

The Primacy of Peter: Theology and Ideology—II

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In the light of what has been said in the first part of this article, it may be useful to examine briefly the text of Matt. 16, 17-19. It is remarkable that most of the interesting exegesis of this passage has been the work of Protestant scholars, notably O. Cullmann in his *Peter: Apostle and Martyr*, and also J. Ringger, 'Das Felsenwort. Zur Sinndeutung von Matt. 16, 18, vor allem im Lichte der Symbolgeschichte' in Roesle-Cullmann, *Begegnung der Christen*, 1959, together with numerous articles on key-concepts by J. Jeremias now available in English in the translation of Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. As to the propriety of looking at these verses in isolation, we may quote the remark of the Catholic exegete, W. Trilling (*Das wahre Israel*, 3rd ed., 1964): 'This language, dense with imagery, of a kind also found in the Qumran writings, is in itself foreign to Matthew' (p. 156). It may be that within the perspective of a modern jurisdictional theology of the primacy, the symbolic sense of the text was not easily accessible to Catholic scholars before Protestant exegetes opened the way to an understanding of it in some respects closer to patristic exegesis.

In summary, then, the whole passage is an instance of anticipated eschatology, in which the Messiah invests an individual with his own messianic powers over the messianic community.

v. 17. In response to his messianic confession, Simon is greeted with a 'beatitude' or 'macarism', for in him the eschatological event of the last times has been anticipated by 'apocalypse'. Without committing oneself to any view of literary dependence, one may note the parallelism to our present text of Gal. 1, 15-16, in particular the opposition of heavenly 'apocalypse' to 'flesh and blood' (see A. M. Denis, O.P., 'L'investiture de la fonction apostolique par "Apocalypse"', *Revue Biblique* 64 (1957), pp. 335-62, 492-515). Simon has not only confessed that Jesus bears the messianic title, he expounds the title to mean the Son of the living God; and it is God the Father of the Son who has revealed this.

v. 18. Simon too has a title, one which is conferred upon him by an authoritative act, and the content and functions of this title are now expounded. The Rock-man is to be a foundation upon which a building is to be built: the Messiah will 'build' or 'make a house'. In chapter 2 of 1 Peter, which may critics would be prepared to attribute to the historical Peter, we see the writer playing with the notion of 'stone' (*lithos*, not *petra*). He invites his readers or hearers

to be 'like living stones built into a spiritual house' (v. 5). The play on words is easier for its antecedents in the Old Testament, for instance in the messianic prophecy of 2 Samuel 7. David proposes to build the Lord a 'house'; but Nathan speaks to David according to a vision by night and declares that the Lord will make David a 'house'. This 'house' is the royal descendance of David, his family and kingdom, as the Lord's 'house' is his temple (in all cases 'house' = *bayith*). We may also consider the appointment of Jeremiah to his prophetic office (*pqd*) 'to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant' (Jer. 1, 10). 'Building' and 'planting' are the acts of the Lord who comes, and the acts of his emissaries, the prophets and apostles: for they are the 'foundation' upon which the household of God is built, 'Christ Jesus himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit' (Eph. 2, 20-22; various derivatives of *oikos*, house). The author of 1 Peter continues his play on the word 'stone' by recalling texts of Isaiah (28, 16; 8, 14-15), bringing out the double character of this stone for faith. The first of these Isaian texts is perhaps specially attractive; it seems to offer an inscription for a foundation or corner stone: 'He who believes will not shake' (following the reading implied by the Targums and the Syriac versions).

A characteristic text from the Qumran hymns is instructive:

The deeps resound to my groaning
 and [my soul has journeyed] to the gates of death.
 But I shall be as one who enters a fortified city,
 as one who seeks refuge behind a high wall
 until deliverance (comes);
 I will [lean on] thy truth, O my God.
 For thou wilt set the foundation on rock
 and the framework by the measuring-cord of justice;
 and the tried stones [thou wilt lay]
 by the plumb-line [of truth],
 to [build] a mighty [wall] which shall not sway.

1 QH VI, 24-27; trans. Vermes.

The parallels here to Matt. 16, 18, already noted by Dupont-Sommer, would be still closer if instead of 'foundation' translating an emendation *yswd*, the original reading *swd* were retained, meaning 'circle of intimates' or 'mystery', i.e. the Community as a group initiated into God's secret plan (see Carmignac in Carmignac-Guilbert, *Les Textes de Qumran*, I, p. 224, n. 90). The parallelism only illustrates, of course, the way in which certain biblical themes might have developed independently in two movements within post-biblical Judaism.

The *ecclesia* of Matt. 16, 18, then, is the community of God's chosen People to be built upon the Rock-man. This People is never an

unstructured mob; it is differentiated into tribes and camps, as the five thousand who were fed were made to sit in 'companies' (Mark 6, 39), the city of Rev. 21. Another 'city', indicated by the 'gates' as part for whole, rises up against the *ecclesia*; this is the combined powers of the underworld, sealed and shut down by the sacred rock (cf. Rev. 20, 1-3). These are the powers of disorder and death; it is in virtue of the Resurrection that the Rock endures and is victorious over death.

v. 19. The keys provide another instance of multiple symbolism. Taken with the preceding verse and the city-gates image, they imply an authority to admit or to exclude, but they may also be seen as an authority of stewardship, as in Isaiah 22, 15-25. We may compare Paul in his role as Apostle in 1 Cor. 4, 1, asking to be regarded as servant of Christ and steward (*oikonomos*) of the mysteries of God. In this sense, Simon is being appointed 'Vizier of the Messiah' (Benoit); in no sense is he the 'porter' or doorkeeper (*janitor caeli*). In accordance with the general structure of each of these three verses, in which a theme is stated and then expounded in antithetic parallelism, the image of the keys is probably to be related primarily to the 'binding and loosing'. This expression, in its Rabbinic use, was applied primarily to doctrinal decisions, declaring things and actions forbidden or permitted, and only secondarily to persons (excommunication). Within the perspective of the inaugurated eschatology of the New Testament, Peter's authority as steward consists in his power to provide or withhold access to the mysteries of God, above all the mystery of the community of the Messiah and Son of Man, the anticipated sacramental realization of the reign of God, the *ecclesia*, the Church.

It is important to note that not all these assurances are proper to Peter alone. The beatitude of v. 17 is appropriate to Paul too, as we have already seen; and it appears from the 'hymn of praise' (Matt. 11, 25-27; Luke 10, 21-22) that the Son may choose to reveal his Father (and his sonship) to 'babes'. Again, in the 'Rule of the Community' of Matt. 18, the power to bind and loose is solemnly declared to belong to the *ecclesia* (v. 18; cf. Trilling, p. 116), here the local community. Since this verse, addressed to 'you' in the plural, follows immediately upon two verses addressed to 'you' in the singular, it is difficult to see how its force can be confined even to the Twelve; it may be best to take it as addressed to the community as a whole, in which case the community as a whole might be thought of as concentrating its own powers as steward in its personal steward, Peter. As Vatican I puts it, 'the Roman Pontiff . . . enjoys that infallibility which the divine Redeemer wished his Church to be equipped with in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals' (DS 3074; my italics).

There remains v. 18. What is promised here is assuredly as unique and personal as the proper name. But if it is proper as the personal

name, is it communicable? We seem to be back at the problem discussed in the section on Leo. There can be no doubt at all that a Catholic must believe that at least something in Peter is in some sense communicable to his 'successors'. Is it, as Professor Ullman would have us believe, a *ius haereditis*, or as Vatican I appears to assert, a *primatus iurisdictionis*?

The essence of the answer to this question, I suggest, consists in recognizing that while 'Peter' is a proper name, it is also a *title*. As personal name, 'Peter' is proper to the historical Simon alone; as title, it is communicable. Perhaps one might think of some English equivalent such as 'Mr Standfast'. What is communicated is the functions symbolically condensed in the title; and we have seen what these might be.

As far as the New Testament evidence goes we can say no more, it seems to me, than that communication of what is 'Peter' is *possible*. Even the idea of episcopal succession to part of what is involved in the Apostolic office is at best only hinted at in the New Testament. It is only in the evangelical *life* of the Church ('Tradition') that we can discover the evangelical sense of the Scripture.

V

The purpose of this article has been to suggest a possible perspective within which to see the place of the papacy in the Church. It used to be suggested that whereas Vatican I defined the place of the papacy in the Church, Vatican II defined the place of bishops in the Church. It has now been clear for some time that this is a misleading oversimplification. Not only do the affirmations about the Pope, taken over by Vatican II from Vatican I, stand out uncomfortably in their new context; but theological discussion since Vatican II, which has tried to interpret the papacy in terms of the 'collegial' categories of Vatican II, does not seem to have been notably successful. Nor can we dismiss the bearing of the famous *Nota Explicativa to Lumen Gentium*. It does not seem to me that the peculiar place of the papacy in the Church can be satisfactorily understood in terms of the headship of the episcopal college.

What has been suggested here is that we need to interpret Vatican I on the primacy in a wider ecclesiological context than the fathers of Vatican I allowed themselves to do (it will be remembered that under various pressures only one chapter of the much more comprehensive schema on the Church was discussed, what forms the present constitution *Pastor Aeternus*), or indeed even envisaged. Like everything else in this article, the suggestion needs far more detailed investigation than has been possible here. Nevertheless I believe that it is of the utmost importance that we should deliberately expose ourselves—at the highest pitch of sensibility to which we can screw ourselves (or perhaps by relaxing into the profoundest receptivity)—to every faint echo of an understanding of the Church, office in the

Church, and the papacy in particular, which, while it has never been wholly lost, has for so long found inadequate expression that it is extraordinarily difficult to recover.

For instance, it seems to me that what is now frequently called a 'crisis of authority' in the Church is only a symptom of something a good deal deeper. If Gratian in his *Decretum* was the first to interpret the power of binding and loosing as 'the judicial authority of the ecclesiastical tribunals over the Church as a society' (Robert L. Benson, in an important book, *The Bishop-Elect*, Princeton, 1968, pp. 48-9 and the references there given), it is quite misleading to oppose this to a sacramental power exercised in the Church's *forum internum* (Benson, p. 48); 'private penance' and the theory of the internal forum are comparative late-comers in the complex history of 'sacramental' penance. The 'authority' exercised in exclusion from or reconciliation to the Church in what is now called the 'sacrament' of penance is neither simply 'sacramental' nor 'jurisdictional': at some deeper level this authority is an original unity which has been inadequately differentiated in later times. For this reason I cannot accept Robert Murray's thesis in what is otherwise a very valuable paper, that 'the institutional element in Christianity, by which I mean especially social structure and law, is not part of the Gospel' ('Authority and the Spirit in the NT', *Authority in a Changing Church*, 1968, p. 19; Fr Murray's italics). It may be that he is misled by an inadequate notion of 'institution' (see John Beattie, 'On the Notion of Institution', *New Blackfriars*, February 1969), but it seems to me also that he has been over-reacting against a particular version of authority (as jurisdiction). The authority of Jesus Christ is neither simply 'sacramental' nor 'jurisdictional' (consider the healing miracles and the expulsion of demons), nor is it simply the authority of 'witness'. In some sense that authority has been transmitted, including powers to heal and to expel unclean spirits (Matt. 10, 1, if not also Mark 16, 17).

It is to this sort of original unity that we have been pointing in speaking about an 'ontological' primacy of Peter. Perhaps even in Leo we see the beginnings of a differentiation between 'sacramental' and 'jurisdictional' versions of this primacy, though Leo's use of *sacramentum* is much wider than that which became standard from the middle ages to our own day. At any rate we need to take simultaneously into account every clue to this original unity. What is more, in the providence of God, we have actually had an historical Pope in recent years, John XXIII, who has given us a personal expression of that original unity, perhaps because personal sanctity alone is the only valid means of discovering and disclosing it.

I believe that current discussions of 'authority and conscience' stimulated by *Humanae Vitae* tend more often than not to be constricted by perspectives in which the ontological primacy of Peter and his successors, in its original unity, *cannot* come to sight; this

would be true of both parties to the controversy. It is characteristically unfortunate that the notion of the *magisterium* should so often serve as the focus of these discussions, since this notion saw its chief theological development in the nineteenth century, in connexion with the jurisdictional primacy of the Pope. There is something both fascinating and depressing to watch in the contortions of so many writers, professional theologians and others, as they struggle to extend or contract the sense of this historically conditioned notion in current controversy. Perhaps it would be a good thing to stop using the word altogether for some years, as was suggested not so long ago for the word 'God'. If what has been proposed in this article is acceptable, the service of the Gospel in the Church by Peter's successors is not in the first place to be construed as a form of jurisdictional, dominative authority over 'private' consciences; it is in the first place being the foundation stone on which is inscribed, 'He who believes will not tremble'—though we have yet neither the institutional nor the theological forms in which to translate that symbolic perception of the original unity into everyday praxis.

(Concluded)

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