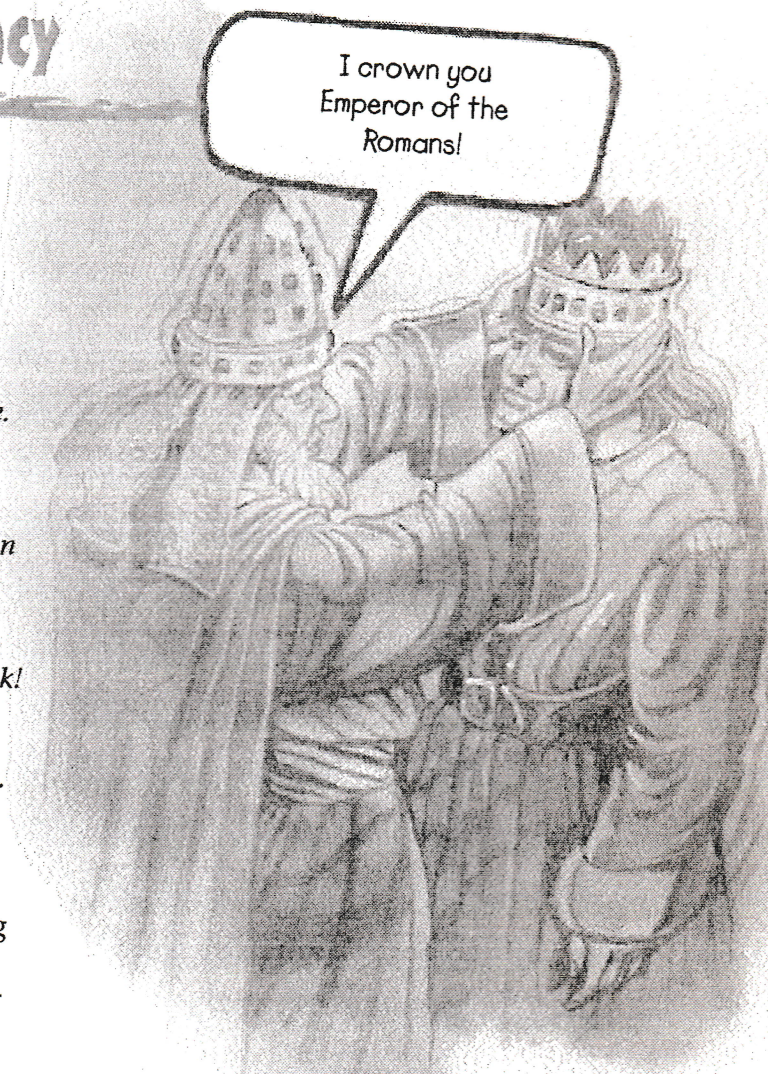
Do you identify with one of the characters above? Which one? All people like to be in charge sometimes. We all enjoy the feeling of being in control.

The early church struggled with the question of power for hundreds of years. Read on to see how the church attempted to answer the question "Who's in charge?"

## The First Church Fathers

Before Jesus returned to heaven, He appointed His disciples to continue His work. Jesus remained head of the church, and none of the disciples had more authority than another.

When the Holy Spirit blessed the work of the apostles in one place, the apostles left the people in the care of believers called *bishops*. We would call these men *pastors*. Some congregations chose men to help the pastor or bishop with his duties. These men were called *deacons*. The positions of pastor, deacon, and church member were all thought to be equal, though they involved different



tasks and responsibilities. Everyone was a servant of the Word with equal power.

Then things began to change. Pastors served as representatives of Christ in administering the Lord's Supper. Bishops oversaw pastors and were considered the heads of large congregations. The power of the bishops increased because congregational members looked to them to settle arguments among believers. Everyone regarded bishops as the rulers in the church.

## Father Pope

The bishops in major cities gained even more power. At the Council of Nicaea in 325, three bishops were named *patriarchs*, or church fathers. Later, two more bishops were added to



the list of church fathers. The bishop of Rome, Sylvester I, argued that the church needed only one head bishop. He hoped to be the one.

For more than a century, the rivalry between the five church fathers continued. The bishop in Rome emerged supreme. By this time, the Roman branch of the church was the largest, wealthiest, and most active congregation in the Christian world.

In the sixth century, the bishop of Rome, Gregory I, claimed to be head of all the bishops. He called himself the *pope*, a term meaning "father." He claimed he was the father of the entire church, especially chosen by God to be Christ's representative. From this time on, bishops of Rome assumed the title of *pope*.

### **The Pope's Power Grows**

By the middle ages, the position of pope was well accepted within the Western church. In 739, Pepin the Short drove out invaders and presented land to the pope. The pope's influence increased to include political power. He was elevated above every emperor and was no longer regarded as having to obey the government.

Popes later recalled the occasion when Pope Leo crowned Pepin's son Charlemagne "Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire" and claimed power to seat and unseat kings and emperors. It was sometimes difficult to tell whether the church or the government was in charge.

The Eastern church objected to the growing power of the Bishop of Rome or pope. Through the years, the objections between Rome and Constantinople grew in number and intensity until finally, in 1054, the churches mutually excommunicated each other. The Eastern church became known as the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Western as the Roman Catholic Church.

### **Papal Policies**

When a pope died, a new pope was appointed to take his place. The church convinced early Christians that an "apos-

tolitic succession" began when Jesus gave Peter authority to work for Him. Jesus said, "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church"(Matthew 16:18). Church leaders claimed that this divine line of authority passed from Jesus to Peter and continued through the popes.

Gregory VII was pope from 1073 to 1085. He said that the pope, speaking from his throne, is infallible (unable to make a mistake). Pope Gregory concluded that the papacy is above every earthly ruler.

### **Who Is in Charge?**

1. Read the full account of what Jesus said to Peter in Matthew 16:13-23. What was the "rock" upon which Jesus promised to build His church?
2. Read Romans 3:23 and Ecclesiastes 7:20. How do these verses contradict Pope Gregory's claims?
3. Whom does the Bible name as head of the church? See Ephesians 1:20-23.

### **To Review and Remember**

God placed all things under His [Jesus'] feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church.  
*Ephesians 1:22*