

# ROMAN CATHOLICISM

## In the Light of Scripture

by

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### CHAPTER FIVE

#### THE PAPAL SUCCESSION

THE BASIC CLAIM OF ROME concerning Peter's supremacy is overthrown not by human reasoning, which is weak at the best, but by the statements of Holy Writ. Because of this, and the inescapable logic of historical fact, it seems almost superfluous to examine the superstructure of papal supremacy built upon the claims for Peter. Yet since it is that very superstructure which has loomed so large in years gone by and still maintains its influence upon millions upon millions of souls in the world today, it is necessary to examine also the claims of papal succession.

The Roman Catholic Church claims that the Apostle Peter was the first Bishop of Rome and thereby the first pope. What support is there for this in Scripture? None whatever! There is one verse to which Rome points, but its application depends solely on her interpretation of its meaning.

**The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you (I Peter 5:13).**

Babylon, says the "*Holy Mother Church*," stands for pagan Rome, and since she claims infallibility in her interpretation of the Scriptures, the claim is proved so far as she is concerned, since Peter sent greetings in his letter from the church at Babylon. That scriptural "proof" may be completely satisfactory to the Roman hierarchy, but it does not satisfy those who do not accept the infallibility of Rome's teaching. And it is curious that this epistle of Peter is the only one of all the New Testament epistles where the place of writing has to be something other than that plainly stated.

Even if we grant, for argument's sake, that at the time Peter wrote his epistle he was actually in Rome, there is still no proof from Scripture that he was there as resident bishop or pope.

We have a full, though not complete, record of his movements in the first part of the Acts of the Apostles, but after chapter 15 he is not once more mentioned. The later chapters are of course the record of the progress of the Gospel in the Gentile world, while Peter was the Apostle to the Jews, so his absence from the story need cause no great surprise. But if, as Rome claims, he was bishop and pope of Rome, then indeed it is remarkable that his name should not once be mentioned again in Luke's record, especially as that record closes in Rome itself.

Rome, however, falls back upon tradition, quoting a number of references to Peter's labor and martyrdom there. There is one tradition about his going to Rome in A.D. 42 to be bishop there for twenty-five years, but this is impossible to believe on the evidence of many scholars, some of whom were themselves Roman Catholics.

According to the New Testament, Peter was in prison just before Herod's death, which is usually placed about A.D. 44 (Acts 12:1-16). Nine years later he was present at the Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:7). Not long after this Paul resisted him at Antioch because he withdrew from fellowship with Gentile believers (Galatians 2:11-16).

Moreover, had Peter been in Rome it is exceedingly unlikely that Paul would have written to the church in that city as he did (see Romans 1:5, 6 and 1:13-16). Nor, would he have felt so strong an urge to go there himself (Romans 1:9-12), for it would have been contrary to his own independent line of action and whole pattern of work which was "**not to build on another man's foundation**" (II Corinthians 10:16; Romans 15:20).

When Paul wrote to the church at Rome in A.D. 58, Peter evidently was not there, for Paul makes no reference to him, though he spoke of his longing to see the believers that he might impart to them some spiritual gift (Romans 1:11).

Again in Romans 16, Paul makes mention of twenty-seven Christian disciples by name. If Peter were there, could he have missed him out of the list?

And when Paul did arrive in Rome, some of the brethren went to meet him. If Peter were among them, would not Luke have recorded the fact? If, as claimed by Rome, Peter had already been there over eighteen years, would not the Jewish community at Rome have known much more about Christianity than they evidently did (Acts 28:17-22)?

Further, while at Rome, Paul wrote letters to the churches at Philippi, Colosse and Ephesus, and also to Philemon. In these letters he mentions the names of many who were there, who labored with him in the Gospel, but makes no mention of Peter (Philippians 4:21, 22; Colossians 4:10-14; Philemon 23, 24).

After some years Paul was imprisoned in Rome a second time. When writing to Timothy during this second imprisonment, he says, "**Only Luke is with me**" (II Timothy 4:13), and again, "**At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me**" (II Timothy 4:16). If Peter had been there, he would not have forsaken Paul. It is evident therefore that during those years Peter was not at Rome. How then could he have held office as bishop of Rome?

Rome sweeps away all this evidence with her usual dogmatism. Official pronouncement has recently been made by the Pope about the finding of Peter's headless skeleton beneath the famous Basilica in Rome, but the report issued to the British United Press by a Vatican official admits that scholars claim no definite proof as to whose the bones were. According to the suggestion in John 21:18, 19, and early church tradition, Peter was crucified and not beheaded. In answer to the question, "What proofs can you give that St. Peter was ever Bishop of Rome?" she says (*Question Box*, page 145):

*It was not divinely revealed that St. Peter was Bishop of Rome, but it is a dogmatic fact, i.e., an historical truth so certain and so intimately connected with the dogma of the primacy, that it comes under the divine infallible teaching authority of the Church. The Vatican Council defined it as an article of faith that St. Peter still lives, presides, and judges in the person of his successors, the Bishops of Rome.*

So now, notwithstanding admitted absence of divine revelation, Peter, by papal definition, was Bishop of Rome, and moreover still lives, presides, and judges, in the person of his successors, the bishops of Rome!

Let us look at this line of successors, described elsewhere as "unbroken."

With such a claim we would naturally expect a line of successors whose titles were so clear and certain as to be indisputable, with no possibility of doubt concerning any one of them, since the strength of a chain is the strength of its weakest link.

Since there were a good many occasions when there were rival claimants to the throne of St. Peter, there are varying lists of popes.

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* contains a list of 259 popes, with Peter as the first, Linus (cf. II Timothy 5:21) as the second, and Clement (Philippians 4:3) as the fourth. The first eleven names, covering from Peter's death to A.D. 165, are all marked with an interrogation point, indicating that there is lack of historical certainty concerning the incumbents of such an office as Vicar of Christ and Head of the Church (cf. Luke 20:2)! Where is the "unbroken succession"?

The register for the next thousand years contains numerous gaps, with occasions when there were two and sometimes even three rival popes, each claiming authority and striving for the mastery!

Twenty-nine on the list are marked as "pretenders." There was one period when false popes usurped the papal throne for forty years, during which the greater number of the countries of Europe ranged themselves behind one or the other, while the Church Council dared not decide for either. A final solution to the problem was only arrived at by setting both claimants aside and appointing an entirely new pope.

So much for the "unbroken succession" through which Rome claims her authenticity today.

Consider the well-authenticated characters of some of these successors. Pope John XI was the illegitimate son of Pope Sergius III by an infamously wicked woman named Marozia. John XII, a nephew of John XI, was a monster of wickedness, who through the influence of the dominant Tuscan party in Rome was raised to the papedom at the age of eighteen. His tyrannies and debaucheries were such that, upon the complain of the people of Rome, the Emperor Otho tried and deposed him. Some of the sins enumerated in the charge were murder, perjury, sacrilege and incest. When called to answer the charges, Pope John replied as follows:

*John, the servant of the servants of God, to all Bishops. We hear that you want to make another pope. If that is your design, I excommunicate you all in the name of the Almighty, that you may not have it in your power to ordain any other, or even to celebrate mass.*

Regardless of the threat, the Emperor and Council deposed "this monster without one single virtue to atone for his many vices," as he was called by the Bishops in Council.

Cardinal Baronius, one of the most powerful champions of popery, in reference to these happenings, writes:

*O, what was then the face of the Holy Roman Church; how filthy, when the vilest and most powerful prostitutes ruled in the court of Rome! By whose arbitrary sway, dioceses were made and unmade, bishops were consecrated, and – which is inexpressibly horrible to be mentioned! – false popes, their paramours, were thrust into the chair of St. Peter.*

Why, may it be asked, after the lapse of these hundreds of years, do we now drag all these unsavory happenings into the light? "**Love covers a multitude of sins,**" some would say. "Would it not be more Christian to bury them in the oblivion they deserve?"

Writing about them is nauseating, and reading of them, too. But the point is that the name of John XII still reckons in the regular line of popes, through whom the unbroken chain of apostolic authority descends upon the pope of today.

Listen to this extract from the Council of Trent Catechism:

*Seeing the bishops and priests are, as it were, the interpreters and ambassadors of God, who, in God's name teach men the Divine law and rules of life, and personate God Himself on earth, it is evident therefore that their function is such as a greater cannot be conceived. They hold the power of the name of the Immortal God among us (Catechism of the Council of Trent, page 120).*

In view of the iniquitous lives of such men as these and others who might be mentioned, could there be greater blasphemy against the Holy God than to say that they “*personated God on earth, and held the power of the Immortal God among us*”? Yet to such depths does the Romish doctrine of Papal Apostolic Succession lead us.

**~ end of chapter 5 ~**

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