

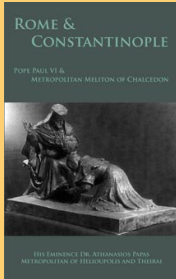
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## "Thou Art Peter"

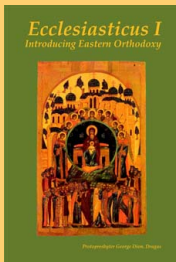
By Fr. John Maxwell

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Since coming to Fort Smith, I must confess that the Roman Catholic Church here has been very kind and brotherly to us. St. Edward's Hospital and Harbor View Mercy Hospital provided free space for our first Church services. Several of the local priests and nuns have shown themselves to be humble, peaceful and God-loving men and women. If only there were more displays of Christian charity between our Churches throughout its history, then perhaps the Great Schism of 1054 AD would never have occurred, and if it had, it certainly would have been healed long ago. Nor are the Catholics here in Ft. Smith isolated examples of such Christian character...Experience...has shown me many examples of true piety among Roman Catholics. And when I earned a Masters degree from a Roman Catholic institution, I found some of God's choicest servants among the Catholics.

It is sad for me that Christianity is so fragmented today. The entire world suffers because of it. Perhaps the most tragic event in the history of Christianity was the breaking of unity between the Church of Rome and the Orthodox Church (the Great Schism of 1054 AD referred to above). Schism is anti-Christian. Our Lord suffered death on the Cross to heal all divisions (see Eph. 2:11-17). He prayed, "That they may be one...that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me" (Jn. 17:21). Division breeds skepticism, unbelief and death. Breaking of unity is a sin against the Cross of Christ, His mission and His heart. We must then look with utter seriousness and sincerity at the cause of the (Great Schism) so that it can be healed. We must seek the truth with all of our heart and follow it as it is revealed to us. It is with this understanding, not in a spirit of Roman Catholic bashing, that I write this short article.

Although there are many issues which divide Orthodox and Roman Catholics such as the Latin addition to the Nicene Creed concerning the procession of the Holy Spirit (i.e. the Filioque), and the Roman doctrines of Indulgences, Purgatory, the Immaculate Conception of Mary, Papal Infallibility, Created Grace, and Original Sin, the most divisive doctrine between the two Churches has been the doctrine of Papal Supremacy. The Church of Rome claims that Christ made Peter and his successors the chief rulers over the Church; the successors of Peter are the Popes of Rome; the Church of Christ (the means of salvation) is located where Peter and his successors are. Therefore, (according to traditional Roman Catholic theology) union with him (the Pope) is necessary for salvation. As the visible head of the Church, he is the final judge of truth, the supreme teacher, the visible sign of unity, and the Vicar of Christ. Since the Pope is the head, the bishops of the Church can do nothing without him. The converse of this is, however, not true. Although the Pope generally acts in concert with his fellow bishops, he can at least in theory, act independently of them.

If these claims are true, then the Orthodox are the guilty party in the schism for not recognizing the supreme authority of the Pope, and must repent. If, on the other hand, it can be historically proven that the Bishop of Rome did not originally possess this power over the Church, but usurped it, then the Papacy is guilty of schism and must repent. Below is an examination of the problems associated with these papal claims.

The first concern that Orthodox have with this premise has to do with the presupposition that Peter was the unique rock upon which the Church was built. The Orthodox Church sees the following...problems associated with this claim.

First of all, although Peter was given the prominent role as the first of the apostles, he was always equal to the other apostles. Christ told the apostles that they would sit on twelve thrones (Matt. 19:28). A special throne was not set up for Peter. Moreover the "keys" were given to all the apostles (Matt. 18:18). The other apostles were also the foundation upon which the Church was built (Eph. 2:20). If the Roman view is to be believed, it is interesting to note that when the disciples disputed among themselves as to who would be the greatest, (Lk. 22:24-27), they seemed unaware that Christ had already picked Peter.

Second, the Rock upon whom the Church is established is Christ. When Christ says, "Thou art Peter," He called him "PETROS," which means "small stone." But when He says, "Upon this rock I will build my Church" the Greek term for rock is not Petros but "PETRA" which means "bedrock." This bedrock which the Church is built upon was always understood by the Greek Fathers and many Western Fathers to mean either Christ Himself, or the profession of faith in Christ's Divinity.

Third, the patristic witness is that no Father of the Church has seen, in the primacy of Peter, any title of jurisdiction or absolute authority in Church government. The Latin Church Father, St. Ambrose, for instance, taught that Peter and Paul were equal: "It was proper that Paul should go to see Peter. Why? was Peter superior to him and to the other Apostles? No, but because, of all the Apostles, he was the first to be entrusted by the Lord with the care of the churches. Had he need to be taught, or to receive a commission from Peter? No, but that Peter might know that Paul had received the power which had also been given to himself." (The Papacy, by Abbe Guettee, pp. 173-174).

Furthermore, he taught that Peter's primacy was not one of honor or rank, but of faith and confession: "As soon as Peter heard these words, 'Whom say ye that I am?' remembering his place, he exercised this primacy, a primacy of confession, not of honour; a primacy of faith, not of rank." (Ibid., p. 174).

Blessed Augustine, one of the "Doctors" of the Roman Church, considered Peter and Paul equal. He puts these words in Paul's mouth: "I am in nothing inferior to Peter; for we were ordained by the same God for the same ministry" (Ibid., p. 187). Blessed Augustine, also referred to Peter's primacy, but he does not understand this to mean power over the Church. "He had not the primacy over the disciples but among the disciples. His primacy among the disciples was the same as that of Stephen among the deacons" (Ibid., p. 176).

The second concern that Orthodox have with the Latin premise is with the claim that an exclusive transference of power occurred from the Apostle Peter to the Bishop of Rome, and from the Church in Jerusalem to the Church in Rome. The Orthodox would first point out that all bishops are successors of all the apostles, and that the Bishop of Rome, the Pope, does not therefore have exclusive rights to Peter. Second, since Peter died before the Apostle John, this would mean, according to the Papal doctrine, that the Beloved Apostle would have been under the universal rule of the Bishop of Rome (at that time), thus reversing the intended order of rank.

Third, Peter ordained several bishops in Rome. (Irenaeus and Eusebius write that he ordained Linus, and Tertullian states that he ordained Clement.) How could they be his successor while he was still alive?

Fourth, Jerusalem had unique authority in the Church. It was the Mother of all the Churches. But it never attempted to lord it over the other Churches as its supposed successor did.

And fifth, if we admit a succession from apostle to bishop and (from) Jerusalem to Rome, then there would be a decrease in authority, due to the unique place of the Apostle and of Jerusalem. Rome, however, has claimed more authority than Peter or Jerusalem ever claimed.

The last concern that the Orthodox have is with the Roman presupposition that the authoritative role of the Papacy always existed from ancient times. To demonstrate the novelty of this idea I cite the ancient witness of Pope Gregory the Great (540-604), one of the greatest of the Popes. Pope Gregory was concerned that the Patriarch of Constantinople, St. John the Faster, had accepted the title of Ecumenical (or Universal) Patriarch. He condemned any such title for the following reasons.

First, anyone who would use such a title would have fallen into pride, equal to the anti-Christ. He wrote: "I say it without the least hesitation, whoever calls himself the universal bishop, or desires this title, is by his pride, the precursor of anti-Christ, because he thus attempts to raise himself above the others. The error into which he falls springs from pride equal to that of anti-Christ; for as that wicked one wished to be regarded as exalted above other men, like a god, so likewise whoever would call himself sole bishop exalteth himself above others" (Ibid., 226).

Second, St. Gregory believed that such a title would be perilous to the Church. "It cannot be denied that if any one bishop be called universal, all the Church crumbles if that universal one fall" (Ibid., p. 223).

Finally, he refused the title for himself because he believed that he was equal with and not superior to his fellow Patriarchs. He wrote to the Bishop of Alexandria these words: "Your Holiness has been at pains to tell us that in addressing certain persons you no longer give them certain titles that have no better origin than pride, using this phrase regarding me, 'as you have commanded me.' I pray you let me never again hear this word command; for I know who I am and who you are. By your position you are my brethren; by your virtue you are my fathers. I have, therefore, not commanded; I have only been careful to point out things which seemed to me useful. Still I do not find that Your Holiness has perfectly remembered what I particularly wished to impress on your memory; for I said that you should no more give that title to me than to others; and lo! in the superscription of your letter, you gave to me, who have proscribed them, the vainglorious titles of Universal and Pope. May your sweet holiness do so no more in the future. I beseech you; for you take from yourself what you give excess to another. I do not esteem that an honor which causes my brethren to lose their own dignity. My honor is that of the whole Church. My honor is the unshakable firmness of my brethren. I consider myself truly honored when no one is denied the honor due to them. If Your Holiness calls me Universal Pope, you deny that you are yourself what I should be altogether. God forbid! Far from us be words that puff up vanity and wound charity" (Ibid., p. 227). Is it possible that Pope Gregory the Great, one of the greatest of all popes, would be unaware that Peter had universal authority over the Church? Is this fact not proof enough that

Peter's supremacy over the Church as well as his passing on that power to the Bishops of Rome, was an invention and not instituted by Christ?

It is illuminating to understand that even some very illustrious Roman Catholic theologians today recognize that the Papacy as it now exists is of late origin. W. DeVries admits, "...throughout the first ten centuries Rome never claimed to have been granted its preferred position of jurisdiction as an explicit privilege" (Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism by Methodios Fouyas, p. 70). Avery Dulles considers the development of the Papacy to be an historical accident. "The strong centralization in modern Catholicism is due to historical accident. It has been shaped in part by the homogeneous culture of medieval Europe and by the dominance of Rome, with its rich heritage of classical culture and legal organization" (Models of the Church by Avery Dulles, p. 200).

The Church was never intended to be an institutional government that is ruled with worldly power (See Matt. 23:8-10). Rather its leaders must be the servant of all. Orthodox rejoice that the Pope now prefers to be called the servant of the servants of God. Sadly, this has not always been the case, and its claims have at times been incongruent with these words of Christ. I entreat my Catholic friends to examine these facts. Do they not give ample evidence that the cause of the Great Schism is rooted in the exaggerated Papal claims and that the way to unity is to return to the Church which did not fall into this error?

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