

30. THE POPE OF ROME

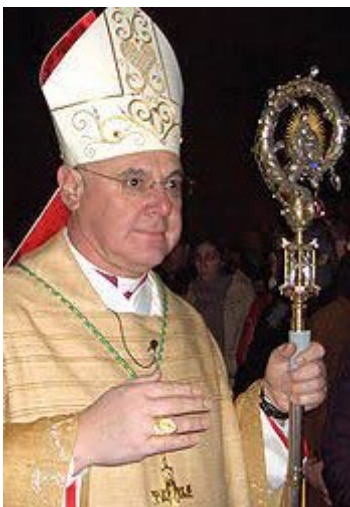
We know that preachers were called 'bishops' in the early church. Bishop means 'overseer'. We have written about Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, and Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch.

We have used the term 'bishop' many times. Like ministers today, bishops served in both large and small congregations. Naturally, not every place is the same size. There are tiny villages and towns, cities, capital cities and large world cities. The bishops of the villages did not have as large a congregation as the bishops of the cities. There's nothing wrong with that. It does not matter at all. Did not the Lord Jesus Himself say that even if only two or three are gathered in His name, He shall be in their midst?

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC HIERARCHY

During the days of persecution, no one took notice of congregation sizes, but when the persecutions stopped, and the churches became rich, that changed. The bishops from the cities became wealthy. They lived in magnificent houses like palaces.

The bishops from the small towns did not become rich. There's nothing wrong with that, either. God has made both rich and poor. But it was terrible



Catholic bishop Gerhard Ludwig Müller wearing the pontifical vestments and carrying a crosier. Wikipedia

when the bishops from the larger cities became haughty. The devil of pride crept into their hearts. When God's servants become arrogant and proud, that *always* has terrible consequences. The city bishops considered themselves very important and looked down on the village bishops

with disdain. They thought: "We are more important than them!"



*Cardinal George Pell. 1941-2023. Wikipedia.
A cardinal is the next level below the pope and they are allowed to choose the next pope from their ranks.*

They did not only *think* that, but they also *said* it. Those city bishops no longer believed the word 'bishop' was important enough. So they began to call themselves 'archbishops'. They thought that sounded a little more dignified. Eventually, the archbishops from the vast world cities were not satisfied with the name archbishop either. So they thought of another name that sounded even more important.

They had themselves addressed as 'patriarchs'. That sounded so important and dignified! There were seven patriarchs in the large Roman Empire. Then the patriarchs also began to quarrel among themselves! They were jealous of each other. One wanted to become more powerful and influential than the other. Which of the seven patriarchs was the most important?

The patriarch of Jerusalem said:

"I am the most important because the Church of Pentecost originated in my city."

The patriarch of Constantinople said:

"No, I am the most important because the emperor and his entourage live in Constantinople."

My city is the court capital, the seat of government."

The patriarch of Rome argued:

"That is out of the question. I am the most important because the Apostle Peter was the first bishop of Rome, and I am the successor of Peter."

The patriarchs quarrelled like this for many years. They were full of envy and jealousy of each other. Finally, there were two patriarchs left who vehemently opposed each other. Which of those two was the most powerful?

The patriarch of Constantinople demanded that all the churches listen to him. He wanted to rule the entire church and believed that all the village bishops, the archbishops from the cities, and the patriarchs from the world cities had to listen to him. They all had to obey *him*!

The patriarch of Rome said: "I will never do that; all the others must listen to *me*. I am the most important. *I* should rule the entire church. They must all obey *me*."

It became an endless quarrel between those two.

HOW THE POPE BECAME THE HIGHEST POSITION

But finally, the patriarch of Rome won. He called himself the successor of Peter. Even worse, he called himself the 'Vicar of Christ'.

He said that the Lord Jesus had appointed Peter as His vicar, for didn't the Lord say to Peter: "You are Peter, and upon this rock, I will build My church?"

The patriarch of Rome said:

"Peter was the first bishop of Rome. There he ruled the church on earth as vicar of Christ, in the name of Jesus. We are the successors of Peter. So we are the vicars of Christ on earth. We will rule the church on earth in the name of Christ." He called himself '*The Pope*'. That word means 'Alone Papa!'

This process did not happen in a few years. It took hundreds of years to develop that far. But sadly, it *did* get that far. Eventually, the whole church yielded. The system that all power rests with the pope of Rome, and all archbishops, bishops and other clergy are subject to him is called *hierarchy*. The pope of Rome rules over the archbishops and commands them what they must and must not do. The archbishops rule over the bishops. The

bishops have oversight over the other clergymen who, in turn, have authority over the 'laymen', the people in the pew.

We can compare the hierarchy with stairs: a gradually descending church government. That system still exists in the Roman Catholic Church. In that way, the church became *Roman* Catholic. Perhaps you ask:

"Is that a good thing?"

No, not at all! This system is another dreadful fallacy, which, alas, was also believed.

The pope of Rome is *not* the vicar of Christ. The *Lord Jesus* rules and governs His church. *He* is the Head of His Church here on earth. He is seated at the right hand of His Father, and He rules His church from heaven. It is not true that the Lord Jesus appointed Peter as His vicar on earth. Peter did not come to Rome as a bishop, but he went to Rome as an apostle, just like Paul. Both those apostles, Paul and Peter, were killed during the reign of Nero. The Romans beheaded Paul



The apostle Peter holding the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Rome believes that Peter was the first bishop of Rome and ruled as vicar of Christ and all popes are his successors. Statue is in Saint Aloysius' church, Glasgow.

because he was a Roman citizen and crucified Peter because he was a Jew.

Besides, the Lord Jesus did *not* say that He would build His church upon Peter, but He would build His church upon the *confession* of Peter. What was that confession?

While He was on earth, the Lord Jesus asked the disciples:

"Who do men say that I am?"

They answered:

"Some say that You are John the Baptist. Others believe that You are Elijah. Others again say that You are Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Then the Lord asked them: "But who do *you* say I am?" Peter answered that question. He replied:

"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

The confession that the Lord Jesus is the Son of God Who came to deliver His people from their sins, Who came to die the accursed death of the cross, is the foundation on which the whole Church of God rests. By faith in that only Saviour, God delivers His people from their sins so that they can praise God forever.

That's why the Lord Jesus answered Peter: "On this Rock, this confession, I will build My church." Thankfully, God does *not* build His church on Peter, a sinful human being, but on the Rock of Ages, God's only and eternal Son and His message of salvation.



...and His message of salvation.

But Rome made out that the church was built on *Peter*. Because the church believed that great lie, it became the false church.

This lie is a gross misjudgement, disowning Christ. I know this part is still somewhat difficult for the younger ones, but this had to be told as, ages

later, all these errors caused the Great Reformation. God *Himself* delivered His church from those terrible errors. Then He gave faithful, God-fearing men who fought the battle to uphold the gospel's truth.

It *seemed* as if the lie had been conquered. It *seemed* as if the devil had been able to destroy the church of the Lord, but it only *appeared* so. In God's time, the Lord led His church out of the power of Rome's errors. More about that later.

QUESTIONS

1. Define the terms 'archbishop' and 'patriarch.'
2. How did the patriarch of Rome become the pope? What did he claim about himself?
3. What responsibility had God supposedly given to the pope in Rome?
4. List the components or order of the church hierarchy.
5. What is a layman?
6. Why is a hierarchy wrong?
7. What was wrong with the pope's interpretation of the text: 'You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church'?
8. What was Peter's confession?
9. Why was this error so serious?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Read Luke 14. How did the haughty bishops violate Christ's command given in this chapter?
2. List two denominations today that have a hierarchical system of government.