5. Peter and the papacy

Often heard: "The rock is Jesus (or Peter's confession), not Peter." / "Paul rebuked Peter." / "Peter was married."
Also heard: "Jesus renamed Simon 'Rock' and gave him alone the keys of the kingdom (Matt 16:18–19)."

Christ alone heads the Church; no papacy by divine right

HELD BY Lutheran human-right primacy at most · Reformed · Anglican some open to primacy · Methodist dialogue open · Baptist

Christ is the only foundation. In Matt 16:18 Jesus contrasts *petros* (a small stone, Peter) with *petra* (bedrock: Christ or Peter's confession). Peter was one apostle among equals, called himself "also an elder," was rebuked by Paul, and James presided at the Jerusalem council. Scripture says nothing about successors or Rome, and the papacy grew through politics.

VERSES CITED

1 Cor 3:11; 10:4; Eph 2:20 (all the apostles are the foundation); 1 Pet 2:4–8; 5:1; Gal 2:11–14; Acts 15:13–21; Matt 18:18 (binding given to all); Matt 20:25–27; 23:8–12; Mark 1:30.

WHERE THE IDEA COMES FROM

The Eastern churches resisted Rome's claim to universal jurisdiction, leading to the schism of 1054 (they accepted a primacy of honor). Wycliffe and Hus attacked papal authority. Luther denied the papacy's divine right at Leipzig (1519) and by 1520 called the pope Antichrist; the Smalcald Articles (1537) made it confessional.

Peter's office of the keys continues in Rome

HELD BY Catholic

Christ renamed Simon "Rock" (Aramaic *Kepha*, the same word both times; Greek needed a masculine form for a man's name) and gave him alone the keys of the kingdom, an image drawn from the royal steward's office in Isa 22, an office with successors. He prayed for Peter's faith so that Peter could strengthen the others, and made him shepherd of the whole flock. The office continues in the bishop of Rome, where Peter died. Papal infallibility (1870) is narrow: it covers only solemn definitions on faith and morals, not every papal statement or the pope's personal holiness.

VERSES CITED

Matt 16:16–19; Isa 22:15–22; Luke 22:31–32; John 1:42; 21:15–17; Matt 10:2 ("first, Simon, who is called Peter"); Acts 1:15–26; 2:14; 15:7–12; 1 Pet 5:13 ("Babylon" = Rome).

EARLY CHURCH AND HISTORY

Clement of Rome intervenes to settle a dispute in Corinth (c. 96). Ignatius (c. 110) addresses Rome as the church that "presides in love." Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3.3.2, c. 180): every church must agree with Rome because of its preeminent authority. Pope Victor (c. 190) threatens the Asian churches over the date of Easter. Cyprian, *Unity of the Church* 4 (c. 251),

speaks of the chair of Peter. At the Council of Chalcedon (451) the bishops hailed Pope Leo's letter: "Peter has spoken through Leo."

CATECHISM AND COUNCILS

CCC 552–553, 880–882, 891, 936–937; Vatican I, *Pastor Aeternus* (1870); Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* 18–25.

Rome held a primacy of honor, not of power

HELD BY Orthodox

Christ alone is the head of the Church, and all bishops, as successors of the apostles, are sacramentally equal. In the first millennium the bishop of Rome held the first place of honor among the patriarchs, but that primacy was granted by the Church, chiefly because Rome was the ancient imperial city, not instituted by Christ's words to Peter, and it gave no power to govern the whole Church. Universal jurisdiction and papal infallibility are therefore rejected: each local Church governs itself in council, and an ecumenical council stands above any single bishop.

VERSES CITED

Col 1:18; Eph 1:22-23; 4:3, 12-16; Matt 20:25-28; Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 14:33

WHERE THE IDEA COMES FROM

The ecumenical councils ranked the great sees; the Council of Chalcedon (451, canon 28) gave Constantinople, as New Rome, privileges equal to Old Rome's because both were imperial cities. The Eastern churches resisted Rome's claim to universal jurisdiction, a main cause of the break of the mid-11th century, after which the primacy of honor among the Orthodox passed to Constantinople.

CONFESSIONS AND DOCUMENTS

Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs (1848), paras. 11-13; Council of Chalcedon (451), canon 28; Apostolic Canon 34; Moscow Patriarchate, Position on the Problem of Primacy in the Universal Church (2013), paras. 1-4

Across the traditions

How each major tradition answers this question, in its own words and from its own documents.

Catholic

Christ named Simon "Rock" and gave him alone the keys, a steward's office with successors. That office continues in the bishop of Rome, whose infallibility, defined in 1870, is limited to solemn definitions on faith and morals. The full case is set out above.

Sources: First Vatican Council, *Pastor Aeternus* (1870); CCC 881–882, 891.

Orthodox

Rome held the first place of honor in the first millennium, a primacy the Church granted rather than one created by Christ's words to Peter; Matthew 16:18 gave Peter no authority over the other apostles, Antioch also claims succession from Peter, and an ecumenical council stands above any bishop. Universal jurisdiction and papal infallibility are rejected. The Orthodox agree the bishop of Rome was first among the patriarchs but differ on what that means today: Moscow allows only a primacy of honor.

Sources: Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs (1848), §§11–12; Orthodox–Catholic dialogue, Ravenna Document (2007), §41 (a commission text); Moscow Patriarchate, *Position on the Problem of Primacy* (2013).

Lutheran

The pope is not head of Christendom by divine right but bishop of the church at Rome. Christ built the Church on the ministry of the confession Peter made, and the keys belong to the whole Church. The Smalcald Articles and the Treatise of 1537 call the papacy "Antichrist"; Melanchthon allowed that a pope who permitted the Gospel could be granted

Reformed

Christ alone is head of the Church and its only universal bishop; all ministers of the Word have equal authority. The Westminster Confession (1646) denied that the pope is head of the Church "in any sense" and called him "that Antichrist"; American Presbyterians removed the Antichrist clause in 1903, and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church also adopted the change.

superiority by human right. Today the Wisconsin Synod still affirms the Antichrist identification, while Lutheran members of a 1973 U.S. dialogue saw a role for a papacy "renewed and restructured under the gospel."

Sources: Smalcald Articles II.4; Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, 1–4, 22–29; WELS, *Statement on the Antichrist* (1959); *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue V* (1973).

Sources: Westminster Confession 25.6 (original and revised texts); Belgic Confession, art. 31; Second Helvetic Confession, ch. 17.

Anglican

"The Bishop of Rome hath no jurisdiction in this Realm of England." In the Anglican–Roman Catholic dialogue, theologians of both churches agreed that the New Testament records no handing on of Peter's leadership, yet that a universal primacy could serve the Church's unity and could be "offered and received" even before full communion. These are commission texts, not binding teaching, and Anglicans differ on them.

Sources: Thirty-Nine Articles, XXXVII; ARCIC I, *Authority in the Church II* (1981); ARCIC II, *The Gift of Authority* (1999).

Methodist

The Methodist Articles contain no article on the pope; they reject "the Romish doctrine" of purgatory and related practices and define the Church by Word and sacraments. The United Methodist Church asks that its anti-Roman articles be read in a spirit of ecumenical goodwill, and the Methodist–Catholic commission (1986) judged Rome's primacy not established from Scripture apart from tradition, while not ruling out its acceptance in a future restored unity.

Sources: Methodist Articles of Religion (1784), XIII–XIV; United Methodist "Resolution of Intent"; Methodist–Roman Catholic International Commission, *Towards a Statement on the Church* (1986), 55, 62.

Baptist

Christ is the only foundation, and the "rock" is Christ or Peter's confession. Peter was one apostle among equals, and Scripture says nothing of successors or of Rome. The full case is set out above.

Sources: Baptist Faith and Message (2000), art. VI; Second London Confession (1689), 26.4.

Where it gets contested: Many Protestant scholars now concede the rock is Peter himself (e.g., D. A. Carson, R. T. France) but deny any successor. Those who reject papal infallibility, Orthodox and Protestant, cite Pope Honorius I, condemned by the Third Council of Constantinople (681) for supporting monothelitism; Catholics reply that he never taught it as a solemn definition. On Peter's marriage: clerical celibacy is a discipline, not doctrine (see Chapter 25).

See also: Chapter 6: the Orthodox claim; Classic arguments 68–77

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