

When the Cardinals Are the True Successors of the Apostles

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Reformed · Late Medieval · Treatise

STROMATA 233

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INTRODUCTION

Written during the final, embattled years before his burning at Constance in 1415, these pages form part of the Bohemian reformer's sustained assault on the ecclesiology that identified the visible Roman hierarchy with the true Church of Christ. The argument turns on a distinction — between the predestinate body known only to God and the institutional college claiming to embody it — that Wyclif had sharpened and that Hus here presses to its logical breaking point, laying groundwork the Reformation would inherit a century later. The reasoning proceeds by scholastic syllogism, quoting the doctors in order to turn them against themselves, and the reader should expect close, deliberate disputation rather than rhetorical fire. What burns beneath the schoolman's tools is a pastoral question Hus keeps returning to: what is the fruit of teaching Christ's worshippers in this way?

The second point is this: the college of cardinals is the body of the holy Roman church. This being so, then the college of the cardinals is the holy Roman church. The conclusion follows from Eph. i : 22: "He gave him to be head over the whole church, which is his body." And as the church, which is Christ's mystical body, cannot be damned, as when Christ said, "on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" — it follows, that the college of cardinals cannot be damned; and since this conclusion is false or, at least, for the doctors doubtful, it follows that in this particular point they have laid down as truth what is doctrinally false or doubtful. What is the fruit of teaching the worshippers of Christ in this way?

Likewise, the college of cardinals is either the true body of the holy Roman church or the pretended body. Not the second, according to the doctors. Therefore they must be the true body, and consequently that college is predestinated unto glory, and, as the doctors have not the revelation of predestination with reference to that college, it follows, that they ought not to have affirmed that the college is the body of the Roman church.

Again, the body of the holy Roman church is made up of all the predestinate, and the college by itself does not include all these. The first part of this statement appears from the words of the apostle, who spoke as the representative of the predestinate: "We being many are one body in Christ," Romans 12:5. And, showing the unity of the body, he does not make the college of the apostles the body of the

church, I Cor. 12 : 28, but he says: "God hath set some in the church, first apostles, second prophets, thirdly teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings," etc. And making a comparison of the body of the church with a man's natural body, he says, "For as there is one body and it has many members but all the members of the body being many are one body: so also is Christ," namely, he is one, because he is one person with his holy church, which is his body.

The second part of this statement, that all the predestinate are not that college, is evident of itself. Therefore, better would the doctors have said that Christ is the head of the holy Roman church, and each of the predestinate a member and that all together are the body, which is the church, than to have said that the pope is the head of the Roman church and the college of cardinals the body, for in this case they would have agreed with the apostles and with the saints quoted in Chapter I, especially with St. Augustine, *de doct. christ.* III [Nic. Fathers, 2 : 569], who says: "For, in truth, that is not the Lord's body which will not remain with him through eternity." 1 If, therefore, the college of cardinals will not remain through eternity, a thing which is hidden from me, how is it the body of the holy Roman church or of Christ ? In a similar way, how is the pope with the aforesaid college the holy Roman church against which the gates of hell cannot prevail?

Therefore, we will speak more safely with St. Augustine who, *Commentary on Psalms*, 80 : 1 [Nic. Fathers, 7 : 386], says: "Finally by this testimony, the confession is made both of Christ and the vine that is the head and the body, king and people, shepherd and flock, and the whole mystery of all Christians, Christ and the church." See, how the doctor of holy church shows us another holy church with its head than the one defined of the [eight] doctors who, without support of Scripture, say that the body of the holy Roman church is the college of cardinals, for which college it were well if its parts were members of the holy church of Jesus Christ. And we ought to think how St. Augustine himself feared to call Christ Lord-man, for the reason that this sense does not appear in Scripture; therefore much more ought we to fear to call any Christian head of the holy church militant, lest Christ perhaps be blasphemed, to whom this name is reserved by the Nicene council, *Trinitatis concilio*, as proper to him. How, then, do the doctors, without any Scripture proof, teach that the pope is head of holy church and the college its body? Since it is enough for the faithful Christian with inwrought faith and perseverance to believe the article of faith concerning the catholic church that it is the one totality of all the predestinate faithful who are to be saved by virtue of the merit of Christ — who is the head of the catholic church — it is not permissible for us expressly to descend to any particular vicar whom the Christian might recognize as the chief — *capitalis*. For many have been saved in Judea, Asia and Ethiopia who have believed in Christ, following the teaching of the apostles, and who did not expressly recognize Peter, nay, or expressly believe what concerns Peter, just as they did not hear anything about him.

The third point is this: the pope is the manifest and true successor of the prince of the apostles, and about this I have treated in Chapter VII near the close. It is, however, to be said again that the doctors do not prove this point. And, as the vicar ought to occupy the place of his superior from whom he has received vicarial power, therefore, occupying his place, he ought more directly to be conformed to him in his works or otherwise the power would be frustrated in him. From this, then, the argument is constructed: a man is the vicar of the person whose place he fills and from whom, in a legitimate way, he receives procuratorial power [delegated as with the Roman procurators]. But no one truly occupies the place of

Christ, or Peter, unless he follows him in his life, for no other kind of following is more fitting; nor does any one otherwise receive procuratorial power. The requirements, therefore, of the vicarial office are conformity of life and authority from him who appoints. If, therefore, the pope is a most humble man, depending little upon mundane honors and the gain of this world, if he is a shepherd deriving his name from the pasturage of God's Word, of which pasturage the Lord said to Peter, "Pasture my sheep," John 21 : 17, if he pasture the sheep by the Word and the example of his virtues being made ensample of the flock with his whole heart, as Peter says, I Peter 5 : 3, if he is meek, patient, chaste, laboring anxiously and solicitously in the service of the church, esteeming all temporal things as dung — then, without doubt, is he the true vicar of Jesus Christ, manifest to God and men, so far as the judgment of the outward senses can determine. But, if he lives at discord with these virtues — for there is "no communion between Christ and Belial," II Cor. 6 : 15, and, as Christ himself said, "He that is not with me is against," Matt. 12 : 30 — how can he be the true and manifest vicar of Christ or of Peter and not rather the vicar of antichrist, seeing he resists Christ in morals and in life?

Therefore, when Peter was opposed to Christ in will and words and after Christ had promised him the keys, Christ called Peter Satan, that is, "adversary," and said: "Get thee behind me, Satan, thou art an offence to me, because thou savorest not the things that be of God but the things that be of men." If, therefore, Peter, chosen to be Christ's first vicar by Christ and deputed to serve the church in spiritual matters, was called by Christ Satan, Peter out of affectionate love having tried to dissuade him from submitting to the sentence of death, why should not another one, more opposed to Christ in his life, not be called Satan and consequently antichrist or antichrist's vicar or antichrist's chief minister? Hence, St. Bernard, Com. on Canticles, says: "Evil has gone out from thy elder judges, who seem to be ruling the people. Alas ! alas ! O Lord God, for they were the first to persecute thee who seemed to hold primacy in thy church and to rule the spiritual principedom. Likewise all friends are all foes, all clients are all adversaries, all servants are no peaceful men, all who seek the things which are their own, they are ministers of Christ and yet the servants of antichrist." See how plainly that holy man brings out that bad prelates are in pretence friends, servants, and ministers of Christ. But in fact they are the foes of Christ and the servants of antichrist.

Likewise, Augustine, Com. on John, also Decretum, 8 : 1 [Nic. Fathers, 7 : 446; Friedberg, 1 : 596], pointing out who are not true shepherds, but mercenaries, says: "There are some superiors in the church about whom the apostle Paul says: 'they seek their own things and not the things of Christ.' What is it, therefore, 'to seek one's own things'? Not to love Christ freely, not to seek God for His own sake, not to follow after temporal comforts, to heap up riches, to hanker after honors from men. When these are loved by the superior, and when God is served for such things, whoever he may be that serves, he is a mercenary and he does not count himself among the children." For about such the Lord also says: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, they received their reward.' Hence the same Augustine says: "That just as Peter, the apostle, was the type of all good men and especially good bishops, so Judas represented all bad men, especially bad priests."

Therefore, commenting on John 12 : 8 [Nic. Fathers, 7 : 283], "The poor ye have always with you, but me ye have not always," he says: "What does he wish for himself ? How is this to be understood, — 'me ye have not always'? Do not fear. The words were spoken to Judas. Why, therefore, did Christ not say, 'thou hast,' but 'ye have'? Because there is not one Judas or one wicked person, but Judas represents the body of the wicked, just as Peter represents the body of the good." Further on he says: "In Peter's person the good in the church are represented; in Judas's person the evil in the church are represented. To them it was said: 'But me ye have not always.' What is this 'not always,' and what is this 'always'? If thou art good, if thou belongest to the body which Peter represents, then thou hast Christ both now and in the future — now, by faith; now, figuratively; now, by the sacrament of baptism; now, by the food and drink of the altar. Thou hast Christ now, and thou hast him always, because when thou goest hence thou wilt go to him who said to the thief : ' To-day thou shalt be with me in paradise.' But if thou livest wickedly, thou seemest now to have Christ because thou enterest into the church, signest thyself with the sign of Christ, art baptized with the baptism of Christ, dost mingle with the members of Christ — now thou hast Christ, but on account of wicked living thou wilt not always have him." Thus much Augustine, who shows that Peter's true vicars are the righteous and Judas Iscariot's vicars are the wicked, and especially wicked priests, hypocrites and blasphemers. And he shows the same when he comments upon Psalm 109: "Deus laudem meam ne tacueris." And Ambrose, 22 : 20 [Friedberg, 1 : 888], says: "Beware, my brethren, against lies. ... For it is a lie to say one is a Christian and not to do the works of Christ. It is a lie to profess oneself to be a bishop, a priest, or a cleric, and to act at variance with this order." Again, 2 : 1 [Friedberg, 1 : 438]. All prelates are not to be esteemed as prelates. Not the name makes the bishop, but the life. And, Dist. IV sub rubrica, under "He is not truly a priest who is called a priest," Chrysostom also says [Dist. 40 : 12; Friedberg, 1 : 147]: "There are many priests and few priests."

From these and other sayings it is evident that no pope is the manifest and true successor of Peter, the prince of the apostles, if in morals he lives at variance with the principles of Peter; and, if he is avaricious, then is he the vicar of Judas, who loved the reward of iniquity and sold Jesus Christ. And by the same kind of proof the cardinals are not the manifest and true successors of the college of Christ's other apostles unless the cardinals live after the manner of the apostles and keep the commands and counsels of our Lord Jesus Christ. For, if they climb up by another way than by the door of our Lord Jesus Christ, then are they thieves and robbers, just as the Saviour himself declared when of all such he said: "All that came before me are thieves and robbers," John 10 : 8. Whosoever, therefore, say that they are Christ's true and manifest vicars, knowing that they are living in sin, lie. Therefore the apostle says: How "do they of the synagogue of Satan say that they are Jews, and they are not, but lie"? [Rev. 2 : 9.]

Hence, if the cardinals heap up to themselves ecclesiastical livings and barter with them and take money for their sale either themselves or through others, and so devour and consume in luxurious living the goods of the poor, and if they do not do miracles or preach the Word of God to the people or pray sincerely or fill the place of deacons — whom the apostles appointed, Acts 6 — by not performing their duties or living their lives — in how far, I ask, are they the vicars of the apostles? In this that they heap up livings or, like Gehazi, seize upon gifts, or because very early in the morning they come into

the pope's presence clad in the most splendid apparel, and attended with the most sumptuous retinue of horsemen — thus attended, not on account of the distance of place or difficulty of the journey but to show their magnificence to the world and their contrariety to Christ and his apostles, who went about among the towns, cities, and castles clad in humble garb, on foot, preaching — evangelizando — the kingdom of God.

Nor in this are they the true and manifest vicars of Christ that they permit themselves to be adored of men on bended knee or that they surround the pope with visitors from abroad, that while he sits on high, splendidly apparelled even down to his feet, yea and far beyond his chair, they with bended knee humbly seek the kisses of his blessed feet, as if the sanctity of this father, the pope, would descend even to the place where his foot is planted? But do they, themselves weak, receive from those feet health? For Christ suffered his feet to be kissed by a woman, but did not protrude them, as appears in Luke 7, because sincere contrition and the care and washing of Christ's feet, that is, of the poor, deletes the sins of pilgrims. But that kiss profits no part [of the body] unto salvation. For, he who kisses, moved by guilty greed or fear or flattery, or deceived by blind devotion, will be altogether chargeable with guilt, he bending his knees and approaching the pope's feet more solicitously and reverentially than he would do before the sacrament of the body of the Saviour. But in allowing himself to be kissed the pope is altogether guilty, because he cannot make himself equal to Christ so as to deserve such honor. And if he may equal Christ (though he will not quickly equal the apostles), yet should he not exceed in honors of this kind what they received, unto the increase of his merit, and by a similar confession, for the profit of the people doing honor. Therefore, they, like Christ, began to do good by excelling in good works and not by receiving kisses, given as unto God. For they despised mundane honors and for that reason forbade men to make genuflections in their presence. For they kept in memory Christ's words: "When thou art bidden to a marriage feast, sit not down in the chief seat, lest a more honorable man than thou be bidden of him, and he that bade thee and him shall come to thee and say, Friend, give this man place; and then thou shalt begin with shame to take the lowest place," Luke 14 : 8, 9.

But it is certain from the sayings of the saints that Christ is speaking of the spiritual and not the corporal vocation, place and meal, for by the wedding is intended the marriage of Christ and the church which will be fulfilled perpetually in the last supper. To this marriage feast many are called, and few are chosen, as Christ said, Matt. 22 : 14, but he sits in the lowest place who, with a good heart, esteems himself the least of the elect, just as did Christ's apostle, who saw into the secret things which it is not lawful for a man to utter and esteemed himself the least of the apostles. If, therefore, the pope esteems himself to be the most holy father, or consents to receive from his inferiors the address, "Most Holy Father," does he not in presumption choose the first place? Therefore, if he had humility, such as St. Gregory had, he would with all haste put a stop to this style of address or seek to put a stop to it. Not because he holds the place of Peter and because he holds the great dotation, is he most holy — sanctissimus — but if he follows Christ in humility, in waging warfare, in patience and toil, and out of the great bond of love, then is he holy. But far be it that he is most holy, because then he would be God almighty and consequently not the vicar of Jesus Christ. For Christ did not want the woman to kiss his feet after the resurrection — immortal and undoubtedly blessed — so that he keep from blasphemous presumption the miserable persons who, for the time, falsely assume that they are Christ's vicars. But the feet of

Christ and those ascending with Christ are blessed and not the food of worms, a putrid member and a fetid sweat of mundane fluids. By these things we should be persuaded in regard to the fourth point — namely, that the cardinals are the manifest and true successors of the apostles, that it does not contain the truth. For by the fruits which it bears, is the tree known.

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