

CHURCH HISTORY TURNING POINTS

Chapter 17

The Papacy

The summer of 2014 saw some really cool events unfold in my life. IVP published a book I wrote out of a summer series I had taught in this class. The series was “Your God is Still Too Small,” but by the time the book came out it was transformed into *Christianity on Trial*.

Totally unrelated to the book, just a few weeks later, Becky and I had the chance to help sponsor a legal symposium on religious persecution in the world. This symposium was in Rome, and Pope Francis expressed a desire to meet the folks behind the event. This meant Becky and I were getting to meet the Pope as part of a larger, but still rather small, group.

I think all others in our group belonged to the Roman Catholic church. I have dear friends who are Roman Catholic, but I am at best a “little ‘c’ catholic,” meaning I believe there is but one church (hence, “catholic” in the sense of all-embracing, but not Catholic” in the sense of the Roman Catholic church.) Even as a Protestant, though, we were both really excited and honored to get to meet this really significant world leader and church leader.

On the morning we were to meet him, we gathered in St. Peter’s plaza (the “*Piazza San Pietro*”), and soon headed under the porched *Città del Vaticano* where we met the escorts. They took us through numerous corridors, up several staircases, and finally we arrived in a beautifully painted room. The room layout had a chair at the front facing those of us in “audience” type sitting. The drapes and fabric on the walls both carried the papal seal. The paintings on the ceiling were spectacular.

The room had painted its date from the late middle ages. It also had the self-proclaimed name, “*Triclinium Vaticanum*.” I elbowed Becky and pointed it out. “Know what that says?” I asked, ready to pounce on the little Latin I remember from studies too long ago. She said, “Something about the Vatican.” I laughingly added that *triclinium* originally referred to three sofas found in the formal eating room, but evolved into the common word for a dining room. “In other words,” I added, “we can say we are meeting the pope in his dining room!”

The meeting was marvelous. He was kind and even smiled when I gave him a copy of my book. (Of course, I am under no delusions that anything happened to the book afterward!) Needless to say, we talked of little else for the next few days!

If we gone to a different room in the Vatican, we would have found on the wall a listing of each leader of the Roman church from the time of Peter up to Francis today. It brings us to examine the role of the pope in the church, with an eye both toward the historical development of the office, as well as the various Scriptures used to defend or deny the validity of papal leadership over the church.

WHAT IS THE “POPE”

What exactly is a “pope?” Our English word “pope” comes from the Latin *papa*, which itself comes from the Greek word *pappas* (πάππας). In both Latin and Greek, the words were the everyday expression a child would have for his/her father. In the 200’s, there is Christian literature where bishops are referred to with that title out of deference to the way the bishops functioned as a spiritual father. This ascription continued for bishops generally through the 400’s. After that time, the traditional Roman Catholic label was used almost exclusively for the bishop of Rome.¹ In the Coptic tradition, the bishop of Alexandria continued to have the title also.

Today, the concept of “Pope” is more than a reference to a spiritual father. The Roman Catholic official directory of the Holy See (the “*Annuario pontificio*”) describes the Pope as the holder of many titles:

1. Bishop of Rome
2. Vicar of Jesus Christ
3. Successor of the Chief of the Apostles
4. Supreme Pontiff of the Universal Church
5. Patriarch of the West
6. Primate of Italy
7. Archbishop and Metropolitan of the Roman Province, and
8. Sovereign of the State of Vatican City.

These titles are ones that have historically accrued to the Pope. By the time of Pope Leo I (pope from 440-461), a number of these titles have taken shape, even if they were not fully named yet!

The foundation for all the titles really stems from the third title, “Successor of the Chief of Apostles.” So, any class on the Pope appropriately starts with Peter and our New Testaments.

¹The Catholic Encyclopedia adds that the first one to consistently refer to only the bishop of Rome as the pope was Magnus Felix, who died in 521. *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, (2d Edition Thomson Gale 2003) Vol. 11, p. 495.

PETER AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament can be examined with an eye toward several questions. First, what authority did Peter have in the early church? Was he truly a “pope” in the sense that he had authority over the entire church? Further, did Peter have successors in his role? Was his position something permanent in the church that would have others take the same role?

The Roman Catholic tradition uses a number of New Testament passages to explain the role of Peter and the role of his successors in the church. The core passages are found in Matthew 16, and John 21, but there are also other passages that are used to fill out the picture of Peter’s role in the church.

MATTHEW 16

Matthew 16:13-19 is the account of Jesus asking his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of man is?” The disciples give various answers, and Jesus follows up by asking, “But what about you? Who do you say I am?” Matthew records that Peter spoke up and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Hearing this, Jesus proclaimed:

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Books could be written on this passage. We will give an abbreviated discussion. A key to understanding the passage, from either a Catholic or a protestant perspective, is realizing the pun that Jesus uses. Peter (“*Petros*” in the Greek) literally means rock.

The Catholic understanding of this passage is that Jesus verbally confirmed his authority on Peter as the rock upon which Christ would build his church. Peter would hold the keys of the church, a symbolic reference to the authority Peter would hold.² Peter would have authority to bind and loose on earth and in heaven.

The protestant positions vary. Some point out that Jesus uses a different word for Peter “*Petros*” than for the rock (“*petra*”) on which the church will be built. This

² See passages like Is. 22:20-25 and Rev 1:18, where keys are images of authority.

perspective asserts that Jesus calls Peter a rock (“*Petros*” in the Greek) but says he will build his church on a rocky ledge or cliff (“*petra*” in the Greek). So, the theory is that Jesus uses a pun off Peter’s name to state that the church will be built on the Peter’s profession of faith as opposed to being built upon Peter himself.

We do well to remember that Jesus most likely spoke to his apostles in Hebrew or Aramaic, Jewish languages of the day, rather than Greek, the international language Matthew used in his gospel. In Aramaic, Jesus would have likely used the word *kepha* for both Peter’s name and for the rock on which he would build the church. If so, there is no real difference in the words used by Christ, even though we read a difference in the Greek of Matthew. Matthew may have made the change because using the same word would have put a feminine ending on Peter’s name in the Greek. In other words, Matthew must change the word for rock from “*petra*” when referring to Christ building his church to “*Petros*” because “*petra*” is feminine and Jesus is not calling Peter a girl!³ Still, this Protestant position remains that the “rock” upon which the church would be built is the faith professed, not the professor of faith. (I.e., Jesus as the Son of God, not Peter as proclaimer of that fact.)

Other Protestants acknowledge that Jesus is stating he will build his church upon Peter. But, that reference is merely to the fact that Peter was God’s main instrument for the church’s growth in the beginning. It was Peter who preached the original sermon in Acts 2 that “opened the door” to the church. In fact, in the first 12 chapters of Acts, we read Peter’s name over 50 times. Peter was God’s tool for much of the early growth of the church. This Protestant view is quick to point out that such acts by Peter are different than the idea that Peter got full authority over the church from Christ.

Protestants also point out that two chapters later in Matthew 18:18, Jesus gives to all the apostles the same charge that, “whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” The

³ The difference between Jesus speaking Aramaic and Matthew writing in Greek also explains another aspect of this passage that some find challenging. Namely here, Jesus speaks of the “church” when, in fact, the church did not yet exist. Some see this as an anachronism showing that the discourse never really took place. That viewpoint is not fair to either the passage or to biblical study in general. While Matthew uses the term “church” (“*ekklesia*”) in translating Jesus’ instructions to his disciples, that would not have been the word or language used by Jesus! Most likely, Jesus was using the Aramaic word *kenyshtha* or the Hebrew word *qahal*. These words referred to a branch of a synagogue or an assembly of people. The Hebrew word was used repeatedly in the Old Testament for the people of Israel, and contemporary rabbis repeatedly used the Aramaic word to reference the synagogue. The Greek version of the Old Testament (the “Septuagint”) also used the same Greek word Matthew uses (*ekklesia*) to translate the Hebrew.

Protestant position is that Peter had no special authority in this regard than any of the Apostles. The Catholic response accedes that point, but adds that Jesus still does not confer the special status on others that the church would be built upon them as the rock.

JOHN 21:15-17

At the end of his gospel, John reports an encounter between Jesus and Peter that happened after the resurrection of Christ. Jesus, Peter, and several other disciples (including John) had just finished eating a breakfast of fish. Jesus asked Peter if he (Peter) truly loved Jesus more than the other disciples love Jesus.⁴ Peter acknowledged his love, and Jesus instructed Peter to “feed my lambs.” Jesus then re-asked the question twice more. Each time after Peter’s affirmation, Jesus instructs Peter both to feed and to take care of Jesus’ sheep.

From this passage, many Roman Catholic scholars see Jesus here ordaining Peter in a special way as the supreme minister in teaching and doctrine of the church, the sheep of Jesus. Special significance is given to the fact that Jesus instructs Peter to feed the sheep three times, signifying a forceful confirmation of the commission.

Protestants view this passage as Jesus setting Peter back on the path of service in light of Peter’s denials of Christ right before the crucifixion. Peter had indeed boasted in Matthew 26:33 and Mark 14:29 that even if all others should fall from Christ, Peter would not. Yet before the cock crowed three times, Peter denied Jesus. Jesus used the time after breakfast to set Peter’s mind back on the job at hand. Peter needed to have the courage and awareness that his ministry calling was still full, even though Peter himself was a frail man subject to sin’s temptations.

OTHER PASSAGES

There are a number of other passages that the Roman Catholic tradition has used to explain the role Peter took in the early church. In Luke 22:31, for example, Jesus tells Peter that, “Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” This passage is seen as one that not only prophesies Peter’s rejection of Christ, but also one that notes Peter’s position once he returns as one of strengthening the other apostles.

⁴ See Peter’s earlier boasts in this regard recorded in Matt. 26:33 and Mk 14:29.

The Roman Catholic tradition often will cite Luke 5:10 where Christ refers only to Peter as a “fisher of men.” Similarly, the many times that the apostles are listed in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), Peter is always listed first, or sometimes the apostles are listed simply as “Peter and his companions” (Mk 1:36; 16:7; Lk 9:32).

Protestants look at these same passages, but come to a very different conclusion. They acknowledge that in certain ways, Peter was certainly a leader, even among the apostles. Jesus saw this, and charged Peter accordingly. As a leader, we see Peter fulfilling much of his charge delivering the Pentecost sermon, giving major speeches throughout Acts (3:12-26; 4:8-12; 5:3-9, 29-32; 8:20-23; 10:34-43; 11:4-18; and 15:7-11). Peter readily heals many in Jesus name (Acts 3:6-7; 9:34, 38-41; 5:15). Yet, Peter was not the only one with these leadership skills in the early church. Paul also takes center stage in the book of Acts starting in chapter 13 and Peter gathers little more attention in the book after that. Paul started innumerable churches, gave countless sermons, and performed many miracles in the name of Christ.

Protestants also point out that Paul actually confronted Peter and cited him for his wrong actions in Antioch. As Paul told the Galatians:

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy, even Barnabas was led astray. (Gal. 2:11-13)

Paul then goes on to detail his statements to Peter in this corrective measure.

The Roman Catholic position on this issue is to point out that being “pope” did not make Peter perfect. Only Jesus was perfect. There have certainly been popes in history that have brought disrepute to their office and charge. The Roman Catholic position is the charge still belonged to Peter and his successors, whether they discharged it in a godly manner or not.

In this regard, the Roman Catholic view of Peter is similar to the Old Testament view of the High Priest. Aaron was appointed the first High Priest. After him, successors were chosen. Some discharged their office in godly ways; others did not. Yet, the office remained with its responsibilities.

The High Priest analogy is a good lead into the second question: Did Peter have successors who held the same place and position in the church as he did? Alan Schreck puts it this way, “Peter may have had a leading role in the early Church, but it is another matter to show that others were authorized to take over his role after he died.”⁵

Protestants point out that there is no passage of scripture where Jesus mentions the Apostles having successors. In fact, the earliest church never really contemplated this issue, believing that Christ would return in their lifetime. Only as time wore on and the Apostles began dying do we see any idea of successors in the church. As Paul approached the end of his life, he instructed Timothy to take the things learned from Paul, and “entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Tim. 2:2).

We also have Paul teaching Timothy and Titus about selecting overseers (Bishops) for the churches. Paul says the Bishop is to be “above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money,” etc., 1 Tim. 3:2-7. Paul tells Titus that he was to appoint elders in every town, giving then a list of qualifications for the elders (Tit. 1:5-9).

Every major division of orthodoxy, Catholic or Protestant, recognizes that some measure of church leadership must perpetuate. There is nothing to indicate that the first generation church was to have leadership, but after that, all churches were merely “members only” with no leadership. The crux of the question is whether apostolic roles continued, whether Peter had a special role that also continued, and whether the early church structure itself was one of a hierarchy of deacons, and bishops with an eye toward expanded roles as time and the church grew.

Much of this information we have to consider in light of history. History begins, of course, with the Bible itself. The earliest church history is there. But, we can fill out a good bit of history with reliable information we get from other historical sources. For example, we gather from 1 and 2 Peter that the apostle Peter went to Rome and wrote from there.⁶ This same data we get from history also. It was in Rome that Peter met his martyr’s death at the hands of Nero (See earlier lesson in this class to that effect).

⁵ *Catholic & Christian, An Explanation of Commonly Misunderstood Catholic Beliefs* (Servant Books 2004) p. 93.

⁶ Peter says he is writing from Babylon, but scholars recognize that “Babylon” was a common label for Rome itself. Most readily agree that the ancient city of Babylon was non-existent for purposes of the church at that time.

So, our historical survey begins with the fact that Peter was in Rome. To the Catholic tradition, this places Peter's successor in Rome as well. Many others argue that scripture shows us that Peter (and Paul) also spent time in leadership roles at the church in Antioch. Similarly, Peter clearly had his leadership role in Jerusalem. It was the Jerusalem church that asserted its authority over other churches in Acts 15. So many protestant scholars, and some early church fathers, use these biblical facts as a challenge to the idea that Rome received a special designation from Peter as opposed to one of the other churches where Peter led and served. The Roman response to this is that Peter died in Rome, so his "last appointed successor," if you will, would have been in that city. Further, the Roman Catholic Church believes that when Peter moved churches, the seat of his authority moved with him as well. So at the time of his demise, that seat would have been Rome.

HISTORY OF PETER'S SUCCESSORS

The title "pope" became common for the leader of the Roman church easily by the 400's. It was first used as a title for the bishop of Alexandria in the 200's in the sense of the meaning "father."

Then after saying some things concerning all the heresies he adds: "I received this rule and ordinance from our blessed father (*papa* - *πάπα*), Heraclas."⁷

The title is still used today for the "patriarch" (also a derivative form of "father") of Alexandria. Our earliest reference to the bishop of Rome as "pope" dates from the late 200's when used of the bishop of Rome Marcellinus.⁸ Since the 400–500's, the men in this line of succession of the bishops of Rome from the New Testament to now have been called "Popes." As we discussed earlier, they draw their title as Pope from the root word in Latin for Father. These men are seen as the spiritual fathers of the church.

Their role, however, goes deeper for the Roman Catholic Church than simply "spiritual father." These men are seen to have two kinds of primacy (read that "comes in first ahead of others in authority") in the church. First, the Pope has "magisterial primacy," meaning that the Pope has the "final definition of doctrine

⁷ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical history*, Book 7, Chapter 7, verse 4.

⁸ Walsh, Michael J., *Lives of the popes: Illustrated Biographies of Every Pope From St Peter to the Present* (Barnes & Noble 1998), at 34.

and teaching” in the church. The second area of primacy is “jurisdictional.” This means the Pope has the “final decision” in areas of church government.⁹

As we discussed in the first section of this lesson, the Roman view of this office stems from their interpretation of several scriptures found in the New Testament. But another aspect of the Roman view important to the historical development of the papacy is the overall view of the church. To many Protestants, the church is a spiritual body made up of the saved wherever they may worship and regardless of denominational affiliation. By and large, the official Roman view is different. The Roman church never considered the church merely a spiritual body. Rather, the church is seen as an “organized, visible, juristic, and corporate society.”¹⁰ As such, the church has set up a government by Christ, just as any other society might have. Over time, as the church grew from a small community of believers in Jerusalem, the government has grown as well. The Roman perspective considers that the governmental growth has continued under the auspices of the Roman Bishop as Peter’s designated successor. It is this growth that we now chart.

1 CLEMENT

The earliest church writing we have outside the New Testament that bears on this matter is 1 Clement. You might recall our earlier class lesson where this “Apostolic Father’s” letter was covered. Written around 95 or 96AD, 1 Clement is a letter from the Roman church to the church at Corinth. The letter confronts the Corinthian church with rebuke and instruction over the Corinthian’s divisions. The Corinthians are told to restore their leaders and cease the destructive schisms.

From a Roman perspective, this letter demonstrates an early exercise of papal authority. Clement is seen as the Bishop of Rome in succession from Peter.¹¹ The letter is considered early proof that the church at Rome, more specifically Clement himself, readily takes authority over other churches (here the one at Corinth) instructing them in church matters.

The Protestant perspective differs. Protestants point out that the letter is not from Clement as the Bishop of Rome or Pope. Instead, the letter is from the church at

⁹ *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, (2d Edition Thomson Gale 2003) “Papacy,” p. 830.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ The church considers “Linus” as the immediate successor to Peter. After Linus (67-76) came Anacletus and Cletus (scholars differ whether they were one in the same or two different bishops) who are dated as bishop(s) from 76-88. The third (fourth) bishop in line of succession from Peter is Clement (88-97).

Rome,¹² and Clement is not even mentioned by name or office in the letter. All agree that the letter itself does give very pointed instruction on proper Christian and church behavior. But, Protestants consider this no different than the New Testament practice seen in the writings of Paul and John where they write churches in a similar instructive manner. Protestants also quickly point to where the church at Jerusalem in Acts 15, with James at the helm, not Peter, writes to other churches with specific instructions on what is proper and holy.

IGNATIUS

A decade after Clement, we have the writings of Ignatius. You might recall from our class on Ignatius that he was on his way to Rome as a prisoner set for martyrdom. While traveling to his death, Ignatius wrote letters to seven churches. Those letters contain some insight on the issue of church government.

Before we look at those letters, we should go back and consider the New Testament's references to church government. As we partially discussed last week, the New Testament church had apostles, but individual church leadership seemed to reside with a plurality of elders or bishops.¹³ Paul saw the elders as those who would "direct the affairs of the church" (1 Tim. 5:17).

In the New Testament sense of governing in the churches, "elder" appears to be synonymous with "bishop." So, when Paul wrote to Titus urging him to finish setting up overseers¹⁴ in the churches, we see in Titus 1:7 that Paul used the word "bishop" or "overseer" interchangeably with the word elder.

Similarly, in Acts 20, Paul sends for the Ephesian "elders of the church" (20:17) to say good-bye to them. When the elders arrive, Paul tells them to "keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers ["bishops"]."

¹² The letter begins, "The church of God which sojourns in Rome to the church of God which sojourns in Corinth."

¹³ New Testament churches also seemed to have a role for deacons. For example, when Paul writes to the Philippians, he addressed his letter to "the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers [bishops] and deacons" (Phil. 1:1). Deacons (and deaconesses—see Rom. 16:1, 3, 12; Phil. 4:2, 3; 1 Tim. 3:11; 5:9, 10; Titus 2:3, 4) had a service role in the early churches. The word itself comes from the Greek *diakonos* meaning a "servant" or a "messenger." The office seems to have started in Acts 6 where seven were chosen to distribute to the widows in need so the apostles might continue their apostolic calling.

¹⁴ The English Standard Version translates the word that is traditionally "bishop" as "overseer" because that is the core meaning of the word.

Peter also uses the word “elder” interchangeably with “bishop” or “overseer.” In 1 Peter 5, Peter writes “to the elders among you.” He tells them to serve as “overseers” in 5:2.

Now, we consider the writings of Ignatius. Just 10 years from the time John wrote his Revelation, Ignatius writes of church government in ways that indicate that the New Testament examples of a plurality of elders/bishops in the various churches is already different. For Ignatius, the role of “bishop” is different than the role of “elder” (also translated “presbyter”).

In the letter to the Magnesians, for example, Ignatius references the church’s “godly bishop” and “worthy presbyters” (2:1). Ignatius also writes to the Trallians, speaking of their bishop Polybius (1:1). Here, the church is urged to be “subject to the bishop as to Jesus Christ” (2:1). The Trallians are told to do “nothing without the bishop.” We have a clear distinction in Ignatius’s letters between the office of “bishop” which seems to have been held by one individual in each church and the office of “elder” or “presbyter” which seems to have had a number of men assigned to it.

At this point, we have the development of three different roles in the church: Bishop, elders, and deacons. The Trallians are told to “respect the deacons as Jesus Christ,” to “respect the bishop, who is a model of the Father,” and to respect “the presbyters [“elders”] as God’s counsel and as the band of the apostles.” Ignatius then adds, “Without these, no group can be called a church” (3:1).

The Protestant position asserts that this shows a gradual changing from the early governing structures of the church as a hierarchy starts to develop. This development sets up a bishop in a preeminent role not seen in New Testament writings.

IRENÆUS

Thinking back through earlier classes, you might remember our classes referencing Irenaeus of Lyon. He was a church father who wrote against the Gnostic heresies of his day. To combat the heresies, Irenaeus linked orthodox faith to Jesus through an unbroken chain. Jesus taught the apostles truth. The apostles taught that same truth to the bishops who succeeded them. Those bishops, each in their own turn, taught the following bishops up through Irenaeus’ day. So, any teaching contrary to that of the properly designated bishop from a line of succession from the apostles themselves was heresy.

In making this argument, Irenaeus set out the list of uninterrupted bishops at Rome from the time of Peter and Paul to his current day. Many Catholics see here an

intrinsic recognition of the preeminence of the Roman Bishopric. Especially noteworthy in this regard is where Irenaeus makes his point that with Rome, “because of its superior origin, all churches must agree.”

Most Protestants see the use of Rome as a handy tool to chart succession of apostolic teaching. The Protestants quickly point out that Irenaeus indicates that, given time and space, he would be able to similarly give an unbroken list of all bishops in the churches. As for the statement of all churches agreeing with Rome, protestants believe that Irenaeus faults those heretics who disagree with the Roman orthodoxy because the orthodoxy came from Peter and Paul (the “superior origin” rather than some unknowns).

POLYCARP

On the issue of papal primacy, some reference the acts of Polycarp, an early Christian martyr also discussed in an earlier class. As bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp came and visited Anicetus, who was Roman bishop from approximately 155-166. Polycarp came to discuss the proper way to establish the date of Easter. Should the church celebrate Easter based on the Jewish calendar, or should adjustments be made to keep the celebrations on a Sunday? As Catholic scholar Joseph McSorley quotes Eusebius, the church historian, “Polycarp could not persuade the Pope, nor could the Pope, Polycarp!”¹⁵

Roman Catholics see here the inherent value the church imparted to the Bishop of Rome in that Polycarp sought and discussed this position above all others. The Protestant responds that this ultimately shows that Polycarp did not find himself bound by the Pope’s position or pronouncement on this theological issue.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SYNODS

Over the centuries from Polycarp up through the 400’s, we find numerous examples of various church leaders writing to the Bishop of Rome for advice, for support of their positions, and for recognition. From a Roman Catholic perspective, these letters and requests are seen as tacit admission in the daily practice of the church that the Bishop of Rome had recognized authority over the universal church.

From a Protestant perspective, the same time period shows a number of churches receiving similar petitions of support. The Protestants view this time as one of no ultimate governing authority beyond the confines of each church, at least in terms of individuals or individual offices.

¹⁵ *An Outline of Church History of the Church by Centuries* (B. Herder Book Co. 1945) at 32.

A larger development was occurring at this time in the church. The church was confronting a number of difficult theological issues that divided many of the church's teachers and leaders. Out of this time grew a technique for resolution that drew its authority from the church's council in Acts 15 over the Jewish/Christian issues of behavior. Starting in the 200's, the churches began meeting in synods or councils to discuss and vote on various issues. The churches saw this as a way to maintain unity and establish orthodoxy.

Various leaders from the invited churches would attend these synods or meetings. These meetings would not only distinguish orthodoxy from heresy, but they would also frequently label heretics and excommunicate them. For example, in the 250's, St. Cyprian summoned several such meetings to make decisions on those in his African area. Cyprian believed as bishop, he had the authority to settle the disciplinary questions for those who were in his jurisdiction. At times, Cyprian took positions opposite that of Stephen, the current bishop of Rome. At other times, Cyprian found support from Rome in his positions and more readily gave authority to the Roman bishop.

A significant synod was held in Antioch in 268 to consider the heresy of Paul of Samosota. Bishops, presbyters, and deacons from the adjacent cities and provinces attended the council. The decisions of the synods were then announced to the "fellow-ministers throughout the world and the whole catholic church under heaven."

These synods rapidly became political plays within themselves. As the gatherings occurred, it was clearly important to all players to get their views supported by as many as possible. The major players became those who had the votes and the leverage at these meetings.

THE ROMAN BISHOP WEIGHS IN

As these synods developed, and especially as larger councils were called, headcounts for votes were important. People, positions, and authority were leveraged for vindication of people and their views. It was not uncommon for letters to be written to any number of bishops seeking their support before and during the conferences. Especially noticeable were the letters seeking support from the bishop of Rome.

When the Roman Bishop aided one's position, the Roman Bishop was lauded for his use of his holy see in support of a position. When the Roman Bishop would disagree with the one's position, the bishop was then discarded as wrong or irrelevant to the issue

The Roman church had never been the site of great debates over the theological issues of the 200-400's. Most of those debates were found in the East (with a couple in Africa). This allowed the Roman Bishop to give his support only when sought. This would change with Pope Leo I and the councils dealing with the humanity of Christ. Without question, Leo was the major theological force behind the Council of Chalcedon's resolution of the orthodox position on the humanity of Christ. It can easily be said that Leo's tome secured the orthodoxy of Jesus, fully human and fully divine, but this is discussed more fully in our next lesson.

THE POWER OF THE CHURCH

As noted in earlier classes, the 300's brought forth major changes as the church was no longer the minority, persecuted religion of the Empire. Instead, once Constantine declared Christianity his faith, he pointed the entire empire itself that direction. The ripples of this go beyond simple government. With Constantine, Constantinople became the center point of the Roman Empire rather than Rome. There became a sense in the church asserting its governing power as coincided with that of the empire. Though scholars may debate the degree to which this holds true, Constantine himself presided over the Nicene Council (held outside Constantinople).

Still, the Roman church was not without power and prestige with Constantine. Constantine gave the Roman church a number of impressive properties as well as building key church structures, including the first basilica of St. Peter. With these types of gifts, the Roman church grew quite wealthy. This wealth was used not only to pay the clergy, but also in support of innumerable widows, poor, sick, and orphans. The more money the Roman church had, the more people it supported and the further its influence reached. The money was dispensed under the oversight of the bishop. The growth in economic power was commensurate to the growth of bishopric power and authority.

As the 400's started, the empire started crumbling in the West. The East continued fairly strongly with an Emperor that held the reigns on the church as well as the state. In the west, the Church was the one stabilizing force as the empire began to crumble. So, we see the Bishop of Rome actually beginning to take on the functions of government in addition to the affairs of the church. It was Pope Leo I who met with Attila the Hun in 452 and persuaded him not to attack and plunder Rome. Leo also had clear oversight for the lands and cities of Italy.

More and more, the people in the West saw the Bishop of Rome as the source for their sustenance and their day-to-day stability. The Roman Pope was seen not only as a spiritual leader, but also as the societal provider of security and

continuity. Leo was able to get a legal recognition of his primacy over the western churches from Emperor Valentinian III. This law gave Leo the authority as an inheritance from Peter. Leo used the Roman laws of inheritance as his basis for his claim on Peter's authority. Under Roman law, one could pass on their titles and responsibilities. Of course one could never bequeath their personality. Leo explained that Peter's position was in a sense inherited by his successors. Peter's personality was not, and that explained why some pope's faithfully discharged their duties, while others did not.

Leo used Roman inheritance law to explain not only papal authority, but also papal inadequacies. Leo explained that one who had honors, responsibilities and possessions could bequeath those upon his death. That is what Peter did. One could never, however, bequeath one's personalities, convictions, etc. That is why Popes subsequent to Peter always had Peter's duties, powers and responsibilities, but might not discharge those as well as Peter did.

MEANWHILE...BACK IN THE EAST

All of these events were running parallel to the theological understandings offered for the Pope's pre-eminence. In the mid 200's in the West, we see the usage of the Matthew passage for the first time as indicating that Peter was the one who held the seat of first authority over the church. In the East, most simply did not see this as true. Origen and his successors saw the Matthew passage in a much different light. Origen wrote that the rock upon which Christ built his church was "every imitator of Christ from whom they drank, who drank from the spiritual rock that followed them." He saw the passage referring to the apostles as a whole rather than just Peter. Similarly, the keys were given to all who believed in Peter's confession of faith, rather than just to Peter.¹⁶

For some Easterners, if there were to be any authority of pre-eminence for the church, then it would belong to Jerusalem not Rome. They viewed Jerusalem as the source of the church. It was Jerusalem where Peter started the church. In Jerusalem, James, the brother of Christ, was the pre-eminent bishop. Eusebius showed that the line of apostolic succession in Jerusalem was unbroken as was Rome's.

In fact, there was not only Jerusalem, but also several power centers for the church built up during these times. Antioch and Alexandria also had strong early bible ties. Antioch, like Rome, could boast both Peter and Paul as its early teachers. Alexandria claimed authority as the church set up by Mark, author of Peter's gospel (our book of Mark). Of course, once the government moved from Rome to

¹⁶ *The Rise of Christianity*, W.H. C. Frend (Fortress Press 1984) at 401.

Constantinople, the church there also had great claim to authority as the headquarters of government and the “new Rome.”

These churches would jostle with each other for authority in the 300’s and 400’s. The Nicene council divided up Roman Christendom into areas for administration. The administrative/authority centers were Alexandria, Antioch, and Rome, but Rome was not given any status above that of the other sees. Ultimately, during the Council of Chalcedon, provision was made in Canon 28 that the sees of Constantinople and Rome were jointly the pre-eminent jurisdictions of the church. Pope Leo, however, would have nothing to do with that! That canon would continue to be disputed in the church for many years to come.

This focus on Chalcedon is where we turn next!

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”* (Eph. 5:25b-26).

All who wear the label “Christian,” whether Catholic, Protestant, and fully non-denominational, should be able to agree on one thing. Jesus Christ is the head of the church. He cares dearly for her as a groom should his bride. He gave himself fully for her, in ways that defy our full understanding. This should call each of us to care for the church as well, but never at the expense of our caring for the Lord! Our care for the church is always a focus first on Jesus. Jesus trumps denominations, family history, and everything else!

2. *“The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation”* (2 Samuel 22:2-3).

Jesus told Peter he would build his church on the rock, but we must never forget this image was not first used with Peter. The language of the Old Testament points us to our God as our rock. Nothing built has any lasting value if it is not built first and foremost on the Lord. This is the sure foundation for all of life, as well as the church. The church holds the distinction of being built on the blood of Jesus who IS the Son of God, as Peter confessed. This makes Jesus the solid foundation, the rock, on which all believers stand, individually and corporately.

3. *“See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. For in Christ, all the fullness of Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority” (Col. 2:8-10).*

When I meet others from other Christian traditions or denominations, my focus is first and foremost on whether they know Jesus. More important than the name on the building where they worship, than how their pastor, minister, elders, popes, or other leaders view their own role or theology, is whether Jesus Christ is Lord of their life. Whether they have been born from above is of greatest importance. We can always find something to fight about, but those things are not always worth fighting over!

HOMework

To recap, we are memorizing 1 John this year in the English Standard Version. That amounts to two verses a week. To be current, we need to have memorized 1 John 1:1-3:7. This week we add 1 John 3:8-9. We provide all verses below for your help!

1John 1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— **2** the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— **3** that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. **4** And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

1:5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. **6** If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. **7** But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. **8** If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us

from all unrighteousness. **10** If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

1John 2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. **2** He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. **3** And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. **4**Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, **5** but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: **6** whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. **7** Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. **8** At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. **9** Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. **10** Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. **11** But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

12 I am writing to you, little children,
because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.

13 I am writing to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.
I am writing to you, young men,
because you have overcome the evil one.

I write to you, children,
because you know the Father.

14 I write to you, fathers,

because you know him who is from the beginning.
I write to you, young men,
because you are strong,
and the word of God abides in you,
and you have overcome the evil one.

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. **16** For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. **17** And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

18 Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. **19** They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. **20** But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. **21** I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. **22** Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. **23** No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. **24** Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. **25** And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.

26 I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. **27** But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him. **28** And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. **29** you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

1John 3:1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. **2** Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. **3** And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. **4** Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. **5** You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. **6** No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. **7** Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. **8** Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. **9** No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.