

Eastern Orthodoxy



Painting by Vasily Ivanovich Surikov in 1876

The Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon in 451 AD

The main objection to Catholicism by the Eastern Orthodox is papal authority. Everything hinges on this Catholic doctrine, when it comes down to other doctrines, such as the Immaculate Conception, Filioque, etc.

The Eastern Orthodox claim the keys given to Peter in Matthew 16:19 only represent the same binding and loosening power found in Matt. 18:18 where Christ tells the other Apostles, *"whatsoever you shall bind upon earth, shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven."* Therefore, Peter has no authority over the other Apostles.

An examination of the passages shows a distinct difference. In the Old Testament, we find a key holder over the Kingdom of David. Eli'akim is given the key to the kingdom of David even though Hezekiah is the king (Is. 22:22). Is it a mere coincidence that Christ uses this imagery or was Christ drawing from Isaiah to illustrate His intention?

Peter is mentioned throughout Holy Scripture as *"Peter and the others"* or some other similar phrase. Peter is found over 190 times in Scripture. The next most mentioned Apostle is John found under 30 times. Peter is clearly understood as one with a special significance over the others.

Just as David's kingdom had a key holder, Jesus, the eternal Son and King assigns a key holder to His eternal kingdom, the Church. The passage in Isaiah denotes that the key holder has successors to maintain the authority over the kingdom. Therefore, it's

reasonable to conclude that the intention of Jesus is for Peter to have successors with the same authority as Peter.

The context of the keys in Chapter 16 is different from Chapter 18, which shows Christ assigning a tribunal to the Church, which obedience ought to be rendered, on pain of being excommunicated and considered a heathen. All bishops have authority of binding and loosening but not on the same scale as Peter, who alone was given the keys.

St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (d. 258) (venerated by the Eastern Orthodox):

"The Lord says to Peter: 'I say to you,' he says, 'that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it. And to you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever things you bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, they shall be loosed also in heaven'... On him he builds the Church, and to him he gives the command to feed the sheep, and although he assigns a like power to all the apostles, yet he founded a single chair, and he established by his own authority a source and an intrinsic reason for that unity. Indeed, the others were also what Peter was; but a primacy is given to Peter, whereby it is made clear that there is but one Church and one chair. So too, all are shepherds, and the flock is shown to be one, fed by all the apostles in single-minded accord. If someone does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he imagine that he still holds the faith? If he deserts the chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, can he still be confident that he is in the Church?"(The Unity of the Catholic Church, first edition 251 AD.)

In the second edition, St. Cyprian changes it to:

"It is on one man that He builds the Church; and although He assigns a like power to all the Apostles after His resurrection...nevertheless, in order that unity might be clearly shown, He established by his own authority a source for that unity, which takes its beginning from one man alone. Indeed, the other Apostles were that also which Peter was, being endowed with an equal portion of dignity and power; but the origin is ground in unity, so that it may be made clear there is but one Church of Christ. ...If someone does not hold fast to this unity of the Church, can he imagine that he still holds the faith? If he resists and withstands the Church, can he still be confident that he is in the Church...? Most especially must we bishops, who exercise authority in the Church, hold firmly and insist upon this unity, whereby we may demonstrate also that the episcopate itself is one and undivided. Let no one mislead the brotherhood with a lie, let no one corrupt the faith by a faithless perversion of the truth. The episcopate is one, of which each bishop holds his part within the undivided structure."(emphasis mine)

St. Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem (d. 386) tells us that only Peter has the keys and is the chief of the apostles:

"[Simon Magus] so deceived the city of Rome that Claudius erected a statue of him. . . . While the error was extending itself, Peter and Paul arrived, a noble pair and the rulers of the Church, and they set the error aright. . . . They launched the weapon of their like-

mindfulness in prayer against the Magus, and struck him down to earth. It was marvelous enough, and yet no marvel at all, for Peter was there—he that carries about the keys of heaven. ...In the power of the same Holy Spirit, Peter, both the chief of the apostles and the keeper of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, in the name of Christ healed Aeneas the paralytic at Lydda, which is now called Diospolis; and at Joppa he raised the beneficent Tabitha from the dead. (Catechetical Lectures [350 AD] 6:14 and 17:27).

The great Eastern Father, St. Ephraim of Syria wrote about Jesus to Peter:

"Simon, my follower, I have made you the foundation of the holy Church. I betimes called you Peter, because you will support all its buildings. You are the inspector of those who will build on Earth a Church for me. If they should wish to build what is false, you, the foundation, will condemn them. You are the head of the fountain from which my teaching flows; you are the chief of my disciples. Through you I will give drink to all peoples. Yours is that life-giving sweetness which I dispense. I have chosen you to be, as it were, the firstborn in my institution so that, as the heir, you may be executor of my treasures. I have given you the keys of my kingdom. Behold, I have given you authority over all my treasures"(Homilies 4:1, 351 AD).

St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople (d. 407) in his homily 54 [55] teaches that by the delivery of these keys by Christ to Peter, there was committed to him the care and government of the whole world, and that he was created pastor and head of the entire Church. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/200154.htm>

If the Eastern Orthodox claim is true that all Apostles had equal authority, why did the great Eastern Fathers St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. Ephraim of Syria, and St. John Chrysostom teach the contrary? Why do we not see Eastern Fathers making it clear that Peter was equal in authority when his successors exercised their authority over the territories of Patriarchs without objection?

For instance, Pope St. Clement (the same Clement mentioned Philippians 4:3) wrote a letter to the Corinthians in 80 AD condemning their *"abominable and unholy sedition"* and to be *"obedient to the things which we have written through the Holy Spirit."*

The letter of Pope St. Clement was so important that it was read in Church thought to be Scripture. Saint Dionysius, Bishop of Corinth, wrote a letter to Pope Soter in 170 AD: *"For from the beginning it has been your custom to do good to all the brethren in various ways and to send contributions to all the churches in every city. . . . This custom your blessed Bishop Soter has not only preserved, but is augmenting, by furnishing an abundance of supplies to the saints and by urging with consoling words, as a loving father his children, the brethren who are journeying... Today we have observed the Lord's holy day, in which we have read your letter. Whenever we do read it, we shall be able to profit thereby, as also we do when we read the earlier letter written to us by Clement"*(Letter to Pope Soter in Eusebius (Bishop of Caesarea), Church History 4:23:9 and 11).

Pope Julius I asserted his authority in the East in defending the great St. Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria.

Perhaps the most glaring contradiction to the Eastern Orthodox assertion that Peter is equal in authority to the other Apostles is the councils. They raise the argument against Peter's supreme authority on the claim that James led the Council of Jerusalem in the Book of Acts. This anachronistic approach is unreasonable.

Peter settles the matter after much debate in Acts 15:7. Barnabas and Paul confirm the truth in verse 12 and then James puts in his two-cents worth. James has to say, "*Listen to me*" since his words need everybody's attention unlike Peter's, who already has everybody's attention. Peter does not have to say, "*listen to me*" because they listen and when he spoke, "*the assembly kept silence* (Acts 15:12)." James then gives his judgment on how Peter's words are to be applied just as all bishops do when the pope lays down the law.

Again, it is Peter most mentioned in the Book of Acts. "*Peter stood up among the brethren...and said* (Acts 1:15)." "*Peter standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them* (Acts 2:14)." "*Peter and the rest of the Apostles*" (Acts 2:37). "*Peter said to them* (Acts 2:38)." "*Peter saw it and addressed the people* (Acts 3:12)." "*Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them* (Acts 4:8)." "*Peter and the apostles answered* (Acts 5:29)." Peter is mentioned another 49 times in the Book of Acts alone, but we are to believe James was the leader at the council?

All heresiarchs used their biblical knowledge and appealed to tradition to promulgate their heresies. In every case, the East looked to Rome for the final answer. St. Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria appealed to Pope St. Celestine I against Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople. The result was the Third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus in 431 AD, which condemned Nestorius. In the Acts of the Council, session 3, it's declared:

"Philip the presbyter and legate of the Apostolic See said: 'There is no doubt, and in fact it has been known in all ages, that the holy and most blessed Peter, prince and head of the apostles, pillar of the faith, and foundation of the Catholic Church, received the keys of the kingdom from our Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of the human race, and that to him was given the power of loosing and binding sins: who down even to today and forever both lives and judges in his successors. The holy and most blessed pope Celestine, according to due order, is his successor and holds his place, and us he sent to supply his place in this holy synod.'"

The great council of the East witnesses to the Catholic dogma that Peter and his successors are "*head of the apostles, pillar of the faith, and foundation of the Catholic Church.*"

A greater example of this council's testimony came after the heresiarch Eutyches spread his Monophysitism heresy. In 449 AD, Dioscorus, the Patriarch of Alexander, led the Second Council of Ephesus, which deposed orthodox bishops and refused Pope St. Leo's

Tome against Monophysitism to be heard. Pope Leo the Great condemned the "*Robber Council*" and declared its members to be deposed.

The Fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon in 451 AD, which had over 600 mostly Eastern bishops implemented Pope Leo's direction. Dioscorus was to be deposed if he remained steadfast in heresy, to restore the repentant bishops to their sees, and define the faith according to the Tome, which was done to the letter. The Council clearly and unambiguously recognized the supreme authority of the Bishop of Rome, as its actions reflected. The Council's declaration in deposing Dioscorus proved that it recognized Pope St. Leo as the final authority:

"Wherefore Leo, the most holy and blessed Archbishop of great and older Rome, by us and by the present holy synod, together with the thrice blessed and worthy of all praise, the blessed Apostle Peter, who is the rock and foundation of the Catholic Church, and the foundation of the orthodox faith, has stripped him of his episcopate and deprived him of all sacerdotal dignity."

The Chalcedonian (mostly Eastern) fathers again confessed their belief in the papal doctrine:

"After the reading of the foregoing epistle [The Tome of Leo], the most reverend bishops cried out: 'This is the faith of the fathers! This is the faith of the apostles! So we all believe! Thus the orthodox believe! Anathema to him who does not thus believe! Peter has spoken thus through Leo! . . . This is the true faith! Those of us who are orthodox thus believe! This is the faith of the Fathers!'" (Acts of the Council, session 2).

After the Eastern Orthodox finally split from the Catholic Church in 1054, they had no more Ecumenical Councils.

Today, we still hear arguments against the papacy by the Eastern Orthodox (and used by Protestants) such as St. Paul's rebuke of Peter in Galatians 2:11: "*But when Cephas was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.*"

What's most interesting is that Cornelius a Lapide notes in his biblical commentary how some Eastern Fathers try to explain away the incident to protect Peter, while the majority of Latin Fathers don't do so. Cornelius writes:

*"Because he was to be blamed. (1.) Because he had been blamed (κατεγνωσμένος) by other brethren, whom Peter had offended by this proceeding, in their ignorance of his true intention and motive, as Chrysostom and Jerome say, or, as Ephrem turns it, "because they were offended in him." (2.) Theophylact and Œcumenius understand it: Peter had been blamed by the other Apostles because he had eaten with the Gentile Cornelius at Cæsarea. Fearing lest he should be blamed again by them or by other Jews, he withdrew himself from all intercourse with the Gentiles. (3.) The opinion of Ambrose is better. He had fallen under the condemnation of the truth and of Gospel liberty, which sets the Gentiles free from the darkness and slavery of Judaism. (4.) The Vulgate *reprehesibilis* (in place of *reprehensus*, as with the authors cited above) is better,*

and agrees with the context. It gives the reason for resisting Peter, *because he was to be blamed* for simulating Judaism.

It may be asked whether Peter was really blameworthy and was actually blamed by Paul. For many years there was a sharp dispute on this point between S. Jerome and S. Augustine, as may be seen in their epistles. Jerome, Chrysostom, Theophylact, Baronius answer in the negative, and hold that the rebuke was only theatrical. They argue that Peter, who had lawfully followed the Jewish customs at Jerusalem among Jews, lived as a Gentile among Gentiles at Antioch; when, however, the Jews arrived who had been sent to Antioch from Jerusalem by James, he withdrew from the Gentiles in favour of the Jews, lest he should offend those who had been the earliest to receive the faith (see ver. 9), and also that he might at the same time give Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, an opportunity of rebuking him, that by yielding he might teach the Jews that the time for Judaising was past. On the other side S. Augustine maintains that Peter was really blameworthy, and was blamed by Paul, as the record distinctly declares.

Out of this arose a dispute between S. Augustine and S. Jerome about simulation and lying. Jerome argued from this action of Peter's that any similar simulation is lawful. Augustine denied that he did simulate, and laid down the unlawfulness of all lying or simulation, especially in matters of religion. In this second question, however, neither seems to have understood the other's position. Jerome did not maintain that Peter told a lie, or put on a profession of Judaism while secretly detesting it, as Augustine, by the strength of his language, seems to think that Jerome held. The latter did not say that Peter was right in professing Judaism; if he did, then it would be right for any one of the faithful to make a profession of any false faith or any heresy. But Jerome only held what S. Chrysostom did, viz., that the rebuke administered to Peter by Paul was not really intended, but was merely theatrical, it being arranged between them beforehand that Paul should rebuke Peter, not for *simulation*, but for thoughtless *dissimulation*, and that Peter should accept the rebuke thus arranged for, that so the Judaisers might be really rebuked in the specious rebuke given to Peter, and with him might clearly understand that Judaising was forbidden. The lawfulness of such an action is not denied by Augustine, all he denies is that the proceeding was of this nature.

From this it appears how little ground Cassian (*Collat.* xvii. 17- 25), Origen, Clement, Erasmus, and others (see the passages in Sixtus of Sens, lib. v. annot. 105) had for founding the lawfulness of lying on this passage, or for endorsing the saying of Plato, that, *although a lie is an evil thing, yet it is occasionally necessary, just as we use hellebore or some other drug*, for this is now an established error condemned by Innocent III. (*Tit. de Usuris*, cap. *super eo.*), and by Ecclesiasticus vii. 14. Against it too S. Augustine writes two treatises, one entitled *de Mendacio* and the other *contra Mendacium*. Nor is there any exception to be taken here against Jerome and Chrysostom. They only understand and excuse a secret arrangement, whereby no lie was acted, but a rebuke was simulated, and this is a legitimate action, as is evident in military

stratagems, when for instance, the enemy feigns to flee, and so draws its foes into an ambush.

A third question was also disputed between Jerome and Augustine as to the date when the Old Law came to an end, but this is outside the present subject, and it is sufficient therefore to say very briefly that the Old Law, so far as obligation goes, came to an end at Pentecost, when the New Law was promulgated, but that its observance did not wholly cease, it being lawful to observe it for a while, till the Jews had been gradually weaned from it, that so in due time it might receive an honourable burial. In this dispute Augustine seems to have held the stronger position.

It may be urged that in this act of Peter's there was at least something sinful, if not actually erroneous in faith, as some have rashly asserted. By his action it may be thought that he thoughtlessly made a profession of Judaism, and so put a stumbling-block in the way of the Gentiles, and tempted them to Judaize with him. He had previously lived with the Gentiles, but he afterwards withdrew from them suddenly, went over to the Jews, and lived with them. From this the Gentiles might properly infer that Judaism was necessary to salvation, both for him and themselves, and was binding on Christians; for though the Old Law, with its ceremonies, was not yet the cause of death, and might be preserved so as to secure for itself an honourable burial, and also to draw the Jews to the faith of Christ, yet it was dead, and in one sense death-giving, viz., to any one who should keep it on the supposition that it was binding on Christians. Although Peter, however, did not so regard it, yet his action was so imprudent as to give the Gentiles good reason for thinking that he did.

The justness of this remark is evident from the two remarks made by Paul: I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed; and: When I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, Why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?—viz., by your simulation, or what the Greeks call hypocrisy. All this shows that either Peter sinned or that Paul told a lie, which God forbid. See S. Augustine (Ep. 8, 9, and 19 to Jerome), Cyprian (Ep. ad Quintum), Gregory (Hom. 18 in Ezech.), Ambrose, &c.

To what has been said I add this: This sin of Peter's was venial, or material only, arising from want of thought, or from want of light and prudence. He seems to have thought that, being the Apostle of the Jews especially, that he ought rather to avoid scandalising them than the Gentiles, and that the Gentiles would readily recognise the rightfulness of this line of action. In so doing he erred, for "although," as S. Thomas says, "the Holy Spirit who descended on the Apostles at Pentecost established them thereafter in such prudence and grace as to keep them from mortal sins, yet he did not also save them from venial sins."

Observe that a lie may consist in deeds as well as in words. For example, if a man lead another to suppose by his conduct that he is a good man or his friend, when he is neither of these, then he is guilty of a lie. This lie by deed is what is properly called hypocrisy.

Similarly, if any Christian at Rome wears a yellow cap he acts a lie, by thus giving himself out as a Jew.

Notice, however, with Cajetan that falsity in deeds is more easily excused than falsity in words. The reason is that words are express signs of mental concepts, but deeds are not, and so admit a wider interpretation. Hence if soldiers feign flight to draw the enemy into an ambush, they are not guilty of hypocrisy, as they would be if they were to say in words: "We flee, O enemy, because we are afraid of you."

Again, observe the following rule: When there is a just cause of concealing the truth, no falsehood is involved. Peter, in the act under discussion, had *partly* a just cause, viz., the fear of offending the Jews. His withdrawal from the Gentiles was not a formal declaration that he was a Judaiser, but only tantamount to saying that he preferred to serve the Jews rather than the Gentiles, the just cause of this preference being that he was more an Apostle of the former than of the latter. I say *partly*, for he was not wholly justified in so acting, inasmuch as he was bound, as universal pastor, to care for the Jews without neglecting the Gentiles. Hence it follows also that in one respect he sinned through want of due consideration. The infirmity of man's mind, however, is such that he cannot always hit the exact mean, and under complex circumstances benefit one without harming another.

Some one will object then: Since Paul corrected Peter, he was of equal, if not superior authority; in other words Paul, and not Peter, was the head of the Apostles.

I deny the consequence. For superiors may, in the interests of truth, be corrected by their inferiors. Augustine (*Ep. xix.*), Cyprian, Gregory, and S. Thomas lay down this proposition in maintaining also that Peter, as the superior, was corrected by his inferior. The inference from what they say is that Paul was equal to the other Apostles, inferior to Peter, and hence they all were Peter's inferiors; they were the heads of the whole Church, and Peter was their chief. Gregory (*Hom. 18 in Ezech.*) says: "*Peter kept silence, that the first in dignity might be first in humility;*" and Augustine says the same (*Ep. xix. ad Hieron.*): "*Peter gave to those who should follow him a rare and holy example of humility under correction by inferiors, as Paul did of bold resistance in defence of truth to subordinates against their superiors, charity being always preserved.*"

He did eat with the Gentiles. He ate, according to Anselm, of pork and other forbidden meats, without any scruple, to show that the Ceremonial Law was abrogated.

For the record, many saints have stood up against popes over the centuries. St. Irenaeus stood up to Pope Victor over the Easter celebration and nearly anathematizing Asia Minor over it.

St. Bridgit of Sweden wrote to Pope Gregory XI, "*Show yourself a man and begin to renew My Church which I have bought with My blood, so that it may be born again and return to its former state ... But this you shall know of a surety, that if you do not obey My will, judgment will be passed upon you as upon a prelate who is degraded and*

deprived of his ecclesiastical vestments. Everything that has formerly been peace and honor to you shall then be damnation and shame. ...And every devil in hell shall have a piece of your soul and fill it with everlasting damnation."

St. Catherine of Sienna wrote to the same pope, *"Most Holy Father ... because He [Christ] has given you authority and because you have accepted it, you ought to use your virtue and power. If you do not wish to use it, it might be better for you to resign what you have accepted; it would give more honor to God and health to your soul. ... If you do not do this, you will be censured by God. If I were you, I would fear that Divine Judgment might descend on me."*

St. Vincent Ferrer stood up to "Pope" Benedict XIII many times and finally rejected him as pope.

In no way does Gal. 2:11 demonstrate that Peter is equal in authority to the rest of the Apostles.

No reasonable explanation can be given against papal authority. All we see from the Eastern Orthodox is the same old tired arguments that have been refuted by their own fathers. If the Eastern Orthodox would only listen to the Eastern Fathers, but alas, people only hear what they want to hear.