Scene—Gate of Heaven

**Julius:** What the devil is this? The gates not opened! Something is wrong with the lock. . . .

**Peter:** Well that the gates are adamant, or this fellow would have broken in. He must be some giant, or conqueror. Heaven, what a stench! Who are you? What do you want here? . . .

**Julius:** Enough of this. I am Julius . . . , P.M., as you can see by the letters if you can read.

**Peter:** P.M.! What is that? Pestis Maxima?

**Julius:** Pontifex Maximus, you rascal. . . .

**Peter:** . . . Let me look at you a little closer. Hum! Signs of impiety in plenty . . . not precisely like an apostle. Priest’s cassock and bloody armour below it, eyes savage, mouth insolent, forehead brazen, body scarred with sins all over, breath loaded with wine, health broken with debauchery. Ay, threaten as you will, I will tell you what you are for all your bold looks. You are Julius the Emperor come back from hell. . . .

**Julius:** Make an end, I say, or I will fling a thunderbolt at you. I will excommunicate you. I have done as much to kings before this. . . .

**Peter:** You must show your merits first; no admission without merits. . . .

**Julius:** The invincible Julius ought not to answer a beggarly fisherman. However, you shall know who and what I am. First, I am a Ligurian, and not a Jew like you. My mother was the sister of the great Pope Sextus IV. The Pope made me a rich man out of Church property. I became a cardinal. I had my misfortunes. I had the French pox. I was banished, hunted out of my country; but I knew all along that I should come to be pope myself in the end . . . I succeeded. I rose to the top, and I have done more for the Church and Christ than any pope before me.

**Peter:** What did you do?

**Julius:** I raised the revenue. I invented new offices and sold them. . . . Then I annexed Bologna to the Holy See. I have torn up treaties, kept great armies in the field. I have covered Rome with palaces, and I have left five millions in the Treasury behind me. . . .

**Peter:** Invincible warrior! All this is quite new to me. Pardon my simplicity, who are these fair curly-haired boys that you have with you?

**Julius:** Boys I took into training to improve their minds.

**Peter:** And those dark ones with the scars?

**Julius:** Those are my soldiers and generals who were killed fighting for me. They all deserve heaven. I promised it to them under hand and seal if they lost their lives in my service, no matter how wicked they might be. . . .

**Peter:** My orders are not to admit men who come with Bulls, but to admit those who have clothed the naked, fed the hungry, given the thirsty drink, visited the sick and those in prison. Men have cast out devils and worked miracles in Christ’s name and yet have been shut out. . . .

**Julius:** If I had but known.

**Peter:** What would you have done? Declared war?

**Julius:** I would have excommunicated you.

**Peter:** . . . When I was pope the difficulty was to find men who would be priests or deacons.

**Julius:** Naturally, when bishops and priests had nothing for their reward but fasts, and vigils, and doctrines, and now and then death. Bishops nowadays are kings and lords, and such positions are worth struggling for. . . .

**Peter:** Why did you take Bologna . . . ?

**Julius:** Because I wanted the revenue for my own treasury, and because Bologna was otherwise convenient for me. So I used my thunderbolts, the French helped me, and now Bologna is mine, and every farthing of the taxes goes to Rome for the Church’s use. If you had only seen my triumphal entry. . . .

**Peter:** He who represents Christ ought to try to be like Christ. But, tell me, is there no way of removing a wicked pope?

**Julius:** Absurd! Who can remove the highest authority of all?

**Peter:** That the Pope is the highest is a reason why he should be removed if he causes scandal. Bad princes can be removed. The Church is in a bad way if it must put up with a head who is ruining it.

**Julius:** A Pope can only be corrected by a general council, but no general council can be held without the Pope’s consent; otherwise it is a synod, and not a council. Let the council sit, it can determine nothing unless the Pope agrees; and, again, a single pope having absolute power is superior to the council. Thus he cannot be deposed for any crime whatsoever. . . .

**Peter:** A novel privilege for my successors—to be the wickedest of men, yet be safe from punishment. So much the unhappier the Church which cannot shake such a monster off its shoulders.

**Julius:** Some say there is one cause for which a Pope can be deposed.

**Peter:** When he has done a good action, I suppose, since he is not to be punished for his bad actions.
Julius: If he can be convicted publicly of heresy. But this is impossible, too. For he can cancel any canon which he does not like. . . .

Peter: In the name of the papal majesty, who made these fine laws?

Julius: Who? Why, the source of all law, the Pope himself, and the power that makes a law can repeal it.

Peter: What else can you do?

Julius: What else? How do kings levy revenues? They persuade the people that they owe their fortunes to them, and then they ask, and the people give. So we make the people believe that they owe to us their knowledge of God, though we sleep all our lives. Besides, we sell them indulgences in small matters at a cheap rate, dispensations for not much more, and for blessings we charge nothing. . . .

Peter: This is all Greek to me. But why do you hate the barbarians, and move heaven and earth to get rid of them?

Julius: Because barbarians are superstitious, and the French worst of all.

Peter: Do the French worship other gods besides Christ?

Julius: No; but they have precise notions of what is due to Christ. They use hard words about certain things which we have left off.

Peter: Magical words, I presume?

Julius: No, not magical. They talk of simony and blasphemy, sodomy, poisoning, witchcraft, in language expressing abomination of such actions.

Peter: I do not wish to be personal, but can it be that such crimes are to be found among yourselves, professing Christians?

Julius: The barbarians have vices of their own. They censure ours and forget theirs. We tolerate ours and abominate theirs. Poverty, for instance, we look on as so wicked that anything is justifiable to escape from it, while the barbarians scarcely approve of wealth if innocently come by. . . . Barbarians forbid usury; we regard it as a necessary institution. They think looseness with women polluting and disgusting; we—well, we do not think so at all. They are shocked at simony; we never mention it. They stick to old laws and customs; we go for novelty and progress. While our views of life are so different, we don’t like to have the barbarians too close to us. They have sharp eyes. They write letters about us to our friends. . . . Thus the Church suffers: we sell fewer dispensations, and get a worse price for them, and we receive less money for bishoprics and abbeys and colleges; worst of all, people are no longer frightened at our thunderbolts. Once let them think that a wicked Pope cannot hurt them, we shall be starved out. So we mean to keep the barbarian at a distance.

Peter: The Church is a community of Christians with Christ’s Spirit in them. You have been a subverter of the Church.

Julius: The Church consists of cathedrals, and priests, and the Court of Rome, and myself at the head of it.

Peter: Christ is our Head, and we are His ministers. Are there two Heads? How have you increased the Church?

Julius: I found it poor. I have made it splendid.


Julius: I have filled Rome with palaces, trains of mules and horses, troops of servants, armies and officers.

Spirit: With scarlet women and the like.

Julius: With purple and gold, with revenues so vast that kings are poor beside the Roman Pontiff. Glory, luxury, hoards of treasure, these are splendours, and these all I have created.

Peter: Pray, inform me. The Church had nothing of all this when it was founded by Christ. Whence came all this splendour, as you call it? . . .

Julius: You are thinking of the old affair, when you starved as Pope, with a handful of poor hunted bishops about you. Time has changed all that, and much for the better. You had only the name of Pope. Look now at our gorgeous churches, our priests by thousands; bishops like kings, with retinues and palaces; cardinals in their purple gloriously attended, horses and mules decked with gold and jewels, and shod with gold and silver. Beyond all, myself, Supreme Pontiff, borne on soldiers’ shoulders in a golden chair, and waving my hand majestically to adoring crowds. Hearken to the roar of the cannon, the bugle notes, the boom of the drums. Observe the military engines, the shouting populace, torches blazing in street and square, and the kings of the earth scarce admitted to kiss my Holiness’s foot. Behold the Roman Bishop placing the crown on the head of the Emperor, who seems to be made king of kings, yet is but the shadow of a name. Look at all this, and tell me it is not magnificent!

Peter: I look at a very worldly tyrant, an enemy of Christ and a disgrace to the Church.

Julius: Mere envy! You perceive what a poor wretch of a bishop you were compared to me.

Peter: Insolent wretch! Dare you compare your glory with mine?—and mine was Christ’s, and not my own. Christ gave to me the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, trusted His sheep to my feeding and sealed my faith with His approval. Fraud, usury, and cunning made you Pope, if Pope you are to be called. I gained thousands of souls to Christ: you have destroyed as many thousands. I brought heathen Rome to acknowledge Christ: you have made it heathen again. I healed the sick, cast out devils, restored the dead to life, and brought a blessing with me where I went. What blessings have you and your triumphs brought? I used my power for the good of all: you have used yours to crush and vex mankind. . . .

Julius: Do you mean to say I am to give up money, dominion, revenues, pleasures, life? Will you leave me to misery?
Peter: Yes, if you count Christ as miserable. He who was Lord of all became the scorn of all, endured poverty, endured labour, fasting, and hunger, and ended with a death of shame.

Julius: Very admirable, no doubt. But He will not find many imitators in these times of ours.

Peter: To admire is to imitate. Christ takes nothing good from any man. He takes what is falsely called good, to give him instead eternal truth, as soon as he is purged from the taint of the world. Being Himself heavenly, He will have His Church like Him, estranged from the world’s corruption, and those who are sunk in pollution can not resemble One who is sitting in heaven. Once for all, fling away your imagined wealth, and receive instead what is far better.

Julius: What, I beseech you?

Peter: The gift of prophecy, the gift of knowledge, the gift of miracles, Christ Himself. The more a man is afflicted in the world the greater his joy in Christ, the poorer in the world the richer in Christ, the more cast down in the world the more exalted in Christ. Christ will have His followers pure, and most of all His ministers, the bishops. The higher in rank they are the more like Christ they are bound to be, and the less entangled in earthly pleasures. Yet you, the bishop next to Christ, who make yourself equal with Christ, think only of money, and arms, and treaties, to say nothing of vicious pleasures, and you abuse His name to support your own vanities. You claim the honour due to Christ, while you are Christ’s enemy. You bless others, you are yourself accursed. You pretend to have the keys of heaven, and you are yourself shut out from it. . . .

Julius: Then you won’t open the gates?

Peter: Sooner to anyone than to such as you. We are not of your communion in this place. You have an army of sturdy rogues behind you, you have money, and you are a famous architect. Go build a paradise of your own, and fortify it, lest the devils break in on you.