

## Who is the Vicar of Christ?

The question to be asked as a new Pontiff is elected

By Richard Bennett

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.*”<sup>1</sup> 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.*”<sup>2</sup> 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.

At this time, world attention is focused on the office of the man who will purport to take the place of Christ, as the election by Roman Catholic cardinals chooses the next incumbent. The Vatican officially teaches that the substitute for Christ Jesus is the Pope; 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.”<sup>3</sup>

As the world waits with great interest for the next successor to this position of “Vicar of Christ”, the biblical imperative must be for the true office of the Vicar of Christ to be clearly seen together with the spiritual consequences of attempting to substitute a man to this divine position.

### **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.”<sup>4</sup> 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*

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<sup>1</sup> John 16:8

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 1:19, 29

<sup>3</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Ed. (Wash DC: US Catholic Conf., 1994, 1997) #882

<sup>4</sup> John 14:16

*Lord.*<sup>5</sup> 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 with 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.”<sup>6</sup> 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.

### **The 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”<sup>7</sup>, that is, the vicar of Peter.<sup>8</sup> 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”<sup>9</sup> was found in the fraudulent document called “The Donation of Constantine”.<sup>10</sup> 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.”<sup>11</sup>

### **The Counterfeit Vicar of Christ**

Rome’s alleged office of Christ’s Vicar on earth is so all embracing and complicated that one man cannot exercise “supreme, full, immediate, and universal power”. Thus the single man 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

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<sup>5</sup> II Corinthians 3:17-18

<sup>6</sup> *Catechism*, Para 937

<sup>7</sup> “Vicarius principis apostolorum” the official title in Latin.

<sup>8</sup> This has been a long-standing contention, since Scripture never mentions Peter as ever residing in Rome.

<sup>9</sup> “Vicarius Filii Dei” is the official title in Latin.

<sup>10</sup> The text of “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

<sup>11</sup> *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.

general.<sup>12</sup> And when the king pin to all this hierarchical structure dies, the running of the office continues but on a different basis. Under the present law of the Vatican, on the death of the Pope the administration passes to “the Chamberlain”, that is a Cardinal appointed by the Pope during his lifetime to act as Papal administrator after his death. Canon Law specifically forbids this Chamberlain from introducing any innovation in the running of the Church while the office of Pope is vacant (Canon 335).

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.*”<sup>13</sup> 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.*”<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> Also the Pope, as “the Vicar of Christ” teaches “rebirth” by baptism, which demeans the glory of Christ.<sup>16</sup>

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.<sup>17</sup> 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*”<sup>18</sup> 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.*”<sup>19</sup>

### **A Successor to the Earthly “Vicar of Christ”**

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<sup>12</sup> For more details, see *Our Sunday Visitor’s Catholic Almanac* 1998 (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, Inc) pp. 141-142.

<sup>13</sup> John 16:14

<sup>14</sup> John 16:13

<sup>15</sup> “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

<sup>16</sup> “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

<sup>17</sup> “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. Many of such unions, called marriages, are in fact, before the Lord and His Word, nothing more than officially blessed whoredoms. Such sinful unions take away the hearts and souls that should be given to God.” Can.1684

<sup>18</sup> Genesis 3:5

<sup>19</sup> II Thessalonians 2:4

When one Pope dies another one is elected. For the election of a Pope a part of the Vatican palace is walled off. Access to the conclave, where the election is held, is through a door locked from the inside by the Cardinal Chamberlain and from the outside by the Marshall of the conclave. There are some openings provided for the passage of food, guarded from within and without. All communication with the outside world is strictly forbidden under pain of loss of office and ipso facto excommunication. Presented to the world is a gathering of walled-in Cardinals dressed in scarlet with the given purpose of electing a new “Vicar of Christ”. The whole scene gives a picture of smoke and mirrors. White smoke from the burning of ballots is the traditional way of informing the world that a new Pope has been elected. It comes out of the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican. This is just part of the ostentatious spectacle of the Roman Church in the traditional election of a new Pope.

The man in the street Catholic may deviate from his church on such issues as contraception, extramarital sex, homosexuality, abortion, confession and the obligation to attend Sunday Mass, but as a Catholic, he shelters serenely in his belief that he has the “Holy Father”. Removing any lingering doubt the Vatican Web page states, “‘THE HOLY FATHER’ The Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible *principle and foundation* of unity of both the bishops and of the faithful.”<sup>20</sup> The Catholic is thus enslaved to a system by the assurance that he has “The Holy Father” and the “Vicar of Christ” in the person of his Pope. Both assertions are utter blasphemy before the One Holy Father in heaven and the One Vicar Christ, the Holy Spirit.

### **“Habemus papam” we have a Papa!**

At the present, the election of the next Roman Pontiff occupies the minds of Catholics as well as, it would seem, most of the secular world. One newspaper assures its readers that “No other event in human society can compare with a papal conclave in its combination of tradition, drama, ceremony and pomp, and significance. ... After what seems to be an endless wait, the senior cardinal-deacon appears on a balcony overlooking St. Peter’s Square and announces: “Habemus papam!”<sup>21</sup> Thus the climax of the drama and all the accompanying pageantry is the pronouncement - “Habemus papam!” “we have a Papa!”<sup>22</sup> Catholics and the world are told that they 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.*”<sup>23</sup> 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.*”<sup>24</sup> 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.*”<sup>25</sup> The Lord Christ Jesus prayed to the only “Holy Father” that exists, “*Holy Father, keep through thine own name those*

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<sup>20</sup> [www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/) 12/5/03 (italics supplied)

<sup>21</sup> [www.startribune.com/stories/614/4230955.html](http://www.startribune.com/stories/614/4230955.html) 12/5/03

<sup>22</sup> In Latin the full proclamation is “Annuntio vobis gaudium magnum. Habemus Papam”, “I announce to you great joy, we have a Papa.”

<sup>23</sup> John 20:17

<sup>24</sup> Romans 8:16

<sup>25</sup> Matthew 23:9

*whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.*<sup>26</sup> 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.*”<sup>27</sup> 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 and Personal Response**

Today some compromised and eclectic “Evangelicals” stop their ears and close their eyes to the true Vicar of Christ and mindlessly agree with the festivities that accompany the white smoke arising 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 and anticipation of a 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<sup>28</sup>, demanding that “a religious respect of intellect and will be paid to his teaching.”<sup>29</sup> 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.*”<sup>30</sup> The words inscribed in 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.<sup>31</sup> The ecumenical allies of the earthly Vicar multiply like mushrooms, yet we do not fear not because we know that in Him we are “*more than conquerors through Him that loved us.*”<sup>32</sup> 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.*”<sup>33</sup> The “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” (ECT) accord determined its own condemnation, as light has no fellowship with darkness. It is time however for us as “True Evangelicals Together in the Lord” to express ourselves!

It is the will of God that every true believer “*should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*”<sup>34</sup> Those of us who cling to Christ and His Word alone and

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<sup>26</sup> John 17:11

<sup>27</sup> I John 2:22.

<sup>28</sup> “The Supreme Pontiff, in virtue of his office, possesses infallible teaching authority...” Can. 749

<sup>29</sup> “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.

<sup>30</sup> Isaiah 14:14.

<sup>31</sup> 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.*”

<sup>32</sup> Romans 8:37

<sup>33</sup> I John 5:4

<sup>34</sup> Jude 3

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. Before and after a Papal election, the world will look at the TV shows and listen to news broadcasts, amidst the fanfare, pageantry and pomp. The media momentum will enhance the power and the glory of the so-called earthly Vicar of Christ. In the midst of all of it as we prepare for these events, I solemnly ask you to make clear where you stand. What we ask is that in a few sentences you express your personal faith in the one Lord Jesus Christ and His one Vicar the divine Holy Spirit, together with a personal resolution to obey our Lord's command to "*contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*"

We will publish in our Webpage under the title, "True Evangelicals Together in the Lord" the statements that we receive from believers across the world. It now really is time for decisive commitments to Christ Jesus and His Gospel. Rather than lamenting the false accords that have deceived Christians in recent times, why not join your personal signature to a true accord in Christ Jesus to be faithful to Him, by His grace and to His glory!

All statements should be sent to: [berean\\_beacon@yahoo.com](mailto:berean_beacon@yahoo.com) or mailed to Richard Bennett, Berean Beacon, P.O. Box 192, Del Valle, TX 78617 USA

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