

WHO IS THE VICAR OF CHRIST?

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As the world's attention is focused on the new Pope, Benedict XVI, we must study his office since the position purports to take the place of Christ. The Vatican officially teaches that the Pope is the substitute for Christ Jesus; the words of the official pronouncement are, "The *Pope*, Bishop of Rome and Peter's successor, 'is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful.' 'For the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise.'"[1]

The world again has a man in position of "Vicar of Christ," so it is the biblical imperative to see the true office of the Vicar of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ entrusted the universal care of souls into the safekeeping of the Divine Person of the Holy Spirit. Concerning this Third Person of the Trinity who was to be His substitute, the Lord promised that, "*when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.*"[2] The Holy Spirit convicts of sin as He makes the sinner realize his lost condition and convicts him of his need of Christ's righteousness. He it is who brings a soul dead in sin to life. This miracle of grace is spoken of in Scripture as, "*the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.*"[3] The majesty, greatness and indescribable power of the office of Vicar of Christ are such that a believer stands in awe of His divine Person. That any human being should lay claim to the office of Vicar of Christ seems totally absurd and blasphemous.

The True Vicar of Christ

Because there is a direct connection between the redemption of Christ and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, it is a soul-damning error to mistake the work of the Holy Spirit as Vicar of Christ with the position or work of any man. As Christ Jesus had been the Master, Counselor and Guide to the believers, He promised to send the Holy Spirit as His substitute so that He might abide with them for ever."[4] In believers' lives the Holy Spirit has full, immediate, and universal influence, as the Scripture so wonderfully teaches, "*now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*"[5] The work of the Spirit is transforming; we are changed from one degree of glorious grace unto another, until by that same grace one day we will be perfect in Him in glory forever. How much therefore should Christians prize the full and complete ministry of the Holy Spirit! In the face of these awesome truths concerning the role and ministry of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ, it is horrendous to learn that the Vatican proclaims, "The Pope enjoys, by divine institution, supreme, full, immediate, and universal power in the care of souls."[6] Persuading men and women that Christ the Lord left a mortal man to be His vicar on earth attempts to gainsay the very purpose of Christ Jesus.

History of the claim to be Vicar of Christ

This outlandish assertion came relatively late in the history of the Papacy. To begin with, the Bishop of Rome claimed to be the vicar of Caesar and his successors the rightful heirs to the Caesars. The city that had been the seat of power for the Roman Empire became the city for the Bishop of Rome to exercise his authority. Gradually other Bishops and national monarchs accepted him as vicar and successor to Caesar with the same supreme title of "Pontifex Maximus." Next the Bishops of Rome claimed to be "The vicar of the prince of the apostles,"[7] that is, the vicar of Peter.[8] Thus in the early fifth century Bishop Innocent I (401-417AD) insisted that Christ had delegated supreme power to Peter and made him the Bishop of Rome. Following this he held that the Bishop of Rome as Peter's successor was entitled to exercise Peter's power and prerogatives. Boniface III, who became Bishop of Rome in 607, established himself as "Universal Bishop," thus claiming to be vicar and master of all other bishops. It was not until the eighth century, however, that the particular title "Vicar of the Son of God"[9] was found in the fraudulent document called "The Donation of Constantine." [10] Although this notorious document was proven false in the early sixteenth century, the Bishops of Rome have used the title "Vicar of Christ" since the eighth century. This title has been the Pope's supreme claim to spiritual and temporal supremacy. The taste of divine power, with which the title resonates, has proven to be addictive. The "Vicar of Christ" is able to recognize no authority other than his own. He looks upon himself as Master of all, and boldly proclaims, "The First See is judged by no one." [11]

It is truly significant that Joseph Ratzinger has been elected as the new Pope as Benedict XVI. Before this he headed up the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, [12] since he emphatically is dictatorial. Archconservatives in the Church of Rome will warmly welcomed him, however he will not be acceptable to many American Catholics because of his hard-line stance. This rigid position was seen clearly in the document that he issued on September 5th 2000 called, "Dominus Iesus." [13] In that document, he boldly decreed that the Roman Catholic Church is the only "instrument for the salvation of all humanity." [14] Dogmatically, he also rules out Evangelical Churches from being considered as "Churches in the proper sense" when he proclaimed, "the ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery, **are not Churches in the proper sense.**" [15]

Counterfeit Vicar of Christ

Rome's alleged office of Christ's Vicar on earth is so all-embracing and complicated that Benedict XVI, as one man, cannot exercise "supreme, full, immediate, and universal power." Thus Joseph Ratzinger, who purports to be invested with the office, needs a vast hierarchy to command. The pyramid of power that constitutes his office of the "Vicar of Christ" consists of cardinals, patriarchs, major archbishops, metropolitans, coadjutor archbishops, diocesan bishops, coadjutor bishops, episcopal vicar, eparches, apostolic vicars, apostolic prefects, apostolic administrators and vicars general. [16]

The counterfeit nature of the Pope's claim to be "the Vicar of Christ" is shown by his doctrine and deeds. The key role of the True Vicar of Christ is to glorify Christ, "*He shall glorify me: for*

he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you."[17] The sending of the Spirit was the glorifying of Christ. God the Father glorifies Christ Jesus in heaven, and the Spirit glorifies Him on earth. All the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit are to glorify Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ promised the Apostles, "*when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth.*"[18] God's truth is an indissoluble, balanced and harmonious whole. In the Bible we have "*all truth,*" in this the Holy Spirit truly glorifies Jesus Christ. In stark contrast, the Pope claims to possess "*infallible teaching authority.*" This neither glorifies Christ nor honors the Spirit of truth.[19] Also the Pope, as "*the Vicar of Christ*" teaches "*rebirth*" by baptism, which demeans the glory of Christ.[20]

By crucifixes, rosaries, and scapulars, the earthly Vicar purports to fortify men and women against the assaults of Satan. He also maintains that indulgences can shorten the sufferings of souls in purgatory. While presiding over substantially the richest financial institution in the world, he maintains and advocates vows of poverty. Even as thousands of souls are corrupted by unbridled filthiness, he defends the vows of celibacy for his priests. By autonomous proclamations he releases men and women from their marriage vows in self-declared annulments.[21] None of these deeds glorify Christ Jesus the Lord. The major enemy of Christ and His Gospel, however, is not materialism nor is it lust, but rather the spiritual pride and the apostasy of the very one who pretends to be His "*Vicar.*" The first lie of Satan, "*ye shall be as gods*"[22] reaches its full fruition in the Papal claim to be "*Vicar of Christ.*" By this the words of the Apostle Paul are literally fulfilled, "*who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God... showing himself that he is God.*"[23]

"Habemus papam," we have a Papa!

The waiting is finished. The senior cardinal–deacon has appeared on a balcony overlooking St. Peter's Square and has announced: "*Habemus papam! We have a Papa!*"[24] Catholics and the world are told that they now have a spiritual Papa to look after them. Christ Jesus constantly spoke about His Father, the word "*Father*" was seventy times on His lips to show true believers that they have a Father, a Father in Heaven – "*my Father, and your Father... my God, and your God.*"[25] Distinctively true believers have an Abba Father, in the words of the Apostle, "*for ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.*"[26] It is precisely because believers have an Abba Father that they are commanded not to call any man "*Father*" in the spiritual sense. Thus the Lord's command, "*call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.*"[27] The Lord Christ Jesus prayed to the only "*Holy Father*" that exists, "*Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.*"[28] The Lord used His usual appellation "*Father*" but prefixed it with the word "*Holy.*" He wanted to emphasize the absolute perfection of the Father's nature. So intimate and worshipful is this, that in a spiritual sense a true believer will only use the words "*The Holy Father*" of God alone! The Roman Pontiff not only takes to himself the office of "*Vicar of Christ*" but also the very title of the Godhead, "*The Holy Father.*" We must therefore ask the question that Apostle John asks: "*Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.*"[29] In assuming these titles to himself, the Pope shows that he truly is "*a vicar of Christ*" in the biblical sense of the Antichrist!

Conclusion

Today some compromised and eclectic “Evangelicals” have stopped their ears and closed their eyes to the true Vicar of Christ and have agreed mindlessly with the festivities that accompanied the white smoke that arose from the Vatican. Ignored once again are the questions: Whom do we honor? Whom do we fear? Is it God or man? As the world and false Evangelicals bow in admiration to the new Pontiff, we might well take a moment to pause and consider where we personally stand as believers in the One Lord Christ Jesus and the One Holy Spirit.

Presented to the world is the office of Pope. The one who holds the office claims to mediate between God and man and to hold the keys of heaven and hell. Most appallingly, he takes to himself the office of “Vicar of Christ,” adding even the attribute of infallibility to his position,^[30] demanding that “a religious respect of intellect and will be paid to his teaching.”^[31] The Papal arrogance tallies well with the Scripture’s prediction for such claims, “*I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.*”^[32] The words inscribed on the Pope’s official miter are “Vicarius Filii Dei,” Latin for “Vicar of the Son of God.” Since there can be but one Vicar of Christ who is infinite, supreme, omnipotent, and all sufficient, the earthly pretender can be none other than a self-energized apostate system and will eventually be judged and utterly condemned by the Lord.^[33] Although the ecumenical allies of the earthly Vicar multiply like mushrooms, yet we need not become fearful because we know that in Him we are “*more than conquerors through Him that loved us.*”^[34] Our victory is assured “*for whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*”^[35]

The self-importance of the Vatican is proverbial. It attempts to establish its own righteousness by devising the importance of merit, indulgences, purgatory and the observance of its sacraments. The folly is that Christ Jesus has come and has brought in an everlasting righteousness. He is the object of faith, and His followers belong to fellowships of believers, comprising His Church. No assembly of believers can ever substitute for the Lord, and no group of believers can assume onto themselves His authority. In history, this attempted replacement has been the key factor in the life of Catholicism and its hierarchy. It is the very same issue that negated the way of salvation to the Pharisees and their followers, “*for they being ignorant of God’s righteousness and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.*”^[36]

As human creatures, each one of us has a supernatural and eternal end. We are therefore bound to answer to the Lord God in the total obedience that He requires. We soon discover, however, that all our efforts at achieving perfect obedience are fruitless, and that of ourselves it is impossible to meet the standards of divine perfection. This righteousness is found in the Lord Christ alone, who in the words of the Apostle, “*is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.*”^[37] Christ Jesus the Lord totally satisfied the justice of God so that we might be partakers of righteousness by faith, “for he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” It is insufficient to be found not guilty; we must also be actually righteous in God’s sight. Not only all sin must be forgiven, but also all righteousness must be fulfilled. All the perfection that God requires of us is found in Him on whom we trust. The actual obedience, which Christ

lived in keeping the whole law of God, is the righteousness whereby we are saved. If you are found in Him, which means that you do not have your own righteousness but rather have the righteousness that is of God by faith, then indeed your life is hid with Christ in God; and when Christ shall appear, you also shall appear with Him in glory. Because Christ Jesus was both God and man, His transcendent excellence is such that it not only satisfies for the sins of believers but it also bestows on them His righteousness.

It is the will of God that every true believer “*should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*”^[38] Those of us who cling to Christ and His Word alone and who are saved before the all-Holy God by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, with all glory and praise to God alone must give voice to our profession of faith. At the time of Elijah there was a call to the people of God to make a stand for the true God or to follow Baal. In a similar way Joshua asked the people to decide between the gods of the land and the true God of Israel. In our day, much more than at the time of Elijah or Joshua, it is urgent that we take seriously the command our Lord gave us to personally give witness as to where we stand.

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References:

- [1] Catechism of the Catholic Church Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Ed. (Wash. DC: US Catholic Conf., 1994, 1997) #882
- [2] John 16:8
- [3] Ephesians 1:19, 29, 29
- [4] John 14:16
- [5] II Corinthians 3:17-18
- [6] Catechism, Para 937
- [7] “Vicarius principis apostolorum” the official title in Latin.
- [8] This has been a long-standing contention, since Scripture never mentions Peter as ever residing in Rome.
- [9] “Vicarius Filii Dei” is the official title in Latin.
- [10] “The Donation of Constantine” states “as on earth he (Peter) is seen to have been constituted vicar of the Son of God, so the pontiffs, who are the representatives of that same chief of the apostles” <http://www.jmgainor.homestead.com/files/PU/PF/doco.htm> 3/9/05
- [11] Code of Canon Law, Latin–English ed. (Wash. DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1983), Canon 1404. All canons are taken from this volume unless otherwise stated.
- [12] Formerly known as the Office of the Inquisition, then the Holy Office, it is still housed in the same building in Rome as it had been during six horrendous centuries of torture and death when it carried out the papal decrees.
- [13] http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/
- [14] “Dominus Iesus,” Para. 22 DI hereafter.
- [15] DI, Para 17. Bolding not in original.
- [16] For more details, see Our Sunday Visitor’s Catholic Almanac 1998 (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc) pp. 141-142.
- [17] John 16:14

[18] John 16:13

[19] “The Supreme Pontiff, in virtue of his office, possesses infallible teaching authority when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful ... he proclaims with a definitive act that a doctrine of faith or morals is to be held as such.” Can. 749

[20] “Through baptism men and women are freed from sin, are reborn as children of God, and, configured to Christ by an indelible character, are incorporated in the [Catholic] Church.” Can. 849

[21] The Catholic Church has taken the Divine institution of marriage and used it for its own purposes. The Catholic Church has granted hundreds of thousands of annulments and allowed remarriage. Vid Code of Canon Law #1684

[22] Genesis 3:5

[23] II Thessalonians 2:4

[24] In Latin, the full proclamation is “Annuntio vobis gaudium magnum. Habemus Papam”, “I announce to you great joy, we have a Papa.”

[25] John 20:17

[26] Romans 8:16

[27] Matthew 23:9

[28] John 17:11

[29] I John 2:22

[30] “The Supreme Pontiff, in virtue of his office, possesses infallible teaching authority.” Can. 749

[31] “A religious respect of intellect and will, even if not the assent of faith, is to be paid to the teaching which the Supreme Pontiff...” Can. 752

[32] Isaiah 14:14

[33] Revelation 18:8 “Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.”

[34] Romans 8:37

[35] I John 5:4

[36] Romans 10:3

[37] I Corinthians 1:30

[38] Jude 3