

The Claim to have the Keys of the Apostle Peter: The Papacy Part II

By Richard Bennett

For most Catholics the authority of the Pope as derived from Peter is the main cornerstone of their faith. The others it is the lifesaver to fall back on, when all else fails.

The Petrine primacy of the Pope is a historic holdover from the false decretals of Constantine and Isidore that we saw in the article on the overview of the History of the Papacy. Nonetheless, the Papacy is the bulwark and foundation of the Church of Rome. It is also the pride and joy of devoted Catholics by giving them, they are assured, a direct link to Jesus Christ. And in these latter days, it appears that the world has rekindled its love of the Papacy. Against the voices of Scripture, history, and reason, the Papacy declares its Church to be founded on the Apostle Peter alone, stating that he was the first bishop of Rome thus bequeathing all of his authority to subsequent popes and bishops. This is the lynch pin of Roman Catholicism. Officially the Church of Rome states,

“The Lord made Simon alone, whom he named Peter, the ‘rock’ of his Church...This pastoral office of Peter and the other apostles belongs to the Church’s very foundation and is continued by the bishops under the primacy of the Pope.”¹

This statement and in fact the whole Roman Catholic structure is based on three presuppositions:

1. That the text of Matthew 16:16-20 means that Peter was the foundation of the Church; that the Church was built on him;
2. That Peter went to Rome and was the first bishop in Rome;
3. That Peter’s successors are the bishops of Rome under the primacy of the pope.

It is worth mentioning here that the list of popes concocted by Rome is a fable. In its humble beginning, the church at Rome was guided by a plurality of elders rather than one single bishop. Then throughout its latter history, there was much intrigue with many of those claiming to be the successor of Peter, an overview of which I will include in the conclusion of this chapter. In this chapter, however, our main focus is not to recount the history of the Papacy but rather to analyze the premise of this notion that the Church of Rome takes for granted.

Presupposition 1: The Lord made Simon alone, whom he named Peter, the “rock” of his Church, i.e. foundation of His Church.

“And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.” (Matthew 16:16-20).

¹ *Catechism*, Para. 881

Whatever contemporaries apprehended Christ to be, this text of scripture plainly shows that the disciples had a distinct knowledge of Him, expressed without hesitation by Peter on their behalf. The Lord attributes this intuitive knowledge that He was "*the Christ*" (Anointed-Messiah) and "*the Son of the Living God*" (co-eternal with the Father and therefore likewise God) to be a revelation from His Father in heaven. It is this revelation, the Lord declared, that would become the rock, or foundation stone, upon which He would build His Church. This cannot be argued against as it is the very concluding subject of the Lord's charge to the disciples, "*Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.*" To hold the view that Peter himself is the rock is to deliberately pervert the plain sense of the Lord's own words. To infer that the Church was built upon a mere man—and not upon God's revelation of Jesus as *the Christ, the Son of the living God*—is to insult Christ's doctrine and corrupt God's Word.

The Holy Spirit confirmed the true meaning of the verse by having it written in Greek. The word for Peter in Greek is *petros*. It is masculine in gender and signifies a piece of rock, larger than a stone. In contrast, the word for rock in Greek is *petra*. It is feminine in gender, describing bedrock, massive in size, and immovable. The Church was thus founded upon a massive bedrock, not a mere chip of granite. That bedrock is the God-given revelation by the Father in heaven. Congruent with this revelation is the distinct commission given to Peter in verse 19. "*Unto thee*", that is, to Peter personally, was given the "*keys of the kingdom of heaven.*" This prophetic declaration of the Lord was literally fulfilled when Peter was made the first instrument of opening the same revelation to the Jews, "*God hath made that same Jesus...both Lord and Christ*" (Acts 2:36), and to the Gentiles, (Acts 10:34-44). The power of the keys was concerning this same revelation of the Person of Christ, actuated by the initial proclamation of this revelation first to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles. The Apostle Peter alone fulfilled the initial proclamation. Succession to this prophetic commission cannot be countenanced, since there was but one first opening of the kingdom for the Jews as for the Gentiles. The second part of verse 19 was a commission for the responsibility of binding and loosening. This is concerning church discipline and was given as well to the other Apostles, as is seen in Matthew 18:18. The whole focus, therefore, of the Matthew 16:16-20 text is on the divinity of Jesus as "*the Son of the living God,*" and His role as Messiah or Christ—this fact is the rock on which His Church is built.

The Catholic apologists argue that the gospel of Matthew was originally written Aramaic. They claim that the original text of Matthew 16:18 used the word *Ke'pha* for both the name given to Simon Barjona and as the word for the rock upon which Christ promised to build His Church. The fallacy of these claims is that the New Testament was inspired in the Greek text, and that there is no Aramaic text in existence from which it is purported to have come. There are Aramaic and Syriac translations of the original Greek text; these, however, cannot be trusted to

accurately represent any supposed original Aramaic text. The Aramaic texts are merely uninspired translations of the original Greek text.²

Even without inventing a non-existing original Aramaic text, the Church of Rome has taken to their advantage the fact that the word Peter and the word ‘rock’ closely resemble each other. As a result with adept skill Rome substitutes the one for the other, and thus makes the passage to read, *Thou art Peter; and upon thee, Peter, will I build my Church*. However, the Lord said “*upon this rock*”, not “*upon thee*”. “*This rock*” signified the truth that had just been enunciated in the words, “*the Christ, the Son of the living God*”. This truth holds a place so fundamental and essential to the Church that it may be truly call “a rock”.

Preposterous claims for a pontiff who substitutes for Christ

Jesus as the Christ has full, supreme, and universal power. This prerogative is His alone, and any pretension by another to hold this power is heinous and despicable. Yet the Church of Rome does not blush to claim the Christ’s power for her pope. Thus she officially teaches, “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 unhindered.”³

Only Christ Jesus, being the very Son of God, can claim that every human creature is to be entirely subject to Him in faith and practice. The Church of Rome gives to her pontiff the offices that belong by nature to Christ alone. “Full, supreme, and universal power” solely and rightly belongs to “*the Son of the living God*”.

It delighted the Father that in Christ Jesus alone as Savior, all fullness should dwell, “*the fullness of him that filleth all in all.*”⁴ He alone abundantly gives to all that are His own people, “*grace for grace.*”⁵ The Church of Rome’s lust for power is not satiated by attempting to usurp supreme and universal power over the whole Church, it alleges further that it has been allotted the very fullness of grace and truth, “...The very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church”⁶. Thus Roman Church has made herself into a substitute for Christ. She decrees therefore, “There is no offense, however serious, that the Church cannot forgive.”⁷ Outrageous and pretentious as these claims are, the Pontiff goes further still by declaring, “It is solely the right of the Roman Pontiff himself to judge...those who hold the highest civil office in a

² In in-depth study of this topic and its historical background (including a examination of the translations of the Greek New Testament which were made in the first five centuries of the Christian Church) is given by Pastor David Th. Stark at: <http://www.gpredding.org/petra.html> 7/10/04

³ *Catechism*, Para. 882

⁴ Ephesians 1:23

⁵ John 1:16

⁶ Declaration “Dominus Iesus”, On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, Sect. 16, Sept. 5, 2000.

⁷ *Catechism*, Para. 982

state...”⁸ Roman Pontiff is presented as supreme, accountable to no one; the sole judge of what is right and wrong.

The end result of the Church of Rome’s interpretation concerning what Christ said to Peter is the creation of a pontiff who claims inerrant infallible teaching authority and power over all creatures in both spiritual and temporal realms. Such an absurd office was foretold by the Apostle Paul when he prophesied, “*The son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.*”⁹ In place of “*the Christ, the Son of the living God*” there has been erected the Pontiff, the son of perdition. The Papacy at its core office and essence, professes to be an entire substitute for the true Christ and His work. It must therefore be identified and denounced Holy Scripture does, “*And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.*”¹⁰

Presupposition 2. That Peter went to Rome and was the first bishop in Rome

The Scripture is utterly silent about the Apostle Peter going to Rome. His visits to Samaria, Lydda, Joppa, Caesarea and Antioch were carefully recorded. But there is simply no mention made of his going to Rome, which is essential to establish the Roman Catholic position. Certainly the Holy Spirit would not have passed over an event so significant and essential. In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul greets many in the Church at Rome but offers no salutation to Peter. The same Apostle Paul, being at Rome in the reign of Emperor Nero, never once mentions Peter in any of his letters written from Rome to the churches and to Timothy, although he does remember very many others who were with him in the city. Clearly this presupposition regarding Peter being in Rome as its first Bishop is a supposed conjecture, a deception, pure and simple. It cannot be the foundation on which faith is based, which is the Written Word of the Lord.

Presupposition 3: That Peter’s successors are the bishops of Rome under the primacy of the pope

This presupposition is officially stated in the following words,

“Divine assistance is also given to the successors of the apostles, teaching in communion with the successor of Peter, and, in a particular way, to the bishop of Rome, pastor of the whole Church...”¹¹

In Scripture there is no mention of successors to Peter or the Apostles. The criteria for apostleship are given in Acts 1:21-22. The position of the Apostles was unique to them and to

⁸ *Code of Canon Law*, Can. 1405.

⁹ II Thessalonians 2:3, 4

¹⁰ Revelation 17:18

¹¹ *Catechism*, Para 892

Paul—all directly chosen by Christ Jesus with no hint of succession. In the New Testament the Apostles appointed not Apostles but rather elders¹² and deacons. This false presupposition is of the essence of the Papacy. It is a huge system based on the concept of apostolic succession. Apostolic succession without apostolic doctrine is a fraud. The Lord God never entrusted His truth to a personal succession of any body of men. Such a foundation of its very nature is flawed. Visible apostolic succession throughout history was impossible. If one link failed, the whole sequence after it was invalid. Yet Catholicism hitched its star to apostolic succession.

The real roots of the Papacy are those of the Roman Emperor and not the Lord Christ Jesus. The Lord commanded, “*The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so.*”¹³ Christ absolutely proscribed all domination in his kingdom. The same condemnation of worldly ways was repeated by the Apostle Peter, “*Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being examples to the flock.*”¹⁴ The Roman Catholic Church is not the successor to the Apostle Peter but rather to the Roman Empire, as her hierarchical and totalitarian control so steadfastly demonstrates.

Early church leaders on the meaning of the Matthew 16 text

The early church leaders and theologians gave in writing unanimous agreement on the true meaning of the Matthew 16 text. The writings of forty-eight church leaders together with the “apostolical constitutions”¹⁵ from the third to the eighth century are preserved. William Webster has compiled these writings in a scholarly article called, “The Patristic Exegesis of the Rock of Matthew 16:18.”¹⁶ From this article we quote the testimony Theodoret the bishop of Cyrus, (393-457).

“Let no one then foolishly suppose that the Christ is any other than the only begotten Son. Let us not imagine ourselves wiser than the gift of the Spirit. Let us hear the words of the great Peter, ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Let us hear the Lord Christ confirming this confession, for ‘On this rock,’ He says, ‘I will build my church and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.’ Wherefore too the wise Paul, most excellent master builder of the churches, fixed no other foundation than this. ‘I,’ he says, ‘as a wise master builder have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.’ How then can they

¹² The terms overseer and elder/pastor are used interchangeably (Acts 20:17, 28; I Peter 5:1-4).

¹³ Luke 22:25-26.

¹⁴ I Peter 5:3.

¹⁵ These were Augustine, Ambrose, Ambrosiaster, Aphraates, Apostolical Constitutions, Asterius, Athanasius, Basil the Great, Basil of Seleucia, Bede, Cassiodorus, John Cassian, John Chrysostom, Peter Chrysologus, Cyprian, Cyril of Alexandria, Cyril of Jerusalem, Didymus the Blind, Epiphanius, Ephrem Syrus, Eusebius, Firmicus Maternus, Firmilian, Fulgentius, Gaudentius of Brescia, Gregory the Great, Gregory Nazianzen, Gregory of Nyssa, Hilary of Poitiers, Ignatius, Isidore of Pelusium, Isidore of Seville, James of Nisbis, Jerome, John of Damascus, Maximus of Turin, Nilus of Ancyra, Origen, Pacian, Palladius of Helenopolis, Paschasius Radbertus, Paul of Emessa, Paul Orosius, Paulinus of Nola, Prosper of Aquitaine, Tertullian, and Theodoret.

¹⁶ <http://www.christiantruth.com/fathersmt16.html> 8/24/04

think of any other foundation, when they are bidden not to fix a foundation, but to build on that which is laid? The divine writer recognises Christ as the foundation, and glories in this title.¹⁷ Other foundation no man can lay but that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus (1 Cor. iii.11). It is necessary to build upon, not to lay foundations. For it is impossible for him who wishes to build wisely to lay another foundation. The blessed Peter also laid this foundation, or rather the Lord Himself. For Peter having said, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God;' the Lord said, 'Upon this rock I will build My Church.' Therefore call not yourselves after men's names, for Christ is the foundation....¹⁸

"Surely he is calling pious faith and true confession a 'rock.' For when the Lord asked his disciples who the people said he was, blessed Peter spoke up, saying 'You are Christ, the Son of the living God.' To which the Lord answered: 'Truly, truly I say to you, you are Peter and upon this rock I shall build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'¹⁹

"Its foundations are on the holy mountains.' The 'foundations' of piety are divine precepts, while the 'holy mountains' upon which these foundations are laid are the apostles of our Saviour. Blessed Paul says concerning these foundations: 'You have been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets whose cornerstone is Christ Jesus.' And again he says: 'Peter, James and John who are perceived to be pillars.' And after Peter had made that true and divine confession, Christ said to him: 'You are Peter, and upon this rock I shall build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.' And elsewhere Christ says: 'You are the light of the world, and a city set on a hill cannot be hid.' Upon these holy mountains Christ the Lord laid the foundations of piety....²⁰

"Let us inquire who is he that is called a stone; and at which appearing small, later became very great, and covered the earth. Let us, therefore, hearken to God Himself saying by the prophet Isaias, 'Behold I lay in Sion a stone costly, a corner stone, precious, elect, into the foundations thereof, and everyone that believeth in it shall not be confounded' (Is. xxviii.16)...Let us also listen to the blessed David prophesying and crying out, 'The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner?' (Matt. xxi.42). And the blessed apostle Peter teaching among the Jews, and bringing before them the prophecy of the Lord, says, 'This is the stone which, rejected by you the builders, is become the head of the corner' (Acts iv.11). And the blessed apostle says, 'Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone' (Eph. ii.20); and elsewhere he says, 'Other foundation no man can lay but that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus,' (1 Cor. iii.11); and again, 'They drank,' he says, 'of the spiritual rock which followed them, but the rock was Christ'(1 Cor. x.4).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), Volume III, Theodoret, Epistle 146, To John the Economist, p. 318.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 1,12*. Cited by J. Waterworth, *A Commentary* (London: Thomas Richardson, 1871), p. 149.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, *Commentary on Canticle of Canticles II.14*, M.P.G., Vol. 81, Col. 108

²⁰ *Ibid.*, *Commentary on Psalms 86.1*, M.P.G., Vol. 80, Col. 1561

Wherefore we are taught by the Old and New Testament, that our Lord Jesus Christ is called a stone.²¹

“For if they say that these things happened before baptism, let them learn that the great foundation of the Church was shaken, and confirmed by divine grace. For the great Peter, having denied thrice, remained first; cured by his own tears. And the Lord commanded him to apply the same cure to the brethren, ‘And thou,’ He says, ‘converted, confirm thy brethren’ (Luke xxii.32).”²²

Final word in conclusion

As we saw already at the beginning of this article the church at Rome was guided by a plurality of elders, and not one single bishop. Throughout its latter history there was much deceit, with many claiming to be the successor of Peter. What in fact these bishops demonstrated was that they were descendants of Adam and his sin. The concept of the bishop of Rome as a successor of Peter was not seriously held until the fourth century. It was first devised by Damasus bishop of Rome (366-384), then Innocent I (401-417). It was more fully formulated in the teaching of bishop Leo I (440-461) in the fifth century. It took many centuries of intrigue and massive forgeries before the concept became the dogma in the Roman church. The Hibernian Christians never accepted the teaching until the Norman Conquest in 1172. The Eastern Orthodox Churches have never accepted it.²³

The desire to be the successor of Peter was the driving force of many men over the centuries so as to reign with power and majesty. Two, even three, concurrent popes were known to vie for the throne at the same time. Thus, for example, at one time three popes in their lust for power each claimed the authority of Peter amid the curses and excommunications with which they assailed one another. The Council of Constance in 1415 set out to settle the matter. The historian Wylie gives some of the details,

“The way being thus prepared, the Council now proceeded to the trial of the Pope. Public criers at the door of the church summoned John XXIII to appear and answer to the charges to be brought against him. The indictment contained seventy accusations, but only fifty were read in public Council; the rest were withheld from a regard to the honor of the Pontificate, a superfluous care, one would think, after what had already been permitted to see the light. Thirty-seven witnesses were examined, and one of the points to which they bore testimony, but which the Council left under a veil, was the poisoning by John of his predecessor, Alexander V. The charges were held to be proven, and in the twelfth session (May 29th, 1415) the Council passed sentence, stripping John XXIII of the Pontificate, and releasing all Christians from their oath of obedience to him. When the blow fell, Pope John was as abject as he had before been arrogant.

²¹ *Ibid.*, *Commentary on Daniel ii.34*. Cited by J. Waterworth, *A Commentary* (London: Thomas Richardson, 1871), p. 153

²² *Ibid.*, *Haeret. Fab. Book 5, Chapter 28*. Cited by J. Waterworth, *A Commentary* (London: Thomas Richardson, 1871), p. 152

²³ King Henry with a strong military carried out the designs of the Papacy in 1171. He received submission from Archbishop and Bishop at the Synod of Cashel in 1172. See our article “The Legacy of the True Historical Patrick” on our webpage: www.bereanbeacon.org

He acknowledged the justice of his sentence, bewailed the day he had mounted to the Popedom, and wrote cringingly to the emperor, if haply his miserable life might be spared, which no one, by the way, thought of taking from him. The case of the other two Popes was simpler, and more easily disposed of. They had already been condemned by the Council of Pisa, which had put forth an earlier assertion than the Council of Constance of the supremacy of a Council, and its right to deal with heretical and simoniacal Popes. Angelus Corario, Gregory XII., voluntarily sent in his resignation; and Peter de Lune, Benedict XIII., was deposed; and Otta de Colonna, being unanimously elected by the cardinals, ruled the Church under the title of Martin V.”²⁴

Coming to reign on the chair of St. Peter was not done by election as it is commonly understood. Rather craft and intrigue of depraved men and women were the major part in deciding succession to the papal throne, as the historian Miller explains,

“For many years the papal tiara was disposed of by the infamous Theodora and her two daughters, Marozia and Theodora. Such was their power and evil influence, by means of their licentious lives, that they placed in the chair of St. Peter whom they would—men wicked like themselves. Our pages would be defiled by an account of their open unblushing immoralities. Such has been the papal succession. Surely Jezebel was truly represented by these women, and in the influence they obtained over the popes and the city of Rome. But, alas! alas! Jezebel, with all her associations, corruptions, tyrannies, idolatries, and uses of the civil sword, has been too faithfully represented by popery from its very foundation.”²⁵

Believing on Christ and believing on the pontiff are incompatible. As others in the past have noted, with the pontiff there is found an “altar” instead of a communion table, a “priest” instead of a preacher, ceremonies instead of sound doctrine, sacraments instead of saving grace, traditions instead of the Written Word of God. This is not in the Church based on God’s revelation of Jesus as “*the Christ, the Son of the living God*” but rather an institution based on the rule a pontiff. Therefore we voice the Lord’s own exhortation, “*hearken unto me now therefore, o ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth. Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.*”²⁶ Those persons or nations submitting themselves to her and her pontiff know neither life nor freedom. Only in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, is found freedom and eternal life! Believe on Him and Him alone, “*and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*”²⁷

²⁴ Wylie, Vol. I, book 3 p. 242

²⁵ Andrew Miller, *Miller’s Church History in Books For The Ages* (Albany, OR USA: AGES Software) Ch. 16, p. 432

²⁶ Proverbs 7:24

²⁷ Ephesians 5:11

Scriptures proclaim the one supreme sovereign head of the Church, the all holy, unchangeable, all-powerful, all knowing, all wise Lord Jesus Christ. The Roman Catholic proclaims “the Sovereign Pontiff John Paul II.”²⁸ One cannot serve two sovereigns for their commands will cross and contradict each another. We serve that only which we love supremely. A man cannot be impartial between two masters who are incompatible. When the necessity of a choice arises, he will despise the one he does not love supremely. So when the supreme Lord Jesus Christ says, “*thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind,*”²⁹ and the sovereign pontiff demands, “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...”³⁰, one must decide, whom does he love supremely? The Lord Christ Jesus died in place of the true believer. His life and finished sacrifice alone are the ransom for the believer. “*The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*” This was the price demanded by the All Holy God in order that His justice might be satisfied in the forgiveness of sins. As a result of this payment the true believer on Christ Jesus alone is freed from sin and Satan. “*For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*” The Matthew 16:16-20 text is foundational to this eternal life, as the role and the divinity of “*the Son of the living God,*” is the rock on which His Church is built! ♦

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²⁸ See “Dominus Iesus”.

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html 8/25/04

²⁹ Matthew 22:37

³⁰ *Code of Canon Law*, Can. 752