

Lord Acton Quotes About the Roman Catholic Church



John Emerich Edward Dalberg-Acton, 1st Baron Acton, 13th Marquess of Groppoli, (10 January 1834 – 19 June 1902), better known as Lord Acton, was an English **Catholic historian**, politician, and writer. He is best remembered for the remark he wrote in a letter to an Anglican bishop in 1887: “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” – Source: [Wikipedia](#)

What Lord Acton has to say about the Catholic Church is one of the frankest and most honest appraisals I have ever heard about the true nature of the Vatican and the Pope! It’s hard to believe he remained a Roman Catholic.

“The story [of the papacy] is much more abominable than we all believed... [The Saint Bartholomew’s Day Massacre] is the greatest crime of modern times. It was committed on the principles professed by Rome. It was approved, sanctioned, and praised by the Papacy. The Holy See went out of its way to signify to the world, by permanent and solemn acts, how entirely it admired a king who slaughtered his subjects treacherously because they were Protestants. To proclaim forever that because a man is a Protestant it is a pious deed to cut his throat in the night.” (quoted by John Robbins, “Acton on the Papacy,” The Trinity Review Number 89, July 1992:3).

Note: The St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre was a widespread slaughter of French Protestants (Huguenots) by Catholics beginning on 24 August 1572 and lasting over two months, resulting in the deaths of between 5,000 and 25,000 people. Another source says up to 70,000 Protestants in all of France.

“I cannot accept your canon that we are to judge Pope and King unlike other men, with a favourable presumption that they did no wrong. If there is any presumption it is the other way, against holders of power, increasing as the power increases. Historic responsibility has to make up for the want of legal responsibility. Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men, even when they exercise influence and not authority: still more when you superadd the tendency or the certainty of corruption by authority. There is no worse heresy than that the

office sanctifies the holder of it... For many years my view of Catholic controversy has been governed by the following chain of reasoning:

1. A crime does not become a good deed by being committed for the good of a church.
2. The theorist who approves the act is no better than the culprit who commits it.
3. The divine or historian who defends the theorist incurs the same blame... To commit murder is the mark of a moment, exceptional. To defend it is constant, and shows a more perverted conscience" (quoted by John Robbins, "Acton on the Papacy," The Trinity Review Number 89, July 1992:2).

"A man is not honest who accepts all the Papal decisions in questions of morality, for they have often been distinctly immoral; or who approves the conduct of the Popes in engrossing power, for it was stained with perfidy and falsehood; or who is ready to alter his convictions at their command, for his conscience is guided by no principle" (quoted by John Robbins, "Acton on the Papacy," The Trinity Review Number 89, July 1992:3).

"The papacy contrived murder and massacre on the largest and also on the most cruel and inhuman scale. They [the popes] were not only wholesale assassins but they made the principle of assassination a law of the Christian Church and a condition of salvation... [The Papacy] is the fiend skulking behind the Crucifix" (quoted by John Robbins, "Acton on the Papacy," The Trinity Review Number 89, July 1992:4).

"The Inquisition was peculiarly the weapon and the work of the Popes. It stands out from all those things in which they cooperated, followed, or assented as the distinctive feature of papal Rome. It was set up, renewed, and perfected by a long series of acts emanating from the supreme authority in the Church. No other institution, no doctrine, no ceremony is so distinctly the individual creation of the Papacy, except dispensing power. It is the principal thing with which the Papacy is identified, and by which it must be judged. The principle of the Inquisition is the Pope's sovereign power over life and death. Whosoever disobeys him should be tried and tortured and burnt. If that cannot be done, formalities may be dispensed with, and the culprit may be killed like an outlaw. That is to say, the principle of the Inquisition is murderous, and a man's opinion of the Papacy is regulated and determined by his opinion of religious assassination" (Lord Acton, Letters to Mary Gladstone, 185-186).