

St Peter and his Successors

By Mervyn Clive

London Catholic Truth Society No.sc33 (1961)

IT is amazing how readily non-Catholics assume that the Papal claims are, at best, based on a single text, and that, for the rest, there is merely a lot of Roman sleight-of-hand without any substantial support; yet the truth is exactly the opposite. It is the Catholic who approaches the question, not by wishful thinking or specious argument, but as it actually is.

We are bidden to go to the Scriptures, and to the Scriptures we certainly shall go. It is indeed extraordinary that a truth which Jesus set in the forefront of His teaching should be so denied and set aside. There is scarcely a single truth He taught for which the Scriptural evidence is so complete and so conclusive. It is the purpose of this pamphlet to show, in some slight degree, the richness of this evidence, But, before doing so, there are one or two other points to notice, as a preliminary.

I

THE first is the gratuitous assumption that God did not or would not work through one man. The evidence lies entirely the other way. If we examine God's way of dealing with mankind in the Old Testament, we find it always to be the same - one man appointed through whom God dealt with His people. Search as we will, we find that God always did work through one man - through Adam, through Noah, through Abraham, through Isaac, through Jacob, through Moses, through David. And God's ways do not change.

As a corollary, it is entirely in accord with human experience in a world in which human beings have to live. We never find an army without a commander, a ship's crew without a captain - or a football team. Could we then expect to find that Christ would have left His religious society without a head? Then again a king will stand by his viceroy in his legislation. That does not mean that the king is subservient to the viceroy. The viceroy derives his authority from the king who appoints him. That does not dethrone the king.

The second point for our attention is the change of name from Simon to Peter. God never changes a name without a real purpose. There are some half-a-dozen such changes of name in the Bible and a very definite purpose underlies each; indeed it would bespeak a puerile and unworthy attitude which would attribute such changes to mere caprice or childishness. Thus Abram was changed to Abraham, i.e. into 'father of the faithful', a change which sets forth his great destiny, as well as being a reward for his faith. (Gen. 17:5) So too with the other changes of name - Sarah, (Gen. 17:15) Jacob, (Gen. 32:29) Joshua, (Numbers 13:16) John the Baptist (Luke 1:59-60) - we find each change of name rich with significance.

The third point is the conflicting ideas of human beings on every conceivable topic. In religion we see it in the number of conflicting sects, each contradicting the other; and outside the sects are thousands upon thousands of individual men, each with his own opinions, none of them agreeing. Indeed, we have only to read the Epistles of St Paul to find that even in Apostolic times men were already following errors of their own making. Yet if by so much as a hair's breadth we are worse off

now, as regards the deposit of faith, than if our Lord had stayed visibly amongst us, then Satan triumphed in the Crucifixion, and death has had its victory. But, if He has left with ONE His divine wisdom to teach, His own authority to decide, then we are safeguarded, the Crucifixion is all triumph and death has left no sting.

II

THE Petrine claims rest, not on one passage of the Gospels, but on three, viz.:

St Matthew 16 : 13-19 St Luke 22 :31-32 St John 21 : 15-17.

The striking feature, almost overwhelming in its force, is that these three passages which might, at first sight, appear isolated from each other are actually inter-locked. Each carries the teaching further forward. Each presumes the others, and together they form a magnificent chain of proof, reinforcing and strengthening each other.

The passage from St Matthew is: 'And Jesus came into the quarters of Caesarea Philippi: and He asked His disciples, saying: "Whom do men say that the Son of man is?" But they said: "Some John the Baptist, and others some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Jesus says to them: "But whom do [all] you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered and said: "You are Christ, the Son of the Living God." And Jesus answering, said to him: "Blessed are you [singular] Simon Bar-Jona: because flesh and blood has not revealed it to you [singular], but My Father who is in heaven. And I say to you [singular]: That you [singular] are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to you [singular] the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever you [singular] shall bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven: and whatsoever you [singular] shall loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven." Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ. From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must... suffer many things... and be put to death'.

It was in the last year of Jesus' life. Jesus had deliberately taken His twelve Apostles apart, in the far north of Galilee, away from the tumults of men. To the question of minor importance ('whom men said He was') 'they' answer.

Then comes the crucial question, 'Whom do you (note the plural) say that I am?' and only Peter answers. It is not what men in general fancied that mattered, but what His own disciples had come to believe about Him. To the supreme question only Peter answers. Immediately Jesus takes us, as it were, deeper into the source of that great answer, showing us that a special gift has been vouchsafed by a special revelation to a special person and that person is Peter.

This is the moment up to which the earlier change of name, recorded by all four evangelists (see especially John 1:42), has led; this is the moment for its significance to be revealed. Jesus emphasizes and underlines it by calling him first by his original name, Simon son of Jona, and then by the changed name He has given him. Jesus spoke in Aramaic, and in Aramaic the name Peter (Cephas) means rock. In English, 'Peter' and 'rock' are two different words but some languages, e.g. Latin and French, are similar in this respect to Aramaic and have the same single word for both. If therefore we put the words into French, 'Tu est Pierre et sur cette pierre, je batirai mon eglise', the significance of the words used by our Lord, the significance of the change of name, will strike us with the clarity of a flash of lightning. 'You are Peter and upon this Peter I will build My Church.' 'You are rock and upon this rock.' The allusion to 'rock' as a foundation was no chance allusion.

Jesus has made this clear from His parable of the house built on a rock that stood firm, as compared with that built on sand that was swept away (Luke 6: 48 and Matthew 7:24-27).

Jesus' next words drive home and amplify the prerogative given to Peter: 'I will give to thee (notice the singular) the keys of the kingdom of heaven'. The keys have always symbolized the power of command over a city, or a society of men. We find an exact parallel in Isaiah (22: 22): 'And I will lay the key of the house of David upon his shoulder: and he shall open, and none shall shut: and he shall shut, and none shall open'. Here then is the fullness of the promise, made in the clearest and most unmistakable words, Peter the rock, to whom are given the keys, and against his city the powers of darkness shall not prevail. Jesus points the climax by following up His promises to Peter with an immediate unfolding, as He never had before, of His coming sufferings and death.

As regards the power of binding and loosing, all the Apostles were given it a little later (Matt. 18: 18). Yet the expressive use of the singular here singles out Peter as the recipient of jurisdictional powers in an especial way. What all received together, he had already received in a particular manner, holding primatially what they all had. They all naturally had jurisdiction; Peter alone had primatial jurisdiction; this is signified, and as it were underlined, emphasized and driven home, by the power of the keys - a power which was certainly not conferred on the other Apostles. Any other interpretation quite clearly makes a nonsense of the binding and loosing in one or other of the chapters in Matthew (16 or 18).

The Passage in St Luke (22: 31-32) is: 'And the Lord said: "Simon, Simon, behold Satan has desired to have you (plural) that he may sift you (plural) as wheat. But I have prayed for thee (singular) that thy (singular) faith fail not: and thou (singular), being once converted, confirm thy [singular] brethren." '

St Luke, as do all the evangelists (see Mark 8:27-30, Luke 9:18-21, and John 6:69), includes Peter's confession of faith but he gives neither the promises to Peter nor the rebuke to him, 'Get you behind Me, Satan'. (See Matthew 16:23) All the evangelists mention the dispute at the Last Supper, but it is St Luke who gives his special and peculiar contribution to the Petrine texts, 'Satan has desired to have you (plural), I have prayed for thee (singular)'.

In other words, the strength of the Apostolic Body was not to be found in Christ's prayer for them; it was to be in His prayer for their Chief, and consequently for all of them as members of the one body of which Peter is the head. We have said that the three passages are inter-woven, and support each other. The above passage does not stand, simply by itself, because nowhere in St Luke's Gospel was Peter made the head, only in St Matthew. Christ's declaration, then, that He had prayed for Peter would have been unintelligible to the Apostles had they not already heard the earlier promise.

The silence of St Mark is exactly what we should expect, since St Mark derives his Gospel from St Peter. It heightens our respect for St Peter to find that no single commendation of St Peter is to be found in it, but that all that is derogatory is faithfully preserved. His denial of his Master is given at great length. The omissions too are significant. St Mark gives the Confession of Faith, but is silent on the promises and does not fail to record the rebuke, 'Get you behind Me, Satan' (Mark 8: 33). He also omits the walking on the water, and the miracle of the coin. (see Matthew 14: 22-33, and 17: 24-27) Even so, there slips out once, as it were unintentionally, in the Resurrection narrative (Mark 16: 7), Peter's true relation to the others: 'Go tell His disciples - and Peter '.

The record both of the denial and the rebuke are interesting. In itself, the denial may seem to take up a disproportionate amount of space in the account of the Passion, particularly in St Mark and St John. Why? The answer surely is to show us first and foremost that Peter's privileges are in the supernatural order only and are not going to change his personal character. The privilege for him and his successors was in no way for his and their personal benefit, but that the faithful throughout the world may always be preserved in the truth.

We have seen that Matthew and Luke each gives us one great Petrine text. These are not, however, mere isolated passages; they are the natural outcome of a crowd of allusions and incidents which, without these great texts, would be meaningless. There is nothing in Mark's Gospel which justifies 'Go tell His disciples - and Peter'. But it is clear in the light of the 'You are Peter'.

It might at first sight seem hopeless to look for the doctrine of the Papacy in the Fourth Gospel. The other three evangelists wrote for the Church in her infancy, St John for her maturity. His aim, as he tells us explicitly, was to set forth the Godhead of Christ. Hence we can scarcely expect him to add vitally to our quest. So we are not surprised that no promises follow upon Peter's confession of faith. (see John 6:69)

Whilst all four evangelists consider the change of name sufficiently important to be mentioned, St John alone enlarges on it; 'You shall be called Cephas which is interpreted Peter'. Luke 22 was unintelligible without Matthew 16 and now we see that Matthew 16 is unintelligible without John 1:42. St John also habitually uses the double title Simon Peter, as if insisting on the importance of the new name. As the story develops, Simon Peter comes more and more to the fore. Nowhere else does he play such a prominent part in the Resurrection.

St John's Gospel appears to end at chapter 20, then comes as an afterthought - a species of appendix - one more chapter. 'Feed My Sheep' is the third promise to Peter. It comes after the Resurrection, and, as well as confirming him in the position he might have forfeited by his denial, is the final promise, crowning and completing the other two. (See John 21:15-17)

But St John is at pains, not merely to give this final promise, but to give the relative positions occupied by St Peter and himself. This is one essential feature of his narrative which does not merely tell us - as so many imagine - that Peter was restored to favour. John is fully conscious of, indeed he is insistent on it, his own great position as 'the beloved disciple', but over it he himself sets the claims of Peter.

And, at the time, Peter had been dead for more than 30 years. There is the circumstance that must make us pause and reflect. He, Peter, was to be shepherd of the entire flock. But Peter was long since dead. Why this tremendous insistence upon Peter's position? Simply because Peter was living on in his successors and, even during John's own life-time, he was exercising Peter's prerogative of shepherding the entire flock, as we see for instance in Pope St Clement's letter to the Corinthian Church. (96 A.D.) To Peter and his successors, and not to John, was given the supreme commission to feed the entire flock of Christ.

The passage from St John really embraces the whole of his twenty-first chapter and should be read, but for reasons of space we can only give the more relevant parts: "This is now the third time that Jesus was manifested to His disciples, after He was risen from the dead. When therefore they had dined, Jesus says to Simon Peter: "Simon, son of John., love you Me more than these? " He says to Him: "Yea, Lord, You know that I love You". He says to him: "Feed My lambs." He says to him again: "Simon, son of John, love you Me? " He says to Him: "Yea, Lord, You know that I love

You." He says to him: "Feed My lambs". He says to him the third time: "Simon, son of John, love you Me? " Peter was grieved, because He had said to him the third time: 'Love you Me?' And he said to Him: "Lord, You know all things: You know that I love You." He said to him: "Feed My sheep." '

Jesus sets Peter apart. He says to him, 'Feed My lambs'. Again does Jesus repeat the question but this time the word for 'feed' would be more closely translated 'shepherd' - it is the same word as is used for the Good Shepherd. 'Shepherd My whole flock.' A third time Jesus puts His question and receives the answer. This time He says, 'Feed My sheep'. 'Feed' is correct here, and it emphasizes the main part of a shepherd's duty. Thus, then, does Jesus clearly and repeatedly entrust His flock to Peter.

And His meaning is even clearer by reason of the metaphor He chooses of sheep and lambs. For hitherto, that metaphor belonged to Christ alone, 'I am the good shepherd'. Now, in His final injunctions to His Apostles, He transfers it deliberately to Peter. Could there be any conceivable way by which Jesus could have made His intention to confer His jurisdiction on Peter clearer?

Jesus rises and bids Peter to follow Him alone. The other Apostles are left, even John is not allowed to come. Peter is taken and the last divine words, sounded in our ears by the last of the Apostles, are, 'Follow Me, Follow you Me'.

Follow in the work of shepherd, follow in feeding My flocks, follow in distributing grace, follow by My power in the work I have done on earth as the good shepherd.

To the titles of rock, holder of the keys, binder and looser, strengthener of his brethren, we must add shepherd of His sheep.

We have said that these three passages inter-lock with a significance that cannot be set aside, and with a cumulative force that is convincing beyond measure. But there is still one more consideration which crowns all the others, binds them together, and sets, as it were, a seal to all that has gone before.

It is this. Each marks a critical stage in our Lord's mission on earth, each is placed in the position of deepest significance, in the same way that we concentrate the lime-light on an event which we wish to emphasize as the key of a problem. For consider:

(i) The 'Tu es Petrus' of St Matthew marks the climax in the training of the Apostles, and from this point they approach the Passion and the Cross.

(ii) The 'Confirm your brethren' of St Luke marks the hour of deepest trial, and points to a future of even greater trial. The scene is the Last Supper, the eve of the Passion and the Crucifixion.

(iii) The 'Feed My lambs and My sheep' of St John marks the risen life of our Lord after the Resurrection. It looks forward to the end of time, to that final resurrection, which marks the close of the life of the Church Militant. Hence it finds fitting place in the scene by the lake-side when the risen Saviour dined with His disciples for the last time before the Ascension.

Could anything be more significant?

III

NEXT, we will consider four miracles, viz.:

- (i) The first miraculous draught of fishes (Luke 5: 1).
- (ii) Peter walks on the water (Matt. 14: 22).
- (iii) The fish and the coin (Matt. 17: 23).
- (iv) The second miraculous draught of fishes (John 21: 3).

These miracles are special miracles, commanded by our Lord, in which He, as it were, uses St Peter as His agent. These miracles were also private miracles in the sense that they were worked within the company of the Apostles, and in all cases the one whom our Lord chose was St Peter.

Most of our Lord's miracles were worked before the eyes of many, or in such a way that the knowledge of them was spread abroad: the great end was to prove that He was from God, the promised Saviour. And for the most part, though not always, they were worked at the prayer of the sufferer or of others asking for him. But these four were worked before the Apostles alone - not even before all of them - and not in answer to prayer, our Lord Himself willing them and bringing them about.

In our first miracle, Jesus calls Peter to be with Him. The other three (James, John and Andrew) are treated merely as Peter's companions. Jesus sees two ships standing by the lake, and enters into Peter's. Jesus teaches the people out of the chosen ship and that ship Peter's, just as today He teaches the people out of the chosen see, and that see Peter's.

They had fished all night and caught nothing. To Jesus' command to launch again into the deep, Simon answers, 'I will let down'; he speaks of himself as one having authority, as our Lord's agent in this commanded miracle. It is the joint action of Jesus and Peter, both in Peter's boat - only Peter's boat, for they had to beckon to the other ship to come to sea.

Thus was the great draught of fishes taken, and St Luke continues: 'Which when Simon Peter saw, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.'" Notice here that it has always been 'Simon' until now: but now the Office-name of Peter is added as if to turn our thoughts to the meaning of this parable-miracle. The others do not fall down, because only he had been joined in the miracle, as a worker in our Lord's name. St Luke adds that after it, 'Jesus says to Peter: "Fear not: from henceforth you shall catch men."'

The second 'commanded' miracle, when Peter walked on the water, is especially graphic. It is not to show Peter first among equals - divine wonders need not be worked for such a mere human superiority as this.

St Matthew tells us (14: 22) that Jesus 'obliged His disciples to go up into the boat' - He arranges the whole incident. St John adds (6: 18) that 'the sea arose, by reason of a great wind that blew'. In spite of all their efforts, the Apostles had only covered three miles by 3 a.m., less than half the distance across the lake. And they saw Jesus walking on the water, and they cried out for fear. But Peter said, 'Lord, if it be You, bid me come to You upon the waters.' Mark what the act is. Never before or since has it been heard that a mere man should walk upon the sea. It is a self-sought danger; St Mark tells us the reason of his going (6: 48). His Lord came unto them 'and would have passed by them', as He did with the two disciples at Emmaus, He made 'as if He would have gone further'.

'And He said: "Come." And Peter, going down out of the boat, walked upon the water to come to Jesus'. It is a commanded miracle, and worked only for Peter. How easily might Jesus have gone at once to the ship. But He does not, nor would it seem does He advance towards Peter. The Apostle travels on alone until 'seeing the wind strong, he was afraid'. But he had seen this before, and had

not been afraid. It reads as if Jesus had permitted the wind to increase in fury and the wave to dash more angrily - the reply as it were of Peter's foes to Peter's act of faith. Jesus sees and permits all.

Then follows the picture of Jesus and Peter alone upon the waves together, the disciple fearing no more, up borne by his Master. Christ supports Peter, who of his own strength would sink, who by his Lord's strength does what none other may do - his brethren not equal to him, not walking the waves by his side, not called as he was.

The Gospel reads as if this picture was kept by Jesus for some time before the eyes of the Apostles. Together they walked, together returned to the ship, and then... 'the wind ceased'. The reason for which Jesus allowed the tempest was over. Our Lord had completed His lesson to the Apostles, had shown them His purpose for Peter - Christ and Peter, they two together over the world, for the sea with all its tossing has ever been a likeness of the unwilling world. And so, 'the wind ceased'.

The third commanded miracle, the fish and the coin, is perhaps the strangest in the whole Gospels (only St Matthew relates it), and becomes utterly irrelevant and pointless if we deliberately set Peter aside.

It is not so much single incidents of this kind that are so significant of the position assigned to Peter, as their cumulative force. Once again, our Lord deals direct with Peter alone, indeed He 'prevents him' in the sense that He opens the subject, which from the context Peter is possibly about to raise. He calls on Peter to do and expect an astonishing thing - the faith of none of the others is tried.

The miracle is surely rich in significance. Jesus joins him closely to Himself, "for Me and you" - as the Vicar of His power for whose needs, as for Himself, He will provide. As Christ was independent of giving tribute to earthly powers, so also is Peter.

The last commanded miracle is the second miraculous draught of fishes. It closes the last Gospel and is picked out by St John rather than the many other things. The Gospels would surely not be closed for all time by an unimportant truth, which loses its importance if Peter is not the shepherd of all sheep.

Seven Apostles are present for this 'private' miracle. Note how very detailed the account is, and how vivid - thus Peter's "I go a fishing"; "Cast your nets on the right side" (the saved are on the right at the last day).

St John first recognizes Jesus. Does he go at once to Him, or tell the others? No, he tells Peter, and Peter goes to Him. Jesus and Peter, once more together, are together alone on the shore, the symbol of eternity, towards which the fish on the right side are to be drawn.

Are we told that the other Apostles draw the fish to land? No. 'Simon Peter drew the net to land, full of great fishes, one hundred and fifty three.' It is noteworthy that they are caught on the right side, and in a particular number, as when the number of the elect will be completed on the last day.

Here then we have four miracles that quite obviously were worked away from the public gaze, and were designed for our Lord's immediate Apostles. In each case they concern one single Apostle, and always the same Apostle, Peter. They become meaningless and empty if they convey no special function designed for that Apostle.

It is necessary, in a small pamphlet such as this, to compress the many other relevant passages in the New Testament. Yet we must mention a very striking event, which could scarcely be more emphatic or clearer in the light it gives us of the prerogatives of Peter and his successors.

It is the filling of the place left vacant by Judas, and it is set right at the beginning of Acts (1: 15). It takes place in the nine days between the Ascension and the coming of the Holy Ghost. Peter stands up in the midst of the disciples and tells them that one must be chosen to fill the vacant place. Notice that word 'must'. Peter does not say, 'I counsel', nor does he put it to the meeting. He does not ask for advice and no discussion follows - the others accept it and pray to know whom God has chosen. Peter orders, and handles with authority the choice of an Apostle, a subject which hitherto had been entirely and completely the special prerogative of Jesus.

There had been plenty of time since Easter Sunday, had Jesus chosen to do this thing before He left earth. Even in those appearances that are recorded, we know that he had with Him at one time 120, at another 500 of His followers, both suitable occasions had He so wished. Yet Jesus leaves it to Peter - it does look like a definite purpose.

And Peter is quite clear how it is to be done. He speaks as one knowing the Divine mind and the whole Church accepts at once this assumption by Peter of the special prerogative of Jesus. What act can prove headship, if this does not?

In the lists of the Apostles, Peter's name always stands first. Now Peter was first neither in age nor in priority of election, his elder brother Andrew having been chosen before him. Especially significant is St Luke's second list, given in Acts 1: 13. Peter is again first. Andrew, however, who had shared Peter's title of fisher of men, is no longer second, because our Lord had given special place both to James and John, at the Transfiguration, in the Garden of Gethsemani and on other occasions. James the Less is in exactly the same position as before, though at the time St Luke wrote (if it was after 62 A.D.) he had already gained his martyr's crown, besides having been Bishop of Jerusalem. Clearly, then, Peter was first, not only in rank and honour, but also in authority.

And now we must summarize:

Peter preached the first sermon (Acts 2: 14) made the first converts (Acts 2: 38) wrought the first miracle (Acts 3: 6) inflicted the first punishment (Acts 5: 3) opened the door of the Church to the Gentiles (Acts 10: 47) gave the first solemn definition (Acts 15: 7).

To the statistically minded, there is the tremendous disparity between the frequency Peter is mentioned in the Gospels and Acts, and the mention of the other Apostles chosen by Jesus. Peter is mentioned 141 times. Of the others, John's name occurs far the most frequently - just 46 times.

No scholar nowadays denies that Peter was at Rome. Granted that Peter held a unique position, did it pass on from him to the Bishops of Rome? The natural answer to this is, 'If not to them, to whom?' Antioch is as old a see. Did Antioch ever contest the point? The whole point of designating a representative would be to ensure that this representation should be permanent. God foreknows the future, and therefore foresaw the claims of Rome through the ages. Is it likely then, is it possible that He would continue deliberately to single out Peter over and over again and on the most solemn occasions, and so set His seal upon the false? Again and again Peter is singled out in a very special way. Peter's name rings ever from the lips of Jesus, Peter's special instruction is repeatedly in the mind of Jesus. Can any Christian conceive that Jesus acted thus aimlessly when every other action

of His was fraught with so much significance? Can anyone conceive that He acted thus, not merely aimlessly, but deliberately to deceive what has always been the largest part of those who believe in Him?

We are often bidden to go to the Scriptures, and to the Scriptures we have gone. Is not the evidence as full as can be? Taken individually, it is very strong. Taken cumulatively, it is overwhelming. Anyone then who sets out to explode the Petrine claims must take into account, not merely the great texts, but the entire structure of each Synoptic Gospel. It is not a case of deleting or destroying this or that text, but of destroying the whole fabric of the Gospels.

This pamphlet has been compiled mainly from two sources. These are Talks About St Peter by Fr Bampffield (two C.T.S. pamphlets which have been out of print for many years), and a lecture given at a Cambridge Summer School by Fr Hugh Pope O.P.
