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Miscellanea

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Miscellanea

The Old Fathers on Matt. 16:18 and John 21:18

In 1869 appeared a brilliant work entitled *The Pope and the Council* (*Der Papst und das Konzil*). It was written by Roman Catholic theologians who opposed the infallibility dogma, which at that time was being advocated by prominent leaders of their Church and had the support especially of the Jesuits and which in the following year was declared to be divine truth by the Vatican Council. The book consisted of articles that had been published in the *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung* and before being re-issued had been somewhat enlarged and provided with the desirable documentary evidence. The title page stated that the work was by Janus, a pseudonym, referring, as soon became known, to two professors of Munich, J. J. I. v. Doellinger and Joh. Huber. The material presented is perfectly annihilating for the papal infallibility claims. We submit here a translation of the paragraph which discusses the interpretation of the Church Fathers on the two passages mentioned in the heading (pp. 97—100).

"All this [that is, the silence of the early Church on infallibility claims for the bishops of Rome] becomes intelligible when we look at the explanation given by the fathers of the well-known words of Christ, commending Peter. Of all the fathers of that time who furnished an interpretation of the Gospel passages pertaining to the power conferred on Peter (Matt. 16:18 and John 21:18) not one applied these passages to the Roman bishops as successors of Peter. How many of them occupied themselves with these passages! And neither one of those whose commentaries we still possess, Origen, Chrysostom, Hilary, Augustine, Cyril, Theodoret, nor those whose expositions are collected in the [so-called] *Catenae* pointed as much as with one syllable to the primacy of Rome as the consequence of the instructions and promises given to Peter. Not one of them explained the rock, or the foundation, on which Christ will build His Church as an office conferred on Peter and from him passing to his heirs, but they understood it to signify either Christ Himself or the faith in Christ confessed by Peter—which two views often coincided in their conceptions; or they thought that Peter was the foundation like all the other Apostles, that hence all the Apostles together formed the twelve foundation stones of the Church (Rev. 21:14). In the bestowal of the keys and the power to bind and to loose, the fathers could by no means see any privilege or perhaps even a ruling power given to the Roman bishops, because they considered an authority which, while first given to Peter, afterwards was given to all Apostles, not as something peculiar to Peter or inherited only by the Roman bishops (a position which everybody at once will find plausible) and because they quite generally looked upon the symbolical term 'keys' as simply signifying the same thing as the figurative expression 'to bind and to loose.'"

A.

Concerning Matt. 16:18 and Roman Inferences *

Dear Mr. X:

We read your letter with much interest. Perhaps the best way to discuss what you submit will be to draw up a series of numbered paragraphs.

1. Was Matthew's Gospel originally written in Aramaic (or Syriac)? The point is debated. Papias says that Matthew wrote the "sayings" in Hebrew (that is, Aramaic); but scholars are not agreed on the question whether Papias refers to Matthew's Gospel or to a collection of sayings of Jesus which in that particular form no longer is extant. Jerome, it is true, avers that he knew the Gospel according to the Hebrews and even translated it into Greek and Latin. But the quotations which he adduces show that he is not referring to our Matthew, because the passages are not found in our canonical Matthew. He informs us that most people call this particular work the authentic Matthew and that it is used by the Nazarenes and the Ebionites (heretical sects). He does not say that he himself regards it as the original of Matthew's Gospel. Your statement that Jerome made use of it when he gave the world his famous translation (we suppose you refer to the Vulgate) seems to rest on an error.—In another connection he does say that Matthew wrote his Gospel in Hebrew; other early writers say the same thing. We do not maintain that the statement is false, we merely assert it cannot be proved, since the Hebrew version no longer is in existence. What is important is that the early Church used our Greek Matthew as the authentic Gospel according to St. Matthew, and in our argumentations we have to proceed from this text. By the way, you undoubtedly are aware that Jerome himself in the Vulgate translates: *Tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram* etc., following the Greek.

2. We agree, of course, that Jesus often, if not usually, spoke in Aramaic. That he gave Peter the Aramaic name Cephas is another statement we do not question. Here we are not dealing with assumptions. But when the assertion is made that Jesus spoke the words recorded Matt. 16:18 in Aramaic and not in Greek, we are indeed dealing with an assumption, because no proof can be adduced for the view. That Jesus could use the Greek if He so desired will at once be admitted. And that Peter and his fellow Apostles understood Greek and could employ it is now likewise granted by scholars, because Galilee was a bilingual section of Palestine. Besides, we merely have to think of Peter's Epistles to realize at once that he was acquainted with the Greek language.

3. We agree that ultimately it does not make any difference whether Matt. 16:18 was spoken in Greek or Aramaic (Syriac). In neither case is Peter made the head of the Church. Nor does either view imply anything as to personal successors or heirs whom Peter would have.

* This is a letter written to a Catholic gentleman who took issue with one of the statements of the Lutheran Publicity Organization of St. Louis, published Sundays in the *Post-Dispatch* and the *Globe-Democrat*.—A.

At the most, the words confer a distinction on Peter, a distinction which soon afterwards was given to all Apostles (cf. Matt. 18:18; John 20: 21-23. Cf. also Eph. 2:20; Rev. 21:14). We must not be understood as denying that Peter played an important role in the founding of Christianity and that till the coming of Paul he was the most prominent Apostle. But when inferences are made from this fact which go beyond anything the Scriptures say and beyond the witness of the early Church, we demur.

4. You refer to 1 Cor. 3:11, denying that it is pertinent. The passage, it is true, does not directly refer to Peter, but it does show that when Paul was asked, Whom do you consider the Foundation of the Church? he at once replied, Jesus Christ; other foundation no man can lay.

With respect to Gal. 1:18, one must not overlook that Paul says he went up to Jerusalem "to become acquainted with Peter." The Vulgate translates: "to see Peter." Let it be noted that Paul does not say that in his visit he had the purpose of receiving instruction from Peter. He tells us in the same chapter (v.12) from whom and how he received his Gospel, namely, through the revelation of Jesus Christ. We should like to urge you to read carefully Galatians 1 and 2 and to ask yourself whether Paul's aim throughout these chapters is not to demonstrate that he in his preaching had not been dependent on the Jerusalem Apostles, and that he was not the subordinate, but the equal of the first leaders of the Church, and that he on a certain occasion did not hesitate to rebuke Peter, who had stumbled in the practice of Christian fellowship principles.

5. Does the New Testament give Peter special prominence? Yes, it does. You are right when you say that in the lists of the Apostles he is mentioned first. That he often was the spokesman of the Apostles we readily admit. He certainly was a chosen instrument of the Lord. With respect to the account of Acts 15 you, in our view, are in error when you say that "evidently St. Peter was the one in authority." Nothing of the kind is stated in the narrative, and, as you yourself admit, the motion which prevailed was made by James, not by Peter.—When we come to the Epistles of Peter, we find no demand on his part that he be listened to as the head of the Church. He calls himself a fellow elder (1 Pet. 5:1). Nor do we note anywhere a hint that after his departure there would be episcopal successors of his who would have to be obeyed. What a difference between Peter, the author of these Epistles, and Pope Pius IX, issuing the decree of papal infallibility!

6. In speaking of the "Fathers" of the Church, we must be careful not to confuse facts and probabilities or possibilities. What proof have we that the Hermas of Rom. 16:14 is the same person as the author of the *Shepherd*? Origen said so, it is true, and others repeated what he averred, but his only evidence seems to have been the identity of the name. The famous Muratorian Canon places the composition of the *Shepherd* into the period about 150 A. D. Who the Clement is whom

the second "vision" mentions is hard to say. Hermas does not state that he has the bishop of the Roman Church in mind.

7. Your statement concerning Ignatius as speaking of the vicar of Christ in the Roman Church we are not able to verify. You may have in mind the statement occurring in his letter to the Ephesians (VI,1): "Therefore it is clear that we must regard the bishop as the Lord himself." But it is addressed to the congregation of Ephesus and is of a general nature, referring to all bishops. To say that here the Roman bishop is exalted above all the other bishops, plainly would be a misrepresentation.

8. With respect to Polycarp, we do not agree that he was martyred together with Ignatius, but merely that the two men were friends. You advance a strange reason for Polycarp's trip to Rome, a desire to accuse Marcion of heresy and to present charges at the tribunal of the Roman bishop because he himself lacked jurisdiction. The reason history mentions for the trip to Rome is the so-called "paschal controversy," in which Polycarp did not hesitate to differ with Anicetus, the bishop of Rome (cf. Eusebius, *Ch. His.*, V, 24, but especially IV, 14, where Irenaeus is quoted as saying that Polycarp went to Rome on account of the paschal dispute). Polycarp, it is true, did valuable work in opposing the heresy of Marcion, but with reference to his attitude to the Roman bishop, we have to say that not submission, but assertion of equality characterizes his conduct.

9. Irenaeus, we admit, speaks those words of praise with reference to the Church at Rome which you quote from his work (*Adv. Her.*, II, 3), calling it the greatest, most ancient, and best known Church. What of it? What has that to do with the supposed universal authority of the Roman bishop? The bishop is not even mentioned.

10. Can Tertullian be appealed to as holding that Peter was the head of the Church? Here are the words to which you have reference (*De Presc. Her.*, 22): "They" (that is, the heretics) "are wont to say that the Apostles did not know all things, being moved by the same madness whereby they turn about again and say that the Apostles did indeed know all things, but did not tell all things to all: in either case subjecting Christ to reproach, in that He sent Apostles with either too little instruction or too little simplicity. Who, then, of sound mind can believe that they were ignorant of anything, whom the Lord appointed as masters, keeping them undivided in attendance, in discipleship, in companionship; to whom when they were alone He expounded all things that were dark, saying that to them it was given to know the mysteries, which the people were not permitted to understand? Was anything hidden from Peter, who is called the rock whereon the Church should be built, who obtained the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and the power of loosing and binding in heaven and on earth? Was anything, moreover, hidden from John, the best beloved of the Lord, who leans upon His breast, to whom alone the Lord pointed out beforehand Judas that should betray Him, whom He commended unto Mary as a son in His own stead? Of what would He have those be ignorant to

whom He even manifested His glory, and Moses' and Elias', and moreover the voice of the Father from heaven, not as casting a reproach upon the rest, but because in three witnesses shall every word be established?" You observe that Tertullian says not one word supporting the theory that the bishops of Rome were the successors of Peter or that the successors had equal power with the original Apostle.

11. Origen, though admitting, as we all do, that Jesus spoke Matt. 16:18 to Peter, argues that the title "rock" is not to be confined to Peter alone, but belongs to the other Apostles as well, and that every disciple of Christ is a rock. (*Hom. 16*, in John, par. 3).

12. Cyprian thinks that all bishops derive their authority from the power given to Peter (*De Unitate Ecclesiae*, par. 3). He is far removed from conceding any authority to the bishop of Rome higher than that of other bishops.

13. You next mention Jerome. We should like to draw your attention to some things this famous translator of the Bible said. He regards Christ as really the Rock referred to Matt. 16:18 and combines this passage with Matt. 7:25, stating that on Christ the Church "was solidly founded, which is shaken by no beating of the flood nor by any tempest." "As He, being the Light, gave to the Apostles to be called the light of the world and they obtained their other names from the Lord, so also to Simon, who believed in the Rock (*Petra*) Christ, He gave the name Petros; and after the metaphor of a rock, it is rightly said to him, I will build My Church upon thee." Cf. Ep. 41 ad Marc. par. 2; c. Pel. 1:14; comments on Matt. 7:25 and 16:18; adv. Jov. 1:26.

14. Now as to St. Augustine. Think of this statement of his, found *Serm. 76*: "This name, that he should be called Peter, was given him by the Lord, and that in a figure, to signify the Church. For since Christ is the Rock, Peter is the Christian people. For *Petra* (Rock) is the chief name. Peter, then, is called from *Petra*, not *Petra* from Peter, as not Christ from Christian, but Christian from Christ. 'Thou, then,' He saith, 'art Peter, and on this Rock which thou hast confessed, on this Rock which thou hast known, saying, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God, I will build My Church.'" Earlier in his life St. Augustine expressed the view that the term "rock" in Matt. 16:18 referred to Peter. Evidently he changed his mind on that point. At the Council of Mileve this great Church Father was the secretary, and among its resolutions we find this significant one: "Whoever tries to appeal to the opinion of those who are on the other side of the sea is not to be fellowshiped by anybody in Africa." You see here the refusal of the bishops of Africa to bow to the bishop on the other side of the Mediterranean Sea, the bishop of Rome.

When you look over these quotations, you will find that Doellinger is absolutely right when he says that the early Church Fathers did not concede that the bishops of Rome had inherited from St. Peter any authority lifting them above the other bishops of the Church.

15. Finally, you quote Martin Luther in that statement of his in which he subjects himself to the verdict of the Pope. It is very true

that he did so, because at the time he still believed that the Pope was the head of the Church and that he would see to it that if Luther was to be tried, fairness would prevail at the trial. He was soon to be disillusioned. Likewise is it true that he, as you state, gave high honor to the Roman Church. He was willing to recognize the many grand and Christ-exalting things that had been written by the early bishops and other members of the Church at Rome, and we all join Luther in doing honor to the martyrs that upheld the truth in Rome and willingly sealed their faith in their blood. But what has all that to do with the Pope's authority? Recognizing the many good things that were done by the early Roman leaders is not the same as saying that they by Christ had been made the heads of the whole Christian Church.

Here we rest our case. It is very plain that the Scriptures do not say that the bishop of Rome was made the head of the Church, and an impartial reading of the early records will show that no such view was held in the first centuries of our era.

W. ARNDT

Omitting Christ

In an article entitled "The Abrupt Amen" in the *Watchman-Examiner* of Dec. 14, 1944, Arthur M. Jeffries writes: "Some Christian ministers who omit Christ from their public prayers probably do not realize any fault or lack. No doubt it is the natural outcome of their seminary training, their having been exposed to modernistic influences and the insidious propaganda of an emasculated Christ. And yet even an elementary study of the New Testament will reveal that 'no man cometh unto the Father but by Me.' Prayer, to be acceptable to God, must be offered in the name of His beloved Son. . . . Recently I listened to the prayers of children under the direction of a woman child-evangelist. Each prayed simply and sincerely, but not one used the name of Jesus Christ. Moreover, they were not instructed by the leader, who seemed to think all was as it should be. Having before me *A Call for Prayer*, which has been furnished for distribution in connection with the World Emergency Forward Fund, I note that there are three suggested prayers for grace at table. . . . The two last prayers breathe a real spirit of devotion, but it hurts severely to note that Christ, our blessed Redeemer and Savior, is entirely ignored and all reference to Him is omitted. These two prayers could be used equally well by Jews or Unitarians; in fact, they are both decidedly unitarian, for neither Jesus Christ nor the Holy Spirit is mentioned. For servicemen—'Grant that their eyes may be fixed upon Thee, that they may be strong in faith, loyal, and valiant, assured that they are in Thy holy keeping.' This is beautiful in what it says, but it is pathetic in what it fails to say."

In reading this article the thought came to us that the lesson it conveys may be applicable not only to prayer, but also to the sermons preached by us. Are our sermons sometimes beautiful in what they say, but pathetic in what they fail to say?

T. L.