

THE NEW TESTAMENT BASIS FOR A PETRINE OFFICE, PECULIAR TO
PETER HIMSELF WITHIN THE APOSTOLIC COLLEGE AND COMMUNITY

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I

It would be uncandid to deny that the documents of the New Testament assign to the **A**postle Peter a place as the chief of the **T**welve **A**postles and as a leader in the primitive Church. He is invariably named first in the lists of the **T**welve **A**postles of Jesus, (Mt. 10:2; Mk. 3:16; Lk. 6:14; Acts 1:13) with the epithet $\pi\rho\omega\tau\omicron\varsigma$ before his name in Matthew. He is one of an inner group of **A**postles present at important moments in the life of Jesus such as the Transfiguration, along with James and John (Mk. 9:28 and para.; cf. 5:37). His denial of Jesus is specifically mentioned by all four evangelists. Perhaps most important of all, there is strong, though not unanimous, evidence among the N.T. writers that Jesus appeared after the Resurrection first to Peter (1 Cor. 15:5; Mk. 14:28; 16:7; Mt. 28:7; Lk. 24:34), probably in Galilee. The earliest sources (Paul and Mark) point in that direction (though the account has been confused by later stories of Appearances at the Empty Tomb), and the story in Jn. 21:¹⁻²³23 confirms the account of an Appearance especially to Peter in Galilee. The book of Acts represents him as taking the initiative from the earliest moment after the Ascension in preaching the gospel (Acts 2:14ff.; 3:12 ff.; 5:29-32), in organizing whatever ministry might be necessary for the earliest Christians (1:15 ff.), in looking after the financial needs of the Church (5:1-11) in accepting formally as Christians those whom others had converted (8:14-17) and in performing works of healing (3: 1-9; 5: 12-16; 9: 32-42). He is foremost also in enduring arrest, trial and imprisonment (4: 1-22; 5: 12-41; 12: 1-19).

Paul's letter to the Galatians, in its first two chapters, confirms Peter's position of leadership; even Paul, for all his claim to independence as an apostle, realised that he was obliged to see that his gospel conformed to the gospel of those whom he calls, **τοῖς δοκουσιν** (Gal 2:2 | compare 2:6 **τῶν δοκούντων εἶναι τι**) and who certainly included Peter, as the continuation of his narrative makes clear. Some years earlier he had gone to Jerusalem specially to communicate with Peter, even though he knew that there were other Apostles there at that time whom he did not see (Gal. 1:18). Elsewhere Paul describes Peter, with James and John as one of the **στυλοὶ** (Gal. 2:4). It should however be noted that Paul mentions on more than one occasion. "James the brother of the Lord", who was not one of the original **Twelve Apostles** (1 Cor. 15:7) Gal. 1:19; 2:9, 12), and that the authority of this James in Jerusalem clearly increases with time, for he, and not Peter, appears to be the leading figure in the Jerusalem Church from the twelfth chapter of Acts onwards (Acts 12:17; 15: 13 ff; 21:18 ff). Peter after saying his say at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:7-11), disappears entirely from the book of Acts. Further, Paul is at pains to equate his apostleship with that of Peter, at any rate as far as authority to preach the gospel went (1 Cor. 1:12 ff; 3:22; Gal. 2:6-10), and describes with some relish how he withstood Peter to his face (Gal. 2:12 ff).

It is therefore clear beyond all possibility of controversy that Peter occupied a position of leadership, which one could describe as primacy if one attached no formal official meaning to that term, in the primitive Church. Jesus himself had given him his nickname of **Κηφᾶς** in Aramaic (**Πέτρος** in Greek) as an addition to his original name of Simon Bar-Jonah, and had apparently chosen him or regarded him as the leader of the **Twelve Apostles**. Precisely what

this position of leadership amounted to, what powers, functions and responsibilities it entailed, is a matter of much obscurity and controversy. There are three classic passages in the Gospels where this primacy of Peter is usually thought to receive some clarification. The first is the moment when at Caesarea Philippi Peter recognized Jesus as the Christ (Mt. 16:13-20; Mk. 8:27-30; Lk. 9:18-21; cf. Jn. 1:40-42). Neither Mark nor Luke represent this incident as a point at which Peter was praised or formally appointed to some office or dignity by Jesus, quite the contrary. But Matthew has here the well-known pericope in which Christ gives Simon his name, Peter, declares that on this rock he will found his church, that the gates of hell will not prevail against it and that he will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven, with power to loose and bind, to Peter (cf. Mt. 18:18 where the power to loose and bind is given to all the ~~A~~postles). Out of the welter of controversial interpretations which has gathered round this passage, a few points must be noted. It is obvious that Simon had already been called "The Rock" by Jesus independently of this passage. Mark and Luke and John and Paul all know that his nick-name was Cephas or Peter, without giving any sign of knowing about the words recorded by Matthew. If this is so, then the old dispute as to whether Christ was founding the Church on Peter or on Peter's confession can be decided. Clearly he was founding the Church on Peter, who already was the Rock, not on Peter's confession, in spite of the majority of Patristic opinion and usual Anglican interpretation, which decides in the other sense. A much more difficult question is to determine how authentic are these words. The noun *ἐκκλησία* is attributed to Jesus only here, at Mt. 16:18, and in a passage of a very similar complexion at Mt. 18:17, a circumstance which in my view renders the passage highly suspect. Again, Matthew has chosen to insert this pericope at a point where, in the parallel passage in Mark, Peter is rebuked and humiliated, and in Luke the ~~A~~postles

generally are rebuked in milder language. Matthew retains this rebuke and humiliation, but precedes it by these words of praise and exaltation for Peter. It is only because we are so used to the Matthaean account that we are not struck by its incongruity; a very similar incongruity attaches to the Matthaean pericope 18:15-18 which is so like in complexion to the pericope 16: 17-19, for its words restricting severely the possibility of forgiveness of a brother are shortly afterwards followed by a passage (18:21, 22) enjoining unlimited forgiveness to our brother. It is indeed true that both these Matthaean pericopae show many signs of being translated direct from an Aramaic original, which might be taken as a proof of their early and therefore authentic origin. But Aramaisms in language do not necessarily guarantee the authenticity of words attributed to Jesus in the Gospels. They need prove no more than that the words originated in an Aramaic-speaking or Jewish Christian community, say in Palestine or Syria. These two pericopae, which obviously hang together, seem to me to show every sign of not originating, at least in the form in which we have them, directly from the mouth of Jesus, but as having their origin and **Sitz im Leben** in an Aramaic-speaking Jewish Christian community. Indeed the conclusion in the case of the second of them (Mt. 18:15-18) seems to me irresistible, and if we decide thus about the second it is hard to refuse the same judgment to the first. But it should be noted that even if we take this point of view we are compelled to conclude that some people at any rate in the early Church believed that Jesus had founded the Church on Peter and given him all these privileges, even though Jesus may not have done so in such explicit terms.

The second classic passage occurs at Lk. 22:31, 32, where Jesus is recorded as saying to Simon, "Simon, Simon, behold Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail;

and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (RSV). It should perhaps be noted that it is a Lucan characteristic to represent Jesus as calling Peter Simon rather than Peter, and that this passage, which is a preface to the prophecy of Peter's denial that occurs in all four Gospels (Lk. 22:33, 34; Mt. 26: 31-35; Mk. 14:27-31; Jn. 13:36-38), has no parallel anywhere else. Obviously it refers to the behaviour which Peter is about to display during the Passion of Christ, and to the position of initiative and leadership which he will take after the resurrection. But its language is too vague for us to build upon it any doctrine of a formal or official position which Peter was destined to occupy. The authenticity of the words need not occupy us here. To me they look like a vaticinium ex eventu, but I do not think that the evidence compels us to press this point strongly.

The third classic passage is of course to be found in John 21:15-23 where Jesus, meeting Peter and other Apostles on the shore of the Lake of Tiberias in a Resurrection Appearance, asks him three times whether he loves him and, on receiving Peter's assurance that he does, thrice enjoins him to feed his sheep. The mysterious words about the manner of Peter's death which follow are part of the pericope but can hardly be said to throw any light on Peter's status or privileges. I somehow find it very difficult to accept the view, which would be that of many scholars today, that as this is the story of a post-Resurrection Appearance with suitable pronouncements and dialogue, and a Johannine story at that, it must be dismissed as historically worthless. I have never been able to rid my mind of the conviction that this story has a ring of truth about it. It is, I believe, a Johannine version of the Appearance after the Resurrection by Jesus to Peter in Galilee, hinted at or even foretold by Matthew and Mark (Mt. 28:7; Mk. 14:28; 16:7), and probably referred to by Paul at 1 Cor. 15:5. I do not, however, think that we can rely on the literal authenticity

of the actual words of Jesus, expunging in a threefold interchange the thrice repeated denial of Jesus by Peter. But I do not think that we should avoid the conclusion that Jesus appeared to Peter after the Resurrection (first to Peter, I believe, and in Galilee) and enjoined him to care for the little community of his disciples as their leader. Certainly many in the early Church must have believed that Peter was thus appointed leader of the Church by Jesus, both during his earthly ministry and in an Appearance after the Resurrection.

II

The next question is to decide whether we can move from recognising that Peter occupied, by the appointment or favour of Jesus himself, the position of leadership or primacy among the apostles in the early Church which has just been outlined, to acknowledging that Peter was appointed by Christ ruler of the whole Church in an official sense and was given the privilege of passing on to his successors as bishop of Rome a position of rule or control over the whole Church as long as it exists, even in the vaguest and most undeveloped sense of these words. It is as well to list the assumptions which such a step would involve. It would mean assuming that Christ constituted Peter a bishop, or at least one capable of himself ordaining bishops, that Peter came to Rome and there instituted a line of bishops and that Peter knew himself to possess, and deliberately instituted a line of episcopal succession which he intended to possess, such powers and privileges as the Popes of Rome later believed themselves to possess in a line of derivation from Peter, even though in a rudimentary form. It is just possible that a similar theory might be thought to apply to a line of succession which was carried on after Peter's death by a committee of presbyters or presbyter-bishops from which a monarchical bishop only emerged after

some time. But this would not be an easy theory to develop or to defend.

I must say at once that in my opinion it is utterly impossible to make such a theory plausible, or even to give it any probability. The only link in the chain of argument that this theory demands which is in any sense a strong one is the assumption that Peter came to Rome. This assumption cannot, of course, be proved from the New Testament, which is silent upon the matter. But I think that evidence from early Christian documents, such as the First Epistle of Clement, and from the very early appearance of the cult of Peter in the Roman Church, enhanced by recent archaeological discoveries, makes this assumption a very probable one, though it cannot be regarded as proved with certainty. The other links in the chain of reasoning necessary to support this theory seem to me to be virtually worthless. I should make it clear that I do not accept the Petrine authorship of either the First or the Second Epistles of Peter, which if they were authentic might be thought to give some support to the theory of Papal primacy deriving from Peter, though in fact I do not think that even on this supposition their evidence would be very impressive. Neither do I accept the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles which, though they make no reference to Peter, might be thought to support a theory of apostolic succession of bishops from apostles.

Let me give some of the reasons why I find the theory of Papal privileges deriving from Peter's episcopacy or apostleship in Rome so implausible. It depends upon the hypothesis that the Apostles of Jesus were official ministers of the Church charged with the duty of instituting successors to themselves in ministerial office.

This seems to me to be a mistake. At the very beginning the Twelve Apostles were in fact almost the only Church there was, and Peter as their leader was the leader of the Church. They therefore inevitably acted as organiz-

ers and administrators at the beginning. But it is clear from both Acts and Paul's epistles that this was not necessarily the task of the Apostles. It was their business to plant or beget churches (Paul uses both metaphors) by preaching the Word, and when administration interfered with preaching and teaching, they did their best to unload the administration on to others (Acts 6: 1-7). They baptized new converts indeed, but this was not a strictly apostolic function (1 Cor. 1. 14-17). The apostolic function was to witness, to see that the Word, the teaching and the tradition concerning Jesus were preached and spread and carried on. It was not their duty to institute Church officials. If we put aside the Pastoral Epistles, which I believe to come from a much later time than that of the Apostles, there is no hint anywhere in Acts or in Paul's epistles that an Apostle is expected to appoint officials to succeed him in his ministry. Indeed as his chief *raison d'etre* was to witness to what his eyes had seen and his ears heard of Jesus of Nazareth, strictly speaking he could have no successor.

I have published elsewhere my views about the structure of ministry in the primitive Church (Groundwork for Unity and The Attractiveness of God, chapter 8). It is sufficient here to say that in my view it should now be accepted that in the earliest, the eschatological, stage, as it were, of the Church's existence there was no fixed, official, permanent ministry of such a type as to require successors in office when each occupant died. Ministry was at this early period charismatic, spontaneous, functional. A universal official ministry in the Church was a later development, I do not for the moment say that it was a wrong or undesirable development, but a development it was. The traditional conventional picture of an apostolic succession of bishops ~~diverging~~^{deriving} ultimately in an unbroken chain from one or more of the Twelve Apostles with Paul is a myth invented in the second century, when the delay in the Parousia had been accepted by the Church, it had become an institution living in history with a future

before it and a past behind it, and it began to look nostalgically back to the Apostolic Age. This view of course precludes any belief that bishops of Rome derived special powers and prerogatives by their standing in an apostolic succession from Peter consisting of single bishops succeeding each other in office.

But I believe that we must take an attitude to the origin of the Christian ministry which is in some ways more radical, though no less Scriptural, than this. The earliest picture of the Church and its ministry which we possess is not that of the sixteenth and eighteenth chapter of Matthew and the twenty-first of John, but that of the epistles of Paul. Here we find the concept of the Church as the Body of Christ, as the new creation of Christ, as the new life introduced by Christ, and a Church created by the Resurrection and Ascension, with no word of its having been founded from blueprints made by Christ in the days of his flesh. Had anybody spoken to Paul about Jesus having created the structure of his Church already before the Crucifixion and Resurrection, as having chosen the form of its ministry and arranged what officers should govern it, I think he would have said that this person was speaking of the Church *κατὰ τὴν σάρκα* "according to the flesh". In Paul's view the Church sprang out of the life given to and in Christ at the Resurrection. It was a community of the new world, living in the Spirit, the Inaugurator of the new world, and enjoying the life of the Risen Lord in a union, effected by faith and baptism, as close as the union of spirit and body. This is a different conception from the conception of a society founded by Jesus during his earthly ministry in Judaea and Galilee and endowed with privileges and institutions like the societies^e founded by St. Ignatius Loyola and William Booth during their lifetime. I doubt if the

two conceptions are wholly capable of reconciliation. There is no doubt about which is the earlier and more primitive conception - that of Paul. But the theory of a Papal office vested in Peter's successors enjoying Papal privileges and power founded by Jesus in the days of his flesh is an extreme example of the first of these two views of the Church and, to my mind, so extreme an example as to be quite unacceptable.

The kind of view which I have been outlining in this paper has indeed to meet the question, "How then did such passages as we have been surveying in Matthew 16 and 18, in Luke 22 and in John 21 come to be written, how did such ideas form themselves in the early Church?" I think that the answer to that very reasonable question is that we have tended to allow our knowledge of the development of Papal office and Papal power to colour our interpretation of these passages. In the twentieth chapter of St. John's Gospel, ~~J~~^S is represented as breathing on his apostles and giving them thereby power to forgive or retain sins. This is not the endowment of a ministry; it is the endowment of the Church. John studiously refrains from calling the ~~T~~^{"A"} Twelve Apostles and except for his last chapter rather tends to reduce than to enhance Peter's position and powers. He wants to make it clear that Christ has given his Church power to exercise discipline over sinners. That is his way of doing it. At that point the ~~T~~^{"A"} Twelve are the Church. The pericopae of Mt. 16: 17-20 and 18: 15-18 (along with 28: 16-20) are Matthew's way of doing the same thing. The words of Lk. 22: 31, 32 and John 21: 15-19 have the same intention and tenor. The flock must be gathered and taught, the gospel or Word must be given free play. Jesus creates a Church which is not just a company of invisible angels nor disembodied spirits but of men and women of flesh and blood. They must be taught, edified, cared for. This is not the inauguration of an official ministry but of a caring Church, and a Church which as a whole is given by Christ the power of forgiving or not

forgiving sins. That is just the sort of Church which we find pictured in Paul's letters. We today find it almost impossible to imagine a Church which is deeply responsible for the sanctity and concerned about the sin of its members but which has no official ministry; but the primitive Christians not only could imagine such a Church, ~~They~~ ran one.

Lastly, all that I have said in this paper does not at all preclude a concept of Papal primacy and Papal authority which is not founded upon a claim to Dominical institution. No Anglican who has read the history of the Church can be unaware that he stems from a tradition of Christianity which is Latin and Western and not Greek and Eastern. However he may respect and admire the Eastern Church, the Anglican can no more cease to be a Western Latin Christian than the leopard can change his spots. Personally, I do not want to change my spots. Without implying any derogation to the Eastern Church, I am proud of being a Western Latin Christian. But in all honesty I must recognize that it has been characteristic of the Western Latin Church for by far the greater part of its existence to acknowledge the bishop of Rome as its Primate and Leader. And I can see several periods of history where this Primacy and Leadership was exercised for the good of the Church as a whole, for its liberation and not its oppression, though I can see other periods, as everybody else can, when quite contrary conditions obtained. I could therefore, as an Anglican, imagine circumstances in which I could be induced to recognize the Primacy and authority of the Pope ex animo and ex conscientia, though there would have to be first considerable discussion of what that Primacy and authority would consist of. What I could not imagine myself ever agreeing to is the acceptance of the view that Papal office and Papal power are based upon an institution by our Lord in the days of his flesh or that they are in any serious sense witnessed to in the New Testament.