

PETER - BISHOP OF ROME?

Important Link: Evidence that Peter was in Rome is non-existent: <http://www.vision.org/visionmedia/article.aspx?id=5820>

Early tradition supports the notion that Peter had more to do with the founding of the Church system of Alexandria though indirectly than with any other see. Even the link with Rome is weaker. A strong indirect link is better than a weak link.

Catholics believe that Peter the apostle, was the first bishop of Rome and the head of the Church. On this dubious supposition, the rock of the Church, the papacy is built. The popes claim to be Peter's successors as bishops of Rome. They think Peter was the first pope. How the papacy could be the rock and the head of the Church when it is built on such flimsy foundations doesn't bother the Church and its lying theologians.

All believe that if Peter was not bishop of Rome then the pope cannot be his successor and cannot be legitimate head of the Church. Peter was the head of the Church and would need to establish the papacy to continue if it he was meant to have successors.

Father Raymond Brown is an example of a Catholic who finds the Catholic tradition that Peter founded the Church in Rome extremely doubtful. He holds that Peter was never bishop of Rome in the sense that we understand bishops (page 158, Papal Sin).

Centuries ago, Eusebius the early Church Historian stated that Linus was the first bishop of Rome. Ronald Knox stated that though Eusebius is right, Peter was the first bishop of Rome (Difficulties, page 125). His solution for the contradiction is that bishop was being used in two different senses. He reasons that as Peter was the apostle of Rome so some would call that bishop and others would not. The latter camp counted Linus as first bishop according to their criteria of bishop but were not intending to deny that Peter had authority over the Roman Church. He argues that Peter's function was as bishop and that is what matters. That is really just trying to get around the fact that Eusebius did not say Peter had any authority over Rome and that is that. The word bishop is nothing special - it only means overseer. Knox's reasoning that both those who would not call Peter the first bishop and those who would meant the same thing and were just using the word differently is unacceptable.

Ambrosiaster wrote in the fourth century that it was the Jews who originated the Jesus faith in Rome and that the Romans became converts "without seeing any sign of mighty works or any of the apostles". The Catholic claim that this refers to the primitive Church there and is talking about the time prior to Peter's arrival is far-fetched. There is no hint that Ambrosiaster meant anything like that.

The Old and New Testaments teach that Jerusalem is central to God's plan in the outreach to the whole world in what some texts indicate is the messianic times. Isaiah 2:1-4 and 62:1-7, Zechariah 8 state this in the Old Testament. Luke 24 and Acts 1 in the New. So why is Roman Catholicism saying the centre is Rome and the pope? Even if Peter were bishop of Rome he never intended for the bishop of Rome to be the head of the whole Church! Also Acts 1 speaks of a new apostle being elected to make up the 12 authenticators of the message of Jesus. The number had to be 12. So how could the pope be an authenticator?

Paul's epistle to the Romans avoids using the word Church at the start. This diverges from 1 Corinthians 1:2 and Galatians 1:2 and 1 Thessalonians 1:1 where the letter is addressed to the Church. Only the house Church of Prisca and Aquila is mentioned in 16:3-5. It is thought that there was nothing in Rome at that time only loose house Churches and Paul was trying to see them unify themselves. Consider the evidence given in Romans 14 to 15:13. Paul was trying to help them cement their relationship and become a Church. It is insane to imagine that Peter would become bishop when there was no Church as such to become bishop of. Paul collected money for the Jewish Christian Church and was afraid that Church would reject it for it was taken from non-Jews (15:31). Clearly the Church of Jerusalem of which Peter was a leader did not consider the Romans to be full brethren. Peter would not become bishop of Rome when he would have shared that attitude.

In Galatians 2, Peter is called the rock by Paul but he states that Peter's ministry was confined to the circumcised or the Jews. The decision to reach out to non-Jews had to be made then. Paul indicates that Peter was rock only for the Church as formed by the converted Jews.

The Church teaches that the bishop of Rome is head of the Church. Bizarrely it is enough if the pope is titular bishop of Rome that is bishop of Rome in name only. Some popes though claiming to be bishop of Rome didn't even live in Rome but in Avignon in France. Clement V made the decision for the papacy to leave Rome and a few successors later Gregory

XI decided to return to Rome with its Vatican in ruins and no papal administration there. So it is enough to have the title of bishop of Rome and whoever bears this title lawfully automatically becomes pope. It is the title then that matters most. Reason says the office should matter but it doesn't. Titles are only for the sake of honouring your office, that is what titles are for so office is what should matter even if the title doesn't matter. You can be called bishop of Rome and not be its bishop at all in any meaningful sense.

If Peter was really the first bishop of Rome and intended that the bishop of Rome must be head of the Church then it was him not God that started the tradition. It follows then that the present pope, who has the right to alter the discipline of his predecessors as long as faith and morals isn't damaged, could start declaring that after his death the Archbishop of Paris will automatically become head of the Church instead of the bishop of Rome. Peter would have left a record if he had really intended for the bishop of Rome to be supreme pontiff. Even if Peter was bishop of Rome and head of the Church that doesn't prove that he wanted only the bishop of Rome to be the head of the Church. The Catholic Church is only guessing.

If Peter was bishop of Rome was he acting with the authority of the other apostles? They had to work together. They had to be one. The Roman Catholic doctrine of collegiality forbids the pope to try and act like the only bishop in the world. If Peter was bishop of Rome was he only a temporary bishop? Was he only acting bishop of Rome? Was he bishop of one congregation in Rome while other bishops in Rome had other congregations? If so then he was never bishop of Rome itself. There are too many questions the Catholic Church doesn't want us to ask. There are too many problems. It is simpler not to take the Roman Catholic claims about Peter being bishop of Rome seriously. Too much faith is asked of us and that is unfair.

The tradition that Peter was NOT bishop of Rome is of greater antiquity than the tradition that he was (page 211, Handbook to the Controversy with Rome). The older tradition would have the most authority. The Catholic Church does not really believe in tradition but only the invented traditions that serve its schemes. The Catholic Church has scholars who say that even if Peter was not called bishop of Rome he was still that for the problem is only one of terminology for the apostles embodied Episcopal powers (page 121, Church and Infallibility). They worked like bishops. But the apostles were bishops so to speak of the whole Church and did not and could not limit themselves to dioceses. And to assume they wanted successors is mistaken when they said they were the sources of the final revelation of God and henceforth the Church was to preserve that revelation and not to add to it. The early Church expected Jesus to destroy the world in their lifetime and to see him coming back as king. Peter then would have believed that if he were pope that there would be no other.

Dionysius first said Peter was in Rome and that was as late as 170 AD. But this is a legend for there is no evidence that he ever was. After him came the first person to go a step further and say Peter was bishop of Rome was the author of the Clementine Recognitions and Homilies (page 79, 80, A Handbook on the Papacy) which date from 190-200 AD and are full of absurd stories and do not fit history and are antagonistic to St Paul making them heretical speculation. But even it is troublesome for Catholics for it says Peter has his chair of teaching in Rome which might mean he was the recognised Christian expert – professor – rather than a bishop!

Irenaeus declared that Peter and Paul set up the Church of Rome and made Linus its bishop, the first bishop of Rome (page 211, Handbook to the Controversy, and page 18, St Peter and Rome). He counted the bishops of Rome in such a way that Peter was excluded from the list.

Irenaeus wrote of the Church of Rome, "All Churches must unite with this Church because it is faithful to apostolic tradition not just by the local authority but by the men from all over the world who are in this Church" (Against Heresies 3:2 paraphrased from the Primitive Faith page 6). He only means that this Church is an expert not that it is infallible or has a pope or anything. He also said that the authority of the Roman Church comes from its priority as regards time and not rank (page 95, A Handbook on the Papacy). His obedience to Rome was necessary for he was in France and Rome was headquarters and supervisor of the Church administration for Italy and France and other regions.

That Irenaeus did not prove that there was a pope in those days is known from when he attacked the bishop of Rome, Victor, for deciding to excommunicate people who disagreed with him about when Easter should be celebrated. This shows that he did not recognise him as ruler of the Church for since Easter is only a memorial of the resurrection it is up to the pope if he is head of the Church to decide how he wants it celebrated and to excommunicate anybody who will not submit to his decrees especially when it would do no harm to go along with his requests. Catholics say that Victor's behaving this way shows he was pope and had the authority (page 140, Church and Infallibility). But the patriarch of Jerusalem and the patriarch of Constantinople did the same things and they were not popes. Nobody denies that the bishop of Rome had great power over a wide area of the Church but we deny that this power was the kind of supreme divine power that the pope pretends to.

Peter was an apostle and his job was to govern and minister to the whole Church so he would not be tied down to Rome by becoming its bishop for bishops have only got authority in their own local region. To become a bishop of Rome would have been to step down from his lofty calling. And who is to say that in the secretive and confused and harangued Church that

existed there since the forties that there was not some man appointed as bishop of Peter's time? An apostle cannot pass on his apostolic status to anybody for the job is for a witness and how can anybody witness like them to Jesus when they have never seen him?

It is a fact that far from having Peter as its bishop, Rome was one of the slowest to develop the episcopacy as a separate degree from the presbyterate (page 7, *The Petrine Claims of Rome*). Peter focused on ministering to Jews while Paul ministered mainly to Gentiles (Galatians 2:7, 8). What would Peter become bishop of Rome for when the few Christian Jews who were there were his interest? There wasn't enough people there to set up a papacy. And why Rome? Jerusalem, the Holy City of God, would have made more sense as the diocese that is the head of the dioceses in the world.

Peter didn't die in Rome for he would have been expelled with Priscilla and Aquila in 50 AD (page 15, *Was Peter the First Pope?*). He would have found safer places to be head of the Church from.

Peter never was bishop of Rome. Even if he was, he didn't die as bishop of Rome so the pope is not his successor. Proof that he was buried in Jerusalem has turned up.

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