

Leo VII [#126] {936 – 939}

Pope Leo VII was the 126th pope, reigning during a politically turbulent period for the papacy as an institution. He succeeded Pope John XI, who had been significantly influenced by his mother, the true power behind the church and the Papal States.

During his brief reign of only three years, Pope Leo VII implemented many land grants. He tragically allowed for the expulsion of the Jewish

people in Germany, marking one of the first such episodes in the Catholic Church's history. He would not, however, allow the archbishop to baptize the Jews by force, though he did authorize their expulsion from the cities on their refusal to embrace Christianity.

Leo VIII [#132] {963 – 964}

Pope Leo VIII served as a Roman prelate before claiming the papacy from 963 to 964, during which time he acted as a rival pope to both Pope John XII and Pope Benedict V. His second term as pope began on June 23, 964, and lasted until his death.

Today, the Catholic Church regards his first tenure in office as illegal, labeling him an antipope. However, his second reign is considered legitimate, making him a true pope. Appointed by the Holy Roman Emperor Otto I of Germany, Leo VIII served during a tumultuous period known as the Saeculum Obscurum, characterized by the immorality of some popes.

Leo IX [#152] (St.) {1049-1054}

Pope St. Leo IX served as the Bishop of Rome and the lord of the Papal States from 1002 A.D. to 1054 A.D. He is widely recognized as the most significant German pontiff of the Middle Ages.

During his papacy, the devastating Great Schism began in 1054, which separated the Catholic Church from the Orthodox Church for over a millennium. Leo was deeply troubled by the attitude of Michael Cærularius, the Patriarch of Constantinople. This ambitious prelate was determined to have no superior, neither in the Church nor in the State. As early as 1042, he had removed the pope's name from the sacred diptychs and began to attack the Latin Church, criticizing its use of unfermented bread (azymes) in the Sacrifice of the Mass. Eventually, he closed the Latin churches in Constantinople in a particularly harsh manner.

In response to this aggression, Leo wrote a strong letter to Michael in September 1053 and started studying Greek to better understand the issues at hand. Although Michael appeared to take advantage of the pope's difficulties with the Normans to advance his own agenda, the Greek Emperor, concerned about his hold on Southern Italy due to Norman successes, pressured the patriarch to be more respectful toward the pope.

In January 1054, Leo received conciliatory letters from both Constantinople and Cærularius, and responded appropriately, condemning the patriarch's arrogance. These letters were carried by two cardinals, Humbert and Frederick, but Leo had passed away before the outcome of their mission was known in Rome. On July 16, 1054, the two car-

dinals excommunicated Cærularius, effectively severing the Eastern Church from the body of the Church.

Leo X [#217] {1513-1521}

Pope Leo X was the 217th leader of the Catholic Church and the 10th among that lot to take the name "Leo." He was also one of the four Medici family popes. His love for opulence and art matched his religious fervor, exemplifying High Renaissance ideals. His rule saw generous support for artists and intellectuals, making Rome a hub of cultural excellence. Yet, his time as pope coincided with the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation, which led to a major split in Christian faith.

"Let us enjoy the papacy since God has given it to us", he is said to have remarked after his election. The Venetian ambassador who related this of him was not unbiased, nor was he in Rome at the time, nevertheless the phrase illustrates fairly the pope's pleasure-loving nature and the lack of seriousness that characterized him. He paid no attention to the dangers threatening the papacy, and gave himself up unrestrainedly to amusements, that were provided in lavish abundance.

The story of Leo X is full of opposing traits: a religious leader who embraced princely comforts, an art patron grappling with faith matters, and a pope whose choices unintentionally sparked religious upheaval. His time offers an intriguing look at a crucial historical moment when Renaissance splendor clashed with rising church dissatisfaction.

Leo XI [#232] {1605}

Leo XI was born as Alessandro Ottaviano de' Medici, a member of the renowned Medici family of Florence. He was the 232nd Pope and Bishop of Rome and one of the four Medici popes.

Before his papacy, Leo XI served as the Bishop of Pistoia, the Archbishop of Florence, and later became a cardinal. He was elected pope on April 1, 1605, succeeding his predecessor, Pope Clement VIII.

Tragically, Pope Leo XI died just a few weeks later, on April 27, 1605, making his papacy one of the shortest in history, lasting only 27 days.

Leo XII [#252] {1823-1829}

Leo XII was the 252nd pope to serve as the leader of the Catholic Church and the 12th to assume the papal name of Leo. Indifferentism and the Protestant proselytism of the period were combated; the devotion of the Catholic world was estimated by the jubilee of 1825, in spite of the opposition of timid and reaction-ary prelates or sovereigns; the persecution of the Catholics in the Netherlands was met and overcome, and the movement for the emancipation of the Catholics in the British Isles was managed and encouraged till success was assured. Popular discontent with the government of the Papal States was met by the severities of Cardinal Rivarola.

Pope Leo XII was a hardly conservative Pope who had an uncompromising perspective on the direction of the Church and of society. While many believed he fully believed what he said, the results of his actions and policies plus the finances of the Church during his papacy, paint an unpleasant picture of the man.

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