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QUESTION AND ANSWER

The Roman Catholic Church claims to be the Christian Church founded by Jesus. On what parts of the New Testament do they base this claim?

It is the belief of Catholics that Christ, Who wishes all men to be saved, not only established a Church, which was to be the means to salvation, but also determined its essential structure, and endowed it with the fullness of power in the spiritual order.

The first point to be noted is the pre-eminence given in the Gospels to the Apostle Peter. He is mentioned in the first place, not only in the general lists of disciples (Mk. III.16-19; Mt. x.2-4; Lk. VI.14-16) but also when the three privileged apostles are cited together (Mk. v.37; IX.1; XIV.33). Time and again he speaks on behalf of the other disciples (Mk. x.28; XI.21; Mt. XV.15; XVI.16, 22; XVIII.21; XIX.27; Lk. XII.41; Jn. VI.68-9): he is given the symbolic name of "The Rock" (Jn. I.42): he personally benefits from the miraculous power of Christ (Lk. v.3-10; Mt. XIV.27-36); he is singled out in the Risen Christ's instructions to the Holy Women (Mk. XVI.7), and is favoured with a personal apparition (Lk. XXIV.34; I Cor. XV.5).

That Peter's pre-eminence involved a true primacy over the other apostles, and thus of the Church, is shown from three texts where Christ publicly invested Peter as head of His community of salvation (Mt. XVI.17-19; Lk. XXII.31-2; Jn. XXI. 15-17). Being the most explicit, the text from Matthew has aroused most discussion on the triple count of authenticity, historical value and interpretation. Considerations of space must limit our remarks to the briefest.

Suffice it to say that the three verses in question are extremely well attested, either in full or with only minor omissions, in all the manuscripts and versions; that no ancient writer, treating the passage, will be found to omit all of them; finally, that the strong semitic flavour of the language used is sufficient indication of the primitiveness of the passage. Most Protestant writers would agree with Catholics in upholding the authenticity and historical character of this text, and of the ones in Luke and John; but their various interpretations have all sought to exclude either the personal or permanent nature of the promise made to Peter—interpretations, however, which could not satisfy so independent a critic as M. Loisy (*cf. Les évangiles synoptiques*, tom. II, pp. 7-8).

For Catholics, Peter has been established as the foundation of the

edifice of Christ's Church, and in the context of a *living* building, "foundation" means "chief" or "head", which gives strength, and, by authority, unity. Under a variety of figures, Christ indicates the fullness of Peter's jurisdiction and teaching authority: the power of the keys, according to biblical usage (Is. xxii.22; Apoc. iii.7), shows that Peter, as majordomo, has full authority over Christ's House, able to allow or refuse admittance: similarly, the office of Shepherd—*πολιτευεῖν*—(Jn. xxi) in the language of Scripture means the power to govern (*cf.* II Kings v.2; vii.7; Ps. ii.9; Zach. xi.9), and since no restriction is made by Christ, we must conclude that it extends to all acts which the wise administration of the new community would require: this figure is close to that of the Lucan text, where Peter is depicted as the spiritual guardian of his brethren, and where his faith, which had led him to confess the Divinity of Christ in Matthew, is pronounced indestructible: finally, "to bind" and "to loose", almost technical terms in Scripture, convey full legislative and judiciary power.

The apostles, as a body under the leadership of Peter, were commissioned to preach the integrity of Christ's Gospel, and to ensure the fidelity of their preaching, Christ promised his continual assistance (Mt. xxviii.19 ff.; Mk. xvi.15 ff.). St Paul explains why Christ appointed privileged rulers and teachers in the Church (Eph. iv.11), namely, to ensure doctrinal stability (v.14). This object still exists today, and it is the belief of Catholics that it is attained in the same way, under the leadership of Peter and the apostles, which is continued in their successors, in that Church which Christ founded, and to which He has promised His lasting protection.

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