

Rome

15-19 May 2024

Rome, Italy



Pizzas, Piazzas,
Palazzos & Popes

Dome of St Peter's

St Peter's Basilica, inside Vatican City, the world's smallest country, towers over the River Tiber in Rome, a city that completely encompasses the Vatican.

Credit where credit is due

The pope who built the largest church in Christendom made sure he and his wealthy family got credit. The Latin inscription across the façade of St Peter's says: "Paul V Borghese, Roman, Pontiff, in the year 1612, the seventh of his pontificate, [erected] in honor of the Prince of Apostles."



Pizzas, Piazzas, Palazzos & Popes

SOURCES: Underlined words link to them

The first person I met the Sunday that Emily and I attended the Church of Scotland in Rome was Finley Metani, who is from the small African nation of Malawi. He's a student at the Tor Vergata University of Rome, a new school founded in 1982 on the "Anglo-Saxon model," and he comes to this church, even though he's an evangelical Christian, because services are in English and he likes the people — especially other Africans — who regularly attend.



Finley Metani

We had an interesting conversation about why his country sent him to school thousands of miles from home and what he plans to do when he returns after finishing his degree. Part of our conversation was about the European colonization of Africa, resulting in new nations like his, founded in 1964, whose boundaries do not fit historical ones, and his adoption of a religion imposed during colonial times. I wondered how he felt about that.

"I try to separate the goodness of the religion from the people who brought it," he said.

It was not lost on either of us that we were standing in a city whose Christian rulers historically had more influence over the current state of affairs in four of the six inhabited continents than any other single factor. Catholic popes once wielded considerable secular political power as well as religious authority.

Beginning in 1095 with Pope Urban II and lasting for nearly 200 years under 33 succeeding popes, a series of military expeditions called the Crusades were mounted in the name of the Prince of Peace at the urging of the church by various kings in order to retake Jerusalem and the Holy Land from Muslim authority. The last of those popes, Boniface VIII, published a "bull" (decree) called Unam Sanctam stating the pope's temporal and spiritual authority over all Christians. Eleven years before Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue in 1492, Pope Sixtus IV issued the bull Aeterni regis, which divided the globe still undiscovered by Christian nations between Spain and Portugal for their conquest and rule. Fourteen years after Columbus' first voyage, Pope Julius II formalized this division with a north-south line through South America called the "Papal Line of Demarcation." That's why today there is the Portuguese-speaking nation of Brazil on the continent's east coast sharing all its land borders to the north, west and south with Spanish-speaking countries.

The church's temporal authority was beginning to wane by that point, however. Two of Europe's maritime powers, England and the Netherlands, had become Protestant and pursued their own explorations and conquests. So did Catholic France, which was the country that 300 years earlier had wanted to tax its clergy, prompting Boniface VIII to write *Unam Sanctam* in the first place.

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Understandably, the church's dual roles as secular and religious ruler faded last in Italy, where the Papal States survived under the direct rule of the pope until the time of the U.S. Civil War. Victor Emmanuel II became the first king of a unified Italy in 1,300 years in 1861, leaving the pope holed up in a small corner of Rome. That corner of the city became the world's smallest country in 1929 when the Lateran Treaty, signed by Cardinal Pietro Gasparri on behalf of Pope Pius XI and King Victor Emmanuel III's prime minister Benito Mussolini, created Vatican City.

Within the Vatican's 109 acres / 44 hectares, its 618 citizens and 764 residents overall (about half the citizens, mostly diplomats, live outside the Vatican) are ruled by Pope Francis as an absolute monarch with full executive, legislative and judicial power. When a pope dies or resigns, a subset of the 236-member College of Cardinals who are eligible to vote because they have not yet passed their 80th birthdays, will elect a new pope. Election requires a two-thirds majority (84) of the current 126 "cardinal electors."

Because the pope appoints all cardinals, it is within this group that he effectively wields his modern-day political authority and creates his legacy. Though cardinals may come from around the world and usually are the bishop in charge of a geographical diocese, dioceses vary greatly in size and population. Some dioceses have had bishops elevated to cardinal without interruption since the Middle Ages; others have never produced a cardinal.

Most important politically, the College of Cardinals is not intended to be a representative body of Catholics, who number about 1.3 billion people around the world. Yet Francis has made it marginally more representative.

Francis was Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, archbishop of Buenos Aires, when he was elected pope in 2013, becoming the first non-European pope since the year 741 when Pope Gregory III of Syria died. Francis was elected by a group of cardinal electors of whom 52% were European. Yet only 21% of the world's Catholics live in Europe. The largest percentage of Catholics — 42% — live in Latin America and the Caribbean. Only 18% of the world's cardinals are from there.

Since becoming pope, Francis has named 72% of the current group of cardinal electors. That, by itself, is not unusual. Cardinals are almost uniformly old guys. The percentage from Europe has fallen to 38% and the share from Latin America and the Caribbean has risen to 20%. The biggest gain in share of cardinal electors is in Asia and the Pacific, which doubled from 9% when Francis was elected to 18% eligible to vote today. Sub-Saharan Africa's share increased from 9% to 13% even though 19% of Catholics live there. North America, home to 7% of the world's Catholics, lost share over Francis' 11-year papacy from 12% to 10%.

Francis' impact on determining the next pope remains to be seen, but he has already offended many of the church's conservatives, particularly with his statements on homosexuality and his refusal to withhold communion from divorced people or politicians with whom the church disagrees. It will be interesting to see if the next pope is elected by men who are more politically and theologically aligned with the man who appointed them.



Inside St Peter's

Unfortunately, the baldachin — the giant bronze canopy over the high altar — designed by 17th Century architect Gian Lorenzo Baldini, was covered by scaffolding during our visit. The Vatican is preparing for next year's Giubileo (jubilee), a special pilgrimage year that happens four times per century, during which 32 million Catholics are expected to visit Rome.

SANCTI ANDREAE CAPUT QVOD PIVS SECVNDVS
EX ACHAI A IN VATICANVM ASPORTANDVM CVRAVIT
VRBANVS VIII NOVIS HIC ORNAMENTIS DECORATVM
SACRISQVE STATVAE AC SACELLI HONORIBVS COLIVLVIT



St Andrew

Compare this sculpture of St Andrew and his X-shaped cross and the one on the campus of the University of St Andrews in St Andrews, Scotland, on page 8 of this [earlier newsletter](#).



Rome's Church of Scotland

Emily poses in church before the service started. Because the Church of Scotland's General Assembly was being held at this time in Edinburgh, we had an Anglican priest as guest preacher.



Red on Pentecost Sunday

The congregation of Rome's Church of Scotland has a social hour following its services just like our Presbyterian church in San Jose. Only more people choose tea over coffee.

Notes on photos

SOURCES: Underlined words link to them.

DOME OF ST PETER'S — Many old European churches were built over the graves of important Christian figures, either in fact or according to tradition. The world's largest church is built over the tomb of San Pietro — St Peter, Jesus' disciple — as attested to by Latin and Greek graffiti found on plaster from a shrine visited by early Christians who believed Peter was buried there. One Greek graffito said PETR[...] ENI[...], translated as "Peter is here" on St Peter's official website. In addition, many popes are entombed beneath the church and they can be visited by tourists.

CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE — The Borghese surname crops up all over Rome, not just on the front of its most important church. Just across the Tiber are the Borghese Gardens, the city's most popular park, which surround the Galleria Borghese, once the family's palace (palazzo) and now a museum of priceless art. The family came from Siena, a separate city-state in the 16th Century, where they made their fortune as wool merchants. Even before moving to Rome, the family had become important in Catholic politics with Agostino Borghese being named a count by Pope Pius II a century before. In Rome, Pietro Borghese was named a senator by Pope Leo X and Marcantonio Borghese was a lawyer in papal service. The family reached the pinnacle of its power when Marcantonio's son, Camillo, also trained as a lawyer, was elected Pope Paul V in 1605. During the 16 years of his papacy, he not only financed the construction of St Peter's Basilica but was a defender of the astronomer Galileo and his theory that the sun, not Earth, was not the center of the solar system. The first of 60 cardinals he appointed was his nephew, Scipione Borghese, who managed the finances of both the church and family. With the official title of Cardinal Nephew, Scipione was able to use church money to finance family projects including its art collection and the purchase of entire towns of Montefortino and Olevano Romano.

INSIDE ST PETER'S — The Latin inscription around the base of the dome, seen only partially here, is the most important statement about this building. In English, it says, "You are Peter and on this rock I will build my church and give you the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven."

ST ANDREW — St Andrews, Scotland, was founded because "relics" (bones) of Andrew the fisherman, Jesus' disciple and Peter's brother, supposedly were taken there for safekeeping. Andrew's most important relic, his head, was kept in Rome from the 15th Century until 1966, when Pope Paul VI donated it to the Church of St Andrew in of Patras, Greece, where Andrew was crucified, as a symbol of friendship with the Greek Orthodox Church.

ROME'S CHURCH OF SCOTLAND and RED FOR PENTECOST SUNDAY — We attended services at St Andrews Presbyterian Church of Scotland, which was founded in 1862 by a congregation consisting mainly of Scottish and American expatriates. The church building was built in 1885 on the condition set by Roman authorities that it not look like a church from the outside. About half the worshipers were natives of various African countries who had sought religious services in English.

FIRST BAPTIST AND SECOND BAPTIST? — Most sources I consulted put the number of churches in Rome at about 900, so it shouldn't be too surprising that a lot of them end up on adjacent street corners. The two churches here — Santa Maria di Montesanto on the left, Santa Maria dei Miracoli on the right — were finished within four years of each other in 1675 and 1679 and intended to look alike. Note that the two bell towers are not identical. The architects and city planners wanted to create symmetry when they redesigned the piazza and got what they wanted.



First Baptist and Second Baptist?

If the two churches I'm standing between were in the United States, you might accurately conclude there had been a congregational disagreement over the new carpet color or next hymnbook. But this is the Piazza del Popolo (people's square) in Rome, and there's another reason twin churches face each other across the street.