

## EARLY CHURCH TRADITION DID NOT RECOGNISE A POPE

The papacy assumes that Jesus made Peter the first head of the Church on earth and Peter became bishop of Rome. Henceforth, each bishop of Rome is the successor of Peter and has claim to the rank given to Peter.

The early Church expected Jesus back any time soon. They were not going to waste time setting up bishops. Peter was not going to become bishop of Rome and set up a system for successors to be appointed.

There is no trace of the view that Jesus made the pope the head of the Church through Peter among the Greek Fathers of the first six hundred years of the Church (page 91, Roman Catholic Claims). Peter being head of the Church and establishing the papacy at Rome are two new doctrines. The Church has no right to add them to the gospel.

It is thought that the popes or bishops of Rome were the successors of Peter.

The oldest list of the bishops of Rome, who were later designated as popes, hails from 170 AD. Suppose they really were popes. One would expect with all the divisions and heresies in the early Church for the list to have appeared sooner and to have been verified and clarified better when the pope was allegedly the centre of unity and the marker of the true faith and Church.

The Apostolic Constitutions which date from before 400 AD name Linus as the first Roman bishop. They say that Peter made Clement the second bishop following the death of Linus (page 451, Catholicism and Christianity). So Peter was not bishop of Rome. Eusebius in his Church History declared that Linus was the first bishop of Rome and transferred his position to Anacletus. The lists of the scholars who Catholics use to prove the Roman supremacy diverge widely. The papacy, described as the rock Jesus supposedly built his Church on, was not much of a rock when we cannot even verify the lists to everybody's satisfaction (page 40, Treasures from God's Storehouse).

Irenaeus wrote that Peter and Paul both created the Church in Rome and entrusted the episcopacy of Rome to Linus (page 449, Catholicism and Christianity). He did not use the word for passed on. And anyway, how could Paul have handed on the papacy with Peter unless both were bishops of Rome or they were apostles and not bishops at all?

Hegassippus was thought to have mentioned a list of bishops at Rome but this seems to be a gloss on the text with the word sojourn being mistaken for succession giving the impression that he thought there was a succession of bishops. The emendation solves the conflict with the context. If it is wrong then the first list of Roman bishops came from 154 AD and was still too late to deserve serious consideration (page 449, Catholicism and Christianity). Also when Hegassippus said that there was no list of the Roman Bishops until he made one it suggests that he invented it (page 76, A Handbook on the Papacy). The gullible Irenaeus and Epiphanius copied their list from him. But he admitted that he made this list to show that the teaching was the same down through the years and not to verify a papal succession.

The first time anybody thought there was a bishop at Rome who was in charge of the Church there was in 154 AD. Polycarp the bishop of Smyrna visited Bishop Anicetus (page 448). But there is no evidence that Anicetus represented Peter but he was probably the head of a college of bishops and priests (page 448).

Rifinus of Aquileia wrote that the episcopate of Rome was conferred on Linus when Peter was alive (Handbook to the Controversy, page 212). However, Pope Gregory the Great denied that Linus was a successor to Peter but to Paul when he declared that the episcopate of Rome is in succession to St Paul (ibid, page 213). Gregory denied he should be given even an honorary title as Universal Bishop - or bishop over the Church. "You know it, my brother ; hath not the venerable Council of Chalcedon conferred the honorary title of Universal upon the bishops of this Apostolic See, whereof I am, by God's will, the servant? And yet none of us hath permitted this title to be given to him ; none hath assumed this bold title" He said he wanted no, "special distinction". Catholicism distorts this to mean that Gregory did not deny he was head bishop of the Church but denied that he should be the only real bishop! That is nonsense for nobody expected or could expect him to run the whole Church in the stead of the existing bishops.

About 200 AD, Tertullian recorded that Clement was the first bishop of Rome and that Peter had ordained him. This contradicts Catholic doctrine (page 450, Catholicism and Christianity) which needs to say that Clement was Peter's successor as bishop of Rome. To answer that Tertullian said that Pope Callistus was indeed the successor of Peter is irrelevant (page 450). He meant Callistus was a successor in some other sense.

Clement of Rome never referred to himself as a bishop in his letter to the Corinthians. So far from claiming to be a pope he

never even put his name on the letter. He wrote his letter in the name of the Church at Rome and it was a disciplinary letter. Therefore one would expect Clement to have written it in his own authority as well as that of the Church or perhaps not mention the Church at all if he was anything like a pope. Ignatius wrote to the Romans and would have specifically addressed their bishop if he had been important and stressed their duty to obey that bishop as head of the Church but he doesn't (page 446, Catholicism and Christianity).

Clement gave no hint that Peter was bishop of Rome.

Tertullian may have said that Pope Callistus was the successor to Peter but that does not prove that Peter was believed to have been the first bishop of Rome. If Peter had been the bishop of Antioch the bishop of Rome could be his successor as head of the Church. There is no law that says that Peter had to be bishop of Rome, or future bishops of Rome either, to be the heads of the Church. A bishop and a universal bishop who runs the Church are two different things. Peter could have been the bishop of Rome without being bishop of the whole Church. If Peter was bishop of Rome that would imply he was not a pope for he could have appointed a bishop of Rome and been bishop of the whole Church from Rome.

There is simply little point in relying on the testimony of people who were too long after the time of Peter to know what they were talking about.

Origen stated that the Church was built on all of the apostles and not on Peter alone. He asked that if the whole Church is built on Peter then what about the other apostles? (page 10, The Primitive Faith and Roman Catholic Developments).

In the fourth century, St Hippolytus denounced the bishop of Rome as a leader of heretics and with the Church being so confused in those days one would expect him to believe that the pope was right if the bishop was a Catholic style pope. The saint was the greatest theologian of that century.

St Athanasius was excommunicated by the bishop of Rome and he did not care much except to say the pope was weak. If the bishop of Rome was what Catholics say he was the saint would have been devastated.

The Sixth Council of Constantinople in 680, an infallible ecumenical council according to Rome, excommunicated the pope for heresy.

There is no evidence that Catholic style bishops with their unique superiority in supernatural power and authority existed in the first century. The evidence says that the Church was run by elders, who were sometimes called bishops or overseers or presbyters who were all equal and made decisions together. That is why you only read of deacons and bishops/presbyters in 1 Timothy 3 which was written close to the time Peter allegedly died. When the letter went to the trouble of saying how good deacons and bishops should be separately though it could have amalgamated them it shows that there were only the two levels. Peter was not bishop of Rome.

Catholics might start saying that "it does not matter who was the first bishop of Rome. Peter was the head and it was up to the Church to decide which Church leader would be his replacement even if his episcopate was not founded by Peter".

Ronald Knox thought that nobody in the primitive Church said that Peter was the first Roman bishop simply because he was an apostle and was higher than a bishop but started the headship of the Church in Rome. So he was a bishop but not called one. Thus Linus, Peter's successor, was the first technical bishop of Rome (Difficulties, page 125). But the pope is a bishop and yet higher than a bishop. Peter only wanted to be called an elder which was worse than being called a bishop. See First Peter.

Because Rome was the supreme capital in the world it had gained the primacy in the Church from the second century. Primacy is just a special honour such as being regarded as something to be united to in representation of the unity of the Church and is not the same as supremacy. Catholics tend not to understand this (page 4, The Primitive Faith and Roman Catholic Developments).

One would expect any man who thought himself to be the head of the Church to call himself Father. The word pope means father. But the first person to take the title pope was Bishop Alexander of Alexandria who played a large role in the Ecumenical Council of 325 AD (page 6, Roman Catholic Objections Answered).

It is impossible to see how Peter as a direct witness of the Lord could have a successor. The successor could not be a real one for he would not be an apostle like Peter. If Peter was a pope he was to be the only one. There was no way the early Church could have believed that Peter would have a successor. There is also the problem that since Peter would be an apostle his authority would be greater than any pope so how could he pass it on unless his successor had a vision of the resurrected Christ to make him an apostle as well? The Bible sees the apostles as foundations and implies there are to be no others. Where are the affidavits that Peter made Linus or whoever the head of the Church in his place? Their non-existence

proves that the papacy is just a human institution for they are necessary. Linus would have ensured that they would have been preserved had he considered himself to be anything like a pope.

St Firmilian saw Pope Stephen as a schismatic and an apostate (page 109, A Handbook on the Papacy). This proves that he did not believe that Stephen was infallible or that God chooses the pope. He accused Stephen of not staying on the one foundation of the Church which was the rock. So he denied that the rock was the pope and the rock must have been something else for there can only be one pope at a time so he could hardly have meant that Stephen should stay on the rock of the pope when he was pope!

Jerome stated bluntly, “The episcopate at Rome has no more authority than any other episcopate” (Epistles cxlvi).

It is not surprising that the Church says that the papacy is necessary and that is proof enough that God created it even if no evidence for its functioning exists in the early days and many conservative Catholics admit there is no evidence (page 7, Church and Infallibility). If God went to the trouble of making a papacy then why didn't he give it more power? Most Catholics are not true Catholics and when one adds Orthodox and Protestants to their number it is clear that only a small minority properly and sincerely acknowledge the pope as head of the Church. The papacy has been a better source of division than unity.

The pope has failed to even be the focal point of unity and its servant and thus the word pope when taken to mean he is the rock of the Church is an oxymoron.