

In another Catholic Answers tract, *The Authority of the Pope, Part I*, we looked at the views of the popes and the other Church Fathers up to the year A.D. 341 and showed that they recognized the unique authority of the pope, the bishop of Rome, in his role as the successor of Peter. In this tract, we will see that the later popes and Church Fathers retained a similar understanding of the Petrine office.

### COUNCIL OF SARDICA

"[I]f any bishop loses the judgment in some case [decided by his fellow bishops] and still believes that he has not a bad but a good case, in order that the case may be judged anew . . . let us honor the memory of the apostle Peter by having those who have given the judgment write to Julius, Bishop of Rome, so that if it seem proper he may himself send arbiters and the judgment may be made again by the bishops of a neighboring province" (canon 3 [A.D. 342]).

"[I]f some bishop be deposed by the judgment of the bishops sitting in the neighborhood, and if he declare that he will seek further redress, another should not be appointed to his see until the bishop of Rome can be acquainted with the case and render a judgment" (canon 4).

### OPTATUS OF MILEVUS

"In the city of Rome the episcopal chair was given first to Peter; the chair in which Peter sat, the same who was head—that is why he is also called *Cephas* ['Rock']—of all the apostles, the one chair in which unity is maintained by all. Neither do the apostles proceed individually on their own, and anyone who would [presume to] set up another chair in opposition to that single chair would, by that very fact, be a schismatic and a sinner. . . . Recall, then, the origins of your chair, those of you who wish to claim for yourselves the title of holy Church" (*The Schism of the Donatists* 2:2 [A.D. 367]).

### COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE I

"The bishop of Constantinople shall have the primacy of honor after the bishop of Rome, because his city is New Rome" (canon 3 [A.D. 381]).

### POPE DAMASUS I

"Likewise it is decreed . . . that it ought to be announced that . . . the holy Roman Church has been placed at the forefront not by the conciliar decisions of other churches, but has received the primacy by the evangelic voice of our Lord and Savior, who says: 'You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it; and I will give to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you shall have bound on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall have loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven' [Matt. 16:18–19]. The first see, therefore, is that of Peter the apostle, that of the Roman Church, which has neither stain nor blemish nor anything like it" (*Decree of Damasus* 3 [A.D. 382]).

### SYNOD OF AMBROSE

"We recognize in the letter of your holiness [Pope Siricius] the vigilance of the good shepherd. You faithfully watch over the gate entrusted to you, and with pious care you guard Christ's sheepfold [John 10:7ff], you that are worthy to have the Lord's sheep hear and follow you" (*Synodal Letter to Pope Siricius* [A.D. 389]).

### JEROME

"I follow no leader but Christ and join in communion with none but your blessedness [Pope Damasus I], that is, with the chair of Peter. I know that this is the rock on which the Church has been built. Whoever eats the Lamb outside this house is profane. Anyone who is not in the ark of Noah will perish when the flood prevails" (*Letters* 15:2 [A.D. 396]).

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"The church here is split into three parts, each eager to seize me for its own. . . . Meanwhile I keep crying, 'He that is joined to the chair of Peter is accepted by me!' . . . Therefore, I implore your blessedness [Pope Damasus I] . . . tell me by letter with whom it is that I should communicate in Syria" (*ibid.*, 16:2).

### AUGUSTINE

"There are many other things which rightly keep me in the bosom of the Catholic Church. The consent of the people and nations keeps me, her authority keeps me, inaugurated by miracles, nourished in hope, enlarged by love, and established by age. The succession of priests keep me, from the very seat of the apostle Peter (to whom the Lord after his resurrection gave charge to feed his sheep) down to the present episcopate [of Pope Siricius]" (*Against the Letter of Mani Called "The Foundation"* 5 [A.D. 397]).

"[On this matter of the Pelagians] two councils have already been sent to the Apostolic See [the bishop of Rome], and from there rescripts too have come. The matter is at an end; would that the error too might be at an end!" (*Sermons* 131:10 [A.D. 411]).

### POPE INNOCENT I

"If cases of greater importance are to be heard [at a council], they are, as the synod decrees and as happy custom requires, after episcopal judgment, to be referred to the Apostolic See" (*Letters* 2:3:6 [A.D. 408]).

"In seeking the things of God . . . following the examples of ancient tradition . . . you have strengthened . . . the vigor of your religion with true reason, for you have acknowledged that judgment is to be referred to us, and have shown that you know what is owed to the Apostolic See, if all of us placed in this position are to desire to follow the apostle himself [Peter] from whom the episcopate itself and the total authority of this name have emerged. Following him, we know how to condemn evils just as well

as we know how to approve what is laudable. Or rather, guarding with your priestly office what the Fathers instituted, you did not regard what they had decided, not by human but by divine judgments, as something to be trampled on. They did not regard anything as finished, even though it was the concern of distant and remote provinces, until it had come to the notice of this See [Rome], so that what was a just pronouncement might be confirmed by the authority of this See, and thence other churches—just as all waters proceed from their own natal source and, through the various regions of the whole world, remain pure liquids of an incorrupted head. . . ." (*ibid.*, 29:1).

### POPE CELESTINE I

"We enjoin upon you [my legates to the Council of Ephesus] the necessary task of guarding the authority of the Apostolic See. And if the instructions handed to you have to mention this and if you have to be present in the assembly, if it comes to controversy, it is not yours to join the fight but to judge of the opinions [on my behalf]" (*Letters* 17 [A.D. 431]).

### COUNCIL OF EPHEBUS

"Philip, presbyter and legate of [Pope Celestine I] said: 'We offer our thanks to the holy and venerable synod, that when the writings of our holy and blessed pope had been read to you, the holy members, by our holy voices, you joined yourselves to the holy head also by your holy acclamations. For your blessedness is not ignorant that the head of the whole faith, the head of the apostles, is blessed Peter the apostle. And since now [we], after having been tempest-tossed and much vexed, [have] arrived, we ask that you order that there be laid before us what things were done in this holy synod before our arrival; in order that according to the opinion of our blessed pope and of this present holy assembly, we likewise may ratify their determination'" (*Acts of the Council*, session 2 [A.D. 431]).

## POPE LEO I

“Our Lord Jesus Christ . . . established the worship belonging to the divine religion. . . . But the Lord desired that the sacrament of this gift should pertain to all the apostles in such a way that it might be found principally in the most blessed Peter, the highest of all the apostles. And he wanted his gifts to flow into the entire body from Peter himself, as if from the head, in such a way that anyone who had dared to separate himself from the solidarity of Peter would realize that he was himself no longer a sharer in the divine mystery. . . . [You, my brothers], must realize with us, of course, that the Apostolic See—out of reverence for it, I mean—has on countless occasions been reported to in consultation by bishops even of your own province [Vienne]. And through the appeal of various cases to this see, decisions already made have been either revoked or confirmed, as dictated by long-standing custom” (*Letters* 10:2–3 [A.D. 445]).

“As for the resolution of the bishops which is contrary to the Nicene decree, in union with your faithful piety, I declare it to be invalid and annul it by the authority of the holy apostle Peter” (*ibid.*, 110).

“If in your view, [Anastasius of Thessalonica], in regard to a matter to be handled . . . decided jointly with your brothers, their decision was other than what you wanted, then let the entire matter, with a record of the proceedings, be referred to us. . . . Although bishops have a common dignity, they are not all of the same rank. Even among the most blessed apostles, though they were alike in honor, there was a certain distinction of power. All were equal in being chosen [to be apostles], but it was given to one to be preeminent over the others. . . . [So today through the bishops] the care of the universal Church would converge in the one see of Peter, and nothing should ever be at odds with this head” (*ibid.*, 14:11).

## PETER CHRYSOLOGUS

“We exhort you in every respect, honorable brother, to heed obediently what has been written by the most blessed pope of the city of Rome, for blessed Peter, who lives and presides in his own see, provides the truth of faith to those who seek it. For we, by reason of our pursuit of peace and faith, cannot try cases on the faith without the consent of the bishop of Rome” (*Letters* 25:2 [A.D. 449]).

## COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON

“Bishop Paschasinus, guardian of the Apostolic See, stood in the midst [of the Council Fathers] and said, ‘We received directions at the hands of the most blessed and apostolic bishop of the Roman city [Pope Leo I], who is the head of all the churches, which directions say that Dioscorus is not to be allowed to sit in the [present] assembly, but that if he should attempt to take his seat, he is to be cast out. This instruction we must carry out’” (*Acts of the Council*, session 1 [A.D. 451]).

“After the reading of the foregoing epistle [*The Tome of Leo*], the most reverend bishops cried out: ‘This is the faith of the fathers! This is the faith of the apostles! So we all believe! Thus the orthodox believe! Anathema to him who does not thus believe! Peter has spoken thus through Leo!’” (*ibid.*, session 2).

## POPE GREGORY I

“Your most sweet holiness, [Bishop Eulogius of Alexandria], has spoken much in your letter to me about the chair of Saint Peter, prince of the apostles, saying that he himself now sits on it in the persons of his successors. And indeed I acknowledge myself to be unworthy. . . . I gladly accepted all that has been said, in that he has spoken to me about Peter’s chair, who occupies Peter’s chair. And, though special honor to myself in no wise delights me. . . . who can be ignorant that holy Church has been made firm in the solidity of the prince of the apostles, who derived

his name from the firmness of his mind, so as to be called Peter from *petra*. And to him it is said by the voice of the Truth, ‘To you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven’ [Matt. 16:19]. And again it is said to him, ‘And when you are converted, strengthen your brethren’ [Luke 22:32]. And once more, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me? Feed my sheep’ [John 21:17]” (*Letters* 40 [A.D. 597]).

NIHIL OBSTAT: I have concluded that the materials presented in this work are free of doctrinal or moral errors.  
Bernadeane Carr, STL, 10 August 2004

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+Robert H. Brom, Bishop of San Diego, 10 August 2004

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## Church & Papacy

THE FATHERS KNOW BEST

# THE AUTHORITY OF THE POPE: PART II