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THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE PAPACY

At our District Convention two years ago, we had our attention called to the far-reaching effects of ecumenicism in our world today. All of us would agree that this was a timely topic indeed. It opened our eyes to the significance of some actions which might otherwise appear puzzling to us.

The same thing could not be said though about the topic assigned for our consideration today. At first glance, it might seem as though it were something we could well do without. For some of us this may be the case. For others, the topic may serve as a brief review of some facts once learned but not too clearly remembered, or perhaps as a reassurance of the fact that the leopard has not changed his spots. When we hear optimistic reports on sessions of Rome's so called Oecumenical Council, we are prompted to think that vast and sweeping changes have taken place and everything is different because we are now classed as "separated brethren" rather than "heretics". It is easy to forget that Rome's past history has made her what she is, just as the past history of the Lutheran Synods in America have made them what they are. Hence it should be of some value to us to give attention to a brief rehearsal of THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE PAPACY. And it might appear to be of even more value when we consider just how many Lutherans have been imbued with Roman tendencies through over-emphasis on liturgical rituals.

No doubt, many of us were shocked, and saddened, two weeks ago, when we heard of the ordination of a former Missouri Synod pastor as a noncelibate priest of the Roman Catholic Church.¹ We would like to avoid a duplication of that experience. Yet, we dare not think, it can't happen here; the danger of its occurrence is there, and we must arm ourselves at all costs.

We should bear in mind that we can not simply point to any one event or experience as the source of the papacy and say: "Here is its origin." Thus we shall rather be tracing a series of developments and so led to discover several origins, so to speak, intangible origins for the most part.

It is safe to say that the spirit of the papacy is first found in the adoption of the Monarchical Episcopate, a system that became universal in the church by the middle of the second century. In the first century, there were but two offices in the church - the pastorate and the diaconate. The deacons were to take charge of the church treasury and to dispense funds where and when needed. The pastors were referred to as presbyters, i.e. elders, or as bishops, i.e. overseers. Each congregation had a group of such pastors. Between the death of Paul and the year 150, this arrangement was changed. One of the elders was elected as head pastor and given the title "bishop" while his assistants were designated "presbyters". Thus there were three offices: bishop, presbyter, deacon. In this system, which is referred to as the Monarchical Episcopate, the bishop became virtually the absolute head of the congregation. He decided just what was the

¹Ernest Adam Beck at Mainz, Germany on June 26, 1964.

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doctrine of the apostles to be passed on by the presbyters and accepted by the members. He determined the time and form of the service. He judged who was fit for Baptism or ready to receive the Holy Eucharist. And by the same token he came to hold in his hands the power of excommunication. It was the bishop who selected and ordained those whom he deemed worthy to be raised to Holy Orders. Once the church had these monarchical bishops, the distinction between clergy and laity was well on its way and the hierarchy had begun to rise.

We may wonder at the rapid development of a monarchy in a church which had but so lately started as a democracy, in which the elders were elected by the congregation. On second thought, though, it is all very logical. One contributing factor was the reverence paid to the Apostles who were "roving bishops," so to speak. We note in reading the Book of Acts that the Apostles were not bound to any one congregation but occasionally left Jerusalem to visit other newly established congregations. And wherever they went, they were able to exercise supervisory powers. It was a very simple thing to transfer this reverence to the students of the Apostles and thus this next generation became the Apostolic Fathers, the successors of the Apostles. Another factor in this development of episcopal authority was the threat of persecution. This became a reality under Nero in 64 and under Domitian in 96, and more especially in 113 when Trajan officially declared Christianity a "religio illicita" and set the policy which was to endure until the Edict of Milan in 313. This policy involved no formal search for Christians on the part of the government. If, however, a formal complaint was lodged by a Roman citizen, the accused party was put to a test by an official. The test consisted of offering sacrifice to pagan gods and/or the emperor. If the individual refused to make such sacrifice, he was adjudged a Christian and punished according to the whim of the local governor of the province - with boycotting of business, confiscation of property, banishment, or death. Although succeeding persecutions came in waves with crests of hostility followed by troughs of tranquillity, and were often confined to one or more provinces, yet the danger was constantly there.

And what was more natural than to look to the leadership of one man? With a great need for secrecy, a monarchical system made for greater efficiency. One leader could make decisions more readily than a board of presbyters - who should conceal the sacred scrolls until the next meeting, where the next meeting should be held, who was in most danger of discovery and should leave town for a while, where a fugitive or his family should be concealed, whether an apostate who had denied the faith in the face of danger and wanted forgiveness should be taken back or not. Certainly not much more was needed to foster the idea that these monarchical bishops were the successors of the Apostles.

It is interesting to learn that Rome itself did not have such a ruling bishop until the year 154 in the person of Anicetus. For us this means that it is historically impossible for Rome to trace an apostolic succession back to Peter who, according to the theory, was supposed to be the first bishop of Rome and as the head of the apostles the one who makes all Roman bishops to be above all other bishops. Rome, however, did fast become the best known of the early congregations, superceding Jerusalem, of course, and ancient Antioch, Paul's home base.¹ The Roman congregation seems to have acquired a reputation for courage and generosity beyond all others. This was the case partly because of its position in the capital city at the very heart of the Empire. Thus it was a comparatively simple thing

¹Destroyed in A. D. 70, Jerusalem never attained its pristine status again.

that the bishop of this congregation should be regarded with a bit more awe than was accorded other bishops. Human nature being what it is, the average incumbent of the office was not at all averse to such honor and before long came to regard it as his due. This development took place even more rapidly during the "long peace" from 260-303. These 43 years of freedom from persecution saw the church come out of hiding, so to speak. In Rome itself, e.g., some 40 churches were constructed during this time. Many city congregations became dioceses. By a diocese, we mean a group of several congregations (urban, suburban, and rural) under one bishop with each congregation headed by a presbyter, who was in turn assisted by other presbyters and/or deacons. Among the dioceses, the one in the capital city of each province became the outstanding one and the bishop of this diocese became known as the Metropolitan Bishop, later Archbishop, the ruling bishop of the province.

Thus the hierarchical system was a well-established fact by the Council of Nicaea in 325. At this first oecumenical council, an order of Precedence was given to the most important metropolitans: Rome, Antioch, Alexandria.

Perhaps the biggest boost to Rome's pretensions was given when Emperor Constantine left Rome in 326 and gave Bishop Sylvester the Lateran Palace, apparently as a part of his policy of doing favors to the Christian Church by way of compensation for all the hardship and loss suffered during the persecutions, especially the last and most bitter one under Diocletian and Galerius which began in 303 and raged for 10 years in the West, even longer in the East. But with the removal of the imperial capital to old Byzantium, thereafter known as Constantinople, the biggest man in the West was the Bishop of Rome. From this date, we seem to be able to trace a more pronounced effort to claim authority for the Bishop of Rome. By the time of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 the struggle for supremacy was out in the open. That Council established one more rank at the top of the hierarchy, that of patriarch for the five most important sees: 1) Rome, 2) Constantinople, now the capital city, 3) Antioch, 4) Alexandria, and 5) Jerusalem for sentimental reasons since it was the home of the original church. The fact that it ranked Rome first, even above the current capital, shows us that a majority of the bishops regarded Rome as possessing the so called "Primacy of Peter", meaning that Rome's bishop was first among other bishops, as Peter was supposedly first among the apostles. Obviously, it was only a matter of time before Rome would seek a rank above that of patriarch to complete the hierarchy. We find, however, as time goes on, that Eastern Bishops were not as strongly imbued with this idea as were Western Bishops.

This ranking at Chalcedon was perhaps partly the result of several claims made over a period of years, e.g. by Innocent I, 402-417, and Leo I, 440-461, that Rome had the custody of apostolical tradition and was the sole heir of the primacy of Peter. Leo even managed to secure an edict confirming his universal jurisdiction from Emperor Valentinian III. And Chalcedon's decision likely helped to encourage the extravagant claim of Gelasius, 492-496: "...there are two by whom the world is ruled: the sacred authority of the pontiffs and the royal power. Of these, the importance of the priests is so much the greater..." Perhaps a kind of climax was reached when a bishop outside of Rome, Ennodius of Pavia, in 502 declared that the bishop of Rome can be judged by God alone.

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Actually then, within the span of 350 years, from 150 to 500, we find the essential claims of the papacy all made; claims to highest ecclesiastical power, to greatest secular authority, and to infallibility. Everything that follows is but an elaboration of these, both by way of clarifying the claims and by way of putting them into practice. After all, it is one thing to pretend to power but quite another to exercise it. Thus almost every action of a Roman pope from the sixth century on is designed in one way or another to make papal claims a reality. Perhaps a brief glance at several of these instances will serve to show how the papacy came to have the significance it still does in our day although at present it is but a shadow of what it was under Innocent III in the 13th century.

Under Gregory I in 590, we find complete supervision of every phase of church life: liturgy, music, clerical conduct, mission work, and doctrine. We find taxes being levied and an army being raised to oppose the invading Lombards, the war culminating in a treaty which gave Gregory the first piece of land to be designated as the "patrimony of Peter." Under Zacharias in 751, we find a Carolingian mayor of the palace being placed on the throne of the Frankish State, in place of the rightful Merovingian king and enough land being given by the new king Pippin, to the pope to merit the title "States of the Church." By the time of Charlemagne, the lines are drawn clearly enough to allow us to detect a struggle between church and state for supremacy, with the pope trying every trick in the book to outwit an emperor who treats bishops and abbots as vassals, said ~~the~~ pope seeking to create for himself the title of king-maker by surreptitiously placing a crown on Charlemagne's head during a mass on the feast of Christmas in 800. One of the most dramatic chapters in this struggle was written in the courtyard at Canossa where Gregory VII, who had been trying to deprive Henry IV of his throne by the ban of excommunication and to crown a king of his own choice, was forced to save the papal face by forgiving the king who had stood barefoot in the snow clothed in the garb of a penitent for three days. Although this try failed, just a century and a half later, Innocent III was able to make and break kings, and was powerful enough to declare heresy a capital crime in 1213, thus forcing the kingdoms of Europe to put to death anyone whom the church judged to be in opposition to Roman doctrine. In the realm of spiritual power, Innocent was able to head the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 which established the Seven Sacraments with their doctrines of Transubstantiation and Semi-Pelagianism as official for all time and made mandatory for membership the so called Easter Duties to which Rome still clings, these consisting of an annual confession and reception of communion. This was the very height of papal power. At this time the pope was able to enjoy virtually every right and power claimed in the forged Decretals of Isadore (designed to exempt clergy from jurisdiction of secular courts) and Donation of Constantine (to claim secular power for pope, as gift from Emperor Constantine.)

Succeeding popes tried to duplicate the feats of Innocent but were unable to bring it off. One of them, though, gives us a still clearer view of papal aims in his famous Bull "Unam Sanctam" of 1303. When Boniface VIII found himself opposed by the king of France in the matter of exemption from taxation for the clergy, he tried his utmost to force obedience to his wishes by declaring in his bull that all temporal powers are subject to spiritual powers, that the pope can be judged by God alone, and, most outrageous of all, "...it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human being to be subject to the Roman pontiff." Here indeed we find a "...man of sin...sitting in the temple of God...showing himself that he is God."

II Thess. 2:4.

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After this everything else seems anticlimactic. Yet, the subsequent claims are bad enough. All of them are, of course, made with papal sanction even though decreed by a church council. The Council of Constance in 1415 withheld the cup in Communion from the laity. The Decrees and Canons of the Council of Trent, 1545-1563, reached a new low in setting Tradition officially on a level with Scripture as the "regula fidei"--the rule of faith, and condemning the scriptural doctrine of justification by God's grace, through faith, for the sake of Christ with a string of anathemas on behalf of almighty God as well as the apostles Peter and Paul. One might regard the "Index librorum prohibitorum"--the list of prohibited books, also as a claim to unwarranted power over the minds and souls of men, more so since Holy Scripture heads the list of forbidden books.

Perhaps four more decisions are worthy of mention as evidence of the elasticity inherent in Tradition. These are: 1) The declaration that the ever-blessed virgin Mary was immaculately conceived in the womb of her mother Anna (1854); 2) The dastardly Syllabus of Errors which, among a total of 80, lists such things as Protestantism, freedom of the press, separation of church and state, religious liberty, and Bible Societies as things to be avoided on pain of punishment (1864); 3) The claim that the Holy Father is infallible when he teaches matters of faith and morals *ex cathedra* as the vicar of Christ on earth (1870), and 4) The doctrine that the Blessed Virgin Mary was assumed bodily into heaven after her death (1950). In each of these instances, we find the papacy asserting its right to be obeyed by every one who desires his soul's salvation for each of these doctrines must be believed on pain of losing that salvation.

To be sure, this is not the whole story of the origin and development of the papacy, but it does give us enough of an insight to see that it is a system firmly entrenched in the Roman Church and one not to be given up easily. We should realize that Rome has not changed nor should we look for change until we actually learn officially that she has repudiated all of the claims ever made for the papacy. We should be aware too that since the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century conditions in the world have changed so that Rome no longer tries in the same way to exert the influence she once wielded. Thus it becomes at times a matter of policy for the sake of public opinion to make no mention whatsoever of the position they expect the pope to hold both in secular and ecclesiastical affairs. You and I should not be deluded into thinking that Rome's silence on the claims for the papacy means the giving up of these claims. As long as we see the pope continue to wear the diamond-studded triple crown, we can know that the claims to high position have not been yielded for the three tiers symbolize 1) his power over heaven shown by canonizing individuals as saints, 2) his power over purgatory shown by granting indulgences from temporal punishment, and 3) his power over earth shown by pronouncing anathemas over those who disobey him.

1. We can expect quite the opposite. Speaking on the Ecumenical movement Archbishop Lawrence J. Shehan of Baltimore said he is "certain there will be no change in the doctrine of the infallibility of the pope ... I don't see any chance for unless there is agreement on this."

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Perhaps we should add a word about the attitude of some men who have occupied the papal throne during the course of history. It is difficult to assess the thinking of any man, dead or alive, for that matter, yet we must concede that many of these men were but creatures of their time. E. G. back in the 11th century when so many clergymen were guilty of sexual sins, the reformers in the church felt that an insistence on complete chastity was the only way to combat the sins of fornication and concubinage. Thus, it never occurred to Gregory VII to consider marriage as the God-ordained solution to the problem. Instead he made celibacy compulsory for all Latin clergy after the year 1075. Again, in view of the fact that so many emperors and kings had practiced lay investiture and simony, by and with the consent of the clergy involved, the reformers felt that a strong papacy was the only solution to all problems in church and state, a papacy that would rule the world as well as the church. In this age, their ideas on reform just did not go beyond immorality and maladministration. To tamper with the doctrines of holy mother church just never entered their minds. Their sincerity, though did not make a wrong policy right.

At the same time, we should take cognizance of the fact that other popes who were not sincere or interested in the welfare of the church often sought the same goal of a strong papacy. In most cases, however, it seems safe to conclude that they did so merely to serve their own ends, witness the vile wretches who ruled during the period of the Pornocracy in the 10th century and again during the Renaissance, e.g. a man like the infamous Leo X who once boasted that the fable about Christ was the greatest money-making scheme ever invented by the mind of man.

All of these men, whether their intentions were good or evil, served to strengthen an office invented by man and used to usurp the authority of Christ and to make a travesty of his holy Word, by lowering it to the level of the writings of the church fathers. It is this office of which we must be aware, it matters not what pious intentions nor saintly living to which its incumbents may hold. It is this office which has not changed. Let us not be deluded by a seeming de-emphasis of Tradition and toleration of Scripture, or by a relaxing of the rules of asceticism on both levels of morality, or by permission to employ the vernacular in the mass or to have some hymns sung by the congregation during the service, or by the fact that Rome has climbed on the ecumenical band wagon.

At the same time, let us be on our guard against any beliefs or practices which might tend to Romanism among us whether it be the censuring of the sanctuary or the churching of women after confinement, whether it be a conversion of the Doctrine of the Real Presence into a form of Transubstantiation or the extension of our trust in the priestly office of our Savior to include some intercession for us by Mary. One thing Church History can teach us - papism grew when the Word was obscured and emphasis was placed on externals. Let us take the lesson to heart. Let us place the Word before all else and emphasize what it can do for the immortal soul of man in time and in eternity. And let us pray simply and sincerely with Luther:

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Lord, keep us steadfast in Thy Word;
Curb those who fain by craft and sword
Would wrest the Kingdom from Thy Son
And set at naught all He hath done.

Lord Jesus Christ, Thy power make known,
For Thou art Lord of lords alone;
Defend Thy Christendom that we
May evermore sing praise to Thee.

O Comforter of priceless worth,
Send peace and unity on earth.
Support us in our final strife
and lead us out of death to life. Amen.