

I FOUND THE ANCIENT WAY

By

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CHAPTER EIGHT

THE TRUE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

EVERY CATHOLIC BELIEVES that the only church of CHRIST established in the world is the one that has its head in Rome. Naturally that was my own opinion, too. But when I began to read the New Testament, following the purpose I said I had made at the end of the previous chapter, I found that one shouldn't take "**church**" to mean a human society but a divine one.

CHRIST said, "**My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews**" (John 18:36).

And Peter, in his first epistle (1:1), writes "**to the strangers,**" and farther on, in 2:11, "**Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims.**"

First he tells us that we are strangers, that is, that the world is not our homeland. So that we can have a clear idea of our situation, then he tells us that we are pilgrims, that is, people who are just passing through. And really that is what we Christians are. We live in the world but we are not of the world. We are traveling toward the kingdom of our Father.

CHRIST didn't found a church for men, so that it ought to have a human organization. He founded a church with men for GOD, and so with an organization that is not human but divine.

The church of CHRIST ought to be one, united not by authorities and hierarchies but by the spiritual bonds of faith and attachment to the true head, who is CHRIST.

JESUS truly did speak of a single fold and a single shepherd. But if the shepherd is one, he can't be the Pope, since there have been many, but of CHRIST himself, and we shall be His flock, those of us who have faith in Him.

The Archbishop of Barcelona says in his pastoral already mentioned: "The unity of the church rests, by will of its divine Founder, as on a very solid stone, on Peter and his successors."

To such a dogmatic statement we can answer:

1. *Peter never was the stone of the church of CHRIST.*

We refer to the cornerstone or foundation stone, since all the Apostles and prophets (Ephesians 2:20) and all the faithful (I Peter 2:5) are also stones. The foundation stone on which the Church of CHRIST is founded is Himself, and that is what Peter states in his first epistle (2:4): "**To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious.**"

Why did Peter get this surname if he isn't the stone? Nothing simpler: He made the confession that is the foundation stone of our faith, "**Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God**" (Matthew 16:16). JESUS answers this confession in verse 18: "**And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter [not a stone, but Peter], and upon this rock [who is the rock? Peter? No, but his confession. Doesn't our faith rest on the belief, or rock, that CHRIST is the Son of GOD?] I will build my church.**"

Paul says, "**For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ**" (I Corinthians 3:11). It follows logically that the Holy Spirit, if what the Apostle says here was really inspired by Him, didn't know that Peter was the foundation and He didn't know how to interpret the above-mentioned words of JESUS!

Oh, the ignorance of those times! It turns out that Peter himself didn't know that he was the foundation stone, for he says, "**This [CHRIST] is the stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the head of the corner**" (Acts 4:11). And he adds, "**Ye also, as lively stones, are built up**" (I Peter 2:5), and he doesn't add, "on me who was appointed the foundation stone of the church," but "**on him.**"

How then are we to understand the very clear and emphatic words of CHRIST that we find in the Gospel:

"Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church"?

Even though we have already given the logical interpretation of these words, derived from the inspired writings after the words of JESUS - and this of course is more than sufficient - we can also see, how some of the Fathers interpreted them.

Hilary: "The response, Thou art, is the believer's welcome to the truth. And this is the rock of confession whereon the church is built" (*On the Trinity*, Book 6).

John Chrysostom says: " '**On this rock,**' that is to say, on the faith of his confession, '**I will build my church**' " (*Homily 54 on Matthew 16*).

Augustine states with greater boldness: "The Rock [Petra] made Peter true, for the Rock was Christ" (*Homilies*, Vol. 10, sermon 147).

Reason tells us that if the Church of CHRIST has a divine purpose to fulfill it can't have a human foundation, so this foundation can be no other than JESUS himself.

2. *Peter was never treated as chief or head of the other Apostles.*

Before beginning to deal with this point I want to set down some premises with which I am sure all the readers will agree.

- a. The one sent is inferior to the one who sends him.
- b. The one who presides among several, in some sense is considered superior to the others and in no case is inferior.
- c. If among the Apostles there was one superior, they should have known it.

Now let's see if these premises are fulfilled in Peter.

a. Peter is sent to Samaria by the other Apostles, who doubtless knew nothing of his primacy: "**Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John**" (Acts 8:14).

b. In Acts 15 we see Peter giving information to the Jerusalem Council just as Paul and Barnabas did, and apparently they listened to the latter with greater respect than to him; for while Peter was talking the text seems to indicate that they all kept on arguing, whereas when Paul and Barnabas began to talk it tells us, "**All the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul**" (v. 12).

Oh, the irreverence and wickedness of those early Christians! They kept quiet while Paul and Barnabas talked and the sacred text doesn't say that they kept quiet when Peter spoke before.

We keep on reading and notice that the one who says the last word is James, with this statement:

"**Wherefore my sentence is . . .**" (v. 19).

I don't understand how James dares to have an opinion of his own, for according to Catholic logic he should have said, "It is the opinion of Peter, our visible head. . . ."

That business of discussing and saying, "My sentence is," would tell me that it is some Protestant affair. At least James wasn't a Roman Catholic and there were already Protestants.

c. Paul tells us in II Corinthians 12:11:

"I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing."

He doesn't consider himself inferior to the vicar of CHRIST. What would happen today to a bishop who would say that he doesn't consider himself inferior to the Pope? He would be excommunicated at once. It is a pity that the excommunication hasn't been preserved that Peter must have thundered against Paul when he heard that Paul had declared he wasn't inferior to him! But such an idea could never have passed through the mind of the Apostle Peter. Why? Because he didn't consider himself superior to any other Apostle.

Does Paul make such a declaration only once? No - in the same epistle to the Corinthians (11:5) he says: "**For I suppose I was not a whit behind the chiefest apostles.**" It looks as if Paul enjoyed repeating to us that there is no visible head in the Apostles and that he considers himself equal to the others and in no way inferior.

3. The Apostles had no need for Peter to strengthen them.

The passage that John so marvelously gives us in his Gospel (21:15-17) is one of those that Rome is in the habit of using as an argument that Peter was put in charge of His flock by JESUS. We don't doubt this, but this charge was also given to all the Apostles when He sent them to preach the Gospel throughout the world.

The three questions put to Peter by JESUS at the lake of Gennesaret were only what in the language of today we would call making up for the three denials, and the three recommendations to feed the flock are simply the restoration of Peter to the apostolate after those denials; not because he had ceased to be an Apostle, but so there would be a record that if he had denied JESUS, for each denial the Master was giving him a recommendation to feed His flock, and that Peter had the same obligation toward those who were to believe in Him as the other Apostles had.

The other passage to which Rome appeals is found in Luke 22:31, 32, in which JESUS says to Peter, "**When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.**"

These brethren can't be understood to mean the other Apostles, who never, it is evident, had need of any strengthening by Peter. The Lord JESUS didn't need to pray for any other Apostle that he would be converted, because no other was going to deny Him.

4. Peter never was infallible. See Galatians 2:11-14:

"But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.

“But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?”

The Scripture tells us that Peter "**walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel.**"

Doubtless the Holy Spirit, foreseeing that in the passing of the centuries some men were going to make Peter infallible, intentionally had a record left in the Holy Scriptures that he did not walk uprightly and erred, so that knowing this we should not fall into the error.

5. Nowhere is it evident that Peter was Bishop of Rome.

There are negative arguments by which we are able to state that he never went to the capital of the empire, such as the silence about him in Paul's epistles written from there.

The first documents that tell us of Peter's becoming Bishop of Rome come from three hundred years after his death.

6. The popes who claim to be his successors committed many errors.

This is easy to prove, since some actually fell into heresy. So we are not dealing with a scientific error, as in the imprisonment of Galileo, but an error of faith.

For example:

- Pope Liberius fell into the Arian heresy,
- Zosimus into the Pelagianism of Celestius,
- Pope Julian into the Sabellianism of Marcellus of Ancyra.

So we have three popes who were heretics. How can it be that they fell into heresy when they were infallible? This is one of the unfathomable mysteries of Roman Catholicism.

But to continue the discussion, if they were all infallible there shouldn't be any contradiction between them in matters of faith. But we see that Pope Honorius I was condemned as a heretic after his death by the Sixth Council (A.D. 680) and by his successor, Leon II, who condemned Honorius I as a Monothelite.

Gregory I (A.D. 600) calls everyone Antichrist who took the title of universal bishop, a title the popes use today.

Innocent I and Gelasius I declare that it is so necessary for children to take communion that they would go to Hell without it. This doctrine was condemned by the Council of Trent. Here we have a council condemning a doctrine given by infallible popes.

Nicholas I assured the Bulgars that it was enough to baptize in the name of CHRIST, instead of doing it in that of the Holy Trinity.

This is a brief list of the infinitude of errors committed by the popes. Where do the present ones get the infallibility that Catholics so dogmatically assert today?

Now let us see what the popes themselves think about pontifical infallibility.

Actually there is no need even to ask them the question. But it is interesting to know what those popes thought of themselves, from whom the present ones have inherited, as they say, this heavenly gift.

Pope Innocent II asserts that, "As for the sins he may have committed against the faith, the Church has the right to judge them" (*Inn. Op. Colonial Agrip.* 1575, Vol. I, page 188). If he admits that he could commit sins against the faith, it is because he probably didn't know that he was in possession of the gift of infallibility.

Hadrian IV says that the popes can make mistakes and that several were heretics (*De Minist. Confirm.* Sent. IV, art. 3).

Gregory VI, Gregory XIII and Clement VI declared that if they had taught anything against Catholic doctrine they retracted it (*Luca Dacherii Spicileg.* Vol. 6).

I could go on citing cases in which the Popes themselves, when they hadn't yet reached today's measure of lack of humility, recognized themselves to be fallible men. I don't want to touch on the crimes and sins committed by those men who claim to be visible heads of the Church of CHRIST on the earth and His vicars.

It horrifies one to think of an Innocent IV, John XX, John XXII (A.D. 1410) deposed by the Council of Constance as a "heretic, assassin, adulterer and sodomite," a Sixtus IV, an Alexander VI, lover of his own daughter Lucretia I, and poisoned to death by his cardinals, etc.

These facts confuse and disturb any good Catholic until he comes to understand as I did that we Christians don't need visible representatives of CHRIST because CHRIST lives, and where two or three of us are gathered in His name, He is in the midst presiding over us. His body is in Heaven, but His Spirit is in each one of us, because we are His living temples; and if I have JESUS in my heart, what need have I of His vicars?

~ end of chapter 8 ~

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