

THE PETRINE OFFICE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

PETER IN GALATIANS

Since the dating of the Petrine traditions in the gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles is highly disputable, it is best to begin this study with the texts about Peter found in the epistle to the Galatians, which may be dated with some probability about 55 A.D., ten years or so before the earliest gospel, that of Mark.

Paul goes up to Jerusalem "to consult with Cephas (ἱστορήσαι Κηφᾶν)" and remains with him fifteen days, seeing none of the other apostles except (not even?) James, the brother of the Lord (Gal 1:18 f.). Fourteen years later, he seeks Jerusalem's agreement to the way in which he has preached the gospel to the Gentiles. He describes his visit on that occasion as one in which he privately laid before "those who were of repute (οἱ δοκοῦντες)" (Gal 2:2, cf. Gal 2:9 οἱ δοκοῦντες στῦλοι εἶναι, i.e. James, Cephas, and John) the Law-free gospel which he had preached. In this connection he speaks of Peter (Πέτρος) as the one to whom the Jewish mission had been entrusted (Gal 2:7 f.). In 2:9 he says that that mission belonged not simply to Peter but to "them," the pillars, James, Cephas, and John. Does the attribution of it to Peter alone in Gal 2:7 f. indicate a superiority of Cephas to the other two? Possibly, but if any superiority is intended it may be no more than that which Peter had because of his being the first to see the Risen Lord (cf. 1 Cor 15:5) and thus the first to receive the apostolic commission.¹ As a result of the conference, the pillars give Paul complete freedom, laying no obligation on him to impose Mosaic Law or any of its parts on his Gentile converts, but charging him to be mindful of the poor (the Jerusalem church)—Gal 2:6-10.

In Gal 2:11-14 Paul rebukes Cephas for his vacillating attitude

¹ In Paul's view, seeing the risen Lord and being commissioned by him to bear witness are the requisites for apostleship in the strict sense of that term; cf. Gal 1:1.15 f.; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:8 f.

at Antioch in respect to table association with Gentile Christians, an attitude caused by fear of the Jewish Christians who had come to Antioch "from James" (Gal 2:12).

It is important to notice that this portrait of Peter as one who gives complete freedom to the Gentiles, a freedom which James wishes to restrict, contrary to the earlier agreement, has certain striking similarities with the portrait of Peter in Acts, and gives support to the *fundamental* accuracy of the Lukan picture of Peter's dealings with Cornelius and his household (Acts 10-11), and of Peter's role at the "Council of Jerusalem" (Acts 15:7-11) where his position on Gentile freedom is rather different from that of James (Acts 15:19 f.) and of the "Apostolic Letter" (Acts 15:23-29) which restricts that freedom.

PETER IN THE GOSPELS

We may simply mention without discussion such important facts as Peter's always heading the list of the Twelve (Mt 10:2-4; Mk 3:16-19; Lk 6:14-16; Acts 1:13), that in the Synoptics he is almost always the spokesman for the other disciples, and that even in the Fourth Gospel, where Peter is no longer, together with Andrew, the first to be called into the group of Jesus' disciples, and where the "disciple whom Jesus loved" is given a role which to an extent diminishes that of Peter (cf. Jn 20:8), there is no serious change in the uniquely prominent place given to Peter.

Three facts deserve closer attention: 1) Mark, and Matthew and Luke in dependence on him, make Peter the first of the disciples to confess to the messiahship of Jesus, although in Mark and Luke Peter when making the confession is simply the spokesman of all the others (Mk 8:27-33; Mt 16:13-23; Lk 9:18-21); 2) Matthew (16:18 f.), Luke (22:31 f.), and John (21:15-17) assign Peter an important role in the post-resurrection period. For Matthew and Luke, this is done by Jesus during his ministry; for John, by the risen Lord; 3) All the gospels assign the giving of Simon's new name, Cephas-Peter, to Jesus, whether as one by which Simon is henceforth to be called (Mt 16:18; Mk 3:16; Lk 6:14) or as one which he will receive at some undetermined point in the future (Jn 1:42).

1. Oscar Cullmann's view that the Markan form of Peter's con-

fession should not be called a confession at all, but a "Reprimand of Peter's Satanic Conception of the Christ"² since it deals principally with Jesus' repudiation of Peter's "diabolical" understanding of the messiahship goes far beyond the meaning of the text. It is true that Peter's protest against the passion prediction is harshly criticized by Jesus, but this does not justify Cullmann's view that Jesus' rebuke is the "real point" of the narrative.³ As Ernst Haenchen remarks, the confession itself, "You are the Christ" (8:29) is the same as the confession of the primitive Church and in itself is in no way defective.⁴ The Matthean form goes beyond the Markan and includes a confession to Jesus as Son of the Living God. Jesus declares that this has been revealed to Peter by the Father ("Blessed art *thou*, Simon, son of Jonah . . ."). Thus in the Matthean form Peter is not the spokesman for the whole group of disciples, as in Mark and Luke, but one who has received a special revelation. Since this raising of Peter above the others is peculiar to Matthew, it ought not to be taken as original as against Mark, much less as historical. The important fact, however, is that in Mark and Luke Peter is the one who expresses the faith of all the disciples in Jesus' messiahship. This probably has a significant bearing on the meaning of Lk 22:31 f. where Jesus promises Peter that his faith will not fail.

2. The Matthean, Lukan, and Johannine words of Jesus to Peter are much controverted in respect to their authenticity. The

² Cf. *Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr*² (Westminster Press, 1962), 186.

³ *Ibid.*, 179. While it is probable that the passion prediction, Peter's protest, and Jesus' rebuke (Mk 8:31-33) were originally an independent piece of tradition (cf. E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus*¹⁵ [Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1959], 161; but that 8:30 belonged to that tradition, as Lohmeyer claims, is entirely improbable) it can hardly be denied that in joining that to the confession Mark has shown the defective understanding of Peter and the other disciples of the nature of Jesus' messiahship—without, however, making that the "real point" of the narrative. In Matthew the confession is certainly presented as praiseworthy, yet that evangelist did not find it necessary to eliminate the rebuke following the passion prediction. It is true that he has separated the prediction and rebuke from the confession more clearly than Mark (cf. ἀπὸ τότε ἤρξατο [16:21]) but Mark's καὶ ἤρξατο διδάσκειν [8:31] also serves to indicate that the rebuke does not bear directly on the confession. For an excellent critique of Cullmann's work, cf. A. Vögtle, "Messiasbekenntnis und Petrusverheissung," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 1(1957), 253-272; 2(1958), 85-103.

⁴ Cf. *Der Weg Jesu* (Töpelmann, 1966), 294 f.

Matthean present a particular difficulty because of the otherwise unattested word ἐκκλησία (in the sense of the universal Church; Mt 18:17 means the local community) in the language of the historical Jesus during his ministry. But all the sayings look to a time after the resurrection, and it is much disputed whether Jesus foresaw and spoke of a period between his own vindication by God and the final coming of the kingdom of God.⁵ Cullmann's view that the promise in Matthew is authentic but that its place in the life of Jesus was not Caesarea Philippi but the Last Supper (where Lk 22:31 f. has what Cullmann thinks a similar promise) has a serious consideration against it. It supposes that there is a substantial identity between the Matthean and the Lukan texts whereas there is in fact a very important difference. Lk. 22:31 f. does not speak of a future mission of Peter in respect to being the foundation of the Church and its leader in teaching and discipline (Matthew), but of Peter's future strengthening his brethren (i.e., the other apostles; cf. Lk 22:14, 31) in their faith. What "faith"? In attempting to answer that question we must see how Luke uses the word πίστις, "faith." It occurs eleven times in his gospel and fifteen times in Acts. In the gospel it means confidence in Jesus' power to heal (5:20; 7:9; 8:48; 17:19; 18:42) or to save from calamity (8:25); confidence in the power of prayer (17:5, 6); belief in Jesus which leads to forgiveness of sin (7:50); belief in the content of the Christian preaching (18:8; cf. 8:11 f.).⁶ In Acts, while the meaning "confidence" is present (cf. 3:16), the preponderant meaning is belief in the Christian message (e.g., 6:7; 13:8; 14:22,27; 15:9; 16:5; 20:21; 24:24; 26:18). Acts 14:22 is especially instructive for its similarity to Lk 22:32. In the latter, Jesus has prayed that Peter's πίστις may not fail, and he, when he has turned (after his denial) must strengthen his brethren (στήρισον τοὺς ἀδελφούς σου); in the former, Paul and Barnabas return to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the disciples (ἐπιστηρίζοντες τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν μαθητῶν) and encouraging them to

⁵ Cf. on this, W. Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfillment*² (SCM, 1961), 64-83; A. Vögtle, "Jesus und die Kirche," in *Begegnung der Christen*² (Evangelischer Verlagswerk, 1960), 54-81.

⁶ For this as the meaning of Lk 18:8 cf. R. Bultmann, "πιστεύω κτλ" *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* VI, 211 n.268.

remain in the faith (ἐμμένειν τῇ πίστει). Bultmann proposes that Lk 22:31 f. belonged originally to a tradition which did not know Peter's denial of Jesus and at that stage of the tradition Peter's πίστις, guaranteed by Jesus' prayer, meant his loyalty. Luke added ἐπιστρέψας, thus preparing for the denial and changing the meaning of πίστις from "loyalty," which would be senseless in view of the denial, to "faith"—the latter "in the sense of the terminology of the Hellenistic Christian mission."⁷ But that explanation is quite unnecessary. In view of Luke's use of πίστις in Lk 18:8 and in the texts of Acts cited above (with the exception of 3:16) the meaning of the word in Lk 22:32 can well have been the same in the entire history of the tradition of the text. The faith of Peter which would not fail, thanks to Jesus' prayer, is his faith in Jesus' messiahship, confessed for the first time in Lk 9:20. (It is interesting to see that in 9:22 ff. Luke alone of the synoptic writers omits Peter's protest against Jesus' suffering and Jesus' rebuke of Peter, enhancing thereby the quality of the confession.) This is the faith of Peter which has not failed, his denial notwithstanding. And because of his seeing the risen Lord and announcing this to his brethren (cf. Lk 24:34: "The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon")⁸ he has restored their faith in the messiahship of Jesus.⁹ That the faith of the others had failed is suggested by Lk 24:21: "We hoped that it was he who would redeem Israel." Peter's role in this strengthening of his brethren was limited to a particular point of history, and only to a brief moment, since the manifestation of the risen Lord was shortly afterwards made to the other disciples as well (cf. Lk 24:36 ff.). But the importance of Peter's part in witnessing to the resurrection, and thus confirming the disciples in their faith, is seen from the fact that his

⁷ Cf. *Die Geschichte des synoptischen Tradition*⁴ (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958), 288.

⁸ The use of "Simon" in this text may be significant. Normally, Luke uses "Peter" after Peter's confession. Yet in the promise-mandate of 22:31 f. "Simon" is used, as in 24:34.

⁹ The importance for Luke of faith in the messiahship is seen in the speeches attributed to Peter in Acts: cf. 2:36, "God has made both Lord and Messiah this Jesus whom you crucified"; 3:20 ". . . that (God) may send the Messiah appointed for you, Jesus." Cf. also Acts 9:20,22, where Paul's preaching that Jesus is "Son of God" (v.20) is understood to mean that he is the Messiah (v.22).

being the first of the disciples to see the risen One became part of the ancient confession of faith which Paul incorporated into 1 Cor 15: . . . ὡφθῆ Κηφᾶ, εἶτα τοῖς δώδεκα (15:5). There is nothing, however, in Lk 22:31 f. which looks beyond, to a continuing role of Peter. That he had such a role is clear from Acts, but his functions there have nothing to do with the promise-mandate of Lk 22.

Mt 16:18 f. and Jn 21:15-17 assign Peter a role in the future, not simply in respect to the other disciples of Jesus during his ministry (as Luke does) but in respect to the entire Christian community. But the rock-saying (Mt 16:18) is quite explicable as referring to Peter's being the first to whom the risen Lord appeared: he is the first witness to the resurrection and, in that sense, the rock on which the Church will be built. It is curious that the rock metaphor has so often been interpreted by Roman Catholics as pointing to a Petrine office continuing after Peter himself rather than to the unrepeatable laying of the rock-foundation.¹⁰ Mt 16:19, wherein Peter is promised the keys of the kingdom of heaven and the power to "bind and loose" on earth in such way that what he does there will be ratified "in heaven" points to his future governance of the Church, as does the mandate in John 21:15-17 that he feed the sheep of Christ's flock. But the power to bind and loose, which refers to teaching and discipline, as the rabbinic parallels show,¹¹ is promised to "the disciples" in Mt 18:18 (cf. 18:1) in a context which has to do with the exclusion of an offender from the Christian community. It is probable that in its original formulation Mt 18:18 applied solely to those who held authority within the community¹² and it is possible that even in its present setting it refers only to them, in spite of the fact that it now appears in the so-called ecclesiastical discourse of Matthew's gospel which is addressed to all the community of "disciples" of Jesus. But in any case it is clear that the power to bind and loose,

¹⁰ The use of the rabbinic story of God making Abraham the rock on which he would establish and build the world (cf. H. Strack-P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*² I [Munich, 1956] 733) as a parallel to this may not be justified. But if the parallel exists, it surely points to a unique and unrepeatable moment.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 738-741.

¹² So W. Pesch, "Die sogenannte Gemeindeordnung Mt 18," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 7(1963), 288.

promised to Peter in 16:19, is here given to others as well. The "keys of the kingdom of heaven," on the other hand is a metaphor which is not used in reference to any member of the community but Peter. The metaphor is apparently derived from Isaiah 22:22, where Eliakim is promised "the key of the House of David," and it designates authority. But it has been placed by Matthew in such close connection with the "binding and loosing" in 16:19 that any distinction between the possession of the keys of the kingdom and the power to bind and loose is unlikely. It would be difficult to conclude from the keys-metaphor that Peter was promised a power not shared by those who, like him, can "bind and loose" on earth, and whose decisions will be ratified in heaven. That the two metaphors say the same thing is confirmed by Mt 23:13, where the scribes and Pharisees are condemned by Jesus for locking the kingdom of heaven before men (κλείετε τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων; cf. Lk 11:52: ". . . you have taken away the key of knowledge . . ."); their teaching and disciplinary decisions have locked off heaven from men.

Jn 21:15-17, a variant of Mt 16:17-19, points, like the latter, to the importance of Peter and in a certain sense even more so, since in John there is no parallel which assigns to other disciples what is predicated of Peter here.¹³ As Bultmann has pointed out, the Johanne passage should not be regarded as a "rehabilitation of the repentant Peter" even in its present setting.¹⁴ It is difficult to agree with him, however, that the evangelist in taking over this traditional material "has no special interest in the office of Peter" and is concerned with Peter's authority only because he claims that it passed to the "disciple whom Jesus loved" after Peter's death.¹⁵ There is not the least evidence of any such claim, and the fact that the governance of the Church, indicated by the shepherd metaphor (cf. 1 Peter 5:1 f.), is spoken of in respect to Peter alone, would seem, on the contrary, to indicate a quite special interest of the evangelist in Peter's office.

The absence of any saying of Jesus in Mark corresponding to

¹³ Cf. on this question, R. Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII-XXI* (Doubleday, 1970), 1116.

¹⁴ *Das Evangelium des Joannes*¹⁹ (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 551.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 552.

those of Mt 16:18 f., Lk 22:31 f. and Jn 21:15-17 constitutes a serious problem for one who would hold that any of those sayings, in whatever form, can be attributed to Jesus himself. This is especially so since it must be said—against Bultmann—that there is no anti-Petrine tendency in Mark,¹⁶ and Mark does preserve, in an admittedly elusive way, the tradition of Peter's being the first of the disciples to see the risen Lord: cf. Mk 16:7, "But go, tell his disciples *and Peter* that he goes before you into Galilee; there you will see him . . ."

3. It is disputed whether Jesus' giving Simon the name Cephas-Peter is a retrojection of the fact that Peter "grounded" the community because of his being the first to witness to the resurrection, or whether it is a fact of Jesus' earthly ministry. Since the only acceptable explanation of the name relates it to Peter's role in the post-resurrection period, conferral of it by Jesus during his ministry would demand knowledge, on Jesus' part, of a time, however short, between his resurrection and the Parousia. The time of the conferral is probably an ultimately insoluble problem, although an argument in favor of its being during the time of the ministry is that it is found in Mark as well as in the other gospels.¹⁷ What is most important is that neither the statements of Mt 16:18 f., Lk 22:31 f. and Jn 21:15-17 nor the name Cephas point to an office or function going beyond the lifetime of Peter himself.

PETER IN ACTS

The prominence of Peter through Acts 15:29 is beyond dispute. For Luke, "the apostles" are the Twelve (except in Acts 14:4,14, where the term is applied to Paul and Barnabas in the same sense as in 2 Cor 8:23, i.e., "apostles of the churches"), and in Acts the apostles have a role of major importance, as witnesses to Jesus (1:8, 22,26), as teachers and ministers of the Word (2:42; 6:2,4), as leaders of the community (8:1; 15:6,22 f.; 16:4). Yet apart from the list in Acts 1:13, the mention of Matthias in the story of his

¹⁶ Cf. *Geschichte*, 277; *contra*, E. Haenchen, *op. cit.*, 301 n.14.

¹⁷ On the question of the name "Cephas-Peter," cf. J. Schmid, "Petrus 'der Fels', und die Petrusgestalt der Urgemeinde," *Begegnung der Christen*² (Evang. Verlagswerk, 1960), 347-372.

election (1:23,26), and that of James, brother of John, in the notice of his martyrdom (12:2), the only apostles who are ever named are Peter and John, and the latter always appears in a subordinate position to Peter. Peter initiates the election of Matthias, he brings the first Gentile converts into the Church (Acts 10-11), the story of his imprisonment is told at length (12:3-19), and he has an important part in the "Council of Jerusalem" (15:7-11). Most important, all the kerygmatic speeches of Acts 1-15 with the exception of that of Acts 13:16-41 are attributed to him (Acts 5:29 ff. is attributed to him and the other apostles: ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ Πέτρος καὶ οἱ ἄποστολοι εἶπαν).

The most significant element of Acts in regard to Petrine office is the story of the conversion of Cornelius and his household, and that of the "Council of Jerusalem." In the former, Peter brings into the Christian Community Gentiles who, although "God-fearers" and thus not to be equated with pagans (cf. 10:1 f.), were not Jewish proselytes and therefore could not but cause ritual impurity in a Jew who had table association with them—as Peter apparently did, since he is asked, after their baptism, "to remain (with them) for several days" (10:48). Peter not only disregards the ritual impurity, but—much more important—baptizes them without their being circumcised.

Whatever the meaning of the account in its pre-Lukan form, the author of Acts has made it an essential part of his story of Peter: Peter is the first who authorizes a mission to the Gentiles in which no requirement of Mosaic Law is laid on them. That that is the intent of the author is clear from his use of the incident in Acts 15, where it is given as justification for such a mission. Moreover, the vision which precedes Peter's dealings with Cornelius, in which he is commanded to kill and eat animals which are both clean and unclean (10:10-16), suggests that the Mosaic Law's distinction of clean and unclean foods is no longer valid, although the vision is interpreted not directly of foods but of men (10:28).

When the event is referred to in Acts 15:7-9 it is used as basis for Peter's decision that Gentiles need not be circumcised and observe the Mosaic Law. While there circumcision is the main issue (cf. 15:1) it is plain that there is question also of keeping the Law in its

entirety; this is seen not only from 15:5, but from 15:10, where Peter speaks against placing on the Gentiles "a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear"—a reference to the Law as such, and not merely to circumcision.

It is significant that it is *not* that view which prevails in the Council, but rather James's compromise that the Gentile Christians observe a minimum of Mosaic Law, i.e., that they abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from πορνεία (cf. 15:20,29).

It is generally admitted that the account of the Council is a composite of distinct traditions, one giving Peter's position, the other, that of James and the church of Jerusalem. The latter, expressed in the "Apostolic Letter" (15:23-29), belongs to a later time than that to which Acts 15 assigns it (cf. Acts 21:25, where Paul is informed of it at the end of his missionary journeys). In uniting those traditions, Luke gives a picture in which the solution of Peter, in spite of the prominence of that apostle, is not the one which the Council accepts, however similar it may be to the one proposed in the "Apostolic Letter." Luke also presents the decision of the Council as one which Paul accepted and communicated to the Gentile churches of Asia Minor during his second missionary journey (16:4)—a fact which is the clearest possible indication of the author's own literary activity. As was pointed out at the beginning of this paper, Peter's position in Acts 15 corresponds to that taken, according to Galatians, by the "pillars," James, Cephas and John, in respect to freedom of the Gentiles from Mosaic Law. James's position, adopted by the Council, corresponds to the restriction on that total freedom which, again according to Galatians, James apparently later insisted on (Gal 2:12).

CONCLUSIONS

1. The scriptural data here briefly reviewed does not, in itself, suggest that the Petrine office continued in the church after Peter's death. Nothing is said in these texts which is not fully accounted for by referring it to Peter's own role in the post-resurrection period.

2. If the sayings of Jesus in Mt 16:18 f., Lk 22:31 f. and Jn 21:15-17 are regarded as reflecting merely the situation and needs of

the later communities which formed them, there is much stronger support for the view that there was a continuing Petrine office. However, historical interest in the one who played so important a role in the beginnings of the Church cannot be excluded as the motive for the formation and transmission of these sayings.¹⁸ Consequently, that the sayings should have originated in communities which did not have experience of the historical Peter is no convincing argument for their being a reflection of the situation of those communities contemporary with the time of the formation of the sayings, and thus of a continuing Petrine office.

3. A possible New Testament basis for the continuance of the Petrine office (insofar as that office pertained to teaching and governing the Church) is that Acts 20:25-32 and especially the Pastoral Epistles point to the continuation of the apostolic office (*mutatis mutandis*) in the ἐπίσκοποι-πρεσβύτεροι.¹⁹ In this connection, one might also suggest Mt 28:16-20, where "the eleven disciples" are given the apostolic commission and the assurance that the risen Lord will be with them "until the end of the age" (28:20). Since the gospel of Matthew was written probably around 80 A.D., it is clear that the author did not think that the promise of the Lord's presence was at that time being fulfilled in the eleven to whom he has Jesus give it; and yet the "end of the age" had not come. This, again, points to a continuation of the apostolic office in persons to whom we can give the title "successors of the apostles," not because it is an accurate one, since in one sense the apostolic office is such that no one can really succeed to it, but because it is a time-honored way of

¹⁸ Bultmann's suggestion that Mt 16:17-19 was formulated in the Palestinian community where Peter was looked up to as founder and leader (*Geschichte*, 277) would indicate such an interest. There seems to be no reason why it would have to be confined only to that community.

¹⁹ H. Conzelmann's view that Luke knows nothing of apostolic succession (cf. *Die Apostelgeschichte* [J.C.B. Mohr—Paul Siebeck, 1963], 9) is based in part on the widespread opinion that Luke did not consider Paul an apostle; consequently Acts 20:25-32 does not point to the continuance of apostolic office. That Luke never applied the word to Paul is quite true (except for the designation of Paul and Barnabas as apostles in 14:4,14 where it has a different sense, as noted above). But that he conceived of Paul as an apostle in the strict sense of the term is at least a probability. For a discussion of that point, cf. M. Bourke, "Reflections on Church Order in the New Testament," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30(1968), 496-498.

designating those to whom the apostolic function of governing and teaching the Christian Church has been communicated. This continuation of the apostolic office may indicate a continuance of the office of the chief apostle, which Peter surely was. But there seems to be nothing said in the New Testament about Peter as *chief* apostle which demands that continuance.

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