

**The Donation of Constantine.**

Falsely, falsely, but not without good faith. Pope Innocent III.  
Melius est ut scandalum oriatur quam veritas relinquitur. \*)  
Bernhard of Clairvaux.

5 Among the sciences that present almost insurmountable obstacles, historical research holds a prominent place, especially when it concerns long-ago times. In our day, when the telegraph is at our service, when newspaper reporters strive to report what happened as quickly and as faithfully as possible, it is already difficult to judge  
10 what actually took place; we often encounter contradictory reports; sometimes what is asserted today is retracted tomorrow; How much more so must this be true for the distant past, when printing did not yet exist, when the events of the day were passed down orally and, if recorded, did not come to the attention of the general public. It has become clear, therefore, how the first pages of the history of every nation  
15 consist of myths and legends, in which the truth is shrouded and of which, upon close examination, sometimes precious little reality remains. In later history, there are stories and situations that have long been considered historical, but have dissolved into mists in the face of contemporary criticism. Such a fiction usually occurred inadvertently, the result of earlier credulity, of a lack of sense of truth and  
20 reality. So it is with the well-known legend of Tell in Switzerland, so it is with the stories of the deaths of Albrecht Beiling and Jan van Schaffelaar in our national history.

These are innocent errors. Worse is when history is deliberately falsified, in the interest of one person or one party. In this, the Roman Catholic Church has always  
25 demonstrated exceptional skill. It is well known how, even today, the story repeatedly surfaces that Luther committed suicide and that he only left the Roman Catholic Church so he could marry. Well known is Janssen's falsification of history in Germany, and among us, the distortion of national history by Nuijens. But all this is nothing compared to the falsifications committed in earlier times by the Church of  
30 Rome, with no other goal than to further its rule. A remarkable example of this is the so-called Donatio Constantini, or Donation of Constantine the Great. Now that it has become apparent, on the occasion of the peace conference, that the Pope, even by Protestants, is still more or less accorded a place among the Princes, it is not superfluous to fully illuminate the origins of the Roman bishop's temporal power. As  
35 is well known, the Pope of Rome was a secular monarch until 1870. Although the Papal States had already been taken from him, the capital remained in his possession thanks to the support of French soldiers. However, when these soldiers withdrew due to the war with Germany, the troops of the Italian government entered the gates without a fight, and Rome was declared the capital of Italy. The Pope was allowed to retain  
40 only his palace, the Vatican. And although this palace is a colossal building with 1,100 rooms and a garden where one can ride around in a carriage and horse, in this respect the Pope is equal to any private individual who lives in a large house and owns a large country estate; there can no longer be any question of secular territory for him. He is a dethroned monarch, who by the grace of the Italian government has  
45 remained in possession of that palace. Nothing can be said against that. When, then, did this secular territory, which the Pope lost in 1870 and to which he still lays claim, begin? History answers: in the middle of the 8th century. Then, Pepin the Short, anointed king of the Frankish empire by Pope Stephen II in 754, surrendered to the Pope all the cities he had conquered in a war with the Lombards. From that time  
50 on, the head of the Roman Church became a secular monarch, who negotiated with kings and emperors as their equals and even felt superior to all kings and emperors. How Pepin came to thus relinquish what he had conquered by force of arms with great effort, at the cost of much human blood, can be partly explained by the spirit of the times, which believed that a head of the Church gained prestige when he could rule  
55 over lands and peoples as a monarch. This idea was not new. From ancient times, Christian emperors were accustomed to granting bishops, in addition to their ecclesiastical domains, considerable influence over the administration of secular affairs. Between that influence and actual governance was only a step. The boundaries between the secular and the spiritual were almost nonexistent.  
60 more. The Master's words, "My kingdom is not of this world," had been completely forgotten. Until the time of the Reformation, we see popes, cardinals, and bishops participating in hunting, and in times of war, mounted on warhorses, armored and armed, marching out to battle. But beyond all this, there was a special reason why Pepin the Short gave such a vast territory to Pope Stephen II.  
65 To understand this properly, we must try to imagine ourselves in the circumstances of that time. In the mid-8th century, the Pope of Rome was in a precarious position. The

city was threatened by the Lombards, a powerful tribe who, since 568, had conquered most of Italy from the emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, the so-called Greek emperor, but had not been able to completely oust him from Italy. Rome and the Exarchate of Ravenna were still under his jurisdiction. The latter was eventually conquered by the Lombards, but lost again by their king, Luitprand, in the mid-eighth century. His successor, Aistulf, reclaimed it in 751 and now marched against Rome. While Pope Zacharias had succeeded in restraining the pious Luitprand through religious considerations and persuading him to withdraw from Rome, his successor, Stephen II, found no sympathy from the less pious Aistulf. Although he sent his brother, the deacon Paulus, \*) to the king, along with the envoy of the Greek emperor, to persuade him to return the places he had occupied to the emperor, it was to no avail.

The pope now turned to the Greek emperor with an urgent plea to send an army to Italy's aid and to liberate both Rome and the entire province from the Lombards. But here too, he knocked on a closed door, and now, in desperation, the Pope turned to the West to seek help from Pepin, the King of the Franks. Pepin was one of those mayors of the palace, or administrators of the royal house, who, during the collapse of the Merovingian royal house, had managed to elevate themselves above the king through their skill and bravery. Only the title of king was still lacking. He managed to obtain this through the Pope, aided by Boniface, the apostle of the Germans. Boniface was devoted to the authority of the Pope with heart and soul. The Christianity he preached had the same fundamental articles of faith: blind submission to the Holy See. He had also managed to impress this upon the Franks. Pepin, therefore, believed there was no better way to achieve his goal than to appeal to the Pope. And the Pope declared that "he who had the power also had the right." Pepin was anointed king by Boniface, amidst popular acclaim. He was therefore under an obligation to the pope. His successor, Stephen II, took advantage of this in his perilous circumstances. Negotiations were opened, first through a pilgrim who brought Pepin a letter from the pope requesting him to send envoys to Rome, pleading with him to come to France and escort him there. Pepin complied with this request and sent Abbot Hrotgang to Rome, then a second, Dux Autchar, the king's trusted confidant, both promising to do what the pope desired. He had sought and received the consent of the leading figures of his realm for this. The pope invoked religious, not political, reasons for his visit. "It is," he says, "by God's command that I come to you. The good work has been reserved for the king of the Franks, to raise the church from its humiliation and to restore the prince of the apostles to his right. None of your ancestors deserved such a glorious task; but God has chosen you and ordained you before all time, as it is written (Rom. 8:30): 'Whom he predestined, them he also called; And whom he called, them he also justified.' You are called; hasten to vindicate the prince of the Apostles; for it is written: 'Faith is justified by works.'" (James 2:26).

"At God's command," the pope now travels to France, anoints Pepin once more at St. Denis (July 28, 754), and falls on his knees before him, praying that he protect him from the Lombards. Pepin declares himself willing to do so and also promises to donate all the cities he conquers from the Lombards to the pope. How? we ask. Wasn't this much more than the pope desired? The opposite is true.

In the letter of Stephen, from which we quoted a few lines, we already heard him speak of a "raising (exaltare) of the church" from its humiliation, a restoration of the pope to his right. And as we read further, we begin to suspect that the Pope made his trip to France not intended something more than just protection against an overwhelming enemy. He draws a comparison between Pepin and Emperor Constantine the Great. "Just as God had acted in this case through the apostles Peter and Paul and through Pope Sylvester, so it is now. God approaches Pepin through his Apostle Peter, through Pope Stephen II. Thus, the blessing and grace of Saint Peter are also poured out upon Pepin."

Negotiations preceded the pope's arrival in France, and these negotiations had reached a successful conclusion. But when the pope invokes the right of the church and Pepin's obligation to raise it from its humiliation, he must have been able to prove that right with the documents. This becomes especially clear when we hear the pope, in his correspondence with Pepin, speak of a restitution (restitutio) of what belonged to the church. And when in 754 an envoy from Constantinople appeared at Pepin's camp in Pavia to request the restitution of his property on behalf of his master, the Greek emperor, Pepin replied, "that he had not gone to war for the convenience of any man, but solely out of veneration for Saint Peter and to obtain forgiveness of his sins."

The pope had thus managed to convince him that forgiveness of his sins could only be

obtained at the cost of surrendering what he intended to conquer from the Lombards. To this end, he invoked Matthew 16:18, 19, the right granted to Peter, and therefore also to his successors, to bind and loose. He had already exercised this right when he declared the last Merovingian king dethroned and had Pepin anointed in his place. But he also sent them a letter from Peter himself, in which this Apostle implores the Frankish kings, now with promises and now with threats, to save Rome and the Roman Church—a letter that has been included as genuine in the collection of the Codex Carolinus!

However, all this was not enough to achieve Stephen's intended goal. To this end, Pepin was shown a document, said to date from the 4th century, in which Constantine the Great had granted Pope Sylvester all sorts of privileges for him and the clergy, and finally presented him with the city and territory of Rome, along with the Exarchate of Ravenna. This document is the infamous Donatio Constantini, which fully convinced Pepin and was ratified by his son, Charles the Great. Thus, he came to donate everything he had conquered from the Lombards to the papal throne. We must now examine this document more closely.

It is reviewed in its entirety by Prof. J. Friedrich, in his important book: The Constantinian Gift \*). It looks strange. After a long introduction, listing all of Constantine's titles, it begins with a confession of faith, in accordance with the Symbolum Nicaenum. Then the emperor recounts how he had been struck by a severe leprosy all over his body and had consulted many physicians in vain, when some priests from the Capitol came to him and told him to make a pool in the Capitol, fill it with the warm blood of young children, and then bathe in it. At his command, a number of boys were gathered, and the priests stood ready to slaughter them; however, when the emperor saw the tears of their mothers, he restrained the priests and returned the boys, laden with gifts, to their mothers. The following night, the empress dreamed of the apostles Peter and Paul, who told him that, because of the compassion he had shown, they had been sent by Christ to give him good advice for his recovery. Pope Sylvester, due to the emperor's persecution, had fled to Mount Seraptus (Soracte) and had found refuge in a cave with his clergy. He was to send for him from there; the pope would then show him a consecrated pool, in which he was to bathe three times, after which the leprosy would disappear. In gratitude for this favor, he was then to restore all the churches of the world, abandon all superstition and idol worship, and convert to the one true God.

After the emperor awoke from sleep, he summoned Pope Sylvester and told him his dream, asking which gods Peter and Paul were. "They are not gods," said Sylvester, "but Apostles of our Savior Jesus Christ. Don't you have a picture of those apostles?" asked the emperor, "so that I may see if they are the same men who appeared to me in the dream." The pope produces the requested pictures, and the emperor immediately recognizes the men he has seen. The pope now imposes a period of penance on him in his palace, the Lateran, to atone for his sins against the Christians. The clergy then laid hands on him and brought him to the Pope, before whom he abjured Satan and his works, along with those of all idols, and professed his faith in the almighty Father and his Son before all the people. He bathed three times in the consecrated pool and was cured of his illness. He was clothed in white robes, anointed with holy oil, and consecrated to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit by the sign of the cross on his forehead. He then received baptism.

The following day, Sylvester instructed him about the power conferred on Peter by Christ, according to Matthew 16:18, 19. The emperor then recognized the Pope as the vicar of Christ and the successor of Peter. He decided to elevate the Roman Church above his own worldly domain and endow it with imperial splendor. He placed it above the churches of Antioch, Alexandria, Constantinople, and Jerusalem, and the Pope above the priests of the entire world. He founded a magnificent church in the Lateran and endowed it with all manner of gold and silver ornaments.

Furthermore, the Pope was given the Lateran as a residence; he was permitted to wear all the imperial ornaments: a gold crown, the phrygium, the lorium (a necklace), a purple robe, etc. He returned to this later, but with the remark that Sylvester, who already wore the crown of Peter, the tonsure, did not want to wear a gold crown over it and was content with the phrygium (tiara). Why he retracted this point and added that he performed the duties of Sylvester's groom, leading his horse by the bridle, will become clear later. The Roman clergy was placed on an equal footing with the Imperial Senate, thus obtaining the ranks of Patricius and Consul. They were granted the right to wear the insignia of imperial noble officials. They were permitted to serve the Pope as chamberlains, doorkeepers, and bodyguards. They were permitted to ride horses with white robes and wear white sandals, which was considered an

extraordinary distinction. If a member of the Senate, with the Pope's approval, wished to become a clergyman, no one was permitted to prevent them from doing so. Finally, and last but not least, the Emperor granted the Pope and his successors the authority over the city of Rome and all the provinces of Italy and \*) the West. And to demonstrate the exalted power of the Pope, Constantine decided to move his imperial seat to Byzantium and found a new city there (Constantinople). "For it is not right that the earthly emperor should rule where the dominion of the head of the Christian church is established." These decrees must remain inviolate until the end of the world. They are sworn to by the emperor before God and declared effective for all his successors, while the most terrible punishments in this and the next life are invoked against all who would deviate from them. This decree was ratified by the emperor with his own signature.

This was the Donation of Constantine, which was presented to Pepin. He was not a man to doubt or investigate the authenticity of this document, but accepted it faithfully as coming from Constantine the Great. As an obedient son of the church, after his victory over the Lombards, he placed the keys of the Exarchate, with the city of Ravenna and twenty other cities—of Emilia, Flaminia, and Pentapolis—on the altar of St. Peter's Church. Charlemagne was less credulous and refused to hear the story of Constantine's conversion. But he recognized his Donation as genuine and sealed his father's gift. Indeed, it was explained to him that Pepin had donated much more to the pope, including Corsica, Venice, Istria, Luni, Monfelice, Parma, Reggio, Mantua, and the duchies of Spoleto and Benevento, so that he retained little of his Italian possessions. Much of it, in fact, did not even belong to him.

The popes made little use of the Donation Charter in the early years. Their secular dominion, including Rome, existed more in name than in reality. It later became a constant bone of contention between them and the German emperors. It was not until 777 that Pope Adrian I mentioned the charter in a letter to Charlemagne. Again, in 785, in a letter to the Greek emperor. Expressions borrowed from the document also appear in the Libri Carolini, four books commissioned by Charlemagne and written by Frankish theologians on the subject of the iconoclasm.

In 840, it was included in a collection of so-called papal decrees, known as the Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals. From then on, it was also disseminated outside Italy, particularly in France.

Among scholars experienced in ecclesiastical history and literature, Aeneas, Bishop of Paris, and Hincmar, Bishop of Rheims, it was recognized as genuine, although the latter was deeply convinced of its inauthenticity and, if need be, provided evidence of it. Some criticism, some doubt about its authenticity, thus began to surface even then.

The popes made no mention of the Donation in their letters until Leo IX, who, in 1054, confidently communicated almost the entire text to the Patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Gerularius, so that he would "convince himself of the earthly and heavenly Empire, the royal priesthood of the Roman See, and that no trace of doubt would remain in his mind," as if this See "wanted to arrogate power through tasteless and old wives' tales." He is the only pope who made the document public in its essence. To the extent that he did so, he did so against his intention, in that it provoked criticism.

Gregory VII, his successor, does not mention the Donation in any of his letters. But in 1081, he did demand of Rudolph of Swabia, who had declared himself king against Henry IV, an oath to restore the lands and revenues granted to Saint Peter by Constantine and Charlemagne. His friend, Cardinal Damian, appealed to the Germans to the authority granted by Constantine to the popes to judge Italy. And when the Margravine Matilda, in 1097, granted the provinces of Liguria and Fuscina to Gregory, we recall that her confessor, Anselm, recorded the Donation in his legal book, and we now understand how she arrived at this generous gift. However highly Gregory VII may have ranked in other respects, he did not hesitate to use questionable documents to expand his power. For example, in 1081, he claimed that, according to the documents preserved in the archives of St. Peter's Church, all of Gaul had been made tributary to the Roman Church by Charlemagne and that this emperor had donated all of Saxony to that church.

As we have seen, Charlemagne had already given the island of Corsica to the Pope. Urban II seems to have been unaware of this; at least, he based his claim to that island on the Donation of Constantine, with the peculiar assertion that all islands were, by law, the property of the state and that Constantine therefore had the right to dispose of them. This assertion was now built upon by including Ireland among the islands. It was Adrian IV, a native Englishman, who first came up with this ingenious

idea. As a great favor, he entrusted the administration of that island to the English king, Henry II. It was a disservice he rendered him, for Ireland still had to be conquered, which was only achieved after a struggle lasting 500 years. Attempts were made to convince the Irish that their island had formerly belonged to the Pope and that he had ceded it to the English king; but they were not foolish enough to believe it. They knew full well that neither the Roman emperors nor the Roman popes had ever possessed a foot of land on their island.

Rome's example of enriching itself by invoking Constantine's Donation was too tempting not to be imitated elsewhere. Thus, one reads in a chronicle of the church of St. Mary of the Principate that the emperor had granted Sylvester, in addition to his other possessions, the kingdom of Sicily on both sides of the Faro. Only Naples was excluded; The emperor and the pope had indeed visited that city, and the former had attended mass in the aforementioned church more than once. He had granted it all sorts of temporal privileges, including a number of estates and possessions, but had not presented it to the pope as a gift.

It is noteworthy, however, that in Italy there was no objection to rejecting the Donation if it conflicted with alleged rights or political plans. For example, in 1105, the monks of the monastery of Farfa, which had been endowed with numerous privileges by the emperor, opposed several Roman nobles who, based on the Donation, wanted to appropriate a castle. While they did not deny its authenticity, they attempted to prove on historical grounds that it could not have referred to the possession of Italy, but only to spiritual rights, since all emperors after Constantine had exercised unlimited rule over Italy. Paschal II, then pope, was so little recognized in Rome itself as lord of Italy that the monks dared to declare without contradiction before the Roman court that the pope was not entitled to worldly rule, since he had received not the keys to an earthly kingdom, but only to the kingdom of heaven.

In 1152, a follower of Arnold of Brescia, Wetzel, in a letter to Emperor Frederick I, decisively opposed the authenticity of the Donation. "That lie and heretical fable," he wrote, "that Constantine ceded the imperial rights in the city to Pope Sylvester is now so clear that even day laborers and women could convince the most learned of it, and the Pope and his cardinals would have to cower in shame." The grounds on which Wetzel relies are incorrect. But it is noteworthy that even then, doubts about or the conviction of the Donation's falsity were so widespread that the author dared to invoke day laborers and women.

Little attention was paid to this contradiction by the papal government. On the contrary, the document continued to be used in Rome where appropriate. It was incorporated into the legal records by Anselm of Lucca, Cardinal Deusdedit, and Ivo of Chartres. Otto of Freising claimed, in his Chronicle of 1143-1146, that all western lands owed the German and French tribute to the Pope. Others inferred from this that imperial power was a voluntary gift from the Pope and that the Emperor should therefore be considered a vassal of the latter. On this basis, in 1157, to the great indignation of the Germans, Adrian IV spoke in a letter to Frederick Barbarossa of "benefices" granted to the Emperor, and even presented the imperial crown as such a benefice. Provost Gerhoh of Reigersberg rightly raised his voice forcefully against this, although he was otherwise deeply sympathetic to the Roman see.

Meanwhile, historians began to treat the Donation with increasing caution. Sicard of Cremona speaks only in general terms of "regalia" granted by Constantine to Sylvester, without further defining those regalia. Romuald of Salerno speaks only of the bishops' submission to the pope. Robert Abolant speaks only of a "privilege" granted by Constantine to the popes. Tolomeo of Lucca speaks only of rights and privileges with which the emperor had endowed certain Roman clergy, the later cardinals. The papal historian Bernard Guidonis is entirely silent on the Donation. Amalrich Augerii mentions only the government of Rome and the granting of the imperial insignia. The latter is not even mentioned by the Belgian Balduin, a monk at the Monastery of Ninove. Another, Gotfried, a canon at Viterbo, allows the proponents and opponents of authenticity to argue with each other, without reaching a decision. While Gervasius of Tilbury, in 1211, believed that Constantine had indeed granted Sylvester royal power over the western lands, but without thereby granting him the empire itself or imperial dignity.

Against this, the jurists and the popes continued to maintain the authenticity of the Donation for a long time. Innocent III says in a sermon on Sylvester that Constantine had granted him "all the kingdoms of the West." The same man, whose beautiful statement we placed at the beginning of this article, dared to defend the temporal power of the popes by invoking the plurality of keys, mentioned in Matthew 16:1. Only the church, he says, can command, like Christ: "Put your sword into its sheath." He



was also the one who compared the rule of the pope and the emperor to the light of the sun and the moon. The moon, that is, the emperor, receives its light from the sun, the pope. Before him, Gregory VII had asserted that all secular power that does not acknowledge its dependence on the Church is robbery and theft. The first king, he said, was the hunter Nimrod, who oppressed his fellow citizens, and to this day, most princes are true sons of this hunter.

Gregory IX asserted to Emperor Frederick II that "Constantine, with the imperial insignia, entrusted Rome, its territory, and the Empire, the realm, to the care of the popes forever. It was a favor of the popes that they had granted the emperors the power of the sword, so that they could be called to account by the popes at any time." In a letter to Bishop Herman of Metz, the same Gregory invokes a letter from Pope Gelasius to Emperor Anastasius, but through elaborations and conflating phrases, manages to distort this so that Gelasius says the opposite of what he intended, since he had actually admonished the heads of the church to obey the imperial laws.

Innocent IV went even further. He called it an error that Constantine was the first to grant temporal power to the Roman See. No, Christ himself granted both royal and priestly power to Peter and his successors. Constantine, therefore, did nothing more than return the power he wrongfully exercised to its rightful owner, the church, and deprive it of this power recovered. This doctrine was formalized by Roman court theologians. Christ, they said, was lord of the entire world; at his ascension, he bequeathed this dominion to his vicar Peter and his successors. Even the most powerful monarch possesses only as much as the Pope has granted him. This theory was intended to deprive the objections to the Donation of Constantine of all force.

For these objections became increasingly loud. A French lawyer, Pierre Dubois, stated, in his dissertation on the bull of Boniface VIII, that the Donation was unlawful from the outset on legal grounds. He invoked the judgment of all legal scholars, but added the peculiar reasoning that the long statute of limitations now granted it a legitimate existence. As if theft ceases to be theft by prolonged possession, a lie by prolonged persistence. On the same grounds as Dubois, in 1306 the Dominican Johannes Quidort, master of the theological faculty of Paris, challenged the legitimacy of the Donation. An emperor, he argued, may only expand the empire, not shrink it. Such a distortion could be undone by any successor, since the emperor alone administers his lands.

During the period of ongoing conflict between the empire and the papacy, from the death of Frederick II until Louis of Bavaria, 1250-1346, the Donation was frequently discussed. The Minorite Marsiglio of Padua, who sided with the emperor, was unsure what to do with it and used it only to emphasize that an emperor who can grant something to a pope thereby proves to be superior to him.

Opinions regarding the extent of the Donation were divided in the 13th and 14th centuries. Some, like Pope Nicholas III, applied it only to Rome. Others, like Clement V, understood it to encompass all kinds of imperial rights in general; or, like John XXII, they spoke only of the imperial seat that Constantine had granted to Sylvester, which the latter could freely dispose of, or, like a Dante commentator, of "all imperial dignities." In contrast, Rudolph of Colonna mentions Rome, Italy, and all the western empires. Nicholas of Clamenge even claims that Constantine had given the entire western empire to the Roman Church and appointed the cardinals as senators.

This went too far. The Parisian theologian Jacques Almain declares that Constantine could not dispose of any land without the consent of the people and that, moreover, the Romans had never been legitimate lords of Gaul. But he adds that it is the general doctrine of the doctors that Constantine never actually renounced the western empire. Nowhere, he says, does one read that. Luipold of Babenberg also dedicated his reflections, in a book on the Roman Empire, to the Archbishop of Trier (1307-1054). He admits, however, that all Roman legal scholars consider the Donation valid and irrevocable; but he also knows that all emperors after Constantine, as well as before him, ruled the West. He even found passages in ecclesiastical law books that only mention a surrender of the city of Rome. He dares not decide and leaves the matter to higher wisdom.

Thus, uncertainty remained for a long time. It was felt that something was amiss in the matter; but a thorough investigation was not yet undertaken. At the end of the 15th century, Johan Hug, pastor of Strasbourg, still dared to defend the Donation. And in Germany, on this basis, the clergy imposed fines for matters that fell entirely within the scope of civil law.

However, alongside the desire to enhance the church's prestige through substantial donations, the conviction arose as early as the 12th century that the church's corruption was primarily due to the clergy's greed, and that this was hindering a

radical reformation of the church. People remembered that the clergy had originally been poor and had to live on charity, and they lamented that Constantine and Sylvester had awakened in them the desire for wealth. The various sects that arose in the Middle Ages fostered this belief and spread it in Italy, Germany, and France. They themselves set the example of this poverty. Consider the Poor of Lyon. Dante's voice in this spirit was heard loud and clear. He names greed and simony as the ill-fated fruits of the Donation. Ottokar von Horneck says that Constantine gave the popes the sword, along with the stole, which they nevertheless did not know how to wield. Walther von der Vogelweide has an angel cry out "Woe!" over the church, which has imbibed poison. The St. Rabsburg chronicler Königshofen says that a voice was heard across Rome: "Today the bile and poison have been poured out in holy Christendom. And know that this is still the source of all strife between popes and emperors." The Minorite Johan von Winterthur, the theologian Johannes van Parijs, and, a hundred years later, the Augustinian monk Dietrich Vrie of Osnabrück, all speak in the same spirit. It became a popular proverb that an angel had proclaimed Woe! upon Rome. At first, it was a fallen angel, the devil himself; later, he became an angel of light. The idea that Constantine had corrupted the church through his Donation was also shared by Wicleff.

However, belief in its authenticity would not last long. As early as 1443, Aeneas Sylvius, then secretary to Frederick III, later Pope Pius II, advised the emperor to convene a council to discuss the issue of the Donation, which "confounded many minds." Apparently, he himself was convinced of its inauthenticity; neither among the ancient historians nor among Damasus, that is, in the Papal Book, \*), he said, is there any evidence of it. He wanted the council to declare the inauthenticity. Around the same time, voices were heard from various quarters in the same vein. Cardinal Cusa did not yet dare to declare himself entirely in favor of its inauthenticity. In contrast, Reginald Pocock, Bishop of Chichester, conducted a very careful historical investigation of the sources. But Laurentius Valla went the furthest. Born in Piacenza in 1407, he served as a teacher of fine arts in the principal cities of Italy in 1431 and 1433. His liberal views incurred the enmity of the scholastics, but he was protected by the King of Naples. Here he published his treatise "De donatione Constantini," in which he demonstrated that the pope had no right to Rome and the Papal States, that he was only the Vicar of Christ, but not of the emperor. In a rhetorical style, he couched the evidence for the falsehood in the form of conversations between Constantine's sons, Pope Sylvester, and the Roman people, thus putting an end to the matter once and for all. The Inquisition instituted a prosecution against the author, which he escaped by flight. In Rome, however, he was protected and accepted by Pope Nicholas V, without having to recant. \*)

For another hundred years, Roman legal scholars clung to the authenticity of the Donation. One of the most famous jurists of the 15th century, Nicolaas Tudeschi, declared any doubt about its authenticity to be heresy. So did Cardinal Parisius, the Spanish bishop Albertinus, Antonius Rosellus, and Louis Gomez. Cardinal Albano considered it evidence of extreme impudence not to bow to the unanimous opinion of so many and such great Church Fathers, or, as Peter Igneus put it, of the entire academy of canonists and legalists.

When Cardinal Baronius finally added his voice to that of the opponents of its authenticity, the fate of the Donation was sealed. He did, however, maintain that Constantine had offered Rome to Sylvester, but that he had refused; nevertheless, he considered the document itself a fabrication. Even popes now smiled at the people's credulity. \*\*) Emperor Otto III had already done the same five centuries earlier. When Ulrich von Hutten, in 1510, was about to leave Bologna, he found Valla's writings in the possession of his friend, the humanist Cochlaeus. He was so captivated by it that he requested a copy, which was provided to him by Frederick Fisher, canon of Würzburg. In 1517, he published it with a mischievous dedication to Leo 7th, whom he praised in various ways as the most excellent pope, a friend of the truth, to whom a writing like this would therefore be especially welcome. He hoped that Leo would openly admit his enthusiasm; then he would make an effort to find something similar for him. He particularly highlights the clumsiness of the deception in this dedication, from which one could sense that it was aimed at the Germans, whom the Italians were accustomed to saying had no brains. If they had been dealing with other peoples, they would have planned things more cleverly. When this publication came into Luther's hands, he was astonished that such blatant lies could have persisted for so many centuries, indeed, could have been considered articles of faith. Now it became fully clear to him that the Pope was none other than the Antichrist.

The deception was indeed so clumsy that it is almost incomprehensible how anyone

could have believed in the truth of this fable for eight hundred years. The story of Constantine's baptism by Sylvester had already been thoroughly discredited.

The legends, from which one usually drew one's knowledge of the fourth century, were in direct conflict. He was not baptized by Sylvester, but by the Ananian bishop Eusebius; not in Rome, but at the castle of Akyron near Nicomedia; not twenty years before his death, but only at the end of his life.

This legend originated as early as the end of the fifth century, probably in Rome. It survives only in a Greek translation and contains no historical element. According to it, Constantine was initially an opponent of Christianity and had many Christians who refused to sacrifice, including his own wife, put to death. Fearing him, Pope Sylvester fled to Mount Soracte. Then follows the story of the emperor's leprosy, which we already know, of his miraculous healing and baptism, whereupon all of Rome, the Senate and the people, believe in Christ. Because Constantine's baptism in the East was recounted by too many Church Fathers to deny it any credibility, the explanation was devised that another Constantine, a nephew of the emperor, was meant; or it was claimed that Constantine had converted to Arian Christianity and been baptized a second time in Nicomedia. The story of the baptism in Rome was included in the Liber pontificalis without any criticism, and the subsequent popes—Adrian I, Nicholas I, and Leo IX—did not hesitate to accept it as undeniable truth in their writings. Even long after the fabrication had been proven by undeniable evidence, men of repute continued to cling to the legend.

Today, no one, even among Roman theologians, dares to defend it. And the Donation, too, has lost all historical significance after Laurentius Valla and the age of the Reformation. The only question about which there can still be a difference of opinion is that of the time in which it originated. That it was concocted in Rome is beyond all doubt. It cannot have originated in Greece, as some have believed, for internal reasons. It also only became known in Greece at the end of the twelfth century. Of France, as others believe, even less can be said. Everything points to its origin in the seat of the papacy. There, in the eighth century, the desire for secular rule had awakened. In 728, Gregory II already attempted to establish a league of cities against the Greeks and Lombards, of which the papacy would be the head and center. That attempt failed. But it increasingly fostered the desire to somehow free itself from the crumbling Eastern Roman Empire and the rule of the Lombards. The city of Sutri, not far from Rome, had already been donated to the papal throne by Liutprand; it was the foundation of the secular realm. \*) That peach tasted like more. And now an obliging spirit came up with the idea of having Constantine the Great fulfill the pope's ardent desire for supremacy. Who that was will become clear to us later. As for the time of the document's creation, it was previously believed \*\*) that it first originated in the ninth century. However, the research of Professors Döllinger and Friedrich has clearly shown that it is of earlier origin. In his Papst-fabeln \*\*\*) (1863), Döllinger generally accepted a period between 752 and 774, in view of the mention of the Donation by Pope Adrian I. He is inclined to attribute the fiction to Charlemagne, as how Pepin came to donate so much land to the Pope remains unanswered. In his 1893 work, Das Papsthum \*\*\*\*), he arrives at a more precise and earlier determination. There it is stated that the document was intended to be shown to Pepin and must have been written shortly before 754, just like the infamous Epistle of Peter. This makes it perfectly clear how the credulous Pepin complied with Stephen's wish by threatening him with the most terrible tortures of body and soul and promising complete forgiveness of sins. We possess an even more detailed examination of the matter in Friedrich's important 1889 book, "Die Constantinische Sehenkung" (The Constantinian Recording). In it, he adds new evidence for the existence of the document in the eighth century, at least before 785. But he also demonstrates that it did not suddenly appear in the form in which we know it today. He divides it into an older and a more recent document. And he does so so clearly that we think of Columbus's egg. Who didn't find it strange that the most important thing in the Donation, the surrender of such a vast territory, is only mentioned at the end, after mentioning all sorts of distinctions of far lesser value? And then, after everything has been enumerated by which the Roman Catholic church was elevated in prestige, she revisits the matter and presents it differently. Constantine had given Sylvester his diadem, the crown, and the phrygium, and he had accepted everything. But now we read that Sylvester felt he was not entitled to wear a golden crown above Peter's crown, the tonsure, and contented himself with the phrygium. Furthermore, the emperor performed the duties of a groom for the pope, leading his horse by the bridle. First, the Lateran Palace had been given to the pope; now, in addition, the city of Rome, with Italy and the western provinces, is added.



Constantine leaves the West and establishes his seat in the East, because it is not fitting for a secular ruler to occupy the same throne as the ecclesiastical; the former yields to the latter. Whereas the emperor had first made the pope prince over all the priests of the entire world, in the final section it is the "heavenly emperor" who grants the earthly emperor his exalted rank.

All this demonstrates that the charter of the Donation was initially simpler. But once the process of condensing had begun, and with success, the papal court saw no objection to resorting to new condensations and enriching the church with ever greater power and influence through Constantine.

When would this first and most extensive section have originated? According to Friedrich, in the seventh century. From a linguistic perspective, this is already clear. A number of words and expressions are used in it in a sense similar to that found in contemporary writers of that century, and no longer so. This is supported by numerous pieces of evidence. Friedrich believes he can pinpoint the time of the first drafting of the document even more precisely, namely during the pontifical reign of Honorius I or Martin I, i.e., between 625 and 653. This, too, is demonstrated by numerous pieces of evidence. The confession of faith, which opens the document, is particularly relevant here. And why this confession was placed at the head of the Donation is also explicable. It vindicated Pope Honorius, who had been condemned for heresy, and demonstrated that he had taught nothing other than what Pope Sylvester had already presented to Constantine. The document must have been composed only after Honorius' death in 638 and before the banishment of Martin I in 653.

Friedrich also points to the precedence accorded the Lateran Church over St. Peter's Church in the first section. The former is first called Basilica Gonstantiniana in 487, without its construction by Constantine being inferred from this. Gradually, it emerged as the main church, the only church where baptisms took place. St. Peter's Church was only mentioned as a baptismal church after 600, and then, in the time of Honorius I, after 625, it began to be placed above the Lateran Church, although opinions remained divided for a long time as to which church had precedence. Indeed, under Honorius, and with his support, the clergy of the Lateran Church succeeded in elevating themselves above those of St. Peter's, and we find expression of this in the first part of the Donation. Martin I confirmed the precedence of the Lateran Church in a papal letter. Since then, there has been no mention of this.

The question of how the Donation was condensed in the seventh century is obvious. The struggle for precedence between Rome and Constantinople had lasted a long time. By this means, they attempted to secure Rome's definitive victory. Constantine the Great, who, as the first Christian emperor, was highly revered throughout the entire church, was made to solemnly declare upon his conversion to Christianity that, by his imperial will, he granted Rome precedence (privilegium) above all churches. This declared the Bishop of Rome the head of all bishops worldwide, a title already offered to Gregory the Great but indignantly rejected by him. Since the seventh century, the Bishop of Rome, who previously called himself "the servant of servants," has been called the "universal pope" (universalis papa) in all official documents. Papal authority is equated with that of the emperor. To this end, Sylvester receives the imperial palace in the Lateran and all the insignia of imperial dignity, the crown, the scepter, etc., all the honors due to the emperor. Rome was still considered the seat of the empire (Imperii solium). But the Senate no longer existed, and in reality, Rome was ruled by the pope. It was obvious that he now also considered himself the owner of the imperial crown and claimed the right to wear the imperial insignia.

Once this was accepted, his entourage also had to correspond to the high rank he held. Hence, the Roman Catholic clergy is being considered. For a long time, they had been accustomed to adorning themselves with insignia in papal processions. Now, they wanted to elevate them to the rank of the former Senate. In the time of Gregory the Great, their presumption had become apparent. What they were denied then, they now managed to obtain through the Donation. And if one examines the various insignia, one finds new evidence for the origin of the first part of the Donation in the seventh century. In the eighth or ninth century, granting such insignia would have been meaningless. At the same time, this part of the document sheds a unique light on the customs and traditions of the time in which it originated.

A hundred years later, however, people were still not satisfied with all the privileges granted to the papal chair, and once again the old and tried method of forgery was resorted to. An addition to the Donation was made, beginning with the words: Decrevimus itaque et hoe. At the end of the seventh century, attention was again focused on Pope Sylvester. In 687, between the death of Pope Conon and the election of his successor, Sergius, an oratory, a place of worship, dedicated to

595 Sylvester, previously unheard of, suddenly appeared, located in the Patriarchy of the Lateran and decorated with paintings by Pope Zacharias. A few years later, Bishop Aldhelm, who was in Rome in 690, published an addition to the Sylvester legend: a new dream of Constantine, which led him to found Constantinople and establish his see there. He did this at the pope's command. And now, in the most recent part of the

600 Donation, we find the answer to the question of why this had to happen. This was because the earthly emperor was not allowed to have his seat in the same city where the heavenly emperor enthroned the head of the Christian religion. When Pepin's brother, Carloman, went to Rome in 747 and became a monk, he retreated to Mount Soracte, where Sylvester had sought refuge, and there founded a monastery,

605 which Pepin requested as a gift. This shows that Pepin was also a devotee of Sylvester, a veneration that was promoted by Popes Stephen II and Paul I. Thus, in those days, one could readily present the Sylvester legend and make of it what one wished. This most likely occurred shortly before the year 754, when Pepin undertook his first expedition against the Lombards. From 752 onward, the popes in their

610 letters speak not of a gift, but of a restitution, sometimes to St. Peter, sometimes to the Roman Republic. And when Stephen II urges Pepin to do so, he does so not on political grounds, but at God's command and by appealing to Romans 8:29, 90. Just as God had worked with Constantine through Peter and Paul, and Paul in turn through Sylvester, so it was now. Pepin was the chosen one, to whom God approached through

615 his apostle Peter, and Paul through the pope. Therefore, anyone who wants to achieve anything must have Peter and his vicar as "protectors," and to achieve this, the Roman Church must be "elevated," restored to its glory. Thus began the negotiation between Stephen and Pepin. It ended with the Donation of the Exarchate, along with Rome and twenty other cities of Italy. In between lies the supplemented document, which led Pepin to believe that he was only returning to the Church what was rightfully its own. That this was indeed the pope's intention is evident from a letter from Pope Paul I, the same person who, as a deacon under his brother Stephen II, most likely led the negotiations. Regarding the Greeks' claims, he writes to Pepin that they rest on fables, while those of Rome rest on "divine

625 words" and "apostolic documents." We find these divine words in Matthew 16:18, 19, the "apostolic" or papal \*) documents in the Donation of Constantine. It is now clear why the most important thing in that Donation, the ceding of the territory, is mentioned last. It is also clear how Pepin came to not only receive the pope with pomp but even to lead his horse by the bridle like a groom, something that

630 had never happened before and was contrary to Frankish customs. Also, why the right to wear the imperial crown is revisited in the most recent part of the Donation? The reality conflicted with this acquired right. No pope had ever worn an imperial crown. Therefore, a solution had to be found to eliminate this contradiction. It was now said that the pope had refused the crown because he had already worn the crown of

635 Peter in the tonsure. The result of these various considerations is, that the oldest part of the Donation was condensed in the middle of the seventh century, specifically under Pope Martin I, between 638 and 653, and that the later part was added to it under Stephen II, in 753. Noteworthy is the similarity of expressions in seven letters of this pope with peculiar expressions in this second part. The same applies to the life of Stephen in the Liber pontificalis. This is even more true for Paul I, Stephen's brother and successor. From this, it can be deduced that no other author of the latest part of the Donation than this same Paul, when he was still a deacon under his brother. Thus, through the acumen of Professors Döllinger and Friedrich, it was possible to

645 completely lift the veil that lay over the Donation document. Although we would not wish to assert that the rule of all other monarchs is based on truth and justice, the aforementioned revelations have made it crystal clear that the worldly rule of the popes rests on lies and deceit.

650 \*) Untruth under the guise of sanctity must not be tolerated. It is better that scandal arise than that the truth be abandoned.

\*) To be distinguished from Paulus Diaconus, a scholar among the Lombards, author of their history, to whom we owe much for our knowledge of this period.

655 \*) It is strange that this work cannot be found in any of our university libraries. For our research, we also used Prof. Döllinger's *Die Papst-fabeln des Mittelalters*, 2nd edition, 1890, and *Das Papstthum*, 1893. The latter is a revised and supplemented edition of *Der Papst und das Concil* by Friedrich, by Janus. *Die Const.* The gift is from 1889.

\*) In Constantine's letter, seu (or) appears; but in the Middle Ages, this word had the meaning of et (and). Anselm of Lucca therefore substituted et.

660 \*) The Papal Book, or Liber Pontificalis, is a collection of biographies of the Roman popes, from Peter to Conon (687), continued from time to time later. It is of very relative historical value, especially the first part.

\*) According to Bayle and Gibbon, he seems to have done so later. See Bayle, in voce Vallet; Gibbon, Hist. of the Decline etc. V, 35.

665 \*\*) See Gibbon, V, 36.

\*) According to others, it was the cities of Osemo and Ancona that Pope Zacharias received as a gift from Liutprand.

\*\*) Zoo Gieseler, K. G. II, 1, 11, 189.

\*\*\*) Papst-fabeln, p. 67.

670 \*\*\*\*) Das Papstthum, p. 28.

\*) That the word "apostolic" is indeed equivalent to papal is demonstrated by Friedrich, pp. 146 ff.

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