

The Pope of Rome

By Malcolm H. Watts

By invitation of the former Prime Minister, Pope Benedict XVI visited the United Kingdom in September 2010. Given that the Pope is the leader of a false religion from which this country was thankfully delivered at the time of the Reformation, and given that he proudly asserts that he is "Father of Princes and Kings, Ruler of the world, and Vicar of (or Substitute for) our Saviour Jesus Christ", and given that he is "that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition, that exalteth himself in the church against Christ" (Baptist Confession, 1689), we, for our part, were totally opposed to his visit and we extended no welcome at all to this usurper and deceiver.

False Claims

"Catholics believe that the bishops of Rome are successors of St. Peter and that because of this they have a special position of authority in the Universal Church... For Catholics, the Pope, as bishop of Rome, continues the task of St. Peter in providing a kind of final authority as Christ's representative." (Martin Murphy in *The Roman Catholic Church: The Religious Education Press*).

The Infallibility of the Pope was solemnly decreed on 18th July, 1870. This was at the great Vatican Council of 1869-70, presided over by Pope Pius IX. Since then, it has been an article of the Roman Catholic faith, the actual wording of the article being as follows:

"We teach and define, as a dogma divinely revealed, that the Roman Pontiff when he speaks "ex cathedra" (that is, when in discharge of the office of Pastor and Teacher of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the universal church) by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter (Lk 22:32) is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed that his Church should be endowed for defining doctrine regarding faith or morals; and that therefore such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church. But if any shall presume (which God forbid!) to contradict this, our definition, let him be anathema (accursed)."

Tested by Scripture

It is almost unbelievable to see Luke 22:32 quoted in the article of faith above. There is no basis whatsoever for believing that these words of our Lord extend to all Bishops of Rome. Christ did not say so. They were spoken to Peter because Peter was about to deny the Lord. After his restoration, Peter desired to do everything he could to exhort his brethren to courageous adherence to Christ and his Gospel, as the two Epistles of Peter make very clear. That a verse like this one was ever appealed to shows the complete lack of authority for Rome's present claims.

Matthew Chapter 16 Verses 18-19

The verses generally quoted by Romanists are Matthew 16: 8-19 - "And I say 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."

(1) The rock: The Church of Rome asserts that Peter is "the rock" upon which Christ built his Church.

The Bible teaches that no man can be "this rock," for it is one of the titles of God himself: "Is there a God beside me? Yea, there is no rock. I know not any" (Is 44: 8, margin). "Who is a rock, save our God?" (2 Sam 22:32). "He (God) is the Rock" (Deut 32:4).

It was, in fact, a Messianic title, used several times in the Scriptures of the Old Testament: for example, the Lord is called there "a rock of offence" (Is 8:14).

When at Caesarea Philippi the Lord laid claim to this title.

It was his purpose to draw attention to himself. "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?...Whom say ye that I am?" (Matt 16: 13, 15). The statement about "this rock" is therefore rightly un-

derstood as referring to himself. "Thou art Peter (the name 'Peter' in Greek [petros] means 'a stone') and upon this rock (a different word [petra], meaning a "large mass" or "ledge of rock") I will build my church." The Lord Jesus, whom Peter had just confessed, is "this rock". Peter was merely "a stone" (Jn 1:42), built upon that great rock.

As Dr. J. A. Alexander writes, "By retaining the invariable classical distinction between petros(stone) and petra (rock), we not only adhere faithfully to usage, and do justice to the writer's careful choice of his expressions, but obtain a meaning perfectly appropriate and striking, namely, that while Peter was a stone, i.e. a fragment of the rock, his Master was the rock itself."

He who entrusts himself to Christ does indeed build on "the rock" (Matt 7:24). So, in Matthew 16, our Lord is not speaking of Peter. He is speaking of himself. Elsewhere, he uses similar expressions to these when drawing attention to himself: "Destroy THIS temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (Jn 2:19). "If any man eat of THIS bread, he shall live for ever" (Jn 6:51).

What other foundation can there possibly be for the Church than the Lord Jesus Christ? "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 3:11). 'Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house...

Wherefore also it is contained in scripture, Behold I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded' (1 Pet 2:5,6 - Note: That is how Peter understood the matter!). "And that Rock was Christ"(1 Cor 10:4).

(2) The keys of the kingdom: Romanists believe that the Lord made Peter and his successors the custodians of the entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

However, his words simply mean that, having just recognized who Jesus was, the Truth was now in his possession; and in preaching that Truth concerning Christ, Peter would open the kingdom to men and women. This, certainly, was our Lord's understanding of 'the keys', for in another place he charges some with having been unfaithful in using the Word of God, and he says, "Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered" (Lk 11:52). What does he mean then in his words to Peter? He simply means that by the use of the Truth (i.e. the Gospel), Peter would open the kingdom, or the church, to sinful men and women. And this is exactly what did happen. It was Peter who, at Pentecost, preached to the Jews, affording them access into the kingdom (Acts 2:14-41); and then, later, it was Peter again who, at Caesarea, opened the door of the kingdom to the Gentiles (Acts 10:44-48). On both

occasions Peter did this by the preaching of the Truth - by using what had been entrusted to him - "the keys".

Our Lord spoke in the plural of "the keys of the kingdom". One of them, as we have seen, is "the key of doctrine", by which the kingdom is "opened" to ruined sinners, but the other is "the key of discipline", by which the kingdom is "closed", shutting out such as are impenitent and unbelieving. According to the inspired record, it was Peter who turned "the key of discipline" on Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) and then upon Simon Magus (8:9-23), expelling those ungodly persons from the "kingdom" or "church."

Our Lord nowhere suggests that this is something which belonged exclusively to Peter, or to the line of his successors, but it did belong particularly to Peter, because he was prominent as a preacher. He proved indeed to be faithful in the use of "the keys", but there were other "preachers" or "teachers", even in our Lord's day, who were manifestly unfaithful in explaining and expounding the Word of God, and to these the Lord said, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in" (Matt 23:13). Later, men like Diotrephes sinfully misused the power of "discipline", excommunicating sincere believers for no good or valid reason (3 Jn 9,10).

In a general sense, therefore, these words - first spoken to Peter - are applicable to all ministers, who are entrusted with the responsibility of teaching doctrine and exercising discipline (See: Matt 28:19,20; Acts 14:27; Titus 3:10,11).

Rome, by "the keys", understands Peter's power, and the power of his successors, to exercise absolute authority over the Church and to open and close heaven for whom they will. This is nothing more or less than the wresting of Scripture in order to find support for the totally erroneous and impious doctrine of Papal Supremacy.

(3) The binding and loosing on earth: This has been used to support the doctrine that authority was vested in Peter and his successors to confer or withhold absolution for sins.

The words "binding" and "loosing" were familiar to the Jews and, in their writings, were equivalent to "forbidding" and "permitting". Dr. John Lightfoot, one of the greatest Hebrew scholars of his day, produced a number of examples of these words being thus used from the writings of the Jewish Rabbis and Teachers, e.g. "To them that take a hot bath on the Sabbath-day, they bind (i.e. they forbid) washing, and they loose (i.e. they permit) perspiring". Evidently this was how the Lord Jesus Himself used the words. Of the scribes and Pharisees, he said: "They bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoul-

ders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers" (Matt 23:4), which means that these men enforced their laws with great rigour and would not ease the people in any of these requirements.

Returning to the verse under consideration, we affirm that it has nothing to do with the forgiveness of sins. Instead, it concerns the authoritative teaching of the apostles in the early church, laying down the precise nature of the laws of the kingdom, which teaching is to be found in their sermons and epistles.

This was not the sole or special prerogative of Peter. It was an authority conferred upon the whole body of apostles. Christ makes that very clear when he says, "Verily I say unto you (plural), Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt 18:18). The apostles did "bind" when they forbade the eating of things offered to idols, fornication, and the eating of things strangled and of blood (Acts 15:20). Yet they did also "loose" when they permitted converted Gentile believers to remain uncircumcised (Acts 15:5-19).

The apostles were the authorized and infallible teachers of the Church. There is no indication at all that they had any successors (Eph 2:20; Rev 21:14). They were chosen men to a unique office and appointed to formulate Christian doctrine

and to complete the canon of Scripture.

Thus Matthew 16:18-19 lends no biblical support whatsoever to the doctrine of Papal Authority, which doctrine is totally at variance to the infallible Word of God.

Other relevant facts

There are very many passages in the Word of God which clearly show that Roman dogma is contrary to revealed Truth.

(1) The Lord Jesus Christ is sole Head of the Church: "And he is the head of the body, the church" (Col. 1: 18). As he is with his Church "always", he is even now our only "Head".

(2) Christ taught that no apostle should claim supremacy: "Jesus called them unto him and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matt 20:25-27).

(3) In the list of offices in the Christian Church no place is given to "the Supreme Pontiff" or "Pope": "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph 4: 11,12; cf. 1 Cor 12:28).

(4) Peter never claimed papal power or supreme authority in the church: "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder. . . . Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Pet 5:1-3). The Twelve generally acted together (e.g. Acts 6:2) and all the evidence shows that Peter was subject to them (Acts 8:22).

(5) At the first great Christian Council, Peter was not called upon to act as Presiding Bishop. James, Pastor of the Jerusalem church, was the leader in that special assembly: "And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me ... my sentence is ..." (Acts 15:13,19).

(6) Far from having "infallibility", Peter erred a number of times and the apostle Paul, on one occasion, was constrained to oppose him: "When Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed" (Gal 2:11 cf. Matt 16:23; Lk 22:31,32).

(7) The identifying of ourselves with one particular apostle is expressly forbidden in the Word of God: "Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? ... For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of

Apollos; are ye not carnal? ... Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas ... all are yours, And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Cor 1:12,13; 3:4, 21-23).

The Witness of History

The Roman Church teaches that Peter had a Roman Bishopric of twenty-five years' duration. The fact is, however, that "For the Roman Catholic fiction of a twenty-five years, there is no foundation... There is no agreement between the witnesses cited in behalf of the Roman Church's theory' (Schaff-Herzog Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge).

Jerome was the first to say that Peter was Bishop of Rome from AD 42 for twenty-five years - and Jerome died in the year AD. 420. This is far too late a tradition to be worthy of serious attention or credence.

Scripture gives strong evidence against this Roman theory: (1) the apostles did not normally stay in one place; (2) Peter was the apostle to the Jews, not to the Gentiles (Gal 2:7,8); (3) according to the book of Acts and Paul's epistle to the Galatians, Peter was located in Jerusalem in AD 49, when Rome's teaching insists he was in Rome (Acts 15:1,2, 6-11; Gal 2:1,9); (4) Paul wrote an epistle to the Romans in AD. 57, but made no mention of Peter and sent no greetings to him,

even though he sent greetings to many of his friends in chapter 16; (5) Paul expressed his hope of one day visiting Rome and preaching there, but afterwards he writes that it was his constant practice to "preach...not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation" (Rom 1:11,15; 15:20); (6) he eventually arrived at Rome in AD 62, but Peter was evidently not there to greet him (Acts 28:15); (7) in the epistles written from Rome, viz. Ephesians, Philip-pians, Colossians and Philemon, there is no mention of Peter being with him in the city; (8) at the time of his first defence, Peter was evidently not in Rome, for Paul writes "at my first answer no man stood with me" (2 Tim 4:16); (9) in this same epistle, the last he wrote, and again written from Rome, Paul states that 'only Luke' was with him, which shows that Peter was not in the city at that time (2 Tim 4:11); and (10) in AD 63, or thereabouts, Peter was residing in Babylon, the famous city on the Euphrates where multitudes of Jews were to be found (1 Pet 5:13).

Rome's proud claim that Peter was Bishop of Rome for twenty-five years is a complete fantasy and myth. In fact, it is plain deceit and falsehood.

The early situation in Rome was very different from the present situation. There was a difference of opinion, history tells us, between Polycarp (the disciple of John) and Anicetus (the bishop of Rome). The dispute was about the keeping of

Easter. Neither could convince the other of the rightness of his opinion and so they agreed to differ and determined not to let it break their Christian fellowship. Anicetus did not claim to be supreme and Polycarp did not feel obliged to accept the opinion of the bishop of Rome.

History presents us with what one historian has called 'a sin-stained succession of Popes'. We do not intend to go into details, and to give examples of the vice which has been enthroned in the Vatican, for the records sicken the soul. Let one quotation from The Protestant Dictionary, edited by C. S. Carter, suffice:

"Innocent VIII (1484-1492) was a man of profligate morals. He was succeeded (1492) by Roderick Borgia, who assumed the name of Alexander VI, and was a man of still more abandoned life. Three sons and a daughter (the beautiful Lucretia), out of a family of five illegitimate children, were alive at the time of his election to the Papacy. His third son, the infamous Caesar Borgia, was raised from the status of a divinity student at Pisa to that of a bishop, and shortly after was made archbishop, and then cardinal! Alexander's pontificate presents a depth of moral degradation unsurpassed in the history of the Papacy. The shameless orgies of the Vatican, the depravities of the papal court and family, were a scandal to all Christendom. Murders at Rome became events of nightly occurrence. At the age of seventy-two the Pope died suddenly, supposedly

by poison, August 1503."

The so-called "infallible" Popes have grievously erred, often in fundamental doctrines. Eleutherius (AD c. 177-193) and Victor (c, 193.-202) sanctioned the heresy of Montanus. Liberius (352-366) believed the Arian error, which denied the full deity of Christ. Zosimus (417-418) was a Pelagian, denying original sin, and the necessity of the grace of God in salvation. Vigilius (537-555) accepted a heresy which denied the two-fold nature of Christ. Honorius I (625-638) was a Monothelite, one of a sect which denied that the Lord had both a human and a divine will. The doctrine of "infallibility" is quite simply wrecked upon the solid rock of church history.

Rome should be embarrassed by her history, for she has to maintain "papal infallibility" and "apostolic succession" with all the facts against her. In the past there have been rival Popes, each claiming the right to the power of the Roman Church. To give only one example here: in the early fifteenth century three persons simultaneously claimed to be Pope (Benedict XIII, Gregory XII and John XXIII) and each one condemned and excommunicated the others!

The claims of Rome are false, and both Scripture and history testify against the great "lie" of Roman Catholicism. Let us wholeheartedly reject Popish Religion; and let us hold fast our Protestant Faith, the

Faith sealed by the blood of so many godly and faithful martyrs!