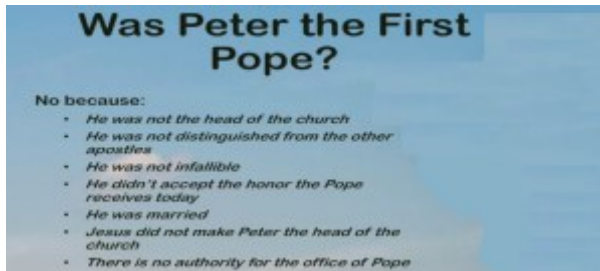


The Papal System – VI. Steps to Papal Sovereignty Over The Churches – Part 1



Continued from [V. Christendom at the Beginning of the Seventh Century.](#)

THE MEANS BY WHICH THE POPE BECAME SOVEREIGN OF ALL CATHOLIC CHURCHES.

The royal dominion of the popes, in its two grand divisions, over sovereigns and over the churches, is the wonder of the ages. Mighty empires were born, reached maturity and perished after its birth and before its death. It witnessed the last throes of the government of the Caesars, and it exercised the rights of chief magistracy when the peoples of France, Germany, and England were almost barbarians. It wielded the scepter of supreme dominion in Europe over the little affairs of hearts and homes, and over the mighty events that convulsed nations, with a grandeur of power and minuteness of universality never equaled in earthly history. The thinkers, the statesmen, and often the monarchs, for the greater part of a thousand years, felt honored by the patronage of the popes. The dominion of Babylon, of Alexander, the Caesars, Charlemagne, or of the first Bonaparte, never equaled the kingly authority of the "Priest enthroned on the Seven Hills." The method by which this sacerdotal empire was built up and shielded against the assaults which overthrew other kingdoms not half so corrupt and tyrannical, has excited astonishment for centuries, and is a fit subject for wonder in this, the most enlightened period of human history.

The temporal power of the pontiffs over their own states, and over kings and governments, is altogether the outgrowth of their spiritual supremacy over the churches. The rise of the spiritual usurpation of the popes is the creation of that platform on which their secular throne was placed.

All great movements among men, wicked and holy, have had some mighty principle or principles, true or false, which gave them a firm grasp on the consciences, hearts, or interests of large numbers. Material instrumentalities, favorable circumstances, heroism, or the weakness of enemies, may aid liberally in securing success. But the thoughtful observer will always look for the great principle which gives birth and vigor to every gigantic movement. Turning away from the pride of the Bishops of Rome which led them to covet universal dominion over the churches, the argument which persuaded the churches to accept the sovereignty of the popes, was that

Christ had built his Church on Peter, and had made him master of it, by giving him the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.

All the skill, audacity, and struggles of the popes would have been fruitless without this Scripture, and the supposed authority with which it invests Peter and his successors. The Saviour's words are:

"Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it; and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven," Matt. xvi. 18.

The papal exposition of this saying is: Peter supports the whole Church, and the pope succeeds him in this position; by the keys which the pontiff receives as Peter's successor, he is the ruler of the whole kingdom or Church of God, with authority to bind or loose whomsoever or whatsoever he will.

This interpretation seemed plausible, and the claim of the Bishop of Rome, when stubbornly made, a little difficult to resist, especially as his pretensions were urged in an age totally ignorant of the divine Word.

At the Council of Chalcedon, this doctrine was prominently announced *for the first time*, by the representatives of Pope Leo the Great. Dioscoros, Bishop of Alexandria, the President of the second council of Ephesus, was the most unpopular man in the episcopal assembly at Chalcedon. Nearly the entire Church, East and West, hated him. Pope Leo, for resisting him, was regarded with enthusiasm. He had given Dioscoros some heavy blows, and received some keen thrusts in return. Dioscoros excommunicated Leo, pope though he was; and on two occasions in the Council of Ephesus, he insolently refused permission for the reading of an eloquent letter of Leo, denouncing the heresy of the monk Eutyches. At this council, while every one was condemning Dioscoros and commending Leo, his delegates declared Dioscoros deprived of his dignity by the authority of Leo, the most blessed and holy archbishop of the great and elder Rome, and in conjunction with: "The twice blessed and all honored Peter, who is the rock and basis of the Catholic Church, and the foundation of the orthodox faith." When these words were pronounced, they were not used to urge a claim to any precedence by the bishops of Rome; they were spoken to give force to the condemnation of Dioscoros, whom all abhorred, and no censure was passed upon them. A little later, when the epistle of Leo was read, the bishops were so charmed with its doctrine that they exclaimed:

"This is the faith of the fathers; this is the faith of the apostles. Peter has uttered these words through Leo. Thus has Cyril taught, the teaching of Leo and Cyril is the same. Anathema to him who does not thus believe."

From the statement, "Peter has uttered these words through Leo," it has been inferred that the prelates at Chalcedon received Peter as the master of the Church; as its foundation; and as the owner of its keys; and Leo as the successor of Peter's privileges. But the bishops never dreamt that Peter was lord of the Church, or that Leo had any authority outside his own province. All they meant by Peter speaking through Leo was, that the present Bishop of Rome wrote the same truths which Peter, the first bishop, published.

No early council so emphatically declares that the dignity of the Church of old Rome rests only on the fact that it was the imperial city. It awarded equal precedence to the Church of New Rome (Constantinople), "Reasonably judging that a city which is honored with the government and senate, should enjoy equal rank with the ancient queen, Rome, and, like her, be magnified in ecclesiastical matters, having the second place after her." Here was the place to recognize Peter as the rock and keyholder of the Church, and the pope as his successor, But at Chalcedon, the pontiff was only respected as the bishop of the old capital of the world.

Leo, in a letter to the Illyrian bishops, asserts the same doctrines in the strongest terms; and on the basis of it makes the most presumptuous claim to supremacy over the churches. He says:

"That on him as the successor of the Apostle Peter, on whom, as the reward of his faith, the Lord had conferred the primacy of apostolic rank, and on whom he had firmly grounded the universal Church, was devolved the care of all the churches, to participate in which, he invited his colleagues, the' other bishops."

This fortunate discovery, *in the middle of the fifth century*, was destined to revolutionize the churches, and the Christian religion. At first it was rejected even when mildly asserted; but in process of time, people became accustomed to it; the pope's friends, who were legion, published it all over the West; the holiest men were engaged in its advocacy; those who sustained it were upheld by Rome in all troubles, and honored by the highest ecclesiastical preferments its bishop could bestow or procure. Finally, St. Peter became a kind of omnipresent deity, whose head-quarters were at Rome, where from his tomb he watched with jealous eye and mighty arm over his successors, and those who befriended them; whose all-powerful protection was stretched over the most distant priest of Rome, and the poorest devotee who paid any reverence to the great bishop who lived on the Tiber.

Gifts to Rome became donations to St. Peter. Insults to Rome became wrongs to St. Peter. The patronage of Rome became the favor of St. Peter. The protection of Rome became the shield of St. Peter. And all over Western Christendom the identity of privileges existing between the departed Peter and the living pope, made the Roman Bishop the most revered of mortals.

In the council at Whitby, A.D. 664, already noticed, Wilfrid, the Romanist, addressed Coleman, the anti-papist, and said:

"If that Columba of yours was a holy man, and powerful in miracles, yet could he be preferred before the most blessed prince of the apostles to whom our Lord said: 'Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, and to thee will I give the keys of the kingdom of heaven?'"

King Oswy demanded if it were true that Christ had spoken these words to Peter? Coleman replied: "It is true, O king." Then, says he: "Can you show any such power given to your Columba?" "None," Coleman answered. The king immediately decided against the anti-papists, received the Romanists into

favor, and ordered the pope's observances to be kept throughout his dominions. And his adversaries found it pleasanter to leave Oswy's kingdom than to remain in it.

PETER ALMOST A DEITY.

St. Peter became an object of terror throughout the barbarous nations of Western Europe, through the astonishing fables told about him by the clerical friends of the Roman Bishop. Lawrence, Archbishop of Canterbury, A.D. 617, was about to leave Britain on account of the harsh treatment he received from Eadbald, the heathen and incestuous King of Kent. On the night before his departure, there appeared to him "The most blessed prince of the apostles," who gave him a long and severe scourging, and demanded why he was going to forsake the flock he had committed to him, surrounded as they were by wolves? Next day he told the story to Eadbald, and showed him the marks of the severe flagellation. Eadbald was greatly alarmed, no doubt fearing a similar visit, and sorer blows; and immediately renounced idolatry and his father's wife, and embraced the faith of Christ and the fear of Peter, whose successor was Bishop of Rome.

Pope Vitalian, A.D. 657, in granting a charter for the English Abbey of Peterborough, added to it these words: "If any one break this in anything, may St. Peter exterminate him with his sword: if any one observe it, may St. Peter, with the keys of heaven, open for him the kingdom of heaven." Thus was *Peter turned into a demon or a deity, to frighten or favor Christians, by the adherents of the pontiff.*

When Pepin, A.D. 755, reconquered from the Longobards the territories they had acquired, he declared that he fought for the "*Patrimony of St. Peter*," and he had a deed of gift made out handing over the subjugated region to the Church of Rome; and this document was placed by his chaplain on the tomb of St. Peter.

Charlemagne, the illustrious sovereign and statesman, was filled with the highest reverence for St. Peter; and accompanied by the most distinguished persons in his empire, he often visited Rome, and there, where the grave of Peter was shown, he missed no opportunity of paying the highest honor to the memory of the prince of the apostles.

From England monks and nuns, ecclesiastics of all ranks, nobles and kings came to Rome, for the purpose of visiting the tomb of St. Peter; that tomb, in the seventh and eighth centuries, to the Anglo-Saxons, was the most sacred spot in Europe, or perhaps in Asia.

St. Peter, with the pope as his successor, became the creator of papal supremacy over the churches; he wrote a famous letter to Pepin, telling him to come to the aid of his representative, the pope, with all his forces; and undoubtedly the letter had great influence with the superstitious Frank; he appeared in visions, encouraging obedience to his vicar, the Roman Bishop, or recommending the presentation to him of some costly gift. Under the standard of St. Peter victory succeeded conquest, until over almost the entire churches of the West the flag of Simon, that is of Rome, waved in triumph.

At the Revolution, in 1775, the words floated from every lip: "No taxation without representation." This declaration involved the great principle which tore the colonies from the mother country, and banded the energies and forces of American patriots on every battle-field. What that cry was to the heroes who defended our freedom, the words of Jesus about the rock on which he should build his Church, about his gift of the keys, and the power of binding and loosing to Peter, were to the popes. It gathered nearly all the churches and peoples of the West into their fold.

This passage gives Peter no power not enjoyed by his brother Apostles.

The Saviour's words to Peter, by a candid interpretation, show that **Peter was not the rock; that the rock was his confession.** The Greek word Petros, or Peter, is not the word translated rock: that word is petra. It is very manifest, that if the Saviour meant Peter to be known as the rock upon which he was about to build his Church, that he would have said: "Thou art Petros, and upon this *Petros* I will build my Church." But instead of that, he says: "Thou art Petros, and upon this *petra* I will build my Church." Petra is a Greek noun in the feminine gender; the pronoun "this," in the Greek text, is in the feminine gender, agreeing with the gender of the noun petra; Petros, or Peter, is in the masculine gender. Petra then **MUST** refer to *something different from Peter*, There would have been Petros on two occasions in this verse, instead of Petros and petra, if Peter had been the rock. Besides, Petros is a stone, a movable stone; petra is a rock, a mass of rocks, a cliff. The one, such a stone as a maid-servant in the hall of judgment might upset; the other the Rock of Ages—the confession that Peter made that Christ was the Son of the living God. And this view was entertained by the most eminent fathers. Says St. Augustine:

"The Church does not fall, because it is founded on the rock from which Peter received his name. For the rock is not called after Peter, but Peter is so called after the rock: just as Christ is not so denominated after the Christian, but the Christian after Christ; for it is on this account our Lord declares, 'on this rock I will found my Church, because Peter had said: 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God?' On this rock which thou hast confessed, he declares, 'I will build my Church;' for Christ was the rock on whose foundation Peter himself was built."

Chrysostom held the same opinion about this passage. He says: "Upon the rock, that is, upon the faith of his confession," and again: "Christ says that he would build his Church upon Peter's confession."

Theodoret says: "Our Lord permitted the first of the apostles, whose confession he fixed as a prop or foundation of the Church, to be shaken."

The same view of this Scripture was taken by other leading fathers of the Church. And, outside of Rome, for the first five centuries of our era, no Christian father of any note dreamt that this saying gave Peter the sovereignty of the Church.

The Rock on which the Church was built was not Petros (Peter) but petra, the

Rock of Ages, the Divine Son.

The Keys.

Romanists, by the keys, sometimes understand Peter's power to open heaven for whom he will, and to close it against his enemies; and sometimes the absolute mastery which the Saviour gave him, as they suppose, over his Church. As the keys of a house confer upon a man the control of that structure, so the keys of the kingdom of heaven, given to Peter, it is believed, gave him complete lordship over the Church.

The kingdom of heaven in Matt. xvi. 18, is undoubtedly the gospel dispensation, as it is in Matt. iii. 2; iv. 17; x. 7, and elsewhere. And the keys of Peter conferred a special honor on him, but no particular power. The gospel kingdom was never properly established till the ascension of Jesus, and his occupancy of the mediatorial throne, and the descent of the mighty Comforter. And when this Comforter comes down in the majesty of regenerating power for the first time, on the day of Pentecost, Peter is the preacher, and Cephas, with his keys of grace, opens the heavenly kingdom to all Israel, and to the assembled Jews of many lands, three thousand of whom are converted.

And when the kingdom of heaven is to be opened to the Gentile nations, Peter is assigned the post of honor. Cornelius, by direction of Heaven, sends for Peter; by the same high authority, Peter is admonished to go to the house of the centurion, and there he preaches to its Gentile inmates, and they are born into the kingdom of Jesus, the first gospel converts from heathen nations. As Adoniram Judson opened the heavenly kingdom to the Burmese, Peter opened it to Jews and Gentiles. And after this labor, which conferred on him an immortality of honor, was over, the work of Peter's keys was ended. The promised keys gave Peter no jurisdiction, no authority over the Church.

The Binding and Loosing.

Peter received undoubted power through the promise: "Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Peter had the loan of the all-piercing eye of the Divine Spirit to see facts, truth, and error, and states of soul, as no man but an apostle ever had in the same omniscient fullness. Hence, when Ananias came before him, he could tell the covetous hypocrite his hidden sin, through divine inspiration. So much was he possessed of the Spirit of God, that the falsehood Ananias addressed to him appeared to be "a lie, not unto man, but unto God." Since the days of the apostles, the power to write Scripture, to possess a supernatural knowledge of facts, or to discern the condition of the soul, so as to know if it was truly penitent, and if so, or if not so, to assure it that its sins were bound on it in heaven, or loosed from it by the great Saviour's loving hands, has not existed in any mortal.

The power of binding and loosing was common to all the apostles. The Saviour says to them, Matt. xviii. 18: "Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Peter had no privilege above his brother apostles. His rights and powers were the same as theirs.

The saying of Jesus to Peter, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not," has been quoted by popes on various occasions as evidence that Peter was above his apostolic brethren. It furnishes testimony only that Peter might be sifted as wheat by the wicked one, and that he needed the Saviour's intercession to keep him from showing the most disgraceful infirmities of the human heart. Anyhow, these words have no more to do with the pope than the other words of Jesus to Peter: "This night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice."

The commands of Jesus, to feed His lambs, and to feed His sheep, have been urged repeatedly to prove that Peter was pastor of the Church universal, or head of the whole Church. *The words convey no such meaning.* Peter was a teacher of the gospel; and, evidently as a rebuke to him for past denials, the Master asks him three times if he loves him. Peter is grieved by the question, and forthwith he receives the command to feed the lambs and sheep of Jesus. "Peter," says Jesus, "if you love me, be faithful in your calling, and feed my flock, young and old." It seems absurd in the extreme to gather papal sovereignty over the churches from such commands. Besides, *Peter, not the pope, is addressed.*

The Apostles were ignorant of Peter's Authority over them.

When the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they "sent unto them Peter and John" (Acts viii. 14) to confirm them. Surely, Peter is not the prince of the apostles, sent on a mission by his subjects. After the celebrated council held at Jerusalem, a letter is sent to the Christians of Gentile antecedents in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia; and the letter comes from "the apostles, and elders, and brethren." Acts xv. 23. Now, Peter was among the apostles sending this letter; but there is not a word about him showing that he was not on an equality with his brethren. If the papal theory is correct, the letter ought to have come from, "Pope Peter, the apostles, elders, and brethren." When deacons were to be elected, Pope Peter has no more to do with the business than his brethren. It is said (Acts vi. 2): "Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them," and gave them instructions to choose seven deacons. Paul says: "For in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles." 2 Cor. xii. 11. Surely, then, he could have no ecclesiastical superior, or his inspired words are false.

And at Antioch, Peter acts like one unworthy of his Master, and Paul rebukes him, as he would have admonished Timothy or Philemon, "And he withstood him to the face, for he was to be blamed." Gal. ii. 11. Undoubtedly, Peter had not yet learned his own infallibility; and Paul was totally unconscious of Peter's elevation to the sovereignty of the apostles and of the Church, And the whole Scriptures are ignorant of this lordship of Peter over Christ's family. It is destitute of Biblical warrant; it has, therefore, no claim to Divine authority.

Peter has no successor as PRINCE of the Apostles.

It is difficult to succeed one in an office which he never filled, and which never existed.

Peter had no successor as an Apostle.

Peter himself took an active part in the choice of a successor to the apostle Judas, an account of which is given in the first chapter of The Acts. Matthias was elected to the place vacated by the traitor. *No successor was ever appointed to any other departed apostle.*

There could not have been a successor to the apostles, according to Peter, after the companions of Jesus died.

In describing the qualifications of a successor to Judas, he says: "Wherefore of these men who have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection." Acts i. 21, 22.

The chief business of an apostle was to be an eye-witness of and for Christ, and especially of his resurrection. To this end, according to Peter, he must have been with Jesus from his baptism to his ascension. And as the class of favored men who enjoyed this distinction left the world soon after their Master, earth soon lost the entire materials out of which (if Peter was not mistaken) successors to the apostles could be made.

There was an unlovely office, the duties of which, on one occasion, Peter discharged with great earnestness—the office of blasphemer. When he denied his Master, Mark says: "But he began to curse and to swear, I know not the man." Mark xiv. 71. The word translated curse is "anathematize," the very word used at the end of every canon of the Council of Trent. That council made 126 canons and five decrees on original sin, in the form of canons, without the name, and each decree and canon is followed by Peter's curse, *even Peter's word*, transferred into Latin, is used.

The last words uttered in the Council of Trent by its bishops were a response to the Cardinal of Lorraine, who exclaimed: "A curse upon all heretics" (*anathema cunctis hereticis*), and immediately the bishops replied: "Let them be accursed, let them be accursed" (*anathema, anathema*). Peter's word, when he wished to give solemnity and credibility to his denial of Jesus, was the last word uttered in the Council of Trent by its episcopal members.

If the succession to Peter fails in some things, it can be stoutly maintained in reference to *Cursing*, by the testimony of every papal canon published for many centuries.

Universal Bishop.

This title had been denounced by Gregory the Great with scorn and horror when given to the Patriarch of Constantinople. Nevertheless, Boniface, A.D. 609, according to Matthew Paris, solicited it from the emperor. Phocas, at the time, sat on the throne of Constantinople. This monarch was diminutive and deformed, with shaggy eyebrows, red hair, a beardless chin, and a cheek disfigured and discolored by a formidable scar. He was quite illiterate, and totally destitute of that culture and capacity which would fit him for his

imperial station. In his moral deficiencies, he was remarkable for drunkenness, lewdness, and other brutal pleasures. From the rank of a centurion, at a bound, he ascended the throne of the Caesars. He had Maurice, his predecessor, and his five sons, dragged forth from the church at Chalcedon, in which they had taken refuge; the sons were slain before the eyes of their father, and then he was dispatched. Their bodies were thrown into the sea, and their heads exposed at Constantinople. A little later, Theodosius, another son, was butchered by his order at Nice. Constantina, the wife of Maurice, was respected as among the purest and noblest of living women; she had three daughters, who were held in the highest esteem. These ladies were seized by command of Phocas, and beheaded at Chalcedon, on the same ground where the father and his sons perished.

Other enemies of Phocas had their eyes pierced, their tongues torn out, their hands and feet cut off, or their bodies transfixated with arrows; or they were scourged to death; or they were consumed to ashes. The hippodrome was ghastly with human heads and limbs, and mangled bodies. A baser wretch never stained a throne, or invited the vengeance of Heaven.

Gregory the Great wrote to Phocas on his accession to the throne, extending his congratulations in terms of unusual delight, saying: "What thanks are we not bound to return to the Almighty who has, at last, been pleased to deliver us from the yoke of slavery" (the mild government of the good Maurice), "and to make us again enjoy liberty under your empire!" He says: "It has pleased the Almighty, in his goodness and mercy, to place you on the throne." Truly there is cause for astonishment in reading these and kindred sayings of large-hearted old Gregory, commending and glorifying a man who carried as many execrations as any wretch that ever cursed his race.

Matthew Paris says that, "At the request of Boniface, Phocas decreed that the Roman Church should be head and mistress of all churches; for, in times past, the Church of Constantinople had styled herself the chief of all churches." Phocas repealed the law bestowing the title of universal bishop on the patriarch of New Rome; and he gave that title, with all its privileges, to Boniface.

The pope assumed it with joy, and resolved to test its worth immediately, by exercising the powers it conferred. He forthwith called a council, which met in Rome, consisting of 72 bishops and some inferior clergy, in which he acted as if he was monarch of the whole Church. By a decree which he issued in that Council, it was declared, pronounced, and defined, that no election of a bishop should henceforth be lawful unless made by the people and clergy, and approved by the prince, and confirmed by the pope interposing his authority in the following terms: "We will and command" (*volumus et jubemus*). Thus the imperial power invested with its high sanctions the claims of the Roman bishops to universal supremacy over the churches.

Phocas, the basest of usurpers and murderers, anointed Boniface as sovereign of Christ's entire kingdom. The imperial decree, coupled with the supposed saying of Jesus, that he built his Church on Peter, seemed to furnish all needed authority, mundane and celestial, for the lordly, spiritual empire of Peter's successors. And these two considerations did give immense aid to the

erection of the spiritual tyranny of the popes.

Continued in [Steps to Papal Sovereignty Over The Churches – Part 2](#)

All chapters of The Papal System by William Cathcart

- [I. The Ancient British Church](#)
- [II. The Ancient Irish Church](#)
- [III. The Ancient Scottish Church](#)
- [IV. Councils For Seven Centuries Repudiate Papal Jurisdiction](#)
- [V. Christendom at the Beginning of the Seventh Century](#)
- [VI. Steps to Papal Sovereignty Over The Churches – Part 1](#)
- [VI. Steps to Papal Sovereignty Over The Churches – Part 2](#)
- [VII. The Pope Claims to be Lord of Kings and Nations – Part 1](#)
- [VII. The Pope Claims to be Lord of Kings and Nations – Part 2. Pope Innocent III Abolishes the Magna Carta](#)
- [VII. The Pope Claims to be Lord of Kings and Nations – Part 3. The Excommunication of Queen Elizabeth](#)
- [VIII. The Council of Trent](#)
- [IX. Baptism](#)
- [X. Confirmation](#)
- [XI. The Lord's Supper, The Eucharist, The Mass](#)
- [XII. The Confessional](#)
- [XIII. Extreme Unction](#)
- [XIV. The Sacrament of Orders](#)
- [XV. Marriage](#)
- [XVI. The Celibacy of the Clergy](#)