

BAD POPES

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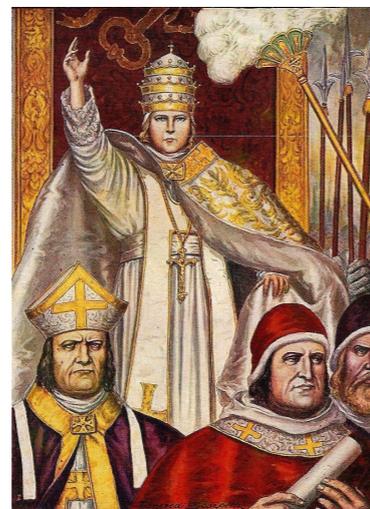
Sins of the Fathers

Money, Sex, Power – All in God's name.

- **An unprecedented series**, never before realized in documentary form. Not that long ago, the Borgias inspired not one but *two* dramatic TV series that lifted a veil on this corrupt Papal dynasty. The Borgias' long list of vices even included incest. But in some ways the Borgias were a bunch of choir boys, compared to the popes that came before and after them. God's Representative on Earth? Sometimes they seemed to be working for the *other guy!*
- With **266 pontiffs in 2000 years**, you have to expect some rotten apples. And let us be clear. There have been plenty of honourable men who have served as the 'Vicar of Christ'. But the bad Popes still astonish us, with their sinful and vicious conduct, their shamelessness. These Bad Popes have started wars, ordered the persecution of innocents and enriched themselves to an obscene degree. And all the while, as they preached about virtue and redemption, their personal lives were outrageous – even by today's standards.



Pope Alexander VI



Pope Benedict IX



Pope John XII



Pope Stephen VI



Pope Boniface VIII

Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

John Dalberg-Acton, 1st Baron Acton

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• The **Power to Shock** – Our focus will be on the Papacy during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, when the Catholic Church was at its mightiest. Popes back then were much more than bishops or priests, as powerful as any Prince or Emperor.

Popes are considered to be successors of Saint Peter, and, through him, according to Catholic tradition, of Christ himself. Spiritual power is one thing – but from the 5th to the 17th century, the Papacy wielded plenty of real-world clout. They were embedded in almost every major political decision of the day. The Vatican ruled over a vast territory dividing the Italian peninsula in two. The Papacy maintained a large and lavish court, scheming and manoeuvring to shape international politics, in ways we can scarcely imagine today.

In **BAD POPES**, (SINS OF THE FATHERS) we will expose these so-called Men of God, and address some fundamental questions about Holy Mother Church:

- * How did the Papacy grow from its humble beginnings as early Apostles of Christ, into a formidable, multinational organization?
- * How did the Popes manage to acquire and develop their own state?
- * Who were the worst Popes in history, the *least holy* of these supposedly holy men?
- * What was their relationship with power, sex and the occult?

The facts speak for themselves. Yes, there have been dramas made from the lives of Bad Popes, but there is no need to embellish or invent. The truth is so much more compelling. Drawing on our tried and tested formula of dramatic reconstructions, and fascinating interviews, BAD POPES will be as visually rich as the Vatican itself. And the stories we will tell are still jaw dropping, even centuries later.

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UNHOLY FATHERS

Just consider some of the extraordinary characters we will be dealing with... What could be more *scandalous* than the early life of **Gregory the Great**, who was born of incest between twins - and then unwittingly married his mother? What could be more *macabre* than the case of **Pope Formosus**? Nine months after his death, his successor Stephen VI ordered his body exhumed - and put on trial! Who could be more *vulgar* than **Pope Lambertini**, who loved nothing better than a dirty joke, especially at the expense of nuns and friars?

One story that did the rounds in Medieval Europe even told of a transgender Pope: According to the tale, the ninth century Pope Iannes Anglicus was in fact a woman: **Pope Joan**. It's said she was removed from the Saint Peter's Chair (the Papal throne) when her female identity was revealed in the most dramatic possible way: She gave birth to a child. Even today mere mention of Pope Joan can upset some devout Catholics. But why, when there were so many other popes whose conduct was shameful? Popes who were definitely 'all man', but also deranged and depraved?

- **John XII** (955-964). Elected Pope at just 18 years old, he was famous for his degeneracy, transforming the Lateran Palace into a house of pleasure, frequented by seductive women and handsome boys. But his list of transgressions was long and varied: ranging from saying Mass without communion; to blinding his spiritual counsellor and castrating a cardinal. He died at the age of 27; according to some accounts, after being thrown out of a window by a jealous husband.
- **Benedict IX** (1032-1048). The great-grandson of John XII, he had a dissolute lifestyle to match his predecessor. One historian described him as "*wallowing in immorality, a devil come from Hell disguised as a priest*".
- **Boniface VIII** (1294-1303). Dante relegated him to Hell for the offence of buying and selling offices of the church. Bonifacio VIII imprisoned his predecessor Celestine V, who died in captivity. Accused by his contemporaries of such wrongdoings as violating confessional secrets, Boniface VIII was himself imprisoned, and died soon after of a violent fever.
- **Alexander VI** (1492-1503). Played by Jeremy Irons in HBO series *The Borgias*, Alexander VI had numerous children, all illegitimate, two of whom were born during his time as Pope. He was the only pope to have both a 'wife' and an official lover, Giulia Farnese. This arrangement was an open secret, so much so that those wanting favours from the Pope would apply to his mistress.

So as you can see, when it comes to selecting Bad Popes, we have plenty to choose from. Let's look at how we will tell their story over 4 episodes.

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EPISODE OUTLINES

EPISODE I: OF POPES AND POWER



From Christ to a Palace: How did a religion founded initially in humility, piety and poverty become one of the most dominant organisations on earth? And how was the Papacy an engine of that expansion? Specific narrative/historical cases will shed light on this amazing papal journey to global superpowerdom. We begin with the birth of both secular power and the papal states, with the Donation of the Lombard King Liutprand to Pope Gregory II in 728, and the subsequent political canvas woven by popes such as Zachary, Stephen II and Adrian, with Pepin the Short and Charlemagne (the Carolingians) in the 8th and 9th centuries. The Papacy became the only real political rival power for the Holy Roman Empire. We will examine the fascinating flaws of popes such as Innocent III and Boniface VIII, before arriving at the Renaissance. The high point in the creation of a papal court of unrivaled pomp and splendor. Political and private adventures reveal scandals involving Alexander VI, father to that Cesare Borgia celebrated by Machiavelli; Sixtus IV, involved in the Pazzi Conspiracy against Lorenzo de Medici and his brother Giuliano in 1478; Clement VII who was the son of the same Giuliano and the one who commissioned Michelangelo to paint the majestic Last Judgment in the Sistine Chapel. Why? To cover up a pre-existing fresco depicting Pope Sixtus murdering his father Giuliano. The Popes' quest for power tells a story which needs no embellishment, it is all a matter of historical record.

EPISODE II: THE POPE'S MISTRESSES



Popes were supposed to be the holiest persons on earth, which meant their personal lives should be beyond reproach. They, more than anyone in the church, were meant to be above the temptations of the flesh. They were not only the representatives of the Church of Christ, but even the successors of Christ himself and his first apostle, Peter. However, even popes got to know earthly love, and they were often enslaved by carnal passions, lust and desire, and even fathered offspring. John XII virtually transformed the Holy See into a house of ill repute, hosting as many girls as he could. Some popes were openly manipulated by their concubines: Pope Sergius III and his lover Marozia became proverbial in 9th century Rome. In the 15th century with Cardinal Rodrigo Borgia, who would become Pope Alexander VI became notorious for his concubines Vannozza Cattanei and Giulia Farnese,. 'La Farnese' had been the sister of Pope Paul III, but became known as the 'Spouse of Christ' because of her papal lover and protector. The intimate life of these popes will be uncovered in order to understand the carnal and bodily side of the holiest figure in western history.

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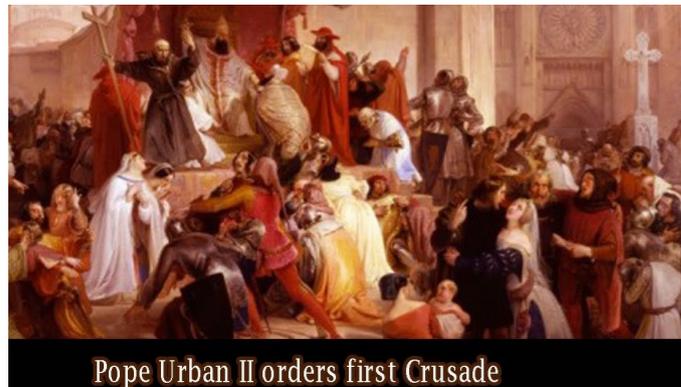
EPISODE OUTLINES

EPISODE III: BAD POPES, BAD MAGIC



Popes were men of faith and religion, certainly, but they were also the products of their time, often prey to superstitious beliefs. Yet these men were in a unique position to determine for the masses what was considered wrong or right, true or false. This applied with the mysterious relationship between the popes and what we would call today *magic*. We will deal with accusations of magical practises leveled at popes for political reasons - and used to discredit them. This was the case with Boniface VIII and his enemy, the king of France Philip IV. But this episode also aims at reconstructing the role played by popes in persecuting practitioners of bad magic (as they decreed it). The church after all had the power to decide who was a true believer and who was a heretic. As terrible as the Spanish Inquisition, the persecution of witches killed untold numbers of women. All this occurred between the 13th and the 15th centuries, but the tipping point was personified by Innocent VIII, who in 1484 put his papal seal of approval on the infamous Hammer of Witches, a handbook written by the Dominican preacher Heinrich Kramer. This nasty piece of work was a handbook for inquisitors on how to identify and wipe out witches. All this time later, it is still chilling.

EPISODE IV: POPES AT WAR



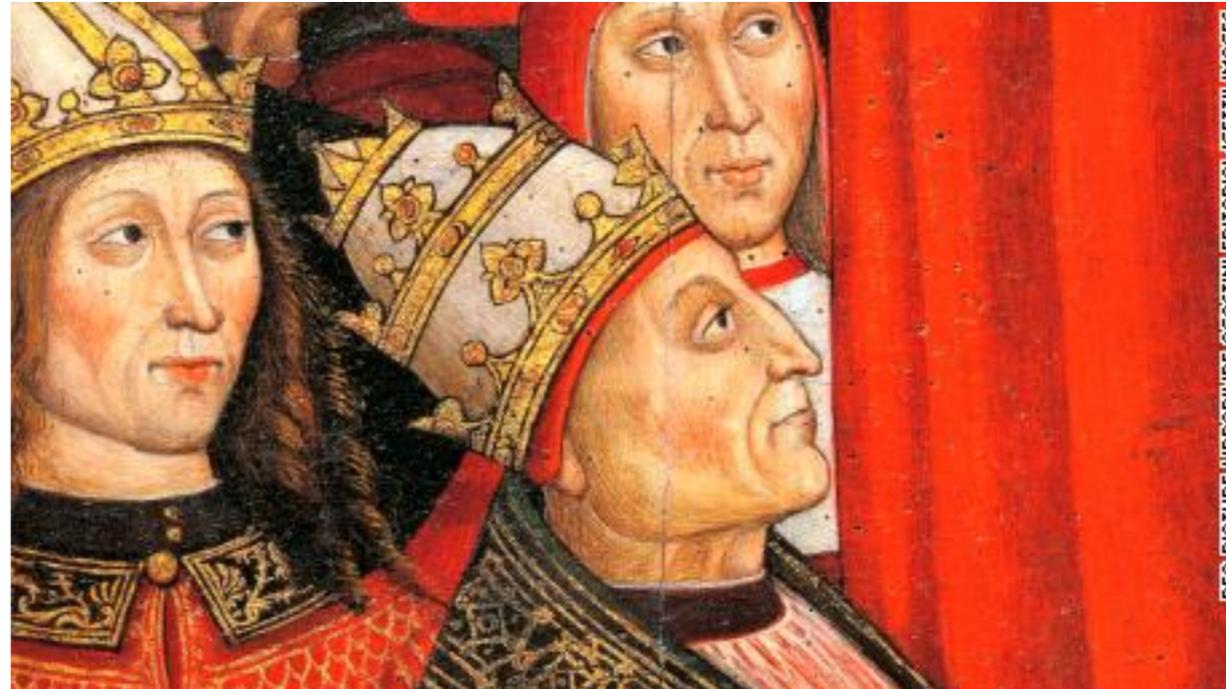
Pope Urban II orders first Crusade

Popes were supposed to spread God's message of peace on earth. But as history often shows, their message was often spread by means of war, such as the 'just wars' of Christians against enemies of the Church. The obvious case in point is Pope Urban II calling for the First Crusade in 1095 at the Council of Clermont, France, and urging all Christians able to bear arms to go to the Holy Land and free Jerusalem from the Muslims. Examples of the relationship between the Papacy and warfare did not end with the First Crusade. Popes hired the best generals for their papal armies, such as during the numerous wars and crusades against the Turks. This was after the Turks had taken Constantinople in 1453, hoping to conquer the rest of Europe. Some popes even led their own armies into battle. That was the case of Pope Julius II, known in the 15th century as the 'Warrior Pope'. Ideals were sometimes involved in the peculiar relationship between the papacy and armed conflict; but often it was about the quest for power and expansion. Proper use of armies could consolidate the Papacy's secular authority, just as it did for other sovereigns of the time. There was a huge difference however. A pope was not only the head of a nation state: he was also the head of the Church, having the power to join together heaven and earth. In this way religion became a masterful means of conquest.

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*As compelling as it is appalling BAD POPES
shines a light on an area of history,
some would prefer forgotten...*



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