Hamblen Park Presbyterian Church

Local Ecumenism Training

Session Four

**Second Doctrinal Training: Papal Primacy**

Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (16:17-19)

1. **Introduction**
2. Ecumenical Assumptions (Again)

* A unified Christian community is the will of Christ for us
* A unified Christian community would be more effective in the mission of proclamation (saving souls) and in social justice (the peace and safety of human beings)
* Ecumenism does not belong either to “liberals” or to “conservatives”—it belongs to all Christians
* Theology belongs to the church, and not to academics, who are stewards not owners of church teachings
* In fact, ecumenical dialogue training is not only excellent **adult education** (RC: catechesis) but also provides skills training in solving problems alongside those who are different than us.
* Ecumenism may also lead to a spiritual transformation that is unique and powerful and which some ecumenists call a “conversion” or a return to the initial experience of Christian conversion

1. Ecumenism and the Pope

* Since the beginning of the ecumenical movement in 1910, the reality of the papacy has played a deeply paradoxical role in the Faith and Order dialogues.
* On the one hand, as a symbol of unity for Roman Catholics the Pope has had **tremendous power to pull his church into dialogue** and other forms of ecumenical relationship. Without John XXIII and Paul VI, there would have been no Vatican II and no corresponding explosion of ecumenical interest and dialogue not only among Catholics but among so many churches
* On the other hand, the Petrine ministry **is a main source of suspicion for Protestants and Orthodox, and therefore a main obstacle** to the realization of the ecumenical goal of “visible unity”—a unity that is not just emotional or theological but structural and concrete!
* In 1995, John Paul II published *Ut Unum Sint*, his papal encyclical “On Commitment to Ecumenism.” To the surprise of many and the delight of some, **JPII himself openly acknowledged the pivotal role that the Papacy plays in ecumenical matters (both positive and negative) and asked for help in making the Petrine ministry “a service of love.”**

This is an immense task, which we cannot refuse and which I cannot carry out by myself. Could not the real but imperfect communion existing between us persuade Church leaders and their theologians to engage with me in a patient and fraternal dialogue on this subject, a dialogue in which, leaving useless controversies behind, we could listen to one another, keeping before us only the will of Christ for his Church and allowing ourselves to be deeply moved by his plea "that they may all be one ... so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn 17:21)? (UUS 96).

* **Ever since this humble invitation, the Petrine ministry has become a main topic in virtually every bilateral or multilateral dialogue.** In a sense we are having this conversation today because of *Ut Unim Sint*.
* NOTE: This topic, more than any other, asks Reformed or Presbyterian or Calvinist Christians to exercise theological empathy, to enter a totally different thought-world as respectfully as possible.
* I am not trying to persuade you to approve the existence of a Pope. My goals: comprehension of the papacy, and **a focus on its functions**.

1. **Understanding the Papacy**

Some very “Catholic” things we need to know.

1. Important Terms for Catholics

* **Pope:** From the Italian “papa,” Father. The Bishop of Rome, who inherits the “ministry of Peter” (see next). From the very early days of Christianity, Peter and Rome were associated because Peter died in Rome and the voice of Peter was said to be leading all Christians from his tomb (St. Peter’s!) (picture on slide)
* **Petrine Ministry:** The special role which Jesus gave to Peter and his successors, to be the “rock” or unifying foundation of His church so as to preserve it intact until his return.
* **Papal Primacy**: The idea that, of all the Bishops of all the churches, the Bishop of Rome has a premier position in the hierarchy that is the church. The Pope is “primus inter pares” (first among equals) with the Bishops and rarely speaks without them.
* **Collegiality:** An emphasis of Vatican II. The balancing point to primacy: the fraternal relationship between Bishops, and between bishops and Pope, actually creates the primacy that the Pope carries.
* **Infallibility**: Often misunderstood, this doctrine claims that the Pope is infallible ONLY with respect to doctrine or morals and ONLY when he speaks ex cathedra, in an emergency.

UUS 94: “When circumstances require it, he speaks in the name of all the Pastors in communion with him. He can also—under very specific conditions clearly laid down by the First Vatican Council— declare ex cathedra that a certain doctrine belongs to the deposit of faith.”

1. Historical Background of the Petrine Ministry

Although Roman Catholics recognize the leadership of Peter (the spiritual **substance** of the papacy) as a divine gift that will adhere until Christ returns, they also acknowledge that the **style** of the papacy has changed repeatedly throughout history. **In each case the “style” is not wholly new but is a re-organization of old themes in a new way**.

Informed by German ecumenist Klaus Schatz, I am going to give a short overview of five important “style” changes throughout history:

1. **The Imperial Papacy**

In the fourth and fifth centuries, the Bishop of Rome adopted the images of old imperial Rome and adapted them in a Christian way, to highlight the Pope as protector of the Western church against barbarian attack without, and heresy within.

1. **The Stabilizing Papacy**

In the early middle ages (seventh and eighth centuries) the Pope becomes the source of right belief, right ritual and right law for the new Christians in the Germanic tribes (the time of Charlemagne), in the face of much resistance.

1. **The Lawyer Papacy**

In the 11th to 13th century we see the development of canon (church) law, and a system of papal courts that stretches throughout Europe so that the Pope may regulate society by speaking for Christ. This brings the Pope into conflict with earthly powers and new religious orders.

1. **The Stronghold Papacy**

This style viewed the Pope as a bastion of Christian truth against secularization. It came into focus after the French revolution and reached an apex in Vatican I and the doctrine of papal infallibility.

1. **The Charismatic Papacy**

Embodied in JP II and Francis. It is the personalization of the papacy, in which the Pope travels widely, speaks widely, and takes on a significance in himself as a symbol of faith and an object of veneration. This also makes him controversial.

**Note:** In each model there is conflict and resistance. **And in each model, there is the risk of adopting power that is not spiritual, but purely political**. JPII agreed, commenting that the papal history is “a difficulty for most other Christians, whose memory is marked by certain painful recollections. To the extent that we are responsible for these, I join my Predecessor Paul VI in asking forgiveness.” (UUS 88)

1. **Reformed Responses to the Petrine Ministry**
2. Calvin’s Rejection

* Calvin did not only object to way the papacy had been corrupted in his time: **He virulently criticized the very idea of the Petrine ministry as established by Jesus Christ**
* As for Matthew 16.18: The “rock” was not Peter but his confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who is the church’s one foundation (I Cor 3.11). The faith of the apostles is crystallized in Scripture, which is what connects us back in time to Christ (not an apostolic succession, and not a ministry in Peter’s name). And even if Jesus did celebrate Peter, he did not celebrate him as Bishop of Rome
* “Of old, Rome was indeed the mother of all churches; but after it began to become the see of Antichrist, it ceased to be what once it was.” (ICR 4.7.24)
* We must honestly admit that Calvin’s biblical and theological rejection was heightened by Rome’s rejection of attempts at reform
* And Calvin’s view does not sufficiently explain why Jesus spoke this way to Peter in Matthew 16, and **why Jesus connected a single apostle, out of the twelve, so explicitly to the preservation of the church**.
* Ultimately, I believe that the greatest reason for Reformed suspicion is that we are deeply drawn toward representative forms of church government and, because of our Reformation roots, deeply nervous about the centralization of power. **This is why we have elders, Presbytery, Synod and General Assembly.**
* However, as Lukas Vischer wrote: “Experience shows that a personal ministry of unity can help [bodies] to work more constructively. . .Is it not therefore imperative for the Reformed churches, precisely because they place so much emphasis on councils… to reflect on the nature and role of a personal ministry?” (142) **Especially if this personal ministry is balanced by collegiality. Sheryl Kinder-Pyle!**

1. **Let’s Look at Functions**
   * **The Source of Unity**

**“**God established Peter and his successors as ‘the perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity. . . whom the Spirit sustains in order that he may enable all the others to share in this essential good.’ ” (UUS 88)

* + **The Moderator of Disputes**

“He has the duty to admonish, to caution and to declare at times that this or that opinion being circulated is irreconcilable with the unity of faith. . . . By thus bearing witness to the truth, he serves unity.” (UUS 94)

* + **The Bishop of Bishops**

“The mission of the Bishop of Rome within the College of all the Pastors consists precisely in "keeping watch" (*episkopein*), like a sentinel, so that, through the efforts of the Pastors, the true voice of Christ the Shepherd may be heard in all the particular Churches.” (UUS 94)

* + **The Eucharistic Center**

“Indeed full communion, of which the Eucharist is the highest sacramental manifestation, needs to be visibly expressed in a [Petrine] ministry in which all the Bishops recognize that they are united in Christ and all the faithful find confirmation for their faith.” (UUS 97)

* + **The Servant of the Servants of God**

“This designation is the best possible safeguard against the risk of separating power (and in particular the primacy) from ministry. Such a separation would contradict the very meaning of power according to the Gospel: ‘I am among you as one who serves’ (Lk 22:27), says our Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church.” (UUS 88) **Note that JPII does NOT call himself the Head of the Church.**

* + **The Teacher of the Faith**

“The Magisterium [teaching function] of the Church, entrusted to the Pope and the Bishops in communion with him, understood as a responsibility and an authority exercised in the name of Christ for teaching and safeguarding the faith” (UUS 79)

* + **The Sign of Peace**

“It happens more and more often that the leaders of Christian Communities join together in taking a stand in the name of Christ on important problems concerning man's calling and on freedom, justice, peace, and the future of the world.” (UUS 43)

* + **The Imperfect Apostle**

“It is precisely in Peter's human weakness that it becomes fully clear that the Pope, in order to carry out this special ministry in the Church, depends totally on the Lord's grace and prayer: ‘I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail’ (Lk 22:32). (UUS 4).

* + **The Ecumenical instigator**

“As Bishop of Rome I am fully aware. . . that Christ ardently desires the full and visible communion of all those Communities in which, by virtue of God's faithfulness, his Spirit dwells. I am convinced that I have a particular responsibility in this regard, above all in acknowledging the ecumenical aspirations of the majority of the Christian Communities and in heeding the request made of me to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation.” (UUS 95)

1. **Activity: Dreaming of Church Structures**
   * To what degree do you feel that these are necessary functions of the Christian community in the world?
   * Who is doing them at this time in the Reformed/Presbyterian world?
   * What would be the ideal structure of a unified church that enabled these functions to shine and thrive?
2. **Concluding Insights**

* **This is a lot to put on one individual, and the contemporary style of Papacy makes that burden even greater**. Archbishop Quinn: “The major change of outlook and structural reform which ‘the new situation’ requires would ideally be the work of a broader constituency” at the levels of decision-making that are closest to the Pope (122).
* It may be that what disturbs non-Catholics about the papacy is not the **substance** of the Petrine ministry, but the dangers inherent in the various **styles.**
* Vatican II does much to remedy these matters of style and to emphasize **the collegiality of Bishops, the communion of the Holy Spirit within the church’s hierarchy, the servanthood of Pope and Bishops, and the sensus fidei—the doctrinal stewardship of lay people**. If all these were in place, the Petrine ministry would indeed look very different.
* One of the keys to understanding Pope Francis: he is trying to bring this Vatican II vision into being.
* Yet the great obstacle now, and always, is the Curia—the bureaucracy of the Papacy. **This body often comes between Pope and Bishops in practical ways and needs reform** before Vatican II can be fully incorporated in the church’s system of governance (canon law).
* I close with a quote from a hero of ecumenical dialogue on the Catholic side, Jean-Marie Tillard: “Probably, within Christianity, only the Bishop of Rome has the power to gather all the confessions. On the condition that this is done in genuine dialogue.” (196).