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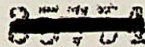
PETER AS LEADER AMONG THE APOSTLES

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

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May 1965



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In my study I was interested in determining whether or not Peter was presented as leader among the apostles by Christ, by Peter himself, by the other apostles, and by references throughout the New Testament. Of further interest was the discovery of the particular areas in which Peter expressed his leadership and the extent to which this leadership applied. I was eager to learn when in Peter's career his leadership role was especially prominent. Finally, it was of interest to note what limitations, if any, there were on Peter's leadership among the apostles.

This study was of particular value to me because I wanted to find out as much as possible about this great apostle. His person had made a lasting impression on me from the facts that I knew of him. Furthermore, I have long felt that Peter was an apostle who has been particularly mistreated and inaccurately viewed by various sources. On the one hand, there are those who feel that they have a special mission to exalt not only the person of Peter, but especially his office, and to make out of it something more than it really was. Then, there are others who have tried to minimize the role which Peter played among the apostles, perhaps as a reaction to those who would unduly exalt him. As a result, Peter has often been unfairly treated in both respects,

one side exalting him too much, the other side not giving the credit that is due him. In either case the picture that Holy Scripture gives us of this great man of God has been misrepresented. As I read about Peter I became impressed with the feeling that he certainly was among the greatest of the apostles, that he exercised a unique leadership role among the Twelve in a number of ways, including his natural leadership, his role as spokesman, and his leadership in missionary work.

In order to approach the problem of Peter's leadership among the apostles properly and intelligently it is necessary to have a working definition of the term "apostle." The New Testament suggests that an apostle is one who has had an encounter with the risen Lord and who has been specifically commissioned by Christ to be His witness. Chapter II will fill in the details of this concept by giving the etymological background of the term apostolos and an overview of how this term was used throughout the New Testament. In dealing with Peter and the rest of the apostles we make reference particularly to those events which apply to specific leadership roles. Thus, no attempt is made to present the lives of the various apostles with any degree of completeness. However, by the very nature of the thesis topic which leads us to deal with Peter's discipleship and apostleship in detail, we will concern ourselves with most of the major facts of Peter's life which the New Testament presents to us.

In dealing with the problem which the thesis suggests I felt no need to examine at length the Roman Catholic "basis"

for the doctrine of papal authority. I also assumed that the problem did not demand an especially conclusive study regarding such questions as whether or not Peter preached in Rome, how long he was there (if he did labor in Rome), whether or not he died in Rome, or whether he was head of a church there.

After the meaning and the implications of the concept apostolos are presented in Chapter II, the next chapter proceeds to show Peter's leadership activity during Christ's ministry on earth. Chapter IV discusses the meaning and the implications of the term "rock," which Christ applied to Peter at a time in his life when he was soon to make the transition from discipleship to apostleship. Peter's leadership of the early Christian Church up to the time of his departure from Jerusalem is presented next. Finally, Peter's role as leader after his departure from Jerusalem is investigated.

For the treatment of the apostolos concept I drew especially upon Burton's commentary on Galatians, Foakes-Jackson and Lake's monumental work, The Beginnings of Christianity, Rengstorf's article on apostolos in Kittel's Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, and, of course, on the New Testament itself.

For the major chapters of the thesis I gained much from assorted monographs, commentaries, and reference works. Especially helpful were Cullmann's Peter--Disciple, Apostle, Martyr; Foakes-Jackson's Peter: Prince of Apostles; Filson's article on "Peter" in the Interpreter's Dictionary of the

Bible; Koulomzine's article on "Peter's Place in the Early Church," and the New Testament itself.

The thesis sets out to show the areas in which Peter's leadership lay, to indicate Peter's heightened role after the ascension of Christ, to show the significance of this leadership for the growth of the early Church, and to show that although Peter displayed a rock-like solidity in the service of his Master, yet he had his moments of instability and weakness. Although God gave Peter much leadership ability and strength, He never gave him the authority of jurisdiction over the other apostles. In fact, in his later years Peter was content to give way to James and Paul, to whom the Church's Lord gave special areas of leadership.

Most fortunately for Christendom, the Church is built upon the Lord Jesus as its sure foundation stone. Nevertheless, the work of such rock-like pillars as Peter, as well as others among the apostles, was invaluable in laying the foundations of the early Church. Upon these foundations the Church of all ages continues to be built.

CHAPTER II

THE APOSTLES

In writing about Peter as the leader among the apostles it is necessary that one define the term "apostle." The word "apostle" seems to be one which is unique to the Christian world. To learn about the implications and the finer shades of meaning of this word one must examine the bits of background which it has.

Background of the Term Apostolos

Roots in Classical Greek

The word apostolos is found only rarely in classical Greek. In Demosthenes the word apostolos signifies a naval expedition. In Herodotus the word refers to an ambassador or delegate, a person who is commissioned by someone to represent him.¹ In classical Greek of the later period apostolos simply means "fleet," though Hesychius says that it can signify an admiral.² The usage of the word apostolos is equally rare in Josephus, who uses it only twice, and in

¹Ernest Burton, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle To The Galatians, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921), p. 363.

²F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, The Beginnings of Christianity (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1933), V, 46.

one of these cases the attestation is poor.³ In his Antiquities⁴ Josephus speaks of Varus, who was the head of a delegation of Jews as apostolos autôn, meaning "their apostle."

Use in the Greek Old Testament

The Septuagint uses the word apostolos only in 1 Kings 14:6. Here Ahijah is commanded by God to perform the technical mission of bringing a divine message to the wife of King Jeroboam. He says to her, "I am a hard 'messenger' toward you," meaning, "I bring you heavy news." Symmachus' translation of the Old Testament refers to apostolos also in Isaiah 18:2, but nowhere else.⁵ Thus, we see that the Old Testament use of apostolos is very rare.

Use in Rabbinic Judaism

Next, we move to the usage of the apostle concept as it is found in rabbinic Judaism. In the term shaliach we have the closest parallel to apostolos in literature prior to the New Testament use of the term.

The Individual Commissions

What characterizes the sheluchim of all periods is the

³Karl Rengstorf, "Apostolos," Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, edited by G. Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), I, 413.

⁴Book XVII, 11.1, cited by Foakes-Jackson and Lake, p. 46.

⁵Burton, p. 364.

fact that they are commissioned to particular tasks which require their traveling away from the residence of the one who sends them. So, one might say that the earliest usage of the term shaliach always asserts the characteristic of sending.

Implicit in this early usage is the concept of authorization. In this use of the term it doesn't matter what the content of the proclamation is. The message can include anything. It can include religious truths, or it can bring news regarding a business transaction. According to Rengstorf the term itself is legal rather than religious.⁶ The legal element in the term lies in the commission--the one who has been entrusted with the message or special obligation represents the commissioner himself. The rabbis summed this up with the statement that "the one sent by a man is as the man himself."⁷ So, a shaliach could be sent on a mission to betroth two people. He could be sent to negotiate divorce proceedings. The mission on which the shaliach was sent was binding. If he chose to go against the trust placed in him, he could sabotage his master. Therefore, a very necessary qualification for a shaliach was that he completely subordinated his will to that of the one who sent him.⁸

The representative role of the messenger is presupposed in the Old Testament. The messenger is shown as completely

⁶Rengstorf, p. 415.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

representing his sender, who is usually the king. The honor which belongs to his sender will be paid to him. Abigail, for example, washed the feet of the messengers of King David, who had come to take her to be his wife.⁹ The opposite treatment of the messenger also is interpreted as reflecting upon the feeling for the sender. So, in another instance,¹⁰ the messengers of David were shamed. This led to the war of destruction against the Ammonites. Again, we see the principle applied, "The emissary of the king is as the king himself."

Larger Groups Commission

The institution of shaliach is at times also construed as being more than a private transaction, a relationship between two men. Sometimes it refers to the relationship between a number of individuals, a definite group, an entire community, or a local congregation. All of these groups may empower a man to act as their representative with full authority.¹¹

It was not unusual for a court to send out a man to convey and even to execute its decisions. Similarly, rabbis were sent out as representatives of the scribes who in turn were representing all of Israel. The rabbis were sent to the whole diaspora by the central authorities. The authority which they bore was that of their senders. And so it is that Saul, who

⁹1 Sam. 25:40f.

¹⁰2 Sam. 10:1f.

¹¹Rengstorf, p. 416.

later became Paul, was such a shaliach, sent out by the central authorities, enroute to Damascus, carrying the customary letters of accreditation which normally were given to sheluchim.¹²

Rengstorf states that the term apostolos was not considered the Greek parallel of shaliach and that the Jews in particular did not make this equation.¹³ Older Judaism never linked the shaliach with missionary activity. This is no doubt due to the fact that the office of the shaliach grew out of the everyday needs of the community. The whole origin and nature of the sheluchim institution was secular rather than religious, and even when it took a religious form, this was only in application.¹⁴

God Commissions

Furthermore, the rabbinic community often used the term shaliach regarding one who was commissioned and authorized by God. They used this in connection with two groups. First of all, in regard to the priesthood, the priest was considered the commissioned minister of God rather than of his particular community. Secondly, a few outstanding men from the Old Testament, notably Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and Ezekiel were considered sheluchim. They were so-called because they did

¹²Ibid., p. 417.

¹³Ibid., p. 418.

¹⁴Ibid.

such things as were normally reserved for God.¹⁵ Moses caused the water to flow out of the rock. Elijah brought rain and raised a dead man. Elisha opened the mother's womb and also raised a dead man. Ezekiel received "the keys to the tombs at the reawakening of the dead."¹⁶ These four men performed miracles which normally were reserved for God Himself. They received their power from God.

The rabbis nowhere describe a prophet as a shaliach of God. It seems that for the rabbis shaliach was not the proper word to express the vital meaning of the prophetic office. The rabbis avoided the term shaliach when referring to either missionaries or prophets, even though these men spoke about God and in God's name. They were not considered God's representatives, sheluchim, because they did not perform any physical action. The quality which to the rabbis made the messenger a shaliach was that he would actively represent his sender.¹⁷

Transition to the New Testament Use of Apostolos

In conclusion, while we note distinct similarities and kindred meanings of the Jewish concept of the shaliach, we note that the New Testament term apostolos has a meaning all of its own, which builds upon the foundations of the shaliach

¹⁵Ibid., p. 419.

¹⁶Ezek. 37:1ff.

¹⁷Rengstorf, p. 420.

concept as used in ancient times. But, whatever the differences between the Jewish conception of the shaliach and the New Testament apostolos may be, the apostle concept came to Jesus and his disciples loaded with the idea of full authorization by a higher authority and of a full and complete subordination of the will of the one who was sent to the authority of the sender. As the New Testament filled the term shaliach with the divine authority of Christ, the term became a very significant theological one.

Use of Apostolos in the New Testament

Origins of the Word

It is impossible to say exactly when the Greek term apostolos first came to be used in the Christian Church. It is very likely that Paul had some hand in popularizing its use. To be sure, he is the first one in whose writings we find the term clearly used meaning "a messenger of Christ" in the singular. It is always used in the plural by the Synoptists. Foakes-Jackson and Lake suggest that it is probable that the Greek-speaking Church of Antioch should be credited with giving impetus to the widespread use of this very natural word.¹⁸ The Antiochian origin of this word affords a very natural explanation since both Paul and Luke were closely connected with Antioch.

¹⁸Foakes-Jackson and Lake, p. 50.

Rare New Testament Usage

There is no indication of general use of the word apostolos outside of the Bible and Josephus.¹⁹ In the New Testament apostolos never means the act of sending, or the object of sending. Instead, it always shows a man who is sent, and with full authority. The Greek of classical times gives us only the form out of which the New Testament term arose. The shaliach of later Judaism gives a measure of the content of the term.²⁰

The word apostolos is used infrequently in the New Testament. Only seventy-nine fully attested references to this term are listed there. Thirty-four of these are ascribed to Luke (his Gospel and Acts). Another thirty-four are ascribed to St. Paul (assuming that he did not author the Epistle to the Hebrews). Thus, a total of sixty-eight out of the seventy-nine New Testament occurrences of apostolos can be attributed to Luke and Paul. The other three evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and John, each used the term only once in their respective Gospels.²¹ The Third Gospel, on the other hand, used the term six times.²²

¹⁹Rengstorf, p. 421.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Matt. 10:2; Mark 6:30; John 13:16.

²²Luke 6:13; 9:10; 11:49; 17:5; 22:14; 24:10.

The Terms "Disciple" and "the Twelve" are Superseded

Two words of note which tie into the use of apostolos should be dealt with here, the words mathêtês and dôdeka. The word mathêtês, disciple, means a "pupil," or "learner."²³ Yet, to be a disciple, while it didn't mean the same as being an apostle, was a preparation for later participation in the apostolate. When Christ called the Twelve, He called them to become "fishers of men." Christ gave the Twelve power over demons and diseases and sent them out to preach and to heal.²⁴ The Twelve were called "apostles" in connection with the mission on which they were sent by Christ to the cities of Galilee.²⁵ After their return from this mission, the Twelve were no longer called "apostles," but were referred to again as "disciples."²⁶

Apostolos as Used in the Gospels

As noted above, the word apostolos itself is used only rarely in the Gospels. The Gospels, for the most part, show the disciples in their role as learners and only rarely as commissioned preachers. When the term "apostle" is used in the Gospels, it often has quite another meaning from its

²³Floyd Filson, "Peter," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), III, 750.

²⁴Luke 9:1f.

²⁵Luke 9:10.

²⁶Luke 9:16ff.

usual meaning in the Acts of the Apostles. John, for example, uses it to mean "envoy."²⁷ Luke, in at least four of the uses of the term in his Gospel, clearly refers to the twelve disciples apart from the role of commissioned preachers.²⁸

Varied New Testament Meanings

There are a number of different meanings for the word "apostolos" throughout the New Testament. In John 13:16 apostolos is the direct parallel of the shaliach of Judaism. Here apostolos simply means one who is legally made responsible to represent another person. St. Paul uses the term "apostles of the churches" in 2 Cor. 8:23. With it he refers to the men who were to accompany him to Jerusalem with the collection. In a similar way he refers to Epaphroditus as an apostolos of the Philippian saints to Paul.²⁹ In the Epistle to the Hebrews³⁰ Jesus Himself is called "The Apostle." Jesus Himself is sent--by God--to reveal God.

The First Twelve Apostles

Finally, apostoloi is used frequently as a comprehensive term for "bearers of the New Testament message."³¹ The name is first applied to the inner circle of the Twelve. These

²⁷John 13:16.

²⁸Luke 6:13; 17:5; 22:14; 24:10.

²⁹Phil. 2:25.

³⁰Hebr. 3:1.

³¹Rengstorf, p. 422.

were the original apostles, which group later included also Matthias, who replaced Judas after his defection.³² Their sending by Jesus is taken for granted. The original view of the apostles limits the group to the Twelve. This seems to be the view of the first part of the Book of Acts.³³

The twelve disciples, who also became apostles, are listed four times in the first five books of the New Testament. They are presented as follows:

	Mark 3:16f.	Matthew 10:2f.	Luke 6:14f.	Acts 1:13f.
1.	Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Simon Peter	Simon Peter
2.	James	Andrew	Andrew	James
3.	John	James	James	John
4.	Andrew	John	John	Andrew
5.	Philip	Philip	Philip	Philip
6.	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Bartholomew	Thomas
7.	Matthew	Thomas	Matthew	Bartholomew
8.	Thomas	Matthew	Thomas	Matthew
9.	James the son of Alpheus	James the son of Alpheus	James the son of Alpheus	James the son of Alpheus
10.	Thaddeus	Thaddeus	Simon the Zealot	Simon the Zealot
11.	Simon the Cananaean	Simon the Cananaean	Judas the brother of James	Judas the brother of James ³⁴
12.	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	

In each listing there seem to be three groups of four headed by Simon Peter, Philip, and James the son of Alpheus, respectively. The fact that the arrangement of the other nine

³²Acts 1:25f.

³³Acts 1:2ff; 1:17,25ff.

³⁴Archibald T. Robertson, A Harmony of the Gospels (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1922), p. 271.

names shows considerable fluctuation makes the uniformity of the arrangement of the names which were mentioned first seem significant. Whether or not much should be made out of the fact that Philip is listed at the head of the second group and James is at the head of the third group, I cannot say. However, it seems very significant that Peter is listed at the head of the tabulation in each of the four references.

The Other Apostles

In a sense the number of "the Twelve" was fixed. It couldn't be increased or decreased. They are the Twelve, and Christ promised that they would sit on thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel.³⁵ When James the Son of Zebedee³⁶ was killed, it does not seem that he was replaced in the number of the Twelve. But, when Judas at an earlier date committed suicide, his office was taken by another. When Matthias took Judas' place, the number "Twelve" was once again complete.

The requirement that Matthias had to fulfil to qualify for the number of the Twelve is found in the description of Acts 1:21,22,

Who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us beginning from the baptism of John unto the day when He was taken up from us--one of these men must become with us a witness to His resurrection.

³⁵Luke 22:30; Rev. 3:21.

³⁶Acts 12:2.

The term "the Twelve," or "the Disciples," was destined to be replaced by the term "apostles" after the resurrection of Christ. Gradually, dôdeka fades out of the New Testament vocabulary. After the persecution of Herod, the death of James, and Peter's departure from Jerusalem,³⁷ the question of keeping the number Twelve filled is never again raised in the New Testament. From this point onward the Twelve (or the Eleven) are only mentioned twice more in the entire New Testament--once by Paul when he recalled the appearance of the risen Lord,³⁸ and once by John when he spoke of the heavenly Jerusalem.³⁹

There are no other texts in the New Testament that tell us when the ten other disciples of the Twelve left Jerusalem, or where they went, nor do we have the story of their apostolic lives except for a few bits of information about John. We can be sure, however, that they went forth to serve their Master in keeping with their apostolic commission.

The epistles of Paul use the term "apostle" to refer to others beyond the circle of the Twelve. The term seems to be used of a Christian missionary who has been commissioned for the preaching of the Gospel. Paul himself claims to be commissioned by God and Christ.⁴⁰

³⁷Acts 12.

³⁸1 Cor. 15:5.

³⁹Rev. 21:14.

⁴⁰Gal. 1:1.

Apparently, there was dispute in Paul's time concerning whether or not he actually was an apostle. Opponents objected that he was not equal to the Twelve, that he had not seen the Lord in the flesh. These accusations moved Paul to defend his apostolate. In his First Letter to the Corinthians Paul says that he has indeed seen the Lord (referring to his Damascus Road vision).⁴¹ He makes a point of his zeal for entering the mainstream of the early Christian tradition regarding Jesus.⁴² He states that he went to talk with the "pillars" in Jerusalem to speak with them regarding their joint mission of bearing witness to the risen Lord. Paul's defense of his apostolate, however, does not necessarily prove that he considers the qualifications set forth by those of his time as being necessary for the apostolate. It does show that he is meeting them on their own grounds.

In the Book of Acts we find both Paul and Barnabas described as apostoloi.⁴³ In the Didache the term apostolos seems to mean a Christian missionary, and nothing more precise. It would be very difficult to explain Didache 11:3 if the conception of the writer limited the term "apostle" to "the Twelve." He would hardly be setting the rigid limitation on hospitality toward the Twelve apostles. This seems to be written in lieu of "false apostles" or apostles who were

⁴¹1 Cor. 9:1ff.

⁴²1 Cor. 11:23ff.; 15:1ff.

⁴³Acts 14:4,14.

taking advantage of their position.

St. Paul refers to others, in addition to himself and the twelve original disciples, as belonging to the group of the apostles. In Galatians 1:19 he refers to James the brother of the Lord as belonging to the apostles, implying that James was an apostle before Paul. In 1 Corinthians 9:3ff. Paul and probably also Barnabas and others are named as apostles. In Romans 16:7 Andronicus and Junius are listed among the apostles and are understood to have occupied a place of prominence among them.

It must be noted that although Barnabas, James the Lord's brother, Junius, and Andronicus are called apostoloi, as is Paul, this is not true of Apollos; nor are Titus and Timothy called apostoloi. The latter three had not had an encounter with the living Christ, which was a necessary qualification for apostleship.⁴⁴

Basis for the Apostolate

The basis of the apostolate seems to be the personal encounter with the resurrected Lord, coupled with personal commissioning by Him.⁴⁵ Through Jesus' commission a number of men, and in particular those who were closest to Him during His life, became His representatives in that they took His place and, thus, assumed a position of authority in

⁴⁴1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8ff.

⁴⁵Acts 1:21f.; 1 Cor. 9:1,15:8ff.

the early Christian Church.⁴⁶

Jesus' commissioning them to take over His work meant that they became missionaries. It was this form of their work that really characterized their office. It is the missionary element which radically distinguished the New Testament apostolate from the Jewish shaliach institution.⁴⁷

The risen Lord did not appoint His apostles for just a brief span of time, but rather for an unknown duration, unto the time of His expected return. However, He made only one appointment, and therefore, the apostolate is limited to the first generation and would not become an ecclesiastical office.

The apostles were empowered from on high and were made responsible to give an account of the commission which was placed upon them. This placed the apostle into a position of obedient service to his Master whose work he was commissioned and empowered to carry on. The office of the Twelve was one of service rather than one of privilege.

The Twelve came to be known as apostles chiefly in connection with the resurrection of Christ. They were witnesses, then, of Jesus' ministry, of His resurrection. Thus, they became His first missionaries.

They were equal in power and authority. When there was a dispute as to who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven,⁴⁸

⁴⁶Rengstorf, p. 431.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 432.

⁴⁸Matt. 18:2.

Christ called a little child and put it in the midst of the disciples and spoke to them of lowliness, not of exaltation. When the mother of the sons of Zebedee asked for special places for her sons, James and John,⁴⁹ Jesus indicated their suffering. Even during the Last Supper the disciples were thinking thoughts of greatness, and Jesus pointed them to humble service.

The position and task of the apostle is most wonderfully expressed in the First Letter of Clement 42:1-3, which I quote:

The apostles received the gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus the Christ was sent from God. So Christ is from God, and the apostles from Christ. Both came to pass regularly by the will of God. So having received their instructions, and having been reassured by the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, trusting in the word of God they set forth in the conviction of the Holy Spirit, preaching. . . .

Thus, they become His first missionaries. They were equal in power, a qualified and commissioned group of individuals with a special task to perform for their Master.

The number of the apostles included the Twelve, plus James the brother of the Lord, Paul, and several others who were missionaries together with Paul. We shall not have occasion to refer to all of these apostles individually during the course of this thesis; for not all of them are specially mentioned as having special individual relationships with Peter in regard to leadership among the apostles except insofar as

⁴⁹Matt. 20:20f.

they are members of the larger group. We shall, instead, concentrate on those groups and those individuals among the apostles whose role of leadership concerns Peter's own role as leader. This shall be the import of subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER III

PETER'S LEADERSHIP AMONG THE TWELVE DURING CHRIST'S MINISTRY ON EARTH (ACCORDING TO THE FOUR GOSPELS)

Peter's Role Among the Twelve in the Synoptic Gospels

Our Lord did not appoint Peter to be leader of the Twelve when He chose His twelve disciples. Jesus Himself remained the sole leader and teacher of them all, a fact which they all completely and willingly recognized.¹ Jesus reminded them that the slave is not greater than his master, nor is an apostle greater than the one who sent him forth.² Acknowledging this fact, let us now proceed to examine how Peter came to be generally recognized as the leader of the group that Jesus had gathered about Him.

The repeated disputes among the disciples (of which three are recorded in the New Testament) prove that no one was recognized by the Twelve themselves as being superior to the fellow disciples in rank. All were equally dependent on their Master. Christ occasionally reminded the Twelve that it was He Who chose them and not they who chose Him.³

As Spokesman

Peter showed leadership qualities among the Twelve in that

¹John 13:13.

²John 13:16.

³John 6:70; 15:16; 17:18.

he generally acted as the spokesman for them. As spokesman he was recognized as the outstanding one of the group. At Caesarea Philippi he represented the disciples in affirming Jesus' Messiahship.⁴ Nor was Jesus' stern reply to Peter intended for him alone. After Jesus announced His coming suffering and Peter had rebuked Him, Christ's act of looking at the disciples while scolding showed that He recognized in Peter's words the expression of the mind of the entire group.⁵ Again Peter spoke for the Twelve when he reminded Christ of their sacrifice in following Him, and asked what reward there would be for them in the future.⁶ Once Peter made a protest to Jesus about His desire to know who had touched Him.⁷ Again, he acted as spokesman for the rest in his confession of loyalty in the synagog in Capernaum.⁸ It was Peter who requested an explanation of the parable when the Pharisees stumbled,⁹ and who wanted to know about the personal application of the parable of the waiting servants.¹⁰ Again, it was Peter who called attention to the withered fig tree.¹¹ Present on the Mount of Transfiguration along with the two sons of Zebedee, Peter was the one who proposed the establishment of three tabernacles.¹²

⁴Matt. 16:16; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20. ⁵Mark 8:33.

⁶Matt. 19:27; Mark 10:28; Luke 18:28. ⁷Luke 8:45.

⁸John 6:68f. ⁹Matt. 15:15.

¹⁰Luke 12:41. ¹¹Mark 10:21.

¹²Mark 9:5.

In the group of four, including also James, John, and Andrew, it was Peter who asked Jesus about the meaning of His startling words about the temple.¹³ It was Peter who objected to Christ's washing of the disciples' feet.¹⁴ Peter was the one who asked the Beloved Disciple to find out from Jesus the name of the traitor.¹⁵ Again, it was Peter who loudly protested his fidelity to Jesus, to which all the disciples agreed.¹⁶

As Peter played the role of spokesman, we find instances where he was spoken to in behalf of the Twelve. In Luke Jesus spoke to Peter in behalf of the rest of the disciples when He said,

Simon, Simon, behold Satan has asked for you in order to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail, and when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.¹⁷

Even though Jesus talked directly to Peter, He purposely linked the rest of the disciples with him. The Greek form shows us that. The quotation is "Satan has asked for you (plural) in order to sift you (plural)." In this example, as in the one above, Jesus directed the saying, which was meant for all, only to Peter; but as He continued, His special charge obviously referred to Peter alone: "Strengthen your brothers!" Again in Gethsemane¹⁸ Jesus turned to Peter with the reproachful question whether he could not watch with Him

¹³Mark 13:3.

¹⁴John 13:8ff.

¹⁵John 13:21.

¹⁶Mark 14:29-31.

¹⁷Luke 22:31.

¹⁸Mark 14:37; Matt. 26:40.

one hour. The sons of Zebedee, who were also present, were obviously included in the address.

Even the outside world recognized Peter as representative of the disciples. It was to Peter that the collectors of the Temple tax in Capernaum came asking, "Does your Master pay the tax?"¹⁹

It was Peter who on a number of occasions came to Jesus with questions which very possibly all the disciples wished to have answered. For example, he asked²⁰ "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother who sins against me? Until seven times?" At another time Peter asked, "Lord, do you speak this parable to us, or also to all?"²¹ On several occasions one Gospel writer shows all the disciples as asking the question while the parallel passage of another Gospel shows only Peter as asking.²²

According to all three Synoptic Gospels Peter played the role of spokesman among the Twelve. This verifies the fact that Peter was given a special distinction within the circle of the Twelve by the entire ancient tradition behind the Synoptics. However, we must add, as Cullmann observes:

While in all these passages Peter is given prominence in the total group of disciples, he always appears as

¹⁹Matt. 17:24.

²⁰Matt. 18:21.

²¹Luke 12:41.

²²Cf. Mark 7:17 with Matt. 15:15; cf. Matt. 21:20 with Mark 11:21.

their spokesman in dialog with Christ. Apart from this relation to Christ he never plays, as he does in the later literature, a leading role.²³

In the Inner Circle

Every time a small inner group of disciples is referred to in the New Testament, Peter is always one of them and is always named first.²⁴ Peter, James, and John are the most frequently mentioned inner group. They are mentioned on the occasion of the miraculous draught of fish.²⁵ Only these three are permitted to enter the house of Jairus, the ruler of the synagog, when Jesus raised his daughter from the dead.²⁶ Only these three accompanied Jesus to the Mount of Transfiguration.²⁷ Again, it was the same three whom Jesus took with Him into the Garden of Gethsemane when He went apart to pray.²⁸

Andrew is mentioned together with Peter and the sons of Zebedee²⁹ regarding a question about the time of the destruction of the temple. Matthew indicates that the disciples asked the question,³⁰ while Luke credits the question to

²³Oscar Cullmann, Peter--Disciple, Apostle, Martyr (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1953), pp. 26-27.

²⁴Mark 5:37; 9:2; 13:3; 14:33.

²⁵Luke 5:10

²⁶Mark 5:37; Luke 8:51.

²⁷Matt. 17:1; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:27.

²⁸Mark 14:33; Matt. 26:37.

²⁹Mark 13:3.

³⁰Matt. 24:3.

unidentified "some."³¹ On another occasion Peter and John are mentioned as a special committee of two to prepare the Passover.³²

As the Rock

Peter's role as leader is certainly enhanced by Christ's words after Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, in which he affirmed, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."³³ At this point our Lord identified Peter with the Rock on which the Church is founded. Peter's strong confession, however noble it was, was but a stage on the way to the full understanding that was needed as the basis for the apostolic Church. His later denial of Christ, when our Lord was on trial, showed that Peter needed more than he possessed at that time to carry out his apostolic functions. Peter became fully equipped to be the leader of the early Church only after the resurrection of Christ, which gave him his basic witness.

The Rest of the Twelve are Associated with Peter

The leading role of Peter is further reflected where he is singled out and the rest of the disciples are mentioned as a group associated with him. The expression: "Simon and those with him" is used in connection with the disciples' seeking out Jesus for prayer as He left Capernaum.³⁴ Again

³¹Luke 21:5.

³²Luke 22:8.

³³Matt. 16:16.

³⁴Mark 1:36.

we are told that Peter and those who were with him replied to Jesus when He asked concerning who in the crowd had touched Him.³⁵ Once again, "Peter and those who were with him," that is, James and John, were very tired on the Mount of Transfiguration.³⁶ The angel at the empty tomb³⁷ used a similar appellation when it instructed the women to "tell His disciples and Peter." Behind all of these statements is the commonly known fact that when the disciples acted or spoke, it was Peter who normally took the lead or acted as spokesman.

First in the Listing of the Disciples

Peter also occupied a very outstanding place in all four lists of the apostles which have been preserved for us.³⁸ While all four lists vary in detail, all have this in common that they put Peter's name in first position. Indeed, in Matthew's Gospel he is presented as prôtos, "first."³⁹ Also in every instance when a small inner group of disciples is referred to, as mentioned previously, Peter is one of them and is named first.

³⁵Luke 8:45.

³⁶Luke 9:32.

³⁷Mark 16:7.

³⁸Mark 3:16; Matt. 10:2; Luke 6:14; Acts 1:13.

³⁹Matt. 10:2.

First Witness to the Resurrection

The earliest written report of the resurrection appearances, St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians,⁴⁰ states that the first post-resurrection appearance of the Lord was "to Cephas." Luke's Gospel agrees with this point⁴¹ that it was to Peter, the one who had been instructed to strengthen his brethren⁴² that Jesus first appeared. By this early appearance to Peter, Jesus showed His compassion as well as His forgiveness to the penitent disciple. The central work of the disciples, who soon were to become apostles of Christ, was to be a "witness to His resurrection."⁴³ It is only fitting that the "first"⁴⁴ of the Apostles also be the first to see the risen Lord. Peter then was equipped to do what Jesus had instructed him to do. He was prepared to begin the bold witness which was so important in the growth of the apostolic Church.

Other Ways in Which Prominence is Shown

The prominence of Peter appears also in other ways in the Synoptic Gospels. Always quick to take the initiative, Peter was the one who volunteered to walk to Jesus on the water. This occurred when Christ appeared to them during the very

⁴⁰1 Cor. 15:3-8.

⁴²Luke 22:32.

⁴⁴Matt. 10:2.

⁴¹Luke 24:34.

⁴³Acts 1:22.

early hours of the morning on the Sea of Galilee.⁴⁵ Likewise, as the disciples were gathered at the Sea of Galilee after the Lord's resurrection,⁴⁶ it was at Peter's suggestion, "I am going fishing," that the disciples went out on the Sea in order to catch some fish. Again, it was Peter's house in Capernaum to which Jesus went.⁴⁷ It was Peter's boat which Christ used as a point from which to present His teaching.⁴⁸ It was Peter who made the stirring confession of faith that Jesus is the Christ.⁴⁹ It was up to Peter to rally the disciples again after they had been scattered following Jesus' arrest.⁵⁰ Despite Peter's three-fold denial of Christ, it was he to whom the risen Lord first appeared,⁵¹ and whose task it was to strengthen the brethren.

Preeminence Somewhat De-emphasized by Mark

Matthew and Luke seem to ascribe a slightly more distinct preeminence to Peter among the apostles than Mark does. James Gray explains this by suggesting that it is probable that Mark's Gospel is based largely on Petrine sources and was very possibly even reviewed by Peter and written under his

⁴⁵Matt. 14:28.

⁴⁶John 21:3.

⁴⁷Matt. 8:14; Mark 1:29; Luke 4:38.

⁴⁸Luke 5:3.

⁴⁹Matt. 16:16; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20.

⁵⁰Luke 22:31-32.

⁵¹Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:15.

direction.⁵² If this is the case, it is certainly a commentary on Peter's integrity and personal humility. Matthew and Luke have included certain passages which emphasize Peter's leadership, which are omitted by Mark.⁵³ Mark ascribes certain words to the disciples in general which Matthew and Luke attribute to Peter.⁵⁴ In another instance, Peter is expressly mentioned by Luke as one of the disciples sent to prepare for the Passover while Mark gives no name.⁵⁵

Despite these differences, there is no real discrepancy between the three Synoptic Gospels on this matter. All of them ascribe to Peter a distinct priority among the disciples. This priority is found in Mark just as certainly as in Matthew and in Luke. The combined witness of the Synoptists shows Peter's outstanding position among the disciples.

Peter and the "Beloved Disciple" According to the Fourth Gospel

The Fourth Gospel presents a somewhat different picture of Peter's position. The outstanding role of the first disciple, which is unchallenged in the Synoptics, is somewhat challenged by the appearance of the "Beloved Disciple," who seems to enter into a certain competition with Peter. However, even though

⁵²James Gray, "Peter, Simon," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, edited by James Orr (Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915), col. 2349.

⁵³Matt. 14:28-31; 16:17-19; 17:24-27; 18:21; Luke 5:3; 12:41; 22:32; 24:12,34.

⁵⁴Cf. Matt. 15:15 and Luke 8:45 with Mark 7:17,31.

⁵⁵Cf. Luke 22:8 with Mark 14:13.

this Gospel emphasizes the close relationship between Peter and John, nevertheless, it never directly denies Peter's special role within the group of the Twelve. Here also, for example, we have Peter appearing as spokesman for the disciples.⁵⁶ Also in this Gospel Peter stands out clearly as the "Rock" and as the solemnly appointed shepherd of the flock.

There is, however, a tendency to lessen Peter's leadership role in that the Gospel writer presents the special role of the "Beloved Disciple" beside the unique position of Peter. That the Fourth Gospel accepts the fact of Peter's preeminence despite the special position of the "Beloved Disciple" appears to be strong proof that this fact was so firmly founded in the early Church that it could not be directly denied or buried in silence, but only minimized. John's Gospel does not oppose Peter's unique position. It does, however, point out that the position of the "Beloved Disciple" is also unique in some respects.

The emphasis on the "Beloved Disciple" appears in a particular way in the Passion story. At the Last Supper⁵⁷ Peter had to turn to the "Beloved Disciple" who was lying on the Lord's breast in order to find out from Jesus who the betrayer would be. Again, it was the "Beloved Disciple" who entered the court of the High Priest with Jesus while Peter remained outside the gate.⁵⁸ Also, at the foot of the

⁵⁶John 6:66ff.; 13:36.

⁵⁷John 13:24.

⁵⁸John 18:15.

cross it was the "Beloved Disciple," and not Peter, who was present. The Beloved Disciple is distinguished in a particular way in the "word" which Jesus spoke to him from the cross: "Behold your mother."⁵⁹ The "Beloved Disciple" came first to the grave, even though Peter was the first to enter.⁶⁰ The "Beloved Disciple" then followed Peter into the grave, and it is significant that it is recorded of him that he "believes" at once when he has seen the evidence of the risen Lord.⁶¹ The writer of the Fourth Gospel cited Andrew and an unnamed disciple, both former followers of the Baptist, as the first disciples of Jesus.⁶² Here also, Peter is not the "first" disciple. The unnamed disciple is probably John. If this is the case, the writer probably wished merely to show in another way how he himself is "first." Again, Andrew was shown to have uttered the confession of Jesus as the Messiah at the very beginning of the Gospel,⁶³ while Peter only later makes his stirring confession:⁶⁴ "You have the words of eternal life; . . . You are the Holy One of God." Yet, it must be said that the Fourth Gospel recognized Peter's title, "Rock," and placed the event of his naming at its very beginning.⁶⁵ The placement of Peter's confession in Chapter VI, then, gives this decisive expression of faith an emphasis all its own.

⁵⁹John 19:27.

⁶⁰John 20:4.

⁶¹John 20:8.

⁶²John 1:40.

⁶³John 1:41.

⁶⁴John 6:68-69.

⁶⁵John 1:42.

The importance of the "Beloved Disciple" again is evident in the Resurrection Chapter.⁶⁶ Here Peter is named first in the list of disciples who were present as Peter appeared at the Sea of Galilee, but the "Beloved Disciple" was the first to recognize the Lord. Again, Peter was the first to go to Him. Once again, we find the paralleling of the two unique positions of Peter and John. Later on in the same chapter the risen Lord gives to each of these two disciples a unique position for the future. Peter is given the office of shepherd, while it is intimated that John will outlive Peter. The greater longevity of John seems to indicate that he, too, will have a special task to fulfil--howbeit, of a different sort.

In the Fourth Gospel the Beloved Disciple seems to have a certain preeminence because of his sympathy with the mind of Jesus. At the same time the writer of the Fourth Gospel brings Peter into prominence by depicting his actions. Assuming that John's Gospel was written a generation later than the Synoptics, there seems to be an indication that Peter's importance among the early Christian churches was constantly on the increase. The writer always closely associated himself with Peter. Peter was probably long dead at the time of this writing, probably having been crucified.⁶⁷ John had long survived Peter and was probably writing at least a generation

⁶⁶John 21.

⁶⁷John 21:18.

later. Thus, the Fourth Gospel gives evidence that Peter was honored by the Church above all the other disciples of our Lord. Also, because John's Gospel tends to emphasize the "Beloved Disciple," it confirms the preeminent position of Peter as presented in the Synoptic Gospels.

In conclusion, Peter, according to the united witness of the Gospel tradition, occupies a special representative position among the disciples of Jesus.

Peter's Temperament and Faith

When Andrew brought his brother Simon to Jesus, our Lord looked on him and said, "You are Simon, the son of Jonas. You shall be called Cephas."⁶⁸ It seems natural to infer that Jesus meant to indicate different sides of Peter's character by giving these names together in this fashion. By calling him "Peter" our Lord meant to indicate that this man would be firm and steadfast and was not to be overthrown, even though he would be severely tried. He was to become, under the influence of his Master, a man with permanence and stability, even though within his own nature he was weak and vacillating. So, we may expect to find that Simon as a natural man had occasional weaknesses and failings with stubbornness and changeability, while Peter, as he was united with Christ, the living Rock, would remain firm and immovable. Commenting on Simon Peter's occasional displays of weakness, Bauer says,

⁶⁸John 1:42.

"He was at least not always a model of rock-like firmness."⁶⁹

It may seem strange at first impression that Christ should give the title "Rock" to one whose nature showed considerable change and mutability. Yet, Christ saw far beneath the surface and grasped the strength and stability that underlay the inconstant and changing outer facade.

Many examples of Peter's faith, subsequent weakness, and then renewal of strength are found in the Gospels. In the account of his walking on the water⁷⁰ his erstwhile bold faith gave way until the outstretched hand of his protecting Master rescued him from sinking into the water. The strong faith of Peter was not unmixed with desires for earthly power. Evidences of this are seen from Christ's first announcement of His sufferings, which He made at Caesarea Philippi, until the end of His Passion. Peter's alternating strength and weakness appears in ever-increasing clearness.

Peter earned the rebuke of the Lord by arguing the necessity of His announced future sufferings.⁷¹ Yet, when he was on the Mount of Transfiguration, he wanted to make permanent the glory that was there revealed to him.⁷² The desire to

⁶⁹Walter Bauer, "Petros," A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, translated and edited by W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 660.

⁷⁰Matt. 14:28-31.

⁷¹Matt. 16:23-24; Mark 8:33.

⁷²Matt. 17:3; Mark 9:5; Luke 9:33.

extend forgiveness as far as possible was again typical of Peter. Even in this he fell far short of the Christian ideal.⁷³

When Peter reminded Christ how both he and the rest of the disciples had left everything in order to follow him,⁷⁴ he seemed very fearless. However, as the Passion approached, Peter became more fearsome, as will be seen from his later denials. Despite Christ's warning that Peter would deny Him, he vowed to remain faithful even unto death.⁷⁵ He had overestimated his strength; for he couldn't even stay awake with his Master in Gethsemane for a very short time.⁷⁶ While he appeared brave and daring for a moment when he drew his sword in the Gethsemane skirmish,⁷⁷ nevertheless, when he saw that his efforts were futile, he fled with the rest of the disciples.⁷⁸

Peter made a quick recovery and appeared in the palace of the high priest where his witness was put to a severe test. The result was that he denied Jesus vehemently three times. However, as the Tempter was desiring to sift him as wheat, Peter's faith was preserved from failing by the special intercession of Christ. Yet, despite all of Peter's vacillation and instability, he never really lost faith in Christ for a moment. When he became aware of what he had almost done by his denial, his intense

⁷³Matt. 18:21-22.

⁷⁴Matt. 19:27; Mark 10:28; Luke 18:28.

⁷⁵Matt. 26:33ff.; Mark 14:29ff.; Luke 23:33-34; John 13:37-38.

⁷⁶Matt. 26:40; Luke 22:45.

⁷⁷Matt. 26:51; Mark 14:47; Luke 22:50; John 18:10-11.

⁷⁸Matt. 26:56.

feeling of shame and sorrow kept him away from Christ until after the resurrection. Then, however, the stability of Peter was renewed. With a great burst of energy he ran with the Beloved Disciple to the tomb of the risen Lord and was seen to be revived in spirit as the Lord appeared to him shortly after His resurrection.

The temperament of Peter as explained here was unmistakably connected with his position of preeminence among the disciples. There was much in his character which marked him as a representative man. In him were found both the qualities of strength and of weakness, of excellence and of failure. In all this he exemplified the changes which the natural man undergoes as he is gradually changed into the spiritual man under the personal guidance and influence of the Lord. Stauffer is certainly correct when he says of Peter, "He is no prize specimen' either as thinker or as a character. He speaks only the 'things that be of men.' Satan himself can talk through him."⁷⁹ By such a statement we do not intend to attack Peter's privileged position. On the contrary, we merely express the position of the Gospels, which makes very clear Peter's position of privilege as a man whom God made into a pillar of strength. Of Peter our Lord says,⁸⁰ "Blessed are you Simon bar-Jona; for flesh and blood has not revealed it unto you, but my Father Who is in heaven."

⁷⁹Ethelbert Stauffer, New Testament Theology (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1955), p. 31.

⁸⁰Matt. 16:17.

Thus, we can summarize Peter's character by saying that, despite all the inherent weaknesses and failures of his makeup, he was made strong and courageous by his loving Master, Who molded him into a sturdy tool which would seldom fail and would be used mightily in the expansion of His kingdom.

Rivalry for Position Among the Twelve

The Twelve Disciples Misunderstand "Greatness"

All of the Synoptics present the incident of the disciples disputing among themselves regarding who was the greatest.⁸¹ It probably took place in Peter's house in Capernaum, which was a favorite stopping place for Jesus. No doubt they had been disputing along the way to the house as they came from the neighborhood of Caesarea Philippi. Perhaps the preference shown to Peter, James, and John at the Transfiguration was the trigger for this dispute. Or, perhaps, Peter's aggressiveness in suggesting the building of the three tabernacles on the Mount led to this argument about precedence. No doubt, the disciples, as can readily be inferred from other passages in the Gospels, were still of a mistaken notion regarding Jesus' kingdom. They possibly were vying for preference in the supposed political kingdom that many hoped Jesus would establish.

In this connection Jesus taught them the lesson of humility through a small child. He told the disciples, "If any

⁸¹Mark 9:33-37; Matt. 18:1-5; Luke 9:46-48.

man would be first, he shall be last of all and minister of all."⁸² He continued, "Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."⁸³ It is obvious that at this point of Christ's ministry none of the Twelve was acknowledged as leader.

Also at the last Passover Meal of Jesus there was a contention among the disciples as to which of them should be considered the greatest.⁸⁴ The dispute arose over places of honor at the table. Each one wanted the place that was in accord with his self-evaluated position. Coming at the eve of His death, the selfish ambition of His disciples must have cut Jesus to the quick. The strife went on after the meal began.⁸⁵ For it was during supper that Jesus rose, took the towel, girded Himself, and poured water into a basis and began to wash the disciples' feet. After the Lord had washed the feet of them all in humble service to them, Jesus interpreted to them the meaning of His action. Thus, He again showed them that true greatness lay in humble service. This is further proof that even in this late stage of Jesus' life no one of the Twelve was acknowledged as being the undisputed leader of the others.

James and John Vie for Position

A third recorded incident in the Gospels tells of the

⁸²Mark 9:36.

⁸³Matt. 18:4.

⁸⁴Luke 22:24.

⁸⁵John 13:2.

ambition of the mother of James and John for her two sons.⁸⁶ Immediately after Jesus had indicated to His disciples that He would soon be offered up, the mother of James and John came, asking a special favor. The timing of this request may seem very cold and unsympathetic. However, in the light of the disciples' mistaken conception of the Messianic kingdom, and with the supposed opportunities for advancement and power, this seemed a logical time for the request for position. The mother of James and John bluntly asked for the two best places for them--one on the right hand and the other on the left hand of Jesus in His glory.⁸⁷ The two sons expressed the confidence that they would be able to drink the cup of suffering and to be baptized with the baptism which Jesus was to receive. (To be sure, James and John were to receive their share of suffering. James was to become the first of the Twelve to be killed,⁸⁸ and John would die of old age, as tradition has it.) It is clear that at this time James and John did not recognize a primacy of Peter or of any of the others, who could be properly angry with them for their presumption. Jesus again found it necessary to teach the disciples a lesson of humility, telling them, "Whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister, and whosoever would be first among you shall be servant of all."⁸⁹

⁸⁶Matt. 20:20.

⁸⁷Mark 10:37.

⁸⁸Acts 12:2.

⁸⁹Mark 10:33f.; Matt. 20:26f.

As one reads John's Gospel the thought suggests itself that John very probably had serious thoughts of his own leadership role among the disciples. The Synoptics also show his desire for acclaim upon another occasion besides the request by his mother, which was mentioned above. John is presented as seeking praise from Jesus for his effort to prevent a man outside of the circle of disciples from casting out demons in the name of Jesus.⁹⁰ Instead of praise John received rebuke.

Along with Peter and James, John belonged to the inner circle and was honored by being permitted to participate in such events as the occasion of the raising of Jairus' daughter, the Transfiguration, and the watch with Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. John is sent with Peter to arrange for the last Passover meal.⁹¹ John runs along with Peter to the tomb in order to see for himself about the news of Christ's resurrection.⁹² John is with Peter at the Sea of Galilee,⁹³ and again in Jerusalem at Pentecost.⁹⁴ Robertson feels that the chief claim of John for precedence is the fact that he rested his head on Jesus' bosom during the Passover Meal.⁹⁵ However, he goes on to allow that even this intimate fellowship with Jesus and this important position at the table with Him does not prove actual leadership of the Twelve.⁹⁶ It seems that

⁹⁰Mark 9:38f.; Luke 9:49f.

⁹¹Luke 22:8.

⁹²John 20:2ff.

⁹³John 21:7.

⁹⁴Acts 3:1.

⁹⁵A. T. Robertson, Epochs in the Life of Simon Peter (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933), p. 108. Cf. John 13:23.

⁹⁶Robertson, p. 108.

John is more concerned with his close bond of love with Christ than he is with any title of leadership.

Judas Shows Ambition

Judas Iscariot, because he carried the bag as treasurer of the Twelve,⁹⁷ may well have considered himself equal to any of the disciples in importance. He seems not to have been suspected of any criminal tendencies prior to the Last Pass-over Meal. It appears that no one else in the group held any official position. Accordingly, A. Wright argues for Judas' primacy among the Apostles.⁹⁸ Wright admits that after the crucifixion of Christ and after the death of Judas, Peter was accorded a position of leadership among the Twelve. However, he asserts that very possibly Judas' possession of the bag, the symbol of authority, put him into the leadership role prior to the crucifixion and that Peter occupied a lesser position, even though by character and action he showed himself the first. Wright goes on to suggest that as Peter was gaining ground in the race for leadership, there was a group which wanted to take the bag from Judas and give it to Peter so that he might become the leader in name as he already was in practice. Furthermore, he suggests that at the Last Supper Judas was placed in a position of honor at one side of Jesus with John on the other.⁹⁹

⁹⁷John 12:6.

⁹⁸A. Wright, "Was Judas Iscariot 'The First of the Twelve'?", Journal of Theological Studies, XVIII (Oct. 1916), pp. 32ff.

⁹⁹Ibid.

This arrangement would have enabled Judas to whisper into the ear of Jesus, "Is it I?" without being overheard by the rest of the disciples. Finally, Wright bases his argument on a translation of ho heis tôn dôdeka found in Mark 14:10, which he feels means "the chief" or "the first" of the Twelve.¹⁰⁰ As Robertson¹⁰¹ and other sound scholars suggest, the ho heis more nearly gives the meaning of "the notorious one" rather than "the first in rank." The dispute among the Twelve on the night of the Passover Meal, which followed close in point of time upon the selfish request of the mother of James and John, casts further doubt on any speculation that Judas or anyone else was accorded a position of primacy at the time of Christ's Passion and death.

It is evident that Judas had ambition for leadership. He may have had grandiose dreams regarding his position in a political kingdom which he felt Jesus would establish. Very likely, Judas' disappointment over the nature of Jesus' kingdom was one of the factors which eventually spurred him on to betrayal of his Lord. But it is impossible to argue that Judas or anyone else was recognized as the official leader of the Twelve disciples at the time of Jesus' death.

Activities of the Rest of the Twelve as Found in the Gospels

We have already discussed the leadership aspirations

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁰¹Robertson, p. 102.

of James, John, and Judas at some length. Peter has been referred to in his leadership roles. It remains for us to say a few words--for the Gospels speak briefly about them--regarding the following disciples: Andrew, Philip, Nathaniel, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean.

Andrew is mentioned as a disciple of John the Baptist,¹⁰² also in connection with Jesus' feeding of the multitude,¹⁰³ and again together with Philip when the Greeks desired to see Jesus,¹⁰⁴ in connection with his call,¹⁰⁵ and when together with Peter, James, and John he asked for an explanation of Jesus' statement regarding the destruction of the temple.¹⁰⁶

Philip is described¹⁰⁷ as a citizen of "Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter." On another occasion the Greeks are depicted as approaching Philip, who in turn approached Andrew (as mentioned above).¹⁰⁸ The final mention of Philip is at the Last Supper where he asked of Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father."¹⁰⁹

Of Nathaniel we know that he was brought to Jesus by Philip and that he was astonished at Jesus' having seen him under the fig tree.¹¹⁰ We again hear of Nathaniel at the end of John's Gospel as being present with other disciples

¹⁰²John 1:40.

¹⁰³John 6:8.

¹⁰⁴John 12:21.

¹⁰⁵Mark 1:16.

¹⁰⁶Mark 13:3.

¹⁰⁷John 1:44.

¹⁰⁸John 12:21.

¹⁰⁹John 14:8.

¹¹⁰John 1:45.

at the Sea of Galilee when Jesus appeared to them after His resurrection.¹¹¹

Matthew is so-called in Mark's list of the Twelve.¹¹² On the occasion of Matthew's being called by Christ to discipleship Mark calls him "Levi, the son of Alphaeus."¹¹³ Luke on this same occasion refers to him as "a publican, named Levi."¹¹⁴ Matthew's high position of regard by early tradition is affirmed by his authorship of the First Gospel.

Thomas, who is called "the Twin," is described as ready to die with Jesus.¹¹⁵ He is portrayed as doubting the resurrection.¹¹⁶ He is also presented as being with the other disciples at the Sea of Galilee at the time of their meeting with Jesus there after the resurrection.¹¹⁷

Other than including them in the lists of the disciples, the Gospels say nothing of James, the son of Alphaeus, or of Thaddeus, or Simon the Cananaean.

Of none of the following disciples: Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus, and Simon the Cananaean, do we have any note in the Gospels that they assumed roles of leadership or were considered as leaders among the Apostles. In fact, up to the time of Christ's death no one is accepted as leader with position or authority over the rest.

¹¹¹ John 21:2.

¹¹² Mark 3:18.

¹¹³ Mark 2:14.

¹¹⁴ Luke 5:27.

¹¹⁵ John 11:16.

¹¹⁶ John 20:24-27.

¹¹⁷ John 21:2.

Peter's Leadership does not Imply Supremacy

The early Church generally regarded Peter as the representative and natural leader of the apostolic body. This is a very distinctly different position from that which makes Peter the head or the governor of the early Church in Christ's stead. Even at Cyprian's time when connection with the Bishop of Rome as Peter's successor was first held to be indispensable, no position of supremacy or special powers of government were attached to the primacy of rank that was claimed. As primus inter pares Peter held no distinct office and never claimed any powers which did not also belong to his fellow apostles in an equal measure.¹¹⁸ Supremacy over his fellow disciples was never conferred upon Peter by Jesus, nor did he claim it himself, nor did his associates ever concede such supremacy.¹¹⁹

During Jesus' lifetime Peter's preeminence among his fellow-disciples was that of being their spokesman or their representative in both good and bad actions. He never gave them any special commissions in the name of Jesus, nor does Christ ever entrust him with such functions for the period

¹¹⁸John M'Clintock and James Strong, "Peter," Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1891), VIII, 6.

¹¹⁹Matt. 23:8-12; Acts 15:13-14; 2 Cor. 12:11; Gal. 2:11.

of His own earthly life. The three passages¹²⁰ in which he is given a special responsibility toward his fellow disciples all refer to the future, to a time after his Lord's death. In this way the Gospel tradition distinguishes between Peter's position before and after Jesus' death.

Peter's character and temperament fitted him well for a natural leadership among the Twelve disciples. He had an enthusiasm and boldness which permitted him to walk on the sea, but that courage soon faded as fear seized upon him. Likewise, he proudly confessed his loyalty to his Lord, but speedily denied Him in the moment of peril. Yet, it was just this character with its many contradictions which Jesus chose to select for future leadership among the Apostles.

Peter's precedence certainly did not depend upon the priority of his call, or it would have gone to Andrew or to the other disciple who first followed Jesus. No doubt, it didn't depend upon seniority either, even though it is very possible that Peter was older than his fellow-disciples. Christ's special designation alone satisfactorily explains why Peter is named first in every list of the Apostles, why he is generally addressed by Christ as the representative of the Apostles, why he is always included in the inner circle of the disciples, and why on most solemn occasions he speaks on their behalf.

¹²⁰Matt. 16:16ff.; Luke 22:31f.; John 21:15ff.

There is no simple answer to the question whether Peter's preeminence can be explained by the giving of his new name, or whether the giving of the name explains his actual preeminence.¹²¹ The special designation which was given to Peter as "Rock-man" rests upon Jesus' act of grace--an act which doubtlessly strengthened Peter in the representative role that his natural characteristics had already marked him out for.

After Jesus' death Peter's unique position presented itself in another way. The unstable and vacillating disciple became the firm and steady apostle of the risen Lord who only rarely showed the signs of his former weakness. Of the significance of his commission for leadership and of that firm leadership in relation to his brethren we shall speak in subsequent chapters.

¹²¹Cullmann, p. 32.

CHAPTER IV

PETER, THE ROCK-MAN

What is the Significance of Simon's New Name?

Peter's Confession, His Naming, and the Explanation of His Name

Peter's original names were Symeon (Hebrew) and Simon (Greek). It seems that during Jesus' ministry he was generally known as Simon. We, however, know him under the new name which Jesus gave him. This name, derived from the Aramaic, was Cephas, and its Greek translation was Petros (Peter).

The most significant use of Simon's new name is found in Matthew 16:17-19, where the significance of the name, Peter, is explained. Jesus here called him Peter because of his sturdy confession of faith after Jesus had asked the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answered for the disciples, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." This confession, which had been revealed by God to Peter through faith in Jesus Christ, led to Jesus' explanation of the significance of His foremost disciple's name.

A question that has often been put forth regarding the naming of Peter is "When did he receive this new title?" The Gospel writers indeed indicate his naming by Christ at varying stages in their respective accounts. Matthew indicates

Christ's naming of Peter in Chapter 16 after he had confessed Christ as the Son of the living God. Mark and Luke¹ first present the naming of Peter at the time when the Twelve were appointed to be with Jesus. Since Mark's Gospel does not use the name "Peter" until the time of the appointment of the Twelve, this could indicate that it was at this time in Christ's ministry that Peter received his title. Many people seem to be confused by the apparent conflict in the times that the Gospel writers chose to first mention Peter's new name. However, I believe that these passages can easily be fit together. In the first chapter of John's Gospel Jesus used the future tense when He said to the newly recruited disciple, "You shall be called Cephas." He does not say "You are Cephas," but He says "You shall be called Cephas."

Luke and Mark indicate that Simon's new name, Peter, was first given by Christ in connection with the appointment of the Twelve. It was not, however, until after Peter's confession of faith that our Lord explained the significance of Peter's new name, as He did in the Matthew 16 passage. He told him that his name, Peter, stood for the solid rock upon which Christ would build His Church.

The name Cephas, or Peter, seems to gradually take the place of the name "Simon" in the New Testament. Perhaps it was a distinctive name and not as common as Simon. More probably, it was increasingly used because the followers of

¹Mark 3:14-16; Luke 6:14.

Christ knew that it carried with it a significance not only for its bearer but also for the life of the entire Church.

The New Name Has Special Significance

While the name actually given to Simon was Cephas, if we follow the argument that it was first given in Aramaic, it was not shown at that time that this name should be expressed in Greek translation as Peter. However, Filson's suggestion sounds plausible. He asserts that just as in the past this disciple had had both a Semitic name, Symeon, and a Greek name, Simon, so also the name, Peter, Greek for "Rock," probably began to be used almost immediately.²

Cullmann³ suggests that we would appreciate the significance of the name-giving better if in English we turned the name, Simon Peter, into "Simon Rock." A parallel development is seen in the way in which Jesus received the title "Christ." The custom of giving an additional name of significance to an individual which pointed to the promise in a particular situation and placed an obligation upon its bearer was common among the Jews.⁴ The Gospel according to Mark agrees that the name, Peter, was given by Christ to Simon even as He had

²F. V. Filson, "Peter," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), III, 751.

³Oscar Cullmann, Peter--Disciple, Apostle, Martyr (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1953), p. 20.

⁴Ibid., p. 19.

given the title "Boanerges," "the Sons of Thunder," to the sons of Zebedee.⁵

The Gospels do not say precisely why Jesus gave Simon the new name of "Rock." The name was, to be sure, more than a simple description of his character; for he was an impulsive man, liable to failure. The giving of the new name was a solemn and significant act; it did have some serious meaning. Very probably it expressed in part Peter's future importance in the Church and a challenge for him to live up to his capabilities and the trust which would be given him by his Master.⁶ It probably also indicated that he would have a new role and be responsible for giving strength and steadiness to his co-workers, the disciples,⁷ who would join with him in laying the foundations of the Church. To be sure, the giving of the name, "Rock," by Jesus is one of the very important facts to be kept in mind in our consideration of Peter's function. The name itself suggests that his position is unique.

While the giving of the name, Peter, as well as its meaning has a clear and virtually undisputed significance, the meaning of the term as it is repeated in the same utterance of Christ is the source of much dispute.

⁵Mark 3:16,17.

⁶Infra, pp. 69-78.

⁷Infra, pp. 71, 72; Luke 22:31-32.

What is the Meaning of "Upon This Rock?"

Etymological Considerations

It makes a significant difference in the interpretation of this passage whether one begins with the presupposition that the original quotation by Christ was spoken in Aramaic or that it was spoken in Greek. First, let us briefly consider the arguments of the proponents of the view that these words have their background in the Aramaic language. Cullmann⁸ argues that these words were spoken first in the Aramaic and that when Christ said, "You are Peter and upon this Rock I will build My Church," He used the same word *Kepha*, for both words, "Peter" and "rock." His statement, accordingly was: "You are Kepha and upon this kepha I will build My Church." According to this interpretation Peter is that upon which Christ's Church is to be built. Cullmann gathers supporting evidence for his argument by citing the Semitic character of other expressions in the passage. For example, the "bar-Jonah" (son of Jonah), the expression "flesh and blood" (for "men), and the word-grouping "bind and loose" are Semitic in background.⁹ Cullmann thus is in agreement with the scholars of the Roman Catholic Church on the meaning of "upon this Rock." The Catholic Encyclopedia, however, is much more emphatic. It asserts as follows:

⁸Cullmann, p. 185.

⁹Ibid.

By the word "Rock" the Savior . . . meant only Peter, as is so much more apparent in Aramaic in which the same word (Kipha) is used for "Peter" and "Rock." His statement then admits of but one explanation, namely, that He wishes to make Peter head of the whole community of those who believed in Him as the true Messiah; that through this foundation (Peter) the Kingdom of Christ would be unconquerable; that the spiritual guidance of the faithful was placed in the hands of Peter, as the special representative of Christ.¹⁰

Warren rejects¹¹ the argument for an Aramaic background for the word Peter. He contends that it is too much to assume that just because the Syriac (Kipho) is repeated in identical form in this passage, that one can assume that the text of the sister Aramaic language would follow the same procedure. Unfortunately, the Aramaic text is no longer extant. Warren continues by suggesting that even though the noun forms were the same, that a distinction could still have been made in the pronoun "this," which has variant masculine and feminine forms in Aramaic. He further states that that is exactly what happens in Syriac version of this passage which is extant.¹² Julius Mantey¹³ points out that there is no proof for the argument that the two words in question were identical in Aramaic since there is no extant New Testament version in Aramaic. He continues by suggesting that even though the Aramaic had only one word for "Rock,"

¹⁰J. P. Kirsch, "Peter, Saint," Catholic Encyclopedia (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911), XI, 746.

¹¹J. Warren, "Was Simon Peter the Church's Rock?," Evangelical Quarterly, XIX (July 1947), 200.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Julius R. Mantey, Was Peter a Pope? (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), pp. 21-22.

nevertheless, Matthew, when he put the conversation into Greek, used two words for "Rock," and his is the only extant record of that statement. Besides, he suggests that the Aramaic might have used an adjective or a circumlocution with the second Kipha, which became unnecessary when the Greek petra was used.

Although the Aramaic elements of the passage to which Cullmann alluded¹⁴ make the arguments for an Aramaic background attractive, this writer must conclude on the basis of the facts that the argument of those who build their case upon the Aramaic expression is, at best, uncertain.

Let us now turn to the various considerations that come before us in dealing with the Greek text that we have, which uses the two different noun forms, Petros and petra.

In considering the meaning of the word "Rock," as it is found in the Matthew 16 passage, we are faced with the reality that even though there may have been a Hebrew version or an Aramaic version of Matthew's Gospel, as some writers have said, yet we have extant only the Greek text with which to deal. Necessarily, the following points will be made on that basis.

The name Peter, comes from the Greek, Petros, which means "a piece of rock," a moveable stone;¹⁵ but the word that is translated "Rock" which is used in the expression "upon this

¹⁴Supra, p. 55.

¹⁵Joseph Henry Thayer, "Petra," A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (New York: American Book Company, 1889), p. 507.

rock" is not from the word Petros, but from another Greek word, petra, which means "bedrock," or "a mass of rock."¹⁶ Thus, our Lord was making a play on words when He addressed Peter. In effect He said, "You are a moveable stone; and upon this bedrock I will build my church."¹⁷ St. Augustine agreed with this view stating that Petros was meant to differ from petra as the part from the whole.¹⁸ William Arndt¹⁹ points out that in this passage even Jerome, the translator of the Vulgate, said, "Tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram," etc., in translating the Greek passage.

Cullmann²⁰ is in the minority among Protestant scholars when he says that there is no essential difference of meaning between Petros and petra. Even if petra originally designated live rock, while Petros meant the detached stone, he points out, this distinction was not strictly observed. He argues that the preference for the form Petros is due to the desire of the New Testament to use a masculine form for the proper name, Peter.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷E. Schuyler English, The Life and Letters of St. Peter (New York: Publication Office "Our Hope," Arno C. Gaebelin, Inc., 1941), pp. 64-65.

¹⁸Cited by Warren, p. 201.

¹⁹William Arndt, "Concerning Matt. 16:18 and Roman Inferences," Concordia Theological Monthly, XVI (August 1945), 553.

²⁰Cullmann, p. 19.

Most Protestant scholars, ranging from Calvin²¹ to Hoyer,²² make a definite point of their contention that the gender of the noun was intentionally changed by Christ to show that He now was speaking of something different. The fact that neither the Markan nor the Lucan account²³ says anything about the Church's being built on Peter seems to suggest further support for the viewpoint that the words differ in meaning; for one would expect particularly that Mark, Peter's friend and associate, would otherwise have made note of this incident somewhere in the Gospel.

From the foregoing etymological considerations one may conclude that it makes a great difference whether one bases his argument upon the possible Aramaic background or upon the extant Greek text. If one argues on the basis of the Aramaic, one may say that Peter and "the Rock" very possibly are identical. If one goes on the basis of the extant text, the Greek text, it is an open question as to what is meant by "the Rock" upon which the Church is built. However, on the basis of linguistic considerations it would seem that Christ is referring to two separate things by the terms Petros and petra.

²¹John Calvin, Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, translated by William Pringle (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), II, 295.

²²Theodore Hoyer, "The Papacy," The Abiding Word (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), II, 730-731.

²³Mark 8:27-34; Luke 9:18-23.

Variant Interpretations

Historically, the interpretations of the identity of "the Rock" in this passage have been many and varied. Let us examine the more outstanding and plausible ones.

Christ as the Rock

One of the most famous of the Fathers, St. Augustine, in his later years came out strongly for the view that the Rock on which the Church is built is Christ, whom Simon and all the Church confessed. He stated that Petros was meant to differ from petra as part from the whole and that Peter was to regard himself as a stone which was a part of the bedrock which is Christ.²⁴ Of further interest is the fact that the translator Jerome also regarded Christ as the Rock referred to in Matthew 16:16-18.²⁵

This interpretation is consistent with other related Scripture passages. St. Paul, when commenting on Moses' smiting of the rock in the wilderness from which the water flowed, showed that the rock there was a symbol of the Son of God. Paul puts it into these words: "And did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them; and that rock was Christ."²⁶ Elsewhere

²⁴Cited by Warren, p. 201.

²⁵Arndt, p. 556.

²⁶1 Cor. 10:4.

St. Paul refers to Christians as "built upon the foundation of Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone."²⁷ Again, he says, "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."²⁸ Peter himself uses the picture of Christ as the Rock as he speaks thus to the Jewish Sanhedrin:

Jesus Christ of Nazareth . . . is the stone which has been set at naught by you builders, which has become the head of the corner. . . . There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved.²⁹

Again, writing to the churches, Peter says thus:

the Lord is gracious. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious, ye also, as living stones, are built upon a spiritual house. . . . Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious; . . . unto you, therefore, which believe, He is precious; but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense. . . .³⁰

It was not unusual for the apostles to refer to the Christ upon which their foundation rested as "the Rock" or as the "Chief Cornerstone." Upon Him the whole Church is built. By confessing Him, Peter and the rest of the Apostles became a part of the larger foundation of the Church, of which Christ is both foundation and chief cornerstone. Peter himself, being established upon Christ, the sure foundation, was now able to build up the faith of future members of the Church. Even as he confessed Christ at Caesarea Philippi, and as he bore witness

²⁷Eph. 2:20.

²⁹Acts 4:10-12.

²⁸1 Cor. 3:11.

³⁰1 Pet. 2:3-8.

to the Church during his career as a bringer of the Gospel, Peter became a part of the foundation of the Apostles on which the entire Church rests, of which Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone.

It is consistent with the theology of the New Testament that Christ is the Rock upon which the Church was built, and that Peter and the other apostles, as well as other Christians, became the foundation of faith on which their fellow men were built up as part of the Church. This building process has taken place whenever the Gospel has been brought to bear upon the lives of men in order to lead them into faith, or into increase of faith.

Peter's Confession As the Rock

The view held by the majority of the early Church Fathers regarding the meaning of "upon this rock" was that the actual confession of faith, which Peter made prior to Christ's statement, was the rock upon which the Church was built. The question of the Lord was put to all the disciples as a group. Even though the answer came from Peter, who usually served as spokesman of the group, nevertheless, it expressed the opinion and the belief of the entire group of the disciples.

The other "building" passages of the New Testament, to which we have referred above, generally speak of the apostles as a body, not of Peter alone, as the foundation of the Church. These passages are consistent in showing Christ as the chief cornerstone and foundation upon which every true disciple must and upon which Peter himself had to be built. It was Peter's

confession which showed that he was upon this Rock. At this time Peter was indeed showing forth the personal characteristic in view of which Christ had long before given him the name Peter, and which He now explained. Thus, the Fathers contended, it was not the personal Rock, Peter, of which Christ is here speaking, but the rock of the truth that Christ is the Son of the living God, which Peter had just expressed, which is the rock upon which the Church was to be built. The majority group of the Church Fathers who held that the faith professed by Peter, and not Peter himself, was "the Rock" includes Origen, Ambrose, Cyprian, Hilary, Bede, Chrysostom, and others.³¹

Billerbeck, who also shares this view, argues in his commentary³² on the basis of the assumption that the Greek text represents a mistranslation of an original Aramaic text. The correct English translation of the Aramaic would be, "I say to you, yes to you, Peter: on this rock I will build my church."³³ According to Billerbeck, Jesus did not say, "You are the rock," but rather, "I say to you, Peter, on this rock I will build my Church," by which expression He refers to His own divine Sonship in which men must believe.³⁴ Cullmann, however, believes that Billerbeck's view is purely hypothetical.³⁵

³¹"Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope," The Book of Concord, translated and edited by Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), pp. 324-325.

³²Cited by Cullmann, p. 163.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., p. 206.

³⁵Ibid.

To be sure, the argument is a difficult one to clinch in view of the fact that the Aramaic text is not available. To this writer the Scriptural references cited by the Fathers in support of their view make for a much stronger case than the hypothetical statements advanced by Billerbeck.

Peter Himself as the Rock

The belief that Peter himself personally was the Rock upon which the Church was to be built is firmly held by many. The theme of building upon a rock is common to rabbinic literature, where the Rock is variously identified with the Law, or Abraham, or Jacob, or Moses, or the Righteous, or Israel. There is also a close verbal parallel in this statement of the Midrash Jalqut:³⁶

When God looked upon Abraham who was to arise, He said, Behold I have found a rock on which I can build and found the world. Therefore He called Abraham a Rock, as is said (Isaiah 51:1), "Look unto the Rock whence ye were hewn."

As Abraham is the rock in that reference, so Peter, it is argued, is the Rock in the Matthew 16 passage. It was Peter who was the Rock, not merely his faith, though that was included, and not Christ, even though Peter would be a rock only through his relation to Christ.

Cullmann³⁷ supplies additional support with the contention that Christ refers here to the person of Peter in the

³⁶Cited by John Lowe, St. Peter (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 56-57.

³⁷Cullmann, p. 20.

same way as He had the person of the Sons of Zebedee in mind when he named them "sons of Thunder."

In the beginnings of the Church Peter was to be the key figure. All of its later stages would be built upon his pioneer witness and leadership. This is borne out by the fact that Peter on the day of Pentecost and during the whole period of the establishment of the early Church was the chief agent in the work of the ministry, in preaching both to the people of Israel as well as to the Gentiles. There was to be leadership and authority in the Church, and Peter would have the key role in laying the Church's foundation. Peter certainly did have the place of leadership among Christ's disciples. He was the outstanding member of the Twelve, the one who generally took the lead, the one to whom Christ committed the task of rallying his fellow disciples even though Peter would deny Him.³⁸ That Peter exercised such a prominent role among the apostles was by God's gift of grace. Martin Franzmann very aptly points to the initiative of God in the life of the Church and in the employment of Peter's efforts in His service as follows:

by receiving from God, by purely receptive relatedness to divine and gracious omnipotence, by committal to God as He is revealed in His Anointed--thus faith becomes power. Thus Peter the disciple walks upon the waters, and thus Peter the apostle is built into the church of the Christ as the Rock upon which the church rests as on its foundation.³⁹

³⁸Luke 22:31-32.

³⁹Martin Franzmann, Follow Me: Discipleship According to Saint Matthew (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), pp. 147f.

The Roman Catholic communion, of course, very decidedly agrees with the view that Peter is the Rock upon which the Church was built. Most proponents of this view who are not within the Roman Catholic Church, while staunchly supporting the argument that Peter personally was the Rock, also make it very clear that it does not necessarily follow that Peter had judicial supremacy over the other apostles along with his pioneering leadership or that his apostolic role could be passed on to others. They stress that no Scriptural support can be found for judicial leadership, and that Peter himself never claimed or exercised such power, but that rather, on a number of occasions, Peter showed himself in a subordinate role to some of the other apostles, as will be shown in more detail in Chapter VI. This fact, however, does not detract from the evidence that Peter did display superiority in positive personal traits, in his reputation and performance as an early teacher and preacher of Christianity, and in his pioneering leadership in the early Church.

Every Confessing Disciple as the Rock

Origen, considered by many to be the most outstanding Bible scholar of the pre-Nicean period, interpreted the words of Christ found in Matthew 16:17-19 as being addressed, not only to the disciple Peter, but to every disciple of Christ who confesses Him in the way in which Peter did.⁴⁰ For Origen the

⁴⁰Vešelin Kesich, "The Problem of Peter's Primacy," St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly, IV (1960), 14.

term "Rock" applied to every follower of Jesus Christ, who in a sense becomes "a Peter." According to his view Christ is "the Rock," and all of His followers should be called "Rocks." He refers to Ephesians 2:20 where the apostles and prophets are declared to be the foundation on which the Church is built with Jesus Christ being the Cornerstone.⁴¹ Mantey very emphatically asserts that to translate petra as applying to either Peter or Christ alone does violence to the prevalent way in which the word is used in both classical and Koine Greek. He would agree with Origen that all confessing Christians constitute a rock-like material which is suitable for the permanent structure on which the Church is built.⁴²

The Opinion of the Early Fathers on the Rock

A book entitled Quaestio, which appeared in 1870 at the time of the Vatican Council, carefully examined the opinions of the Church Fathers on the subject of divine authority on the basis of this Matthew 16 passage. This book, which was prepared by Roman Catholics, quoted eighty-five Fathers. The following statistics will give an idea regarding the variant opinions which the Fathers held. Eight of the Fathers listed interpreted the word "Rock" in the text as meaning all the apostles collectively. Sixteen Fathers held that our Lord meant Himself as the "Rock." Forty-four of these early churchmen interpreted the "Rock" as the faith

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Mantey, p. 26.

which Peter confessed; and, seventeen applied it to Peter himself.⁴³ The statements of these Fathers of the Early Christian era adequately demonstrate the great variety of opinions held then. As the figures show, the majority considered the faith which Peter confessed as "the rock." However, there was no unanimity among them on this point.

Summary

Even though there is much diversity of opinion as to the exact verbal meaning of the phrase "upon this rock," yet certain definite understandings can be drawn from this passage. Basically, these points are as follows: Peter had his name explained. His name means "Rock." He received this name because of his rock-like faith which was based upon Christ--the Rock. It is upon this Rock, the Christ, as well as through the confession of that Rock, and through the agency of men who witnessed to that Rock that the Church is built. These solid building stones include men like Peter, the other apostles, and generations of other Christians, insofar as they witnessed to the Rock Himself, Christ.

Certainly, Peter exercised the early leadership within the Church of Christ, as the Acts of the Apostles clearly

⁴³W. G. Polack, "Was the Papacy Founded in Matt. 16: 16-18?," Lutheran Witness, LXVII (Feb. 24, 1948), 55f.

evidences. Through the power given him from above he became a man of rock, a very vital part of that foundation of the apostles of which St. Paul speaks,⁴⁴ upon which the entire Church rests; but Jesus Christ Himself is the Chief Cornerstone. Christ is the basic foundation upon which the Church rests.

What Promises Did Christ Give Peter?

The Church Will Be Built

The illustration upon which Christ drew when He said, "upon this rock I will build My church," certainly is common among writers of the New Testament books. A similar building illustration was used by St. Paul,⁴⁵ as previously noted, when he wrote that the Church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets." The Apocalypse⁴⁶ speaks of the "twelve foundations of the walls of the Holy City, on which the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are written." Paul used another building picture when he refers to the "pillars."⁴⁷ From these passages it follows that the first Christians considered the apostles to be the foundation of the Church in their apostolic function. St. Peter added another dimension to this illustration when he described the work which the community is to accomplish as "building a

⁴⁴Eph. 2:20.

⁴⁶Rev. 21:14.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁷Gal. 2:9.

spiritual house" which comes into being when the members of the Church are joined as living stones to Christ, the Cornerstone.⁴⁸ The uniqueness of Christ is completely protected as this metaphor is developed.

The word "church" itself comes from the Greek ekklêsia. It does not mean a building made with stone, or an organization, or a denomination. Rather, it means those who are "called out." It refers to all those who trust in Christ alone. It means that great body of believers of which the apostles and those that they brought to the faith of Christ were members.⁴⁹ Ekklêsia, as it is used in the Septuagint, usually translates the Hebrew qahal, which, Cullmann observes, when it is "connected with the genitive Yahweh, 'of God,' always designates the people of Israel with a reference to redemptive history."⁵⁰ Another word which very possibly may be the background term to shed light on the meaning of ekklêsia is the Hebrew term kenishta. It refers to a local Jewish community, or a separate synagog.⁵¹ Campbell states that the term ekklêsia in the New Testament refers primarily to a local church.⁵² No matter what its precise background is, the word ekklêsia refers to the people of God. This is the way in which the Jewish people commonly understood the term.⁵³

⁴⁸1 Pet. 2:4-6.

⁴⁹English, p. 66.

⁵⁰Cullmann, p. 187.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 188.

⁵²J. Y. Campbell, "The Origin and Meaning of the Christian Use of the Word ekklêsia," Journal of Theological Studies, XLIX (1948), 139.

⁵³Cullmann, p. 188.

The Church would grow; it would be built. This was the promise made by Christ. It would be built by the admission of more people of God, by the addition of new members, and also by the development of the interior resources of Christian knowledge, faith, and fellowship.

To understand this term "church," then, we must not assume that it had the meaning which it commonly has for people today. We must not think in terms of an advanced organization. Jesus was speaking of the group which centered in Him. He meant the loyal people of God, rather than an organization. This is what He promised would be built up.

You Will Exercise Leadership in the Building of the Church

Jesus promised Peter that He would have leadership in building the Christian Church, both in missionary activity and in rallying the disciples. In John 21 our Lord urged Peter to feed His sheep. He at that time entrusted Simon with the pastoral office. To him was given the task of ministering to the Church of Christ. This task, however, did not give Peter a special superiority. For, Christ urged Peter to pasture the sheep, that is to feed the people of God's flock with His Word, or to govern the Church with His Word. Peter held this commission of bringing God's Word to bear on peoples' lives in common with the rest of the apostles.

Although Peter was a man with definite weaknesses, as we showed in Chapter III, yet he became a powerful leader. To prepare him for his new role the Lord gave him the privilege of being the first witness of the resurrection.

Peter had been given a place of outstanding leadership among the disciples during the time of Christ's ministry. It was to him that Jesus gave the special task of rallying his fellow disciples, a commission which our Lord gave him on the night when the disciples ate the Last Supper with Him.⁵⁴

That Peter was an active leader during the early years of the Christian Church can be seen from the Book of Acts. He led in selecting Matthias.⁵⁵ He interpreted the meaning of Pentecost.⁵⁶ He took a bold stand against the Sanhedrin.⁵⁷ It was Peter who exercised church discipline against Ananias and Sapphira.⁵⁸ Again, it was Peter through whom the Holy Spirit opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.⁵⁹ That Peter actually was the leader of the Primitive Church is thus amply shown.

This leadership, however, was exercised only during the very earliest period of the Church. Nevertheless, Peter retains for all time the unique position of having been the leader of the Christian Church during its first days. In this way he played a very vital role in the planting of the Church, in truth, in laying its foundation. However, only the original Church was led by Peter, and he led it only during that first period. For, as soon as that foundation was laid, James, another apostle, became leader of the mother church in

⁵⁴Luke 22:31-32.

⁵⁶Acts 2:14ff.

⁵⁸Acts 5:1ff.

⁵⁵Acts 1:15ff.

⁵⁷Acts 4:8.

⁵⁹Acts 9 and 10.

Jerusalem. Peter then concentrated his efforts in missionary work, as will be shown in Chapter VI.

The Gates of Hades Will Not Prevail Against This Church

In the Matthew 16 passage we hear that the gates of Hades will not prevail against the Church which Jesus will build upon the rock. By the term "Hades" is meant the realm of the dead.⁶⁰ The image of the gates of the realm of the dead is found throughout Israelite and Jewish writings.⁶¹ In contrast to the Church as a Temple that is built upon a rock, Hades, or death, is thought of as a fortress with strong gates. The common rendering seems to imply that there will always be a conflict between the Church and Hades, and that the Church will always in the end prevail. No matter how true this may be, yet the point of this passage seems to refer to the strength and sturdiness of the Church, rather than to its aggressiveness. Death is often regarded as a very strong power, and here the Church is said to be even stronger than death; not even the gates of Hades shall surpass it in strength.⁶² The passage speaks of the triumph that the resurrection brings over death and Hades.

⁶⁰Cullmann, p. 201.

⁶¹Isaiah 38:10; Psalms 9:13; 107:18; Job 38:17; Wisdom of Solomon 16:13; 3 Maccabees 5:51; Psalm of Solomon 16:2.

⁶²Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew (London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., n.d.), p. 230.

Christ's function on earth was realized when He obtained the victory over death by His own resurrection from death. The rock upon which the Son of the Living God built His Church served as a foundation to support the building of God's people which is solid and enduring because of His victory over death and Hades.

You Will Receive the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, the Authority to Bind and Loose

We are accustomed to seeing cartoons which show pictures of St. Peter standing at the "gates of heaven" with keys in his hand as if it were his decision as to who should enter heaven and who should be excluded from it. Such a thought dishonors the Lord Jesus because it is only through His work on the Cross, by which He earned life and salvation for us, that we can enter heaven. Our Lord did not tell Simon that He would give him the keys of Heaven, but rather the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven.⁶³ The term "Kingdom of Heaven" is defined in the "Kingdom Parables" of Matthew 13. The Kingdom of Heaven refers to the time of grace in which both the "wheat and the tares" grow together. In short, it includes the entire sphere of professing Christendom. The keys to the Kingdom of Heaven must be the means of making Christ and the riches of His grace, that is, the preaching and the teaching of His Word, known to mankind.⁶⁴ In this sense,

⁶³ English, p. 67.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 67-68.

then, Peter can be spoken of as the first "gatekeeper" of the Christian era. On the day of Pentecost he threw open the doors of the "Kingdom of Heaven" to the many who came to the profession of Christ on that day. Also it was Peter who, together with John, officially opened the door for the Samaritans. It was he who first opened the door for Cornelius and his fellow Gentiles. Again, it was Peter whose voice was decisive in winning a quiet hearing for Paul and Barnabas at the Council of Jerusalem, which settled the first great conflict about the terms of admission of Gentiles.⁶⁵ Peter, indeed, on these occasions brought the Gospel of Christ to bear and made available to many people and races the opportunity to receive the faith of Christ.

In Matthew 16:19 Christ says, after promising Peter the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, "and whatsoever you will bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you will loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." What does this "binding and loosing" signify? It concerns the authority which Christ gave to Peter to have here on earth in carrying on the work of the Church. The two words "binding and loosing" are technical expressions which were well understood by the people of Christ's time. To bind is to forbid, and to loose is to permit.⁶⁶ Just as a rabbi who had great knowledge was to decide what was to be allowed or prohibited according to the Law, so Peter would decide what was to be

⁶⁵Acts 15:7ff.

⁶⁶Plummer, p. 231.

permitted or to be disallowed according to the teaching of Christ.⁶⁷ It is important to notice that it is "whatsoever you will bind," not "whomsoever you will bind." The addition of the terms "on earth" and "in heaven" probably means no more than that the decision has authority.⁶⁸ The context of the Matthew 18 passage, in which this same authority was given to the other disciples, shows us that the disciples were given authority to deal with problems which would arise among believers. It does not refer to the forgiveness of sins or to eternal salvation. It simply states that authority is given to the disciples to act for Christ in matters of discipline among believers and that such action, when it is taken by the command of the Lord in accord with His Word, is valid in heaven.

The question has often arisen whether this authority was given to Simon Peter exclusively. In the Matthew 16 passage Christ gave this authority only to Peter because He addressed him alone here. However, what is given to Simon Peter here, was also given to Christ's other disciples. For, on a later occasion⁶⁹ our Lord spoke to all of the disciples saying, "Verily I say unto you whatsoever you will bind on earth will be bound in Heaven, and whatsoever you will loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." These are exactly the words He spoke to Peter. So, we know that the authority was not Peter's exclusively.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Matt. 18:18.

The Fourth Gospel has a similar statement which substantiates the point that this authority in the Kingdom of God here on earth, which was given to Peter, was also given to the other disciples.⁷⁰ The power to forgive and to retain sins, to which John referred, was, in fact, given to all those who have received the gift of the Holy Ghost. For Christians of all time the power to forgive the sins of the penitent and to retain the sins of the impenitent has the authority of God Himself in Heaven.

What Powers Were Not Given in Christ's Promise to Peter?

Even though Christ gave Peter great responsibility as well as the necessary equipment and power "from on high" to carry out his task, nevertheless, there were certain powers which have been claimed for him in later ages which were not given to him. I refer to the declarations of the Constitutio Dogmatica Prima de Ecclesia Christi, official document of the Vatican Council of 1870, which asserts as follows:

Docemus itaque et declaramus iuxta evangelii testimonia primatum iurisdictionis in universam dei ecclesiam immediate et directe beato Petro apostolo promissum atque collatum a Christo domino fuisse. . . . Si quis igitur dixerit, beatum Petrum apostolum non esse a Christo domino constitutum apostolorum omnium principem et totius ecclesiae militantis visibile caput . . . anathema sit.

⁷⁰John 20:22-23.

Unde quicumque in hac cathedra Petro succedit,
is secundum Christi ipsius institutionem primatum
Petri in universam ecclesiam obtinet.

Si quis ergo dixerit non esse ex ipsius Christi
Domini institutione, seu iure divino, ut beatus
Petrus in primatu super universam ecclesiam habeat
perpetuos successores; aut Romanum pontificem non
esse beati Petri in eodem primatu successorem;
anathema sit.⁷¹

In these three paragraphs the Church of Rome claims
(a) the primacy of Peter, (b) the transmission of Peter's
"special position" to successors, and (c) the besting of
Peter's transmitted "authority" in the Roman bishop. The
next several pages will deal with each of these three points.

Control Over the Other Apostles

Scripture gives no evidence to show that Peter had
control over the other apostles. During Christ's ministry
there was dispute among the disciples as to who should be
the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.⁷² Christ replied
to the disciples that they must become as little children if
they wanted simply to be in the Kingdom of Heaven. Even on
the night in which Christ was betrayed into death there was
contention among the disciples as to which of them should be
the greatest.⁷³ Christ on this occasion exhorted them to

⁷¹Quoted by Erich Fascher, "Petrus," Paulys Real-
Encyclopaedie der Klassischen Altertumswissenschaft
(Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1938),
Achtunddreissigster Halbband, column 1353.

⁷²Matt. 18:1ff.

⁷³Luke 22:24.

find greatness in service.

St. Peter himself does not pretend to hold a position of primacy in his ministry. Nowhere in the account of his vigorous activity in the first ten chapters of the Book of Acts do we see a hint that he considered himself to be more than the other apostles. In his two epistles he speaks of himself as an "elder,"⁷⁴ and as "a servant."⁷⁵

Throughout the rest of the New Testament none of the other disciples or apostles in any way indicated that Peter was in control of them. In the first council of the apostles, recorded in Acts 15, Peter did not preside at the meeting. From all indications there James presided.⁷⁶ St. Paul claimed equality with Peter.⁷⁷ He stood up to Peter at Antioch when he felt the need to rebuke him,⁷⁸ and Peter took the correction. The apostle John, who lived for many years after Peter's death, never wrote of him as ruler of the Church.

The first of the Church Fathers whose comment on Matthew 16:18-19 has been preserved in Christian literature is Tertullian. His reference indicates to us that in his time there was no distinction among the apostles in degrees of knowledge. He mentions the apostle John's name immediately after reference was made to Matthew 16:18-19 in a way which

⁷⁴1 Pet. 5:1.

⁷⁵2 Pet. 1:1.

⁷⁶Acts 15:13-21.

⁷⁷2 Cor. 11:5.

⁷⁸Gal. 2:11.

makes it very clear that he does not consider Peter's knowledge above that of John.⁷⁹

Although the Greek Fathers in their exegesis of the passages which are generally considered to be the source of the claims for the primacy of Peter granted him a position of honor, they never suggested that his leadership put him in any kind of control of the other apostles; nor did they imply that this authority was transmitted to successors.⁸⁰ This exegesis carries particular weight because it came in the period of the United Church when East and West had not as yet shown the conflict which was to come in later periods of the Church. These Fathers who represented the common mind of the Church lived in the spirit of the New Testament.⁸¹

That the later Fathers held a similar view is seen from this summary account presented by Cardinal Strossmayer in his speech at the 1870 Vatican Council. He said:

What Augustine taught was the conviction of all Christendom of his time.--I summarize: (1) that Jesus gave His apostles the same power as Peter; (2) that the apostles never considered Peter the Vicar of Christ and the infallible teacher of the Church; (3) that Peter never thought himself a pope and never acted as a pope; (4) that the councils of the first four centuries gave the Bishop of Rome a high position in the Church because of the city of Rome, but it was only a position of honor, not of judicial dominion; (5) that the holy Fathers never interpreted the passage Matthew 16 so, that the Church is built on

⁷⁹De Praescriptione Haereticorum, chapter 22, cited by Kesich, pp. 12-13.

⁸⁰Kesich, p. 17

⁸¹Ibid., p. 18.

Peter, but on the rock (not super Petrum, but super petram), that is, on the confession of Peter's faith.⁸²

It is clear that Peter did not hold any primacy of authority among his fellow apostles. This is shown in his dealings with the apostles and in his work among the churches; nor did his fellow apostles accord him such a position of leadership. After Peter left Jerusalem, James became the leader there. Peter was responsible to him while he carried on his mission activities from the central base, Jerusalem. In the centuries that immediately followed the Church Fathers gave us no concrete evidence that Peter was accorded a central position of power or jurisdiction over the Church.

While, however, it is established that Peter enjoyed no judicial supremacy over the other apostles, it would perhaps be going too far to say that no special dignity or leadership role was conceded to him on the part of his brethren. His distinguished personal abilities as a leader and as a preacher, the prominent part which he took in carrying out his Master's great commission, both before His death and after His ascension, provide sufficient reason for his being raised to a place of respect and influence in the early Church and among his brother apostles.

⁸²Quoted by Hoyer, pp. 737-738.

Apostolic Succession

Because of the claim of the Roman Catholic Church that the commission which was given to the apostle Peter was passed on to successors, it is necessary to examine the relevant Scripture passages. From the examination of the Matthew 16 reference, which is the chief passage from which the Roman Church draws its claim for the primacy which it feels it has derived from Peter, we discover that that passage did not contain a single word about successors of Peter. It does speak about Peter, and it speaks about the Church. The Church is a fellowship which is to be built in the future (after Christ's death). Peter, of course, refers to the apostle whose earthly activity would, naturally, be brought to a close at the time of his death. Roman Catholic scholars feel that the entire promise of building the Church upon the petra must also be continued after Peter's death, and therefore, successors of Peter must also be considered here. However, the John 21 passage,⁸³ which refers to Peter's feeding of the lambs and the sheep, certainly is limited by his death.

As Jesus continues His statement in the Matthew 16 passage, He gives to Peter the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, the power to bind and to loose. This also refers to the future. In this instance, again, the reference is only to

⁸³John 21:16ff.

the lifetime of the man Peter following the death of Jesus. That this is so can be seen from the Lucan parallel.⁸⁴ In this passage the command to strengthen the brothers is closely associated with the prediction of Peter's denial. Peter must first be converted before he can strengthen the brethren. What is said here is directed only to the historical Peter who had denied Jesus. Christ does not include in this reference a hint at any successors.

So, the statement, "I will build my Church," need not be extended beyond the lifetime of Peter. Even if we concede that in the Matthew 16 passage Christ referred to a period of time well beyond Peter's death, this does not mean that the "Rock," assuming that this rock is Peter, had successors. In this passage it is only the task of building which belongs to the future ages, not the laying of the foundation of the rock on which the Church is built.⁸⁵ Christ would build His Church upon the foundation which was laid during the earthly career of the apostle Peter. This is consistent with the various passages in the New Testament which refer to the building illustration. Just one example should suffice. St. Paul refers to the Church as "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets."⁸⁶ Here he speaks of the foundation laying as being an accomplished fact. The laying of the foundation stone is something unique. It is an act that

⁸⁴Luke 22:31ff.

⁸⁵Cullmann, p. 209.

⁸⁶Eph. 2:20.

is unrepeatable. It has consequences that remain for the future, but no one can take over Peter's function as the Rock Man. The foundation is laid once and for all. No one can inherit his apostolic commission.

As indicated in Chapter II, the New Testament describes the apostolic office as one that is unique and not to be repeated. The conditions that were necessary for membership in the apostolic circle were that, first, each apostle must be a "witness of the resurrection"; in the second place, he must have been personally commissioned by Christ. Only during the time right after Jesus' ascension could there be a group who met these qualifications, who could be eyewitnesses of the historical Jesus. Never again would there be such a witness. It is upon these eyewitnesses that Christ intended to build His Church. The apostles belonged only to the first days. The authority which was given them by their sender could not be transmitted to others. Obviously, there would always be a need for leadership in the Church. In a sense the bishops would succeed to the work which the apostles had left behind, but there is no statement in the New Testament which gives to the bishops the distinct commission of laying the foundations for the Church upon Christ the solid Rock. Their function was rather that of building upon the foundation once laid by the apostles, which foundation is Christ, and to keep building upon this foundation.

Further evidence that Peter did not pass on to successors any "authority" which was committed to him by the Lord is that when he left Jerusalem to undertake his

missionary work, James, the brother of the Lord, became the key leader of the congregation at Jerusalem. Peter assumed a subordinate position to the new head administrator of the mother congregation in Jerusalem. Paul's rebuke of Peter at Antioch, which will be discussed at greater length in Chapter VI, adds further weight to the fact that Peter already considered himself responsible to someone else (whom he did not himself appoint, who was now head of the congregation which he had left).

Further evidence that Peter's power was not passed on to successors can be found, ironically enough, in the summary statement of a Roman Catholic theologian which was made in 1869 before the Vatican Council. It states that of all the Fathers whose commentaries we still possess, none of them applied the Matthew 16:18f. and the John 21:15ff. passages, which pertain to the power given to Peter, to the Roman bishops as successors of Peter. The commentaries to which he was referring include those of Origen, Chrysostom, Hilary, Augustine, Cyril, Theodoret, and others.⁸⁷

The significance of Peter is often obscured by arguments over his connection with possible successors. The New Testament does not link him with a chain of successors having complete authority, or with the bishops of Rome; nor do the earliest ancient traditions support such claims. Peter's

⁸⁷Cited by William Arndt, "The Old Fathers on Matt. 16:18 and John 21:18," Concordia Theological Monthly, XVI (August 1945), 552.

real contribution lies in his apostolic role. Pains must be taken not to belittle Peter's contribution to the growing Church because of the expanded claims which had been made for an organizational system which claims its dependence upon him.

Rule By One Congregation or Organization

The Roman Catholic Church believes that the preeminence of the local Church of Rome is Scripturally sanctioned. It bases its claim upon its interpretation of the Matthew 16: 17-19 passage, saying that there Christ has in mind successors. They base their argument for Rome's leadership of the Church on the suppositions that Peter was bishop of the Church there and that this Church has actually led the entire Church throughout history. Upon exegetical examination of the Matthew 16 passage, however, it is clear that there is no reference to the idea that a specific local congregation was to carry out the continued leadership of the entire Church. It is noteworthy also that the entire New Testament does not contain a single passage which mentions the name of Rome in connection with Peter. Although it is very probable, even if not conclusive, that Peter came to Rome near the end of his life and there became a martyr, this is not sufficient as a starting point for the assertion that only this church may appeal to a continued succession of divinely sanctioned leadership.

To be sure, we can say that the apostles, by instituting local church heads in their unique apostolic capacity,

thus created the first bishops of these churches. However, this does not say anything as to who was to choose the bishops who would carry on after them. The Apostle Peter himself never did establish a bishop of the entire Church, and he himself never gave any local church except the one at Jerusalem the distinction of being the seat of leadership of the entire Church. Even if Peter temporarily became the leader of churches other than the Jerusalem congregation, he was leader there only temporarily and only of those single churches, none of which were in control of the entire Church.

Peter was leader of the entire Church only while he was at Jerusalem, and that for only a few years. If there is one church that has a specific claim in this respect--that of exercising leadership over the total Church--it would have to be the Jerusalem congregation. In Jerusalem, which is hallowed by various of Christ's redemptive acts, it is the congregation, rather than the head of it, that seems to be predominant. For, great as he was in all of his leadership capacities, Peter eventually left Jerusalem, and the leadership of that Church passed on to another, James. When other local congregations came into existence, Jerusalem had no control over them. Her position of leadership was derived from the salvation events which took place there, not from the power which she might have exercised over other churches.

The Jerusalem Church is the only one of which we hear

in the New Testament that Peter stood at its head. Of the other churches we hear only by tradition. A tradition which first appeared in the Second Century tells us that Peter was bishop at Antioch. The suggestion that Peter was bishop of Rome came only later. It is first in the last half of the Second Century that we have any mention at all of the apostolic foundation of Rome, which foundation is traced back to Peter and Paul. Even this cannot conclusively be proved from history.⁸⁸

But even if Peter was the bishop of Rome at that time, he would have only been in control of the local church of Rome. For in the sixth decade of the First Century Rome was not yet a leader in the Church at large, and Peter did not rule the entire Church from Rome.⁸⁹

Not only in the Scriptures, but also throughout the history of Primitive Christianity one can find no trace that the leadership of the Church at large was to be determined by the fact that Peter had been bishop in a given city. Even Jerusalem, where Peter had been leader of the entire Church for a brief period of years, is not to be considered the permanent seat of power over the entire Church. Nor was the authority of leadership in Jerusalem, which was passed on to James, derived from Peter; rather, it was given in connection with the direct kinship which James had with Jesus Christ.⁹⁰

⁸⁸Cullmann, p. 229.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 230.

Besides Jerusalem and Rome, Antioch is another city which regards Peter as its first bishop. Peter did not "rule" the Church at large from either Antioch or from Rome, but only from Jerusalem. The history of early Christianity does not allow for the assumption that Peter came to Rome in order to transfer the leadership of the entire Church to that place.

Roman Catholic theologians argue that from the Second Century on Rome began to play an outstanding and leading role in Christendom. Thus, they argue from the later development of Church history in an attempt to prove the point that the primacy was passed on from Jerusalem to Rome. However, no divine sanction for all time for this one church can be derived if, as we have shown, this particular preeminence does not have any connection with the apostolic age and with Scripture.

An objective examination of Church history would lead one to disagree with the Roman argument from history. For, the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. decided that the bishop of Alexandria should administer the churches in the East and the bishop of Rome should exercise a similar responsibility for the churches of the West. Thus, the authority of the Roman bishop grew out of the decision of a Council rather than out of a decision which Christ made while He was walking on this earth and speaking to His disciples. This was a leadership by human right. For, if the bishop of Rome had had a leadership by divine right, it would not have been

proper for the Council to withdraw any right from him and transfer it to the bishop of Alexandria.⁹¹

Many ancient synods were held in which the bishop of Rome was not the leader. The Council of Nicea is just one example. This, again, shows that Church history does not record a universal acknowledgement of the bishop of Rome.⁹²

Furthermore, it was not until the beginning of the Third Century that a single bishop of Rome ever referred Christ's statement of Matthew 16 to himself to make a case for his leadership of the entire Church. It was either Calistus or Stephanus who first applied Christ's words, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church," to himself. His contention did not go undisputed. Tertullian and Cyprian and others spoke out against this view.⁹³ The fact that there is such a long gap between the Apostolic Age and the time when Rome finally began to justify its position of preeminence by the Matthew 16 passage is significant.

Certainly, there is a chain of succession of Roman bishops. However, there is no chain of succession of the leaders of the entire Church, even though the list of Roman bishops was later made to serve for this very purpose. There is a large gap after James. When the defenders of

⁹¹"Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope," pp. 321-322.

⁹²Ibid., p. 323

⁹³Cullmann, p. 234.

Roman preeminence looked for a foundation for their position, the Matthew 16 passage was handy since by that time already Rome and Peter were closely connected by tradition in the general mind. However, because there is nothing in the Scriptural text to warrant this view, the argument has to be squeezed out by the assumption that Christ must have meant that there must be a visible center of the Church in which power is concentrated in one person. If one begins with this presupposition, then the achievement of Rome and its bishops make it a simple matter to focus that unity in Rome. Of course, the appeal to later history is a valuable part of their argument. The question remains: does the role which the Roman Church played in the post-apostolic age justify its claims of ruling the whole Church for all time when the New Testament and the Apostolic Church did not suggest or even know of such a preeminence? The question is answered by its asking.

Conclusion

Peter was given a special name by Christ which foreshadowed the important role that he was to play in the laying of the foundation of the Early Church. Christ gave to Peter the special responsibilities of administering the affairs of the Early Church and of bringing the gospel to feed the sheep of that Church. Christ promised that the proclamation of the gospel would be effective to the extent that not even the realm of death would be able to overcome in its struggle against it. Christ gave to Peter the particular task of

rallying and leading the disciples after His departure. Peter became the key witness to the resurrection of Jesus and the strong leader of the Church during its earliest years. Later he became a missionary-evangelist and led in the proclamation of the gospel among the Jews of Palestine, Syria, and more outlying areas.

To the extent that Peter is "the Rock" he is so in the sense of laying the Church's foundation as an apostle. He did this by proclaiming the Living Christ. Every succeeding generation is used by Christ to build that Church upon that foundation of the apostles, among whom Peter stands out very prominently.

The apostolic role of Peter, however, as foundation stone for the Church is unrepeatable. That Peter was not interested in continually functioning as administrator of the Church is shown by his departure into missionary activity away from Jerusalem. The power of binding and loosing which Jesus gave to Peter and to the rest of the apostles and to the entire Church is one that cannot be limited within a particular congregation or organization. That one given Church or one given succession of bishops has divine right to exercise leadership over the entire Church is without foundation in Scripture; but the Rock, which was to form an invaluable part of the foundation of the entire Church, remains with its significance for all time. On the foundation laid by Peter and the rest of the apostles, with Jesus Christ Himself being the Cornerstone, Christ will keep building His Church as long as the earth remains.

CHAPTER V

PETER'S LEADERSHIP OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH UP TO HIS DEPARTURE FROM JERUSALEM

No Other Leader at First

In the approximately fifteen years which are covered by the first twelve chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, Peter was the outstanding leader of the Church. Without a doubt the other disciples were also active, but the Book of Acts does not mention nine of them in any individual capacity of active leadership. Besides Peter, only John and James are depicted in an active leadership role.

John, the Son of Zebedee, went with Peter to the Temple;¹ he was imprisoned with Peter;² and later on he went to Samaria with him.³ In each of these instances, however, John was the silent partner or a secondary figure who never took the initiative. The brother of John, James, was designated for martyrdom.⁴ This by itself is an indication that he had been active in Christian work and so had attracted the attention of Herod Agrippa I. No specific acts of his career are recorded, and he cannot have been the leading figure in the Church.

Two members of the Seven who were chosen to serve as deacons to the Grecians, Stephen and Philip, are prominently

¹Acts 3:1. ²Acts 4:3. ³Acts 8:14. ⁴Acts 12:2

mentioned in the first part of Acts. Stephen preached powerfully at Jerusalem. This led to his martyrdom.⁵

Philip preached in Samaria and in the coastal cities of Palestine.⁶ Barnabas also is presented as an able leader,⁷ but his role, like that of Stephen and Philip, was also a subordinate one.

St. Paul, the key figure of the last half of the Book of Acts, is briefly introduced in these chapters,⁸ but not as yet in a leading capacity among the Apostles. James, the brother of the Lord, eventually rose to a position of leadership in the Jerusalem Church, but until the time of Peter's departure⁹ James was not in the position of first rank. Peter dominated the entire period up until his departure from Jerusalem.

Peter's Credentials for Leadership

After a study of the Gospels, it must be said that Peter was at least the outstanding representative of the disciples. When we read through the Book of Acts, it is obvious that Peter's position was even more important. The letters of Paul substantiate this fact. In The Acts of the Apostles, Peter definitely is shown as the apostolic leader of the

⁵Acts 6:8-8:1.

⁶Acts 8:4-8,26-40.

⁷Acts 4:36-37; 11:22-30; 12:25.

⁸Acts 7:58-8:3; 9:1-30; 11:25-30.

⁹Acts 12:7.

earliest Christian Church.

To what source should one trace the leadership that St. Peter acquired? Perhaps Peter's credentials are most obvious in the commissions which Christ gave to Peter before and after His death and resurrection. Shortly before His death the Lord commissioned Peter to "strengthen the brethren."¹⁰ This commission which Jesus gave to Peter near the end of His earthly life can be cited as authority enough for Peter's leadership position after the Lord's death and resurrection.¹¹ There is, however, another commission given to Peter shortly after the Lord rose from the dead,¹² according to which Peter was to "feed my sheep." The Damascus Document, discovered in 1910, adds depth of meaning to this utterance "feed my sheep." This document speaks of the leader of a group as the "shepherd of the flock." It is his task to proclaim the Word, to explain the sacred writings, and to carry out discipline within the community.¹³

Jesus' command to Peter to feed the sheep includes the two special areas of responsibility which Peter exercised in his apostolate, that of leading the Church in Jerusalem and of preaching to the unconverted. The conception of missionary activity is implied by John 10 which speaks of the office of

¹⁰Luke 22:31f.

¹¹Oscar Cullmann, Peter--Disciple, Apostle, Martyr (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1953), p. 57.

¹²John 21:15ff.

¹³Cullmann, p. 64.

the shepherd, and which suggests his responsibility for the "other sheep" who are not of the flock.¹⁴ Jesus further implies this office of the shepherd in the Gospel According to St. Matthew¹⁵ when He speaks of "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" to which He had been sent. Thus, we can see that the commission given to Peter is described as being like the apostolic functions which he carried out according to the Book of Acts.

Also very important to Peter's position within the earliest Church is the fact that he was the first to whom the risen Lord appeared.¹⁶ It has often been asked whether this special appearance carried with it a special commission. One of the criteria of apostleship as set forth by the disciples themselves and by St. Paul¹⁷ was that the person must have seen the risen Lord. Accordingly, Matthias is chosen to "become a witness of His resurrection."¹⁸ The concept of witnessing to the resurrection is found frequently in the Book of Acts.¹⁹ Could it be that the first one to enjoy this privilege of seeing the risen Lord and witnessing to Him would be held in a position of special authority? Cullmann believes very strongly that this individual was regarded as being especially commissioned by Christ to carry on His

¹⁴John 10:16.

¹⁵Matt. 10:6.

¹⁶1 Cor. 15:5.

¹⁷Acts 1:22; 1 Cor. 9:1.

¹⁸Acts 1:22.

¹⁹Acts 2:32; 3:15; 4:33; 5:32; 10:41-43.

witness.²⁰ He feels that Christ's appearance first to Peter is sufficient foundation for the authoritative position which he held as leader of the early Church. Thereby he feels that Christ put the special seal upon the distinction which He had given Peter by naming him Cephas.²¹

No doubt, the fact that Christ appeared first to Peter tremendously increased his prestige; but it is safe to assume that his actual leadership rested also upon a combination of other factors. Very prominent in this list of factors are the commissions which the risen Lord gave to Peter to feed His "sheep" and to "strengthen the brethren." The giving and the explanation of the name, Peter, certainly must have added dignity and significance to the role of leadership which Peter was to play. Furthermore, the representative role which Peter had played as a disciple during Christ's ministry on earth helped to stabilize the position in which he now served the Church in leadership roles as administrator and as missionary.

Along with Peter's commission to feed the sheep we have a prediction of his martyrdom.²² This prediction suggests that the commission to Peter has a time limitation. It is limited to Peter's lifetime, to the period of the foundation of the Church, as noted in Chapter IV.

²⁰Cullmann, p. 63.

²¹Ibid., p. 59.

²²John 21:18-19.

Peter's Leadership Activities Between Christ's Ascension
and Peter's Departure from Jerusalem

The Choosing of Matthias

The first part of the Acts of the Apostles records the activities of the early Church of Jerusalem. In nearly all of these events Peter stands out as the recognized leader of the apostles. However, it is equally clear that he does not exercise or claim any authority apart from the apostles, or over the apostles. In the first chapter it is Peter who points out to his fellow disciples the need for supplying the place vacated by Judas. He presents the qualifications of an apostle. The election then was made by the apostles. The exact extent to which the election was divided between Peter and the rest depends upon the text followed. According to the Neutral Text the apostles nominated two, and then cast lots between them. According to the Western Text Peter nominated two and the apostles cast lots for the new apostle. The Western Text is remarkably like some forms of later Church elections.²³ The argument regarding the possibility that the later Church structure may have modified the text, however, lies beyond the scope of this paper.

Whether or not we agree with Arthur McGiffert that "the most important fact connected with the appointment of Matthias

²³F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, The Beginnings of Christianity (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1933), V, 52.

was the position of leadership assumed by Simon Peter,"²⁴ it must be said that Peter's role of immediate leadership is significant. This is the same Peter who just a few weeks previously had violently denied his Master. That he already had been restored to the confidence of his fellow-apostles and even appeared as their leader and spokesman certainly seems surprising at first consideration. That he was at this time the leader is undisputed. His subsequent role in the Book of Acts adds weight to this fact. The reasons for his immediate preeminence in the newly-established Christian Church have been indicated earlier in this chapter.²⁵

Preaching at Pentecost

In the second chapter of Acts Peter again is the most prominent person. He there takes part in the greatest event that happened after the resurrection. This occurred at the Feast of Weeks, or the Pentecost, fifty days after the Passover, when the little body of the faithful assembled very early, probably in the temple, to commemorate the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai. Suddenly tongues, as of fire, appeared on the heads of each of the apostles and they began to speak with other tongues. The strangers "from every nation under heaven" which filled Jerusalem were able to understand in their own language what was being said. Peter, empowered by

²⁴ Arthur Cushman McGiffert, A History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), p. 47.

²⁵ Supra, p. 94.

the Holy Spirit, stood with the Eleven, explaining the meaning of the miraculous gifts,²⁶ and showing the fulfillment of the prophecies,²⁷ both in the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, and in the resurrection and death of Jesus.

This discourse was the first public confession of the work of Jesus Christ after His Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension. At the close of the speech, in reply to the question of the people as to what they are to do, Peter said, "Repent, and be baptized . . . , save yourselves from this perverse generation."²⁸ The fact that three thousand people obeyed Peter, marking the beginning of the Christian Church, and "continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship," bore a strong witness to the power of the Spirit, which spoke through Peter on Pentecost.

Healing and Restoring Life

The first miracle after Pentecost was performed by Peter.²⁹ John was with Peter in this event. It was Peter, however, who took the cripple by the hand and commanded him to rise and walk "in the name of Jesus of Nazareth." This happened at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. As soon as the healing had taken place a crowd began to gather at Solomon's Porch. Peter took this opportunity to address the assembly. He spoke

²⁶Acts 2:14ff.

²⁷Joel 2:28-32; Psalm 16:8-11; Psalm 110:1.

²⁸Acts 2:38ff.

²⁹Acts 3:6f.

to them in a manner similar to the Pentecost address. He showed them that the lame man had been healed by the power of Jesus, Whom the people had crucified. Then he proceeded to speak to them of repentance. The boldness with which Peter preached led to the arrest of the two apostles, with which we shall shortly deal. As time went on Peter and the rest of the apostles were engaged also in other healing activities at Jerusalem.

The apostles were regarded very highly because of their ability to heal. The shadow of Peter alone was enough to heal those upon whom it fell.³⁰ The priesthood of the Jews, while furious with developments, was unable to do anything to stop this apostolic activity. The apostles were threatened, imprisoned, and even beaten. In the face of these threats it was Peter, once again, who voiced the determination of the apostles to "obey God rather than men"³¹ and to continue bearing witness to Him.

Later healing miracles are ascribed to Peter in his work in the outlying cities of Lydda and Joppa. At Lydda he healed the paralytic Aeneas, and at Joppa he raised the virtuous woman named Tabitha, or Dorcas, from the dead.³²

Defending the Faith to a Hostile Public

Whenever the authorities took action against the apostles,³³ it was Peter who stood up to defend the cause of the Gospel.

³⁰Acts 5:12ff. ³¹Acts 5:29. ³²Acts 9:31-41. ³³Acts 4:8; 5:29.

After the healing of the lame man Peter alone spoke to the Sanhedrin answering them that it was by the authority of the Christ, Whom they had crucified and Whom God had raised, that they performed their work of healing. He then declared the triumph of the Messiah, Whom they had rejected, and announced that there is salvation in His name only. Peter's bold profession was another "first" in the history of the Church. It was the first recorded instance of a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ before civil authorities. After exhorting the disciples to keep silent about their experience, these apostles were set free despite their insistence to keep proclaiming what they had seen and heard.

The second persecution of the apostles came as the result of the numerous healings performed by the apostles. The outburst of popular feeling for the apostles stirred up the animosity of the Sadducees.³⁴ The Sadducees, as noted above, imprisoned the apostles in order to stop the popular movement toward them. The apostles were again commanded to cease preaching and healing. Nevertheless, they continued their work in the temple, publicly proclaiming the Word. When they were brought before the Sanhedrin by the chief officer of the temple, Peter, as spokesman for the others, declared their necessity for obeying God rather than men. The Sadducees, being greatly enraged over being implicated in the crime of killing Christ, were filled with murderous thoughts. It was

³⁴Acts 5:17-42.

the Pharisee, Gamaliel, who saved the day by persuading them to follow a more sensible course. He suggested that if this movement be of men, as in the cases of Theudas and Judas, then it, too, would die out. The Sadducees accepted this logic and dismissed the apostles after beating them and commanding them not to speak any more in the name of Jesus. As we well know from the subsequent accounts in Acts, the apostles kept right on proclaiming the faith.

Exercising Church Discipline

The way in which St. Luke selected his material for the Acts of the Apostles seems to have been governed by the intention of showing the beginnings of various Christian practises. Thus, we hear of the first apostolic decision, the first preaching, the first miracle, the first imprisonment for the sake of the gospel, and the first public defense of the faith. In the story of Ananias and Sapphira we have the first recorded use of disciplinary power.³⁵

These two people had laudably sold their estate and had given money from its sale to the apostles for use in the Christian community which the apostles administered. However, they sinned in lying about the sale price. They said that they had given all that they had obtained for their property to the apostles. This sin of hypocrisy was punished in a most decisive manner. Both Ananias and Sapphira, each in turn

³⁵Acts 5:1-11.

as they voiced their deceit, were stricken dead. This was the immediate punishment for the first open and deliberate sin against the Holy Ghost. Peter was the minister of that transaction. As he had first opened the gate to the power of the Spirit to the penitents,³⁶ so now he closed the gate to the hypocrites who had sinned against that same Spirit. The punishment did not come directly from God, as sometimes occurred in the Old Testament, but it happened after Peter had examined them and pronounced them guilty that they were struck dead.³⁷ Peter, however, acted merely as an instrument of God, not pronouncing the sentence, but denouncing the sin, and that he did in the name of the Holy Ghost and of his fellow apostles. Once again, Peter took the lead in behalf of his fellow apostles, this time in the matter of administering church discipline.

Confirming Philip's Mission Work

Up to this time the story of the early Christian Church had centered in Jerusalem, and the Twelve, with Peter in the lead, were the center of the life and work of the Church. The appointment of the Seven³⁸ called attention to the Greek portion of the Church. Some very vigorous leaders grew out of this circle of Seven, notably Stephen and Philip. The martyrdom of Stephen soon led to a persecution which scattered this Hellenistic-Jewish group. Philip, one of the Seven, then

³⁶ Acts 2:37-38.

³⁷ Acts 5:3-10.

³⁸ Acts 6:3ff.

instructed and baptized many converts in the city of Samaria.³⁹ His work meant that the Christian mission was expanding and that to have pure Israelitish blood was no longer a condition for admission to the Church.

The Twelve Apostles had not been driven from Jerusalem,⁴⁰ but with the growth of the church at Samaria the role of the apostles changed. They decided upon an outreaching ministry.⁴¹ They delegated the two most prominent of their members, Peter and John, to go forth to review the work of the evangelist Philip. Peter and John went to Samaria and prayed for the Christians there that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.⁴² This outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the second stage of the Church's history, the period of outreach to the rest of Palestine, seems to be the parallel to the Pentecost outpouring in the first period of the Christian Church. This passage shows that the laying on of hands and the giving of the Spirit were regarded as connected with the office of the Twelve. It also shows that all missionary activity was considered to be completely dependent upon the Jerusalem congregation.

The sequel to this imparting of the Holy Spirit shows Simon Magus as a heretical threat within the Church. Simon Magus, the most prominent of Philip's converts, when he saw that the apostles had the power of giving the Holy Spirit by

³⁹Acts 8:5ff. ⁴⁰Acts 8:1. ⁴¹Acts 8:14. ⁴²Acts 8:15ff.

the laying on of hands, tried to bribe them to give him the same power.⁴³ Simon did not try to purchase the gift of the Spirit for himself. The apostles apparently had already given it to him. He wanted to have the power to confer it upon others, probably for the simple purpose of increasing his magician's repertoire. Peter denounced this request as a degrading influence upon Christianity. He pronounced him to be an outcast from the gospel, but held out to him the hope of repentance and prayer for forgiveness.

This was the first effort to extend the gospel beyond Jerusalem. The initiative rested with the evangelists who had gone forth from Jerusalem at the time of the persecution following Stephen's stoning. The function of the apostles, for whom Peter was again spokesman, was to set the seal of approval of the Mother Church upon this work and to deal with the new danger of heresy that had arisen within the new church.

After the apostles returned from Samaria, it seems that Peter continued at Jerusalem throughout the rest of the period of persecution of the Christians. Then, after the conversion of Saul of Tarsus and the subsequent period of peace for the Church, Peter alone undertook a journey of evangelization⁴⁴ in which he visited many churches. This itinerant preaching and visiting was followed by longer ministries at Lydda and Joppa,⁴⁵ where Christian communities had already been founded. Later he went to Caesarea, where another very important first for the Christian Church was to take place.

⁴³Acts 8:18ff.

⁴⁴Acts 9:32.

⁴⁵Acts 9:33ff.

Reaching Out to the Gentiles

Although Peter had already given spoken acknowledgement of the fact that God's gospel invitation would be extended into all the world, even to the Gentiles,⁴⁶ now he still felt that his sole responsibility was toward the Jewish Christians and potential Jewish-Christians.⁴⁷ In fact his aversion to the Gentiles was so strong that only a vision with special divine commands could make him enter the house of the Gentile Cornelius, a Roman centurion in Caesarea, and preach the gospel to him and to his family and friends. While Peter was preaching, the Holy Ghost fell upon his hearers. When Peter saw the evidence of the Spirit's presence in the Gentiles by their speaking in tongues, he knew God had endorsed their conversion. Peter immediately arranged for their baptism.⁴⁸ That was the crown of Peter's illustrious ministry.

This was the Pentecost of the Gentiles. The Spirit had come upon the new converts as it had earlier at Jerusalem and at Samaria. It should be noticed that the three outpourings of the Holy Ghost signal the beginnings of the three stages of the progress of the gospel--Jerusalem, Samaria, and the Gentile world--and that with each of them Peter is closely associated.

Peter, who had first preached the resurrection to the Jews, who had baptized many new converts on Pentecost and on

⁴⁶Acts 2:39; 3:25-26. ⁴⁷Acts 10:42. ⁴⁸Acts 10:44-48.

succeeding days, who had confirmed the first Samaritans, now without the advice of any of his colleagues, under direct command from God Himself, threw down the barrier which separated the Jewish-Christian world from the Gentile world. This act in time led to the fusion of the Gentile and Hebrew elements of the Church. At the request of the newly admitted Christians of Caesarea, Peter remained there awhile, probably to further instruct them in "the Way," as Jesus' following was then known.

Peter returned to Jerusalem and found opposition among his fellow churchmen over his act of admitting Gentiles into the Church.⁴⁹ After he had explained to them his vision and the directive of God that he preach to the Gentiles, his fellow apostles recognized the correctness of this great act of admitting Gentiles on the single condition of spiritual repentance. The outgrowth of this expanded missionary program led to the establishment of a church at Antioch, which was largely of Gentile origin. Barnabas was sent to head this mission.⁵⁰ This set the seal of apostolic approval upon the work which had been begun by Peter.

This great beginning of Gentile missions was followed a few years later by the imprisonment of Peter. Herod Agrippa I, after executing James, the son of Zebedee, arrested Peter.⁵¹ Undoubtedly Herod felt that he could appease a segment of the Jewish population by the arrest of Peter, who had lost popular

⁴⁹ Acts 11:2f.

⁵⁰ Acts 11:22.

⁵¹ Acts 12:1ff.

favor with many of the Jews who still opposed the admission of Cornelius and of the Gentile world in general.

Peter's miraculous deliverance from prison marks the close of the second period of his unique ministry. The special work of bringing the gospel to the Gentiles had been initiated; he had played a key role in founding the Church, having opened its doors to both Jews and Gentiles; and had laid down the terms of admission as prescribed in Jesus' own preaching. At this time Peter departed and "went to another place."⁵² From this time forth we have no continuous history of Peter. We, however, will again observe him in action in connection with the Apostolic Council,⁵³ and in his confrontation with St. Paul at Antioch,⁵⁴ as well as through other scattered references to his life in the Pauline epistles.

The Outstanding Leadership Qualities of Peter, the Apostle

The disciples of Jesus Christ, who became His apostles, entrusted with the mission of planting the Christian Church, became new men. As we read through the Gospel accounts we note that these men are people with imperfections and human weaknesses similar to those that most ordinary children of God have. However, in their apostolic role, we observe the outstanding leadership that they provide. It certainly must be said that these men were able to go forth with power, as they did, because of the inward presence of the Holy Spirit.

⁵²Acts 12:17.

⁵³Acts 15.

⁵⁴Gal. 2:11ff.

As we survey the work of St. Paul in Acts 1-12, it is especially evident that the erstwhile impetuous and vacillating disciple now is a pillar of strength and stability as he goes forth in the power of the Spirit to bring the Word of God into the hearts of his hearers. It is obvious that the power, which was sent from on high, and which descended upon the apostles on Pentecost Day, remained with them throughout the period of their apostolic activity. As we follow the events of Peter's life throughout the Book of Acts, we cannot help but be impressed by the outstanding character traits which he used in the Lord's service, traits not always obvious during the time of Jesus' earthly sojourn prior to His ascension.

E. Schuyler English⁵⁵ refers to the following qualities of the Apostle Peter:

1. Courage,
2. Familiarity with Scriptures,
3. Possessing the gift of prophecy,
4. Interest in the souls of men,
5. The delivery of excellent messages,
6. Getting outstanding results, and
7. Confidence and assurance in Christ.

First of all, we note Peter's courage. Not only did he stand up to confess his faith in Jesus before the multitudes of his own people who were gathered in Jerusalem on Pentecost Day, but also he pointed to this same audience, accusing them of Jesus' death, saying, "Him . . . ye have taken, and by

⁵⁵E. Schuyler English, The Life and Letters of St. Peter (New York: Publication Office "Our Hope," Arno C. Gaebelein, Inc., 1941), pp. 116-121.

wicked hands have slain and crucified."⁵⁶ On a later occasion, after Peter had been brought by the priests and Sadducees before the Sanhedrin, which had the power to recommend the death penalty, he declared,

Be it known to you . . . that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Whom you crucified, . . . by Him does this man [the lame man whom Peter had healed] stand before you whole. This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other.⁵⁷

The erstwhile disciple who had denied his Lord three times now was a courageous apostle. Why? He was emboldened by the Holy Ghost.

In the second place, Peter expressed a familiarity with Scriptures. As we check through his brief speeches while he was a disciple we spot only one instance⁵⁸ (and that was between Christ's Ascension and Pentecost Day), when Peter quoted the written Scriptures, the Old Testament. Yet, in his very first address after the Holy Ghost had come upon the apostles Peter quoted from the Book of Joel and the Book of Psalms⁵⁹ interpreting their prophecies exactly. In his subsequent speeches he referred to Scriptures repeatedly. He appears to be saturated with the Scriptures. The explanation again is, of course, that he was filled with the Holy Ghost.

Third, Peter prophesied. He declared great truths of God even though later events show that he didn't fully

⁵⁶Acts 2:23.

⁵⁷Acts 4:10-12.

⁵⁸Acts 1:16ff.

⁵⁹Acts 2:17-21, 25-28, 34-36.

understand his utterances. For example, in his Pentecost address, he said to the audience that "the promise is unto you and to your children and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord, our God, shall call."⁶⁰ Certainly, Peter knew at this time that the promise was to the Israelites, but that this was to also include the Gentiles, "all that are afar off," was not clear to Peter yet. We see this from one of his later experiences. When the Lord commanded him to go to the house of Cornelius, Peter initially had qualms over the Lord's command to extend the Christian message to the Gentiles.⁶¹ How was he able already at the time of Pentecost to foretell the Gentiles' inclusion in the promise? Only through God's revelation!

Fourth, Peter was sincerely interested in souls. He longed that men should be saved. He forcefully preached repentance for the remission of sins.⁶² He declared that only in Jesus' name is there salvation.⁶³ That was the thrust of his message. That was the great concern of Peter, who during the years of his discipleship had been interested, for the most part, in his own place in the coming Kingdom.⁶⁴ Now his longing was for the salvation of others. This can, again, be explained only by the fact that he was "filled with the Holy Ghost."

Fifth, even though Peter had very little education and was a man of humble background, yet the speeches that he

⁶⁰Acts 2:38-39.

⁶¹Acts 10:9ff.

⁶²Acts 2:38f.

⁶³Acts 4:12.

⁶⁴Matt. 19:27.

delivered⁶⁵ were of a sort of which great preachers and orators could be proud. This man, who, although he was an uneducated Galilean, was able to speak before thousands and was able to move their hearts to repentance, was able to do this only through the power of the Holy Ghost.

In the sixth place, Peter got outstanding results. After his Pentecost message about three thousand souls were added to the Church.⁶⁶ After his second speech about five thousand more men came to believe in Jesus.⁶⁷ Again, the secret of Peter's power was that he was "filled with the Holy Ghost."

Seventh, as an apostle Peter went forth with great boldness and confidence in Christ. When he and John were commanded by the Sanhedrin to quit speaking in Jesus' name, Peter declared, "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."⁶⁸ On the occasion of his healing of the lame man at the temple in Jerusalem we see another display of Peter's assurance of divine assistance. He told the lame man, "I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."⁶⁹ We are told that the man's ankle bones immediately received strength and that he was completely cured. This was the first recorded miracle which one of the apostles performed; but the amazing thing is the assurance

⁶⁵Acts 1:16-22; 2:14-40; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 5:29-32; 10:34-43; 11:5-17; 15:7-11.

⁶⁶Acts 2:41. ⁶⁷Acts 4:4. ⁶⁸Acts 4:20. ⁶⁹Acts 3:6.

which Peter had that God would perform the miracle as Peter said that He would. This certainly is a complete reversal from the man of little faith, whom we saw sinking into the waves of the Sea of galilee as his faith faltered while he walked toward his Lord. How could this one-time vacillating disciple have such strength and assurance of faith? It was because he was "filled with the Holy Ghost."

Such were the apostolic qualities of the humble fisherman who had so often been quick to action, but slow to think; who had been hasty in speech, but hesitant in times of testing; and who was virtually uneducated, yet had had great expectations for himself in Christ's Kingdom. The Lord had called forth this man and had made of him a pillar of rock; He rescued him from his sins; He trained him and helped him to overcome himself; and, He gave him His Holy Spirit, which filled him with power so that he went forth to do great things in Jesus' name.

Pre-eminence Given Peter by the Acts of the Apostles and Paul

Erich Fascher aptly indicates the prominent position given Peter in the Book of Acts by suggesting that the title "Acts of the Apostles" is completely misleading because it promises too much. He says that in reality this is the work of only two apostles, Peter and Paul. He goes on to suggest that the brief sketches of men like Stephen, Barnabas, Philip, John, and James served merely as background material to set off the

two leading figures, Peter and Paul, all the more clearly.⁷⁰ That St. Luke gave special prominence to Peter's work in the early Church can be seen from his selection of speeches. Of the eight principal speeches recorded in the first twelve chapters of Acts seven are uttered by Peter.⁷¹

In scattered references throughout the epistles of Paul, the "Apostle to the Gentiles," we have further evidence of the prominent position given St. Peter even in the Gentile world, and in particular by St. Paul. From Galatians⁷² we learn that Paul went to Jerusalem several years after his conversion, especially to see Peter, that he remained with him fifteen days, and that James was the only other apostle noted as present at that time. At the time of Paul's visit James, who was to later succeed Peter in the leadership of the Jerusalem church, was not as yet leader there. Peter still was occupying the leading position there.

It is significant that Paul made the journey to Jerusalem to see Peter, even though he did not as yet know him personally. The fact that Paul recognized Peter's authority at this time and in this epistle has all the more weight because it is in the letter to the Galatians that Paul specifically asserts his independence of the Jerusalem apostles.

⁷⁰Erich Fascher, "Petrus," Paulys Real-Encyclopaedie der Klassischen Altertumswissenschaft (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1938), Achtunddreissigster Halbband, column 1342.

⁷¹Foakes-Jackson and Lake, V, 403.

⁷²Gal. 1:18,19.

When Paul speaks of Peter and his two fellow workers in Jerusalem, James and John, he calls them "pillars" of the Church and "men of repute."⁷³ As Acts clearly shows, Peter had been the leading authority figure in the first church at Jerusalem. Paul did not refer to him as a "pillar" of the Jerusalem, or of the Palestinian church, but of the Church, the Church which included the Jerusalem, the Palestinian, and the Pauline churches. The "repute" which Paul ascribed to Peter was not only acknowledged among the Jewish Christians, but also among the Gentile Christians of Galatia and Corinth where certain of Peter's practices, such as the fact that he took his wife with him on his travels,⁷⁴ were considered the standard behavior for preachers. From this we see that the authority and the example of Peter had universal significance throughout the Apostolic Church.

Peter's Departure from Jerusalem
and the Breakup of the Apostolic College

In the persecution of Herod Antipas, James, the brother of John, was the first victim. In addition to having James killed, Herod had Peter seized and imprisoned. Peter, however, was miraculously delivered from prison. After Peter briefly visited the house of John Mark's mother, Mary, he withdrew from Jerusalem "to another place."⁷⁵ The exact point to which Peter withdrew is unknown. The statement

⁷³Gal. 2:2,6,9.

⁷⁴1 Cor. 9:5.

⁷⁵Acts 12:17.

which we have does, however, show us that Peter at this time gave up his permanent residence in Jerusalem and along with it his position in the church there. After this time we know of Peter's appearance in Jerusalem only at the time of the Apostolic Council.⁷⁶

With the withdrawal of Peter from Jerusalem and the death of James, the son of Zebedee, we now see the breakup of the apostolic college of the Twelve. There is no evidence that anyone was named to replace the martyr James, as had been done at Judas' death. From this point on the Twelve (or Eleven) are mentioned only twice in the New Testament: once by Paul⁷⁷ in connection with the appearances of the resurrected Lord, and a second time in the Apocalypse,⁷⁸ where John speaks of the Jerusalem to come.

After Peter's departure from Jerusalem there seems to be a division of responsibility within the Church. Paul is entrusted with delivering the gospel to the Gentile world. To Peter is entrusted the preaching of the gospel to the Jewish Christians.⁷⁹ James, the brother of Jesus, now seems to come into prominence as the leader of the local Jerusalem congregation.⁸⁰

Thus we see that the Apostle Peter, who in later times was regarded as the symbol of the organized government of the Church, actually exercised the administrative function only

⁷⁶Acts 15.

⁷⁷1 Cor. 15:5.

⁷⁸Rev. 21:14.

⁷⁹Gal. 2:7f.

⁸⁰Gal. 2:9.

briefly at the beginning of the Christian era and then went into full-time missionary work. After Peter's departure from Jerusalem it seems that the two functions of administration and missionary work were separated. James remained in Jerusalem at the head of the congregation there while Peter moved on into missionary activity away from Jerusalem. The wide area of Peter's influence in his new field can be seen from the number of countries and regions that he addressed in the opening verse of his first epistle.

Of this last period of Peter's life we know only very little from the scant references that have come down to us. It was during Peter's time of apostolic leadership in Jerusalem that he stood out as the leader among the twelve disciples as well as in the larger apostolic circle. It was in the period of his Jerusalem leadership that Christ used him mightily in building His Church.⁸¹ It was at Jerusalem that Peter was to show the faith which would not fail, a faith which would be used for strengthening the brethren.⁸² It was here also that Peter was to become shepherd of the young flock of Christ and carry out His command, "Feed My lambs, feed My sheep."⁸³ For the outstanding role which Peter played in Christ's service in laying the foundation of the early Church, Peter truly earned the first position accorded him by Matthew's Gospel.⁸⁴

⁸¹Matt. 16:18.

⁸²Luke 22:33.

⁸³John 21:15-17.

⁸⁴Matt. 10:2.

CHAPTER VI

PETER'S ROLE AFTER HIS DEPARTURE FROM JERUSALEM

James' Leadership at Jerusalem after Peter's Departure

The imprisonment of Peter by Herod Agrippa I and the increased hostility to Peter in Jerusalem signaled the end of his active leadership there. After he had been released from prison by the angel, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark. After announcing his escape to the believers who were praying there for him, he asked that they tell "James and the brethren."¹ Then Peter "departed and went to another place."² This marked the end of his leadership at Jerusalem. When Peter appeared in Jerusalem again at the time of the Apostolic Council, it was James who presided at the meeting.

The persecution of Herod, which obliged the remnant of the Twelve to seek safety in flight, was the natural signal for the appointment of a new resident head for the Jerusalem Church.³ The legalistic background of this congregation favored a man such as James, who was a strict observer of

¹Acts 12:17.

²Ibid.

³Burnett Streeter, The Primitive Church, Studied with Special Reference to the Origins of the Christian Ministry (New York: Macmillan Company, 1929), pp. 43f.

the Law.⁴ The Jerusalem Church had always been one which was zealous for the Law. James was, of course, thoroughly in sympathy with the religious ideal that prevailed from the beginning of this church and was himself one of its most earnest workers and supporters. In this respect he was much more acceptable to the general spirit of Jerusalem Christianity than Peter was, especially after the latter's ministry to the Gentile Cornelius.⁵ Eusebius states that the apostles had allotted to James, the brother of the Lord, the leadership of the church in Jerusalem. He goes on to tell about the exceptional character of James, who was called the "Just" because he was regarded as "holy from his mother's womb."⁶

Eusebius says of him:

He drank no wine or strong drink, nor did he eat flesh; no razor went upon his head; he did not anoint himself with oil and he did not go to the baths. He alone was allowed to enter into the sanctuary, for he did not wear wool but linen, and he used to enter alone into the temple and be found kneeling and praying for forgiveness for the people, so that his knees grew hard like a camel's because of his constant worship of God, kneeling and asking forgiveness for the people. So from his excessive righteousness he was called the Just and Oblias, that is in Greek, "Rampart of the people and righteousness," as the prophets declare concerning him.⁷

⁴J. B. Lightfoot, Dissertations on the Apostolic Age (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1892), pp. 124f.

⁵Arthur C. McGiffert, A History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923), p. 552.

⁶Eusebius, The Ecclesiastical History, translated by Kirsopp Lake (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1926), Book II, 23. 4.

⁷Ibid., verses 5-7.

Furthermore, to the Jew both monarchy and priesthood were offices that were hereditary in a sacred house. To the Jewish Christian, then, the most prominent male relation of Jesus was marked out as His successor by divine right. Any other leader would have seemed unnatural in the Jerusalem situation.⁸

It is not surprising that even while Peter and the other Apostles were still in Jerusalem, James' influence should have been great, and that, after Peter left the city to carry out his missionary work elsewhere, James should have been recognized as the leader of that church. Nevertheless, it was not until the time of Peter's departure that James came into the position of first rank in Jerusalem. Peter seems to have dominated the entire period up until his departure from Jerusalem.⁹

The exact time for the transfer of the Jerusalem leadership from Peter to James is unknown. The Book of Acts and the Epistle to the Galatians suggest that the change occurred, without indicating precisely when it took place. We note that when Paul went up to Jerusalem three years after his conversion, he went there in order to see Cephas, and he stayed with him for fifteen days.¹⁰ Peter was then still the

⁸Streeter, pp. 43f.

⁹F. V. Filson, "Peter," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), III, 753.

¹⁰Gal. 1:18.

head of the Jerusalem Church. James at this time did not yet occupy the outstanding position. He is the only other apostle, besides Peter, whom Paul mentioned in connection with his visit. Cullmann suggests that James may have already been playing a role beside Peter at this time.¹¹

Fourteen years later when Paul went up to Jerusalem, he was with the three pillars, of whom James is mentioned first.¹² Paul here seems to regard James as a leader on the same level with Peter and John.¹³ The fact that his name is mentioned first in the listing of the pillars does not necessarily indicate that he was in first position of leadership at this time. However, that his name would be thus placed does suggest that his influence was considered to be on a par with that of Peter and John. Paul regarded James' judgment equal to that of Peter and John. Paul placed as much stock upon having his teaching and apostleship recognized by James as he valued its recognition by Peter and John. If this visit occurred at the same time as the Apostolic Council, it seems very natural for James to be listed in first position. For at this Council James served as chairman.

When Peter was forced to leave Jerusalem, after the imprisonment by Herod, James already appeared to be his substitute. Peter's request to tell this "to James and to the brethren" indicates that James is now in a representative position

¹¹Oscar Cullmann, Peter--Disciple, Apostle, Martyr (New York: Meridian Books, Inc., 1953), p. 39.

¹²Gal. 2:9.

¹³Gal. 2:6, 9.

similar to that in which Peter was at the time of Pentecost when the multitude came to "Peter and the rest of the Apostles."¹⁴ The Acts account seems to point very strongly to the suggestion that the final transfer of leadership in the Jerusalem congregation was effected with the departure of Peter from Jerusalem, with James remaining to carry on the work.

James thus seems to be the one in the responsible position a few years later when the important decision regarding Gentile converts had to be made. The rapid evangelization of the Gentiles and the resultant scruples of the Jewish Christians made a decision very necessary. It was due to a large extent to James' wise handling of the Council that this major crisis in early Christianity was settled peacefully.¹⁵

The Apostolic Council

The Problem Which Led to the Council

The inclusion of many Gentiles in the Christian Church began to present problems to the older Jewish Christians. The situation which resulted in the Apostolic Council had developed over a period of years. Misgivings had existed already in Jerusalem at the time when Peter visited the home of the centurion Cornelius and led him and his household to

¹⁴Cullmann, p. 41.

¹⁵Acts 15.

Christianity.¹⁶ The entry of Gentile Christians became an acute problem especially as the church of Antioch and its daughter churches, which were founded by Paul and Barnabas, began to increase rapidly in membership.

The question which the Judaizers stirred up at Antioch and which the Church would have to settle revolved around whether the new Gentile Christians were to be admitted into the Church with faith in Christ as the sole condition, or whether they should, like the Hebrew-Christians, receive circumcision, and carry out the details of the old Mosaic Law. It seemed that outside of Jerusalem these conditions were not insisted upon. The church of Antioch, as well as the churches of Asia Minor which Paul and Barnabas had founded, adopted the more liberal attitude from the very outset. There were, to be sure, a few Jews who thought that the rite of circumcision might be omitted, but the vast majority considered circumcision as necessary.¹⁷ The latter seems to have been the prevailing attitude in Jerusalem.

If the problem were not discussed and decided upon by the entire Church at this time, there was great danger that there would be a split between the churches of Jerusalem and Judea and the more liberal Gentile churches of Antioch and Asia Minor. The problem was brought to a head by the action of some men who had come from the Jerusalem church to Antioch,

¹⁶Acts 11:1-3.

¹⁷Frederick F. Bruce, Commentary on the Book of the Acts (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), p. 287.

who insisted upon the necessity of circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic Law. These men by their refusal to participate in the Eucharist as well as in other fellowship with the uncircumcized began to raise doubts regarding the way of salvation and the matter of fellowship between Jewish and Gentile believers.¹⁸

Paul and Barnabas must have gone up to Jerusalem with a conviction of the importance of solving the dispute in the manner in which it had already been solved in the churches which they had been permitted by the grace of God to found. Their previous meetings with Peter and James must have convinced them that these leaders held the same conception of Christianity as they did. They must have known that also these leaders of the Jewish Christians shared with them the view that faith in Christ was the only requirement for admission into the Church and that imposition of circumcision upon the Gentiles as a condition for being received was not possible according to the precepts of Christ.

From Galatians and from Acts it seems that several meetings were held in Jerusalem in addition to the larger meeting of the entire Church.¹⁹ To determine the exact number of these meetings is not important for our purpose here; however, it is important that we note the outcome of these meetings, to which we shall now turn.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 288.

¹⁹Gal. 2:1-10; Acts 15:4-29.

The Pillar Apostles Endorse Paul

Paul, the missionary to the Gentiles, received a very important endorsement in the meeting of "the pillars" which is recorded in Galatians 2:1-10. Olaf Moe declares that this meeting took place shortly before the convocation of the general Apostolic Council.²⁰ The text of Acts 15:4-6 allows for such a preliminary meeting. No matter when this meeting was held, Paul and the leaders of the Jewish-Christian mission did come together at some time to arrive at a clear position on the question of whether the gospel as Paul and Barnabas preached it was sufficient and whether these two apostles should be recognized as independent missionaries. The participants in this meeting, besides Paul and Barnabas, were James the Just, who was now head of the Jerusalem congregation, and Peter and John. If others of the apostles had been present, Paul would probably have mentioned them as being among those who gave him and Barnabas the "right hand of fellowship."²¹

The opponents to Paul's work in Galatia had tried to build up the pillar apostles as opposition to Paul. Since the Judaizers had claimed the authority of the pillars in support of their own position, Paul wanted to be very explicit

²⁰ Olaf Moe, The Apostle Paul, His Life and His Work, translated by L. A. Vigness (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, c.1950), pp. 228f.

²¹ Gal. 2:9.

in letting the Galatians know that nothing was added to his gospel, nor were any obligations placed upon that gospel by the pillars.²² Paul would not yield one bit for the sake of the truth of the gospel. Neither did the pillars insist upon the circumcision of Titus,²³ thereby indicating their agreement with Paul regarding the sufficiency of the gospel. Nor did Peter, James, and John disapprove of their practice of not imposing circumcision upon the rest of the Gentiles, for they realized that the apostleship of the uncircumcision was as clearly by command of God as their own apostleship to those of the circumcision was. In this way the pillar apostles acknowledged that the two types of ministry were on a par, and they gave to Paul and Barnabas the "right hand of fellowship."²⁴ The same gospel of grace was to be preached to both Jew and Gentile. A division of responsibility of a general sort was made. The pillar apostles were to continue to minister to the Jewish Christians while Paul and Barnabas were to continue the work among the Gentile Christians.²⁵

Speeches at the Council

At the meeting of the apostles and elders,²⁶ over which James presided, the agreement reached by the pillars was publicly ratified. There was much debate on the part of the

²²Gal. 2:1-10.

²³Gal. 2:3.

²⁴Gal. 2:9.

²⁵Gal. 2:7-9.

²⁶Acts 15:6ff.

assembly before the principal apostolic speakers rose to give the arguments which carried the day.²⁷

Peter is the first of the apostles who is recorded as speaking.²⁸ He reminded the Jerusalem Christians of the experience at Caesarea where Cornelius and his household were not required to become Judaized, but were accepted by their own congregation as Christians within the Church. Peter further reminded them how the Holy Spirit had come into the household of Cornelius, even as at Pentecost He had come upon the assemblage at Jerusalem, and that it was necessary also for the Jews to believe on Jesus in order to be saved. Thus, it was wrong to put the yoke of circumcision upon the Gentiles when it had not been able to save even the Jews. In this way Peter took a firm stand with Paul and Barnabas. These two apostles then told of the many blessings under God's hand which had come upon their missionary dealings with the Gentiles.²⁹

Next it was James' turn to speak. He repeated the reasoning of Peter which supported Paul and Barnabas and underscored it with a quotation from Isaiah, thus bringing the debate to a solemn conclusion. Finally, James, upon whom the circumcision party may well have been relying for support, agreed in a judicial summing up that God had chosen the Gentiles as well as the Jews and that conditions must not be imposed upon these believers which God had not

²⁷Acts 15:7.

²⁸Acts 15:7-11.

²⁹Acts 15:12.

required of them. James' ruling prevailed. No other condition besides faith in Christ was to be imposed upon the Gentiles as necessary for salvation. The only special request which was made of the Gentiles was that they avoid the sins of idolatry and fornication and that they respect the Jewish feeling regarding blood and things that were strangled.³⁰ The decision was carried unanimously. The approval of the Holy Spirit also was claimed for the decision.³¹

Among the apostles who were present at the Council, Peter played a key role. His argument citing the example of the conversion of Cornelius and the acceptance by Jerusalem of this God-directed act was very much to the point and certainly set the stage for the later unity which was evidenced at the meeting. It is interesting to note that Peter, as can be seen from Galatians 2:12ff., probably stood nearer to Paul at heart than he did to James on this entire question of fellowship with Gentile Christians.³² In this particular conference he refers not to his experiences as apostle to the Jews but to the fewer experiences which he had had with Gentiles. Even though Peter was designated as the apostle to the Jews, yet he also can lay claim to an obligation to preach the gospel to the Gentiles,³³ as he certainly did upon occasion.

Despite Peter's important speech it is, nevertheless, James who plainly presides over the assembly, who draws the

³⁰ Acts 15:13-21.

³¹ Acts 15:22,25,28.

³² Acts 5:7-11; infra, pp. 140-146. ³³ Acts 15:7ff.

final conclusion in keeping with the tenor of the major speeches, and who formulates the "decree." James did the summing up and in the first person pronounced the final judgment.³⁴ The summation was more than stating an opinion. The formal sense of the passage hardly leaves room for a weak meaning for krinô such as "recommend."³⁵ It was James' right to thus act as chairman and to formulate the decree, for he was at this time the head of the local church at Jerusalem and had been since the time of Peter's departure. Because James was in this position at Jerusalem, any assembly which met there would have had him as chairman despite the presence of great personalities such as Peter, Paul, and the others.³⁶

Leadership Responsibility after the Apostolic Council

Is James Head of the Entire Church?

The position which Acts and Galatians assigns to James is one of increasing importance. It appears that James already occupied a prominent position among the apostles at the time of Paul's visit to Jerusalem three years after his conversion.³⁷ Peter signaled James' representative

³⁴Bruce, p. 299; Cullmann, p. 49.

³⁵F. J. Foakes-Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, The Beginnings of Christianity (London: Macmillan and Company, Limited, 1933), IV, 177.

³⁶Nicolas Koulomzine, "Peter's Place in the Early Church," The Primacy of Peter (London: The Faith Press, 1963), p. 131.

³⁷Gal. 1:19.

position when, as he left Jerusalem after his imprisonment, he asked that the news of his safety be reported to James and to the brethren.³⁸ Fourteen years after his conversion Paul refers to James as one of the three "pillars" of the Church, naming him in the first position in order, from whom Paul had received the right hand of fellowship, and who, among others, agreed upon the division of missionary responsibility for the leading apostles.³⁹ James, as head of the local church in Jerusalem, presided over the Apostolic Council and gave shape to its resolution.⁴⁰ The influence of James in and beyond Jerusalem is seen especially from Galatians 2:12 where "certain men came from James" to Antioch and by their presence led Peter and Barnabas to stop eating with the Gentiles.⁴¹

Even if these men did not directly represent James, it remains true that it was because they were considered to be of the circle of James that Peter and Barnabas did not feel that they could resist their influence. When Paul visited Jerusalem for the last time, he was met by James and the elders. No other apostle is mentioned as then being present in Jerusalem.⁴² James appears to be the head of the Christian community there.

That James held the leading position in the church of Jerusalem can be assumed with a degree of certainty from the marshalling of events by Galatians and Acts. What James' exact

³⁸Acts 12:17.

³⁹Gal. 2:7-9.

⁴⁰Acts 15:13ff.

⁴¹Gal. 2:11-13; infra, pp. 140,146.

⁴²Acts 21:18.

position in the church of Jerusalem was, however, is impossible to say with absolute assurance. Clement of Alexandria suggested that James was the first "bishop" of the Jerusalem church, and also reported that he was appointed to that office by the apostles.⁴³ Cullmann strongly suggests, basing his argument upon the Pseudo-Clementine literature, that Peter after he left Jerusalem to begin his full-time missionary work labored in a role subordinate to James.⁴⁴ He refers to statements which say that Peter has to give an accounting to James, the bishop of Jerusalem, that he has to send his public addresses to James for examination, and that Peter even received his commission from James.⁴⁵

More significant than the traditions of Clement are the several relevant Scriptural references which show Jerusalem as continuing in a position of importance among the other churches. This leadership seems to be one of a natural and voluntary continuation. Paul gathered the collection for the Christians at Jerusalem eagerly, even though he didn't have to do it.⁴⁶ Peter very definitely felt personally responsible in his actions to the Jerusalem-based James or to those who purported to be from James, as he withdrew from fellowship with the Gentile Christians at Antioch.⁴⁷

⁴³Eusebius, Book II, 1.

⁴⁴Cullmann, pp. 224f.

⁴⁶Gal. 2:10.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 225.

⁴⁷Gal. 2:12.

That James was the most prominent figure in the church of Jerusalem after Peter's departure and exercised a wide range of influence is something that is clear. Whether or not James could properly be designated as bishop of the church of Jerusalem lies beyond the scope of this study. However, we can say that Scriptural evidence gives no indication that he held any official executive or administrative position within the church of Jerusalem. That he possessed a controlling influence is clear. This, however, is not demonstrably due to an official position. The decree of the Apostolic Council, even though it was framed by James, was issued by "the apostles and elders."⁴⁸ It seems that the decree would have had James' name on it if he were holding a specific office which was distinguishable from that of the rest of the apostles and superior to that of the elders. It cannot be demonstrated that during James' lifetime there was any official leader or governing body within the church of Jerusalem.

James was the spiritual leader of the church of Jerusalem. That is clear from the writings of Eusebius as well as from scattered New Testament passages already referred to. His sphere of influence was without a doubt, however, wider. It is doubtful that the churches throughout Judea ever regarded themselves as completely independent of each other and of the church in Jerusalem. One can assume that the influence of James was felt in some measure throughout the Holy Land. Although James is

⁴⁸Acts 15:23ff.

generally thought of in terms of the local Jerusalem situation, yet it is too much to assume that he never visited any of the neighboring churches. This is hardly likely in view of the statement of St. Paul which refers to the journeys of the brothers of the Lord.⁴⁹ In his epistle James speaks to the Jewish churches in dispersion.⁵⁰ It is not unlikely that he visited some of these congregations. That James had great authority in and around Jerusalem is incontestible.

It can not be demonstrated, however, that he acquired authority over the entire Church. The early Christian churches which radiated out from Jerusalem had great respect and love for their Mother Church, but they did not regard it as superior.⁵¹ Therefore, the leader of the Jerusalem church was not automatically the head of the whole church. When Peter was leader of the earliest Christian Church at Jerusalem, his leadership was not one of supreme authority. When James later came to be head of the Jerusalem church which had now branched out into many mission churches far beyond the reaches of Jerusalem, the position of James likewise was not one of legislative superiority.

The only authority which the New Testament acknowledges is that of the Holy Spirit, which James, Peter, and all the other apostles acknowledged, and in service of which Spirit they served as willing and capable organs. Despite the offices which they may have held, their influence was largely personal,

⁴⁹1 Cor. 9:5.

⁵⁰James 1:1.

⁵¹Supra, pp. 86-88.

an influence which in turn they had received through the indwelling of Christ. This accounts for the reverence which the Church held for the views and acts as well as for the office of these great leaders.

Peter and Paul's Separate Areas of Mission Responsibility

In a private conference between Peter, James the Just, John, Paul and Barnabas, it was agreed that they should continue to follow the general lines of missionary responsibility which they had assumed in their earlier work.⁵² James and his colleagues saw clearly that Paul and Barnabas had been chosen to be apostles to the Gentiles especially, and that James, Peter, and John should continue their work of evangelizing the Jews. This was no doubt the best practical arrangement for the men involved. Paul and Barnabas were better equipped for work among the Gentiles while James, Peter, and John were more adept at working among the Jews. By this joint division of responsibility the work of gospel proclamation could best be carried on.

It is interesting to note that in connection with this division of responsibility mention is also made by Paul of the fact that he is equal in every way to Peter and the rest. Just as Peter was regarded as a special apostle to the Jews, so also Paul was considered as a special apostle to the Gentiles.⁵³ Paul would have it be known unmistakably that in no way is he

⁵²Acts 2:9.

⁵³Gal. 2:7-8.

behind any of the "chief" of the apostles.⁵⁴

Objections have been raised that the conversion of Cornelius through the preaching of Peter destroyed the independence of Paul's work as apostle to the Gentiles. It has furthermore been maintained that Paul's reference to Peter in Galatians⁵⁵ as the apostle to the circumcision proves that Peter cannot have preached the gospel to the Gentiles, as he did in the case of Cornelius. However, even though Paul refers to himself as the apostle to the Gentiles, and even though he expresses his intention of not building upon another man's foundation,⁵⁶ this does not imply that he was the very first to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Nor does Paul anywhere try to give that impression. It was Paul's conviction that it was his special area of responsibility to do work among the Gentiles, and not that no one else ever had done work among them before.

By the same token it cannot be said that Peter, who worked primarily among the Jews, never preached to the Gentiles in view of his designation as the apostle to the circumcision; for we know that he did preach to Gentiles, as in the case of the household of Cornelius.⁵⁷

Paul's subsequent history also shows how far he was from understanding this defining principle as a rigid limitation upon his activity. As he evangelized the Gentiles, he also felt free

⁵⁴Gal. 2:1-10.

⁵⁵Gal. 2:7-8.

⁵⁶Rom. 15:20.

⁵⁷Acts 10.

to teach the Jews at synagogs at Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, and other places.⁵⁸ St. Paul, to be sure, had been sent to Israel as well as to the Gentiles,⁵⁹ even as Peter and the rest of the original Twelve had been sent to the Gentiles as well as to Israel.⁶⁰

As Paul went forth into the Gentile world, he discovered that no region was completely Gentile, for all the larger population centers had Jews. Neither were there churches which were of total Jewish composition, for Gentiles soon joined themselves to the established Jewish-Christian churches. This was a fact which perhaps was not fully taken into account in the division of responsibility decided upon in Jerusalem. We see the inevitable conflict from such heterogeneity almost immediately in the church of Antioch to which we shall refer below.⁶¹

The Jewish-Christians who followed the work of St. Paul generally could justify their interference in Paul's churches by the fact that there were Jewish-Christian churches which the other missionaries had founded. It was, however, against his principles to do so.⁶² Paul makes only one exception to this principle, and that is in regard to the church at Rome. He felt justified in working in this area which had previously been missionized because he felt the need for having the

⁵⁸Acts 17:17; 18:4; 19:8.

⁵⁹Acts 9:15; 26:17f.

⁶⁰Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:15; Acts 1:8.

⁶¹Infra, pp. 140-146.

⁶²Rom. 15:20.

capital city as a base from which to make his further contacts in the West in Spain.⁶³

Paul's Independent Position

That there was no acknowledged leader of the universal Church after the Apostolic Council is evident from the epistles of St. Paul. He makes a definite point of this fact as he writes to the Galatians. Paul was firmly convinced that he had received the call to become an apostle of God directly from Christ, and not from men.⁶⁴ Likewise, the gospel which he preached came to him not by the teaching of men but directly through revelation by Jesus Christ.⁶⁵ The fact that Paul received his revelation direct from Christ made it unnecessary for him to receive his apostolic power from the Twelve at Jerusalem. Immediately after his conversion he did not go to Jerusalem to confer with the apostles there, but instead went away into Arabia.⁶⁶

When Paul did go to Jerusalem three years after his conversion, he went there to visit Cephas.⁶⁷ No doubt at this time he wished to establish friendly relationships with the church of Jerusalem and to learn more of the historical facts about Christ from Peter.

Paul is very careful to emphasize, however, that he already

⁶³Rom. 15:20-24.

⁶⁴Gal. 1:1.

⁶⁵Gal. 1:11-12.

⁶⁶Gal. 1:15-17.

⁶⁷Gal. 1:18.

at this time had the gospel, that he did not receive it from Peter, and that he in no way subordinated himself to Peter. Paul makes a point of mentioning that he went up to Jerusalem in his trip to that city fourteen years later by revelation. By this he means to say that he was not ordered to go there by the "men of repute."⁶⁸ He testifies further that these men gave to him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship that Paul should go forth as apostle to the Gentiles in the same way as Peter would be apostle to the Jews.⁶⁹ It is clear from this that Paul never thought of Peter as being in control of the entire Church. Each had his own particular area of work and sphere of responsibility.

Only one request was made of Paul, and that was that he should remember the poor. Paul was very eager to do this.⁷⁰ During his third missionary journey Paul organized collections for the benefit of the poor in Jerusalem. No doubt, being a Jew himself, he had a strong desire to work for the unity of the entire Christian world.

On several occasions St. Paul says that he is not a bit behind the chief apostles.⁷¹ He speaks of Cephas and the brothers of the Lord as having an apostolic privilege which belonged also to himself and Barnabas.⁷² Similarly he lists himself as a witness of the Lord's resurrection alongside of Cephas and James.⁷³

⁶⁸Gal. 2:2.

⁷⁰Gal. 2:10.

⁷²1 Cor. 9:5.

⁶⁹Gal. 2:9.

⁷¹2 Cor. 11:5; 12:11.

⁷³1 Cor. 15:5,7.

The independence of Paul was clearly illustrated on the occasion of Peter's visit to Antioch.⁷⁴ Paul rebuked Peter for his vacillating actions in submitting to the influence of the men of James. Paul felt justified as Peter's equal in condemning him for his inconsistency in first eating with the Gentiles and then refusing to do so, thus jeopardizing the faith of the congregation there. This passage clearly shows that from the time when Peter and Paul begin to exercise their parallel mission, no one can speak of a primacy of one in relation to the other. The erring Peter accepted the just rebuke of Paul. Again, in writing to the Corinthians, Paul will not countenance a Cephas party any more than he will any other faction which might compromise the gospel of Christ.⁷⁵ Paul indeed is subordinate to no one save Christ Himself in his work of bringing the gospel to the Gentile world.

Peter's Dilemma at Antioch

Apprehensive Withdrawal Before the James Party

It was probably some time after the Apostolic Council that Peter went up to Antioch to visit with the believers there and to accept invitations into their homes.⁷⁶ When Peter first arrived at Antioch, he had enjoyable fellowship not only with the Jewish believers, but also with the Gentiles. We can imagine how welcome this apostle who had known the Lord so

⁷⁴Gal. 2:11-14.

⁷⁵1 Cor. 1:12ff.

⁷⁶Gal. 2:12.

intimately during His walk on earth must have been in these homes.

Then something unfortunate happened. A few Jewish men who had somehow been associated with James in Jerusalem came to Antioch. Peter immediately withdrew from intercourse with the Gentile Christians "fearing them which were of the circumcision."⁷⁷

Perhaps these men from Jerusalem had been sent by James to investigate Peter's social relationship with the Greek Christians in Antioch. On the other hand, it is very possible that these Judaizers had no right at all to claim to be representatives of James, but had been of the group who had received the humbling defeat at the Apostolic Council and now saw an opportunity for reopening the old issue by scaring Peter with threats regarding his relationship with Jerusalem because of his fellowship with the Gentile Christians.⁷⁸ It is unlikely that the same James who presided over the conference in Jerusalem only recently before, and at whose resolution the earlier Jew-Gentile problem at Antioch was settled, would be the kind to send out spies to Antioch to get Peter, Paul, and Barnabas into trouble.

The Judaizers probably threatened Peter with a report to James, saying that he had gone beyond the Jerusalem agreement.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ A. T. Robertson, Epochs in the Life of Simon Peter (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933), p. 254.

They may even have reminded him of his previous examination before the Church after he had returned from evangelizing Cornelius and his Gentile household, at which time Peter explained that the action had resulted from the direct intervention of God.⁷⁹ Whatever these men said, it had the effect of striking fear into Peter's heart and of causing him to withdraw from fellowship with the Gentile Christians here. In fact, others including even Barnabas were carried away from fellowship.

These men very probably were of the party which insisted that circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic Law were necessary for salvation. This type of people would of course refuse all forms of social relationships with uncircumcized people, including even participation in the Eucharist. In effect they introduced not only the question of fellowship among the Christians within the church of Antioch, but also the more important and fundamental question of the way of salvation. The question of fellowship compromised the principle of salvation by grace alone. The only valid reason for making circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic Law mandatory as a condition of fellowship would be that it were necessary for salvation. Peter's withdrawal was bound to have a disastrous effect on the faith of other Jewish Christians.

What makes this fear of Peter seem so ironic is that he was the same man who had also been the agent for first bringing

⁷⁹Acts 11:1-18.

the gospel to the Gentiles. Then he had been bold to explain to the brethren of Jerusalem the plan of God in this matter. Only shortly before coming to Antioch this same Peter had stood boldly before the Council of the Apostles and Elders defending the principle of free grace for the Gentiles without the restrictions of Judaism being foisted upon them. What did Peter's actions mean? Did he no longer believe what he had by act and word declared? Of course he did! He separated himself from the Gentiles in Antioch because he was afraid of the criticism of the men "from James." Fearing that they might go back to Jerusalem and tell of his fellowship with the Gentile believers and that he might have a hard time explaining it, Peter vacillated and veered away from the doctrine which he professed and believed.

Cullmann explains this terrific fear of the James-party by suggesting a very close dependence of Peter for his missionary standing upon the church of Jerusalem. Accordingly, as a missionary leader dependent upon another church Peter occupied a position in relation to the James party which was much more difficult than the independent Paul's position. This conflict put Peter, the first head of the Jerusalem church, into an especially painful dilemma.⁸⁰ One must not overemphasize the importance of this Antioch clash between Peter and Paul. It does indicate, however, that in relation to James, whose representatives Peter feared, the former first leader of the

⁸⁰Cullmann, pp. 43, 51.

Jerusalem church no longer took the leading role.

Rebuke Received from Paul for Confusing the Christians

In effect Peter was doing exactly what the Judaizers had been guilty of when they demanded the circumcision of the Gentile believers. He was building a wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, a wall which had been broken down once and for all by the blood of Christ.⁸¹ Paul could see that in the long run Peter's concession on the matter of fellowship compromised the principle that salvation is a gift of God through Christ to be received by faith alone.⁸² It was to be expected that Peter's refusal to eat with the uncircumcised believers would be followed soon by a refusal to admit them to membership in the Church or to regard them as recipients of salvation through Christ. Paul saw immediately that to make the Gentile Christians into Jews was to make of Christianity a mere sect of Judaism with all of its Pharisaic rules imposed upon the Gentile Christians.⁸³

Peter had influenced others also to separate themselves from the Gentile believers, including even Barnabas,⁸⁴ who had been with Paul on his first missionary journey, and who had stood firmly with Peter, Paul, James; and the rest at the Apostolic Council opposing the need for conformation to the Mosaic Law. They had become guilty of hypocrisy, of pretending, because of the fear of others' tongues, to follow what

⁸¹Eph. 2:13,14.

⁸³Robertson, p. 249.

⁸²Gal. 2:14-21.

⁸⁴Gal. 2:13.

in their hearts they did not believe.⁸⁵

Paul could not but point out their error. He openly rebuked Peter because he had not walked according to the truth of the gospel.⁸⁶ It must have taken great courage on the part of Paul to rebuke Peter. After all, he had been a persecutor of the Church and was reprimanding one of the Twelve who had been in daily contact with Jesus and had been pointed out by Jesus Himself as the leader of the apostles. Paul could not keep silence on a matter so grave as this, nor would it have been proper for him to express his objection in writing or in private to Peter. This was a public offense and it had to have a public reprimand.⁸⁷ Paul reasserted the truth that man is justified not by works of the Law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.⁸⁸ Even though Peter and Paul were in total agreement in doctrine, as can be seen from their preaching as well as from their written epistles, yet this was one time when Paul of necessity had to differ from his comrade. Peter had momentarily yielded to an old weakness in his character, that of temporarily giving in for fear of what people might think of him. Paul was justified in bringing Peter's mistake out into the open so that the oneness of the Body of Christ would not be jeopardized.

Later events show that Paul won both his position on this point as well as the fellowship of both of the brethren,

⁸⁵ Gal. 2:12-14.

⁸⁶ Gal. 2:11-21.

⁸⁷ Moe, p. 247.

⁸⁸ Gal. 2:14-21.

Barnabas and Peter.⁸⁹ That Peter did not hold a grudge can be seen from his reference to Paul in his second epistle when he refers to him as "our beloved brother Paul."⁹⁰ Peter further attests to his esteem for Paul's work when he refers to his body of writings as being on a par with the Old Testament Scriptures.⁹¹ If the New Testament is our only guide, Peter and Paul did not meet again after their confrontation at Antioch, but worked independently. Legend, however, is filled with stories of their contact including their death together in Rome.

Peter's Later Missionary Work

Where did Peter go after he left Jerusalem? The New Testament does not tell us that. There is very little more about Peter in the Acts or in the epistles. From the scattered references that we do have of his activity, we can estimate with good reason that he was continuously engaged in missionary work over a wide area. After the time that he left Jerusalem for "another place,"⁹² we have record of only one return to Jerusalem and that was at the time of the Apostolic Council. Reliable information about the latter part of Peter's life is very scant.

We don't know exactly at which churches he worked. However, we do have some indications. The introduction of the first epistle of Peter suggests that he may have done mission

⁸⁹1 Cor. 9:5,6; Col. 4:10.

⁹⁰2 Pet. 3:15.

⁹¹2 Pet. 3:15-16.

⁹²Acts 12:17.

work in Asia Minor. Again, this is not a definitely stated fact. Peter's name has been connected most strongly with three early centers of Christianity--Antioch, Corinth, and Rome.

We know for a fact that Peter visited Antioch.⁹³ It was here that he had to submit to the rebuke of Paul. Even though such men as Origen, Eusebius, Chrysostom, and Jerome asserted that Peter founded the church at Antioch,⁹⁴ that he actually did so is rather doubtful. On the basis of Acts 8, which states that the apostles were not dispersed from Jerusalem along with the other Christians at the time of that persecution, it is very doubtful that Peter was the founder of the church of Antioch, although that is not impossible. We do know that Peter visited the church of Antioch for a time and very probably had close relations with this church as Galatians⁹⁵ seems to suggest.

There is some support for the suggestion that Peter came to Corinth and worked there as a missionary. In the opening chapter of First Corinthians we are told of parties which had formed in Corinth, one of them being a "Cephas party."⁹⁶ The existence of this party in itself does not prove that Peter visited Corinth, nor does it make him responsible for the formation of this factional group. Later on in the same letter⁹⁷ St. Paul refers to the example of Cephas, who took his

⁹³Gal. 2:11.

⁹⁴Cullmann, p. 52.

⁹⁵Gal. 2:11ff.

⁹⁶1 Cor. 1:12.

⁹⁷1 Cor. 9:5.

wife along with him on his missionary travels. This passage would be most meaningful to the Corinthians if they had known Peter personally. However, it is not conclusive evidence to prove a visit of Peter. Of what Peter did accomplish in Corinth, if he was there, we have no verifiable record.

Eusebius refers to a statement by Dionysius, bishop of Corinth, that Peter and Paul had founded the church jointly at Corinth, and seems to indicate that Peter must have been in that city at some time.⁹⁸ The validity of this statement is minimal due to the statement of Luke,⁹⁹ which refers to the conversion of the Christians of Corinth through the preaching of Paul. No Corinthian preaching or converting activity of Peter is recorded by Luke. Likewise, St. Paul himself testifies in his first letter to the Corinthians that he had planted the church there and that he had become their father through the gospel.¹⁰⁰ It appears from the three references cited that Paul is clearly the sole founder of this church.

While it cannot be proved that Peter did any missionary work in Corinth nor that he even visited this city, yet it seems very likely that at sometime he did visit Corinth. Nevertheless, there is no conclusive evidence for such a suggestion.

Two different listings of place names in Peter's first epistle suggest the wider area of his missionary responsibility. He may have gone to Asia Minor. In the opening verse of his

⁹⁸Eusebius, Book II, 25.8.

⁹⁹Acts 18.

¹⁰⁰1 Cor. 3:6; 4:15.

first epistle Peter refers to the "exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bythinia." His addressing of the epistle to the Christians of these areas certainly suggests his missionary concern and responsibility. It does not, however, clearly indicate that he had visited these areas. The fact that this epistle contains no indication of Peter's personal acquaintance with the regions whose people were addressed also makes it difficult to insist that Peter actually visited these places. Further on the same epistle suggests Peter's presence in "Babylon."¹⁰¹ We know nothing more about this place from Peter's epistles. Those who claim that Peter was in the Babylon of Mesopotamia do so on the basis of a literal interpretation of this passage. Whether or not this is the proper interpretation of the term "Babylon" remains an open question. Other than the literal interpretation for the term "Babylon" there is no verifiable evidence of Peter's activity in that area.

Although there is no definite New Testament reference which can be adduced to prove the point, yet there seem to be strong indications that Peter made his way to Rome and preached there and eventually also died the martyr's death there. Clement of Rome in his epistle to the Corinthians seems to imply Peter's visit and martyrdom in Rome.¹⁰² Ignatius of Antioch in his epistle to the Romans also suggests Peter's

¹⁰¹ Pet. 5:13.

¹⁰² The Apostolic Fathers, translated by Edgar J. Goodspeed (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1950), chaps. 5-6.

preaching in Rome without explicitly stating that he had been there.¹⁰³ Eusebius quotes Dionysius of Corinth and Clement of Alexandria who refer to Peter's presence in Rome as though it were a known fact.¹⁰⁴ Other literature of the early centuries after Christ again and again mentions Peter's presence in Rome. Because of the frequent testimony of this early period it is generally accepted as fact that Peter visited Rome. Nevertheless, there is no established evidence regarding the exact time or duration of Peter's stay there.

Peter's stay in Rome at the time of Paul's third missionary journey when Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans seems inconceivable because Peter's name is not mentioned at all in the letter. Neither is Peter mentioned as one of those who came to greet Paul when he later arrived at Rome in chains. The epistles which Paul penned from Rome do not mention the name of Peter, neither does the epistle to the Hebrews, which was very possibly written at Rome.¹⁰⁵ Even though the Book of Acts and the letters of Paul do not refer to Peter's stay in Rome, one cannot conclude that he did not visit Rome. The witness of the early church fathers gives much weight to the argument that he did work in Rome as well as die there by crucifixion in the persecution of Nero.¹⁰⁶

The silence of Scripture seems to indicate that if Peter was at Rome he was often absent from the city, or else he

¹⁰³Ibid., chaps. 4-5.

¹⁰⁴Eusebius, Book II, 25; Book VI, 14.

¹⁰⁵Heb. 13:24.

¹⁰⁶Eusebius, Book II, 25.5.

arrived there very late (perhaps even after Paul's death). In any event, it is very unlikely that Peter had a permanent church in Rome for more than a short period of time.¹⁰⁷

Thus our reliable ancient sources give us very little factual material regarding the missionary activity of Peter after his departure from Jerusalem at the time of Herod's persecution. Virtually nothing regarding Peter's missionary wanderings can be stated with certainty. We can assume that he had a very active and fruitful ministry as apostle to the Jews. We can also assume from the many traditions regarding his wanderings that he visited many cities, that he was highly regarded by the Jewish Christians throughout the Mediterranean world, and that very probably he did not establish himself in any given church over a very long period of time, but instead visited many churches, building them up in the faith which had once been delivered to him by his Master.

¹⁰⁷Koulomzine, p. 123.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY

In order to gain an understanding of Peter's leadership role among the apostles it will be well to examine what the term "apostle" involved, as well as to consider who the people were who were numbered among the apostles. The use of the term apostolos is rare in classical Greek and its meanings are diverse. The term is likewise used very rarely in the Septuagint, where it refers to a messenger who is on a technical mission. It is in the rabbinic literature that we have the closest parallel in the literature previous to the New Testament to the word apostolos.

The term shaliach of rabbinic-Judaism designates one who is sent to be the representative of another individual who has authorized him to perform a given mission in his stead. The one who has been sent has full legal responsibility. He is to be regarded as though he were the sender himself. It is implied then that the one sent has completely subjugated his will to the sender in whose service he is. While the Jewish term shaliach has some similarity of meaning to the New Testament term apostolos, yet apostolos has a meaning all of its own. Like the shaliach the apostolos also has received complete authorization by a higher power and must completely subordinate his will to that of his sender.

The New Testament term, however, refers to a definite

group with specific qualifications. The term "apostle" was first applied to the Twelve, the disciples of Jesus. It was used by Christ in connection with a mission on which He had sent them. The usage of the Gospels as well as of the first part of the Acts of the Apostles generally equates the Twelve disciples with the apostles. After the death of James the son of Zebedee, however, the term apostolos generally has a broadened meaning in Acts as it also does in the epistles of Paul. It includes also others outside of the Twelve who were specially commissioned by Christ. The basis of the apostolate seems to be the personal encounter with the resurrected Lord as well as a special commissioning by Him to proclaim the resurrection. Jesus' commission meant that the apostles were to become missionaries. It was this form of their work which really characterized the apostolic office and distinguished it from the office of the Jewish shaliach.

Since a personal confrontation with the risen Lord was a necessary qualification for the apostleship, the number of the apostles was necessarily limited to those who were alive during Jesus' lifetime. The number of apostles included the original Twelve disciples; Matthias, who replaced Judas; James, the brother of the Lord; Paul; Barnabas; and several others who were missionaries along with Paul. These are the ones who were sent forth by Christ to be witnesses of His resurrection, to be His first missionaries.

During Christ's ministry on earth He Himself remained the sole leader of the chosen band which congregated around Him.

Even though a few of the disciples upon occasion showed an inclination toward being recognized as of superior rank, yet, the frequent disputes among them as to who was to be regarded as greatest clearly indicate that during the lifetime of the Master no one other than He Himself was their leader.

Nevertheless, even during Christ's lifetime Peter already began to show certain leadership qualities which marked him out from the rest. He generally served as spokesman for the disciples. As such he was regarded as the outstanding one in the group. In this role we also find Peter occasionally being spoken to in behalf of the Twelve. Also in the smaller groups of disciples we again and again find that it is Peter who serves as speaker for the rest. Whenever a select group of disciples is referred to in the Gospels, Peter is always among them and is always named first. The name "Peter," which our Lord gave to Simon, bestowed upon him a singular honor. Upon a number of occasions the disciples are referred to as "Peter and those with him." In the four New Testament listings of the twelve disciples the name "Peter" always occurs first, and Matthew specifically points him out as "first." Peter is the first among the apostles to witness the resurrection. Thus, and in other ways, the New Testament shows Peter's outstanding position among the disciples.

The Fourth Gospel presents a somewhat different picture of Peter's role. His position is somewhat challenged by the appearance of the "Beloved Disciple" in a position of somewhat parallel leadership. That the Fourth Gospel, however, accepts

the special role of Peter despite the emphasis given to the "Beloved Disciple" seems proof enough that also this Gospel regarded Peter as an outstanding disciple.

The Gospels depict Peter's temperament as being subject to considerable fluctuation. Many examples of Peter's strong faith followed by weakness and then renewal of strength are found in the Gospels. Despite Peter's many inherent weaknesses our Lord made of him a pillar of strength whom He would use mightily in the building of His Church.

The early Church generally considered Peter as the representative and natural leader of the disciples. This estimate differs very markedly from the view which would make Peter the governing head of the Church in Christ's place. Peter did not hold any special office, nor did he claim any distinctive powers which did not also belong to his fellow disciples in an equal measure. Neither did his fellow disciples ever concede him a place of supremacy over them. That Peter did exercise an outstanding position of natural leadership among the apostles already during the time of Christ's ministry was due to His act of grace which chose to use the endowments and gifts which had been so richly given to this disciple.

Simon received a new name from Christ after he had confessed Him to be the Son of the living God. The new name "Peter" means "rock," and it signals the steadfastness that he was to display in the work of Christ. Although there is general agreement that the new name which Christ gave Peter

meant "rock," yet when this term is repeated in the immediately following expression, "upon this rock I will build My Church," its exact meaning is uncertain. Much dispute has arisen regarding the possible meaning of this expression. One will naturally get to different conclusions depending upon the textual background that is assigned to this quotation. If one argues on the basis of a possible Aramaic background, it may be said that Peter and "the rock" are identical. If, on the other hand, one goes on the basis of the extant Greek text, it is an open question as to what is meant by the "rock" upon which the Church is built. It would seem on the basis of linguistic considerations, however, that Christ is referring to two different things by the terms Petros and petra.

The interpretations of the "rock" upon which the Church is built have been many and varied throughout the ages. The leading views have variously depicted the "rock" to be Christ, Peter's confession, Peter himself, even every confessing disciple. The statements of the early Fathers on this very point also demonstrate the great variety of opinions. The majority of them considered the faith which Peter confessed to be the "rock." There was, however, no overwhelming agreement among them on this point.

Even though there is a great difference of opinion regarding the exact meaning of the phrase "upon this rock," yet certain definite understandings can be gained from this passage. The new name which Peter had received was given to him because of his rock-like faith which was based upon Christ, the Rock. It

is upon this Rock, Christ, as well as through the confession of this Rock, and by means of the efforts of men who witnessed to that Rock that the Church is built. These solid building stones of the Church include such men as Peter, the remaining apostles, and generations of other Christians insofar as they witnessed to Christ, the Rock.

Christ promised Peter that he would have a part in the building of the Church of which He Himself is the Cornerstone. The "Church" in whose building Peter was to participate was not defined by Christ to be an advanced organizational structure. Rather, it was described as the called people of God. Peter was promised that he would have leadership in the building up of God's called people both in respect to missionary activity and in regard to the strengthening of his fellow apostles. Christ also promised Peter that the preaching of the gospel would be effective to the extent that even the realm of death would not be able to overcome in its struggle against it. For Christ would conquer death once and for all. Furthermore, Peter was assured that he would open the kingdom of heaven to people through the preaching and the teaching of God's Word, the gospel, which is the key to heaven. In addition to this power, which Peter shared with the other apostles as well as with Christ's disciples of all ages, he was also given the promise of the power to forgive and to retain sins and to carry on the work of Christ's Kingdom with the authority of God Himself in heaven.

Even though Jesus gave Peter great power and authority, yet certain claims have been made for him which are not based upon the Word of Christ. The Church of Rome specifically claims Peter's primacy of power over the rest of the apostles, the transmission of Peter's "special position" to successors, and the vesting of Peter's "authority" in the bishop of Rome. Upon examination of the Word of Christ it is clear that Peter is nowhere given absolute administrative control over the other apostles, nor does he claim it. Likewise, the unique apostolic office is not passed on, nor can it be transferred by the very definition of the apostolate. Scripture likewise rules out control of the entire Christian Church by one congregation, organization, or bishop.

In the approximately fifteen years which are covered by the first twelve chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, Peter is clearly the outstanding apostolic leader of the Church. No doubt the other apostles were active at that time, but only Peter and John are shown in positions of actual leadership. Peter is clearly the outstanding one.

Peter's credentials for leadership certainly were strong. Shortly before the death of Christ, our Lord commissioned Peter to "strengthen the brethren." Shortly after He arose from the dead, Jesus commissioned Peter to "feed My sheep." Peter thus had a special obligation toward the apostles as well as the task of preaching to the unconverted. The appearance of Christ to Peter first after His resurrection no doubt increased Peter's prestige and may well have solidified his position

of leadership. The giving of the name "Peter" certainly must have presented him a special dignity among the rest of the disciples. Furthermore, the representative role which Peter played already as a disciple during the time of Christ's ministry helped to establish his position of leadership in which he served the Christian Church in its earliest years as administrator and as missionary.

Peter certainly engaged in many activities of leadership between the time of Christ's ascension and Peter's own departure from Jerusalem. The first part of the Book of Acts records the activities of the early Jerusalem church. In nearly all of these events Peter stands out as the recognized leader of the apostles. In the first chapter it is Peter who takes the lead in supplying the place among the Twelve which had been vacated by Judas. Peter in his preaching at Pentecost was once again clearly the most prominent of the apostles. Likewise, in the healing of the lame man at the Temple Peter took the lead. That was the first miracle to be performed after Pentecost. Peter was God's instrument in it. When the Sanhedrin took action against the apostles because of this miracle, again it was Peter who stood up to defend the cause of the gospel. He indicated that it was by the authority of the crucified and resurrected Christ that this man has been healed. This was the first recorded instance of a public profession of faith in Christ before civil authorities. When a second persecution of the apostles occurred because of the numerous healings which they had performed, Peter again was the spokesman for the others,

declaring the need to obey God rather than man. In the story of Ananias and Sapphira we have the first recorded instance of the use of disciplinary power. Once again, Peter took the lead in behalf of his fellow apostles in denouncing the sin against the Holy Ghost. When the disciples decided upon an outreaching ministry, Peter together with John was delegated to go to Samaria to review the work of the evangelist Philip. Together they prayed for the Christians that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Along with the impartation of the Holy Spirit in Samaria the first heretic, Simon Magus, appeared within the Christian Church. It was Peter who denounced his sin and also held out to him the hope of repentance. After Peter and John returned from Samaria, Peter continued at Jerusalem through the rest of the period of persecution of the Christians. Then Peter alone undertook a journey of evangelization, going to such places as Lydda and Joppa before arriving at Caesarea, where he became the instrument of another very important "first" within the Christian Church. God led Peter to preach the gospel to the Gentile Cornelius and to his household. The Holy Spirit fell upon these hearers bringing them to faith. This was the crown of Peter's illustrious ministry.

This new outpouring of the Spirit was the Pentecost of the Gentiles. The Spirit had come upon the new converts in the same way as earlier it has come upon those at Jerusalem and Samaria. In each of the three outpourings of the Holy Ghost, which signalled the growth of the Church from Jerusalem to

Samaria to the Gentile world, Peter is very closely associated with the occurrence.

Soon, however, Herod imprisoned Peter. After his escape from prison Peter departed from Jerusalem. From this time on he was to be employed primarily in mission work in places removed from Jerusalem. Peter had played a key role in founding the Church and in opening its doors to both Jews and Gentiles. From this point on the New Testament says very little about the work and life of Peter.

When Jesus' disciples became His apostles, entrusted with the mission of planting the Christian Church, they became new men. They were empowered by the Spirit. As one reads through the Acts of the Apostles he becomes duly impressed by the outstanding character traits which they exhibited in the Lord's service. In summarizing the traits of the Apostle Peter one would certainly include a mention of his courage, familiarity with Scriptures, his gift of prophecy, the concern for souls, his excellent speeches, his astounding results, and his confidence in Christ. All of these traits can be attributed to the fact that he was "filled with the Holy Ghost."

The prominence of Peter, as well as of Paul, is signalled by the arrangement of events in the Acts of the Apostles. This early history of the Christian Church is for the most part the work of only two apostles, Peter and Paul. Luke and Paul himself in his epistles portrayed Peter in a very prominent position. Paul mentioned him several times in connection with his own early years as a missionary. His references clearly

show the importance of Peter both to Paul personally and to the Church at large.

After Peter withdrew from Jerusalem, and after James the son of Zebedee had been killed, the circle of the twelve disciples seemed to come to a close. From this point on the Twelve as a collective group do not have a prominent place in the subsequent New Testament history.

We see a division of responsibility among the three apostles whom we know to have exercised prominent positions of leadership within the Church after Peter's departure from Jerusalem. James the brother of the Lord now came into prominence as leader of the local church of Jerusalem. The responsibility for missionary work was divided between Peter and Paul. To Paul was entrusted the bringing of the gospel to the Gentiles while Peter spent the rest of his life as apostle to the Jews. Peter's active leadership role in Jerusalem was now clearly at an end. From this time forth he was to serve his Lord by feeding the lambs of Jewish descent throughout the mission fields beyond Jerusalem.

As Peter embarked upon full-time missionary activity, he left the leadership of the Jerusalem church in very capable hands. James the Just was a natural choice for head of the local church there. His piety as well as his kinship to Jesus as a brother made him a natural selection.

Peter is mentioned as returning to Jerusalem only one time after the departure referred to above. That is at the time of the Apostolic Council. Here, together with James the Just and

John, he gave to Paul (and Barnabas) the right hand of fellowship, endorsing his preaching and his responsibility as apostle of equal rank with himself, but with a different area of responsibility, as apostle to the Gentiles.

Peter also made his presence felt at the Apostolic Council itself where he spoke forcefully and effectively in behalf of the Christian liberty of the Gentile converts in Antioch and throughout the world. It was very likely here at the time of the Council that the division of responsibility for missionary endeavors between Peter and Paul was made. It was to be Peter's responsibility in particular to missionize the Jewish Christians.

That Peter still felt some dependence upon the Jerusalem congregation is suggested by the last detailed account of him in the epistles of Paul. Paul pictured Peter withdrawing from fellowship with the Gentile Christians at Antioch after the arrival of a group of men who claimed a tie with James. The public reprimand which Peter graciously received from Paul once again set things straight in the church at Antioch. Peter must have quickly recognized his error and regained his position of influence among the Jewish Christians.

Of Peter's later missionary activities we know very little. No doubt his activity was itinerant mission work which touched upon many lands and covered a wide area of responsibility. Most of Peter's later life story is pieced together from traditions. Although many of these traditions are untrustworthy, yet their volume of testimony would lead

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