

Commentary — From the Margins “On This Rock”

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” He said a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend [shepherd] my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.” (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, “Follow me.” (John 21:15-19)

In the practice of typological exegesis, inclusion of a passage into the text [Scripture] signifies that what has been included is a shadow and copy—a type—of an invisible spiritual thing or phenomenon. Therefore, when Jesus asks Peter three times if he, Peter, is “fond of Jesus” the redundancy with which the question is asked points to three “somethings,” not repetition for the sake of emphasis. Thus, since the three questions and commands to feed and shepherd disciples followed by the command to *follow Christ* appear sequentially, the typological “reality” of these three questions and commands will also be sequential in occurrence.

Note: Jesus does not address Simon Peter as *Cephas* or *Peter* [Πέτρος], but as *Simon, son of John*. It is Simon, son of John, who is first commanded to (1) feed Jesus’ lambs [ἀρνία]; then (2) tend or shepherd His sheep [πρόβατά]; followed by (3) feed His sheep [πρόβατά]; and finally (4) *follow me*. Peter is not free to go in any direction but where Christ led; he is not free to establish belief paradigms that are not of Christ. And this becomes important since it is Paul who laid the foundation of the spiritual house of God, with this foundation being Christ Jesus (1 Co 3:10-11). Hence, Peter is to follow Paul, a reversal of what is usually taught; for Jesus is the stone or rock that was rejected by the builders, the cornerstone of the foundation laid. It is Paul who uses this cornerstone to build the foundation, not Peter.

Lambs [ἀρνία] are not called “sheep” [πρόβατά]. Lambs are babies, or the young. Thus, Jesus saying to Peter *when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted* pertains to when Peter was a young fisherman following in his father’s vocation; pertains to when Peter choose to follow Jesus; and pertains to Peter feeding Christ’s lambs. What Jesus said also pertains to Peter returning to fishing after

Calvary (John 21:2-3) — Peter was still young in the faith, only recently born of Spirit, a lamb himself. Thus, Peter returning to fishing after Calvary becomes a second type of Peter *when young and able to walk where he wanted*. Peter would have dressed himself with his own obedience when he was a young fisherman; he would have dressed himself with the garment of Christ's righteousness as a newly born son of God. And Christ would have "dressed" Peter with the visible baptism of Spirit and fire on that day of Pentecost following Calvary. From that day, Peter was not free to go where he wished, but would go where he was sent by Christ.

Yes, when Jesus asked Peter if he, Peter, loved Him, Peter did not realize that when he was old (i.e., mature in the faith) he would have no choice about what he would do or where he would go; that it would be others that dressed him and carried him to where he did not want to go. Yes, what Jesus told Peter pertained to how he, Peter, would die (v. 19), but it is also idiomatic of how the Body of Christ, built upon Peter, would die in the 1st-Century when the mystery of lawlessness, at work while both Paul and Peter still lived (2 Thess 2:7), was no longer restrained.

Here wisdom is required for Peter is the "little rock" [*petra*] upon which Jesus would build, of Himself, the church (Matt 16:18). Jesus, however, is the Rock about whom Moses wrote (Deut 32:4), the Rock who is "a God of faithfulness and without iniquity." Jesus said to Pharisees, concerning Moses, "If you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words" (John 5:46-47). And Moses wrote of Jesus in the song that ratified the Moab covenant (as well as in Deuteronomy chapter 18). This song was a warning to Israel, a mixed circumcised and uncircumcised nation, to be careful to do all the words of the law: Moses said, "For it is no empty word for you, but your very life" (Deut 32:47)

Again, the Apostle Paul wrote that he, not Peter or James or any of the other first disciples, laid the foundation for the house of God, and this foundation was Christ Jesus. Thus, for Peter to *follow Jesus* he must build on the foundation that Paul laid—and Peter wrote of Paul,

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scripture. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, *take care that you are not carried away by the error of lawless people and lose your own stability.* (2 Pet 3:15-17 emphasis added)

"Lawless people" are those who are ignorant and unstable and who twist Paul's epistles into instruments of their own destruction. Lawlessness is sin (1 John 3:4). Those who teach lawlessness will be denied by Christ in their resurrection (Matt 7:21-23). So Peter, in following Jesus, endorses the wisdom found in Paul's epistles and warns disciples not to be deceived by the error of lawless teachers.

Moses, in writing about *the Rock*, warned Israel to keep the law. Paul wrote that the uncircumcised person who keeps the precepts of the law will have his [or her] uncircumcision counted as circumcision (Rom 2:26). James who seemed to be a pillar in the Church (Gal 2:9) wrote that whoever breaks the law in one point breaks the law

(2:10). John who also seemed to be a pillar wrote that “we know that we have come to know him [Jesus], if we keep his commandments. Whoever says ‘I know him’ but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:3-4).

Jesus said the person who would be “great” in the kingdom of heaven will keep the commandments and will teach others to do likewise, whereas the person who will be called “least” [at least the person will be in the kingdom] will relax, not even break, the least of the commandments and teach others to do likewise (Matt 5:19).

So the testimony of Moses, Jesus, Paul, James, Peter, and John is consistent: to follow Jesus, the person will keep the commandments, thereby making of Moses, the descendant of Abraham through Isaac, Jacob and Levi, a great nation even though Moses protested against the Lord making of him this nation.

Every disciple will be in one of three categories:

1. The “great” in the kingdom of heaven will keep the commandments and will teach others to do likewise.
2. The “least” in the kingdom of heaven will *relax* the least of the commandments and teach others to do likewise—for most disciples, the least important commandment is the Sabbath.
3. Those who will be denied entrance into the kingdom of heaven teach others that since Jesus fulfilled the Law, disciples do not have to keep the law.

A little “lawless” teaching goes beyond relaxing the least of the commandments. The person who, through ignorance (2 Pet 3:17), strictly keeps Sunday as the Sabbath, doing those things on Sunday that God expects of the person on the Sabbath, has *relaxed* what this person deemed as the least of the commandments. But the person who knows to keep the Sabbath and does not—this person willfully breaks the law and is a hypocrite. His or her righteousness does not exceed that of the Pharisees and this person will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:20).

To follow Christ is to walk as He walked (1 John 2:6). To imitate Paul (Phil 3:17) is to walk as Paul walked, and Paul argued in his defense before Festus, “Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I committed any offense” (Acts 25:8). In the many accusations brought against Paul, he is never accused of breaking any commandment. Thus, the foundation of the house of God that Paul laid, with Christ Jesus being the corner stone and every stone laid being of Christ, will have disciples keeping the commandments. To teach otherwise is to twist Paul’s epistles into damnation for the one who teaches.

Again, according to Peter, Christ Jesus is the living stone rejected by men (1 Pet 2:4). He is the cornerstone chosen and precious to God, but rejected by Pharisees and Sadducees (*vv.* 6-8). Israel stumbled because this nation disobeyed the word of God “as they were destined to do,” meaning that physically circumcised Israel was not free to keep the commandments but remained consigned to disobedience (Rom 11:32) although—and here is the catch—Israel had a law that would have led to life if it had been pursued by faith (*cf.* Rom 9:30-33; Deut 30:1-18). So faith is the element that natural Israel lacked as this nation served as the lively shadow of spiritually circumcised Israel; faith is the element necessary for “life”; faith and belief will have a person hearing the words of Jesus and believing the One who sent Him, thereby causing the person to

pass from death to life (John 5:24). And to hear Jesus' words is to hear what Jesus said in His sermon on the mount (Matt chaps 5-7).

Peter is told to *feed the lambs of Jesus*, and Peter does: in his first epistle, addressed to “those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Pet 1:1-2 emphasis added) Peter begins his feeding with explanation of being born anew to a living hope ... note: in the Apostle Paul's discussion of predestination, the first step is “those whom [God] foreknew” (Rom 8:29). Being *foreknown* by God precedes being predestined, called, justified, and glorified. So those to whom Peter addresses his first epistle are lambs, “newborn infants” (1 Pet 2:2). They are only beginning the journey that will end with them being glorified; plus, the subject matter of this first epistle is spiritual milk (same verse), appropriate food for lambs, disciples new in the faith. Therefore it can be said that Peter's first epistle, chapter 1 through the end of chapter 4, was written to fulfill that which Jesus commanded Peter to do in John chapter 21, verse 15.

Hold this thought: why does Peter have to inscribe the spiritual milk with which he is commanded to feed the lambs of Christ if “apostolic succession” were a reality rather than a fiction? Why does Peter not trust those who succeed him to feed further lambs? And it is here where the argument for the primacy of the Latin Church first breaks down: Peter was not a writer, and the epistles of Peter reveal that he did not want to write. He was being led where he did not want to go. So if Peter could have passed on his “authority” to feed the lambs, he would not have needed to write his epistles—but he could not pass on his responsibility with which he was *clothed*.

Peter begins chapter 5 of his first epistle as follows:

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (5:1-4)

Jesus' second command to Peter is to tend or shepherd [Ποίμαινε] the sheep—and in chapter 5 of his first epistle, Peter gives instructions on how to “shepherd” and “be shepherded.” So in his first epistle, Peter leaves an inscribed record that satisfies the first two commands given him by the glorified Jesus (this epistle is in addition to the mostly unrecorded physical work Peter had been doing from the beginning).

The third and fourth commands remain: (3) feed the sheep, and (4) follow Christ. And Peter, in his second epistle, addresses the sheep: “To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing to ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 1:1). The person who has a faith equal to the faith of the first disciples is a person now mature in the faith. This person can no longer be called a lamb.

Feeding the sheep requires warning the sheep to make the calling and election certain; requires warning the sheep about false prophets and teachers; requires assuring the sheep that the day of the Lord will come; requires reminding the sheep that this visible world will be set on fire and dissolve, that only those who lived lives of holiness and godliness will remain. Peter doesn't waste feed. His words are few, but their place in

Scripture comes from Jesus commanding their production. Therefore, these few words are of utmost importance.

In his final words (2 Pet 3:14-18), Peter tells the sheep how to follow Christ as he is following Christ; for the foundation that Paul laid in heavenly Jerusalem is Christ Jesus ... to follow Christ, disciples are not to twist Paul's epistles to their own destruction as lawless people do, meaning that the person who uses Paul's epistle to support lawlessness has condemned him or herself to the lake of fire.

Now, the reason for the above lesson: on 10 July 2007, the Vatican released a document called "Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine of the Church," written by William Cardinal Levada, head of the *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*. The purpose of this surprisingly honest document is to clarify controversial doctrinal points, and in this document, the Latin Church reaffirmed the position taken in *Dominus Iesus*, issued 5 September 2000, that salvation is only through the Roman Catholic Church, that only the Roman Church has "apostolic succession," meaning that its priesthood and power goes back to the Apostle Peter, to whom Jesus said that he, Peter [Πέτρος], was the little rock [πέτρα] upon which Jesus would build, of Himself, the church [ἐκκλησίαν]. The Roman Church asserted that it is the only "Church," that all other denominations were only "communities" [remember the ἐκκλησία is the "assembly of God" and not a human organization].

Obviously, the Orthodox Churches and the many Protestant fellowships challenge the Latin Church's teachings about Petrine *apostolic succession*. In these challenges, the assignments of meaning ascribed to Matthew 16:18 range from bizarre to outright dishonest; for Jesus really said to Peter that He would build that church that was *of Him* on Peter. But Jesus also commanded Peter to *follow Him*, with the Apostle Paul laying the foundation that was *of Him*; so Peter was to follow Paul, which now raises an interesting juxtaposition: Peter was the apostle sent to Israel, while Paul was the apostle sent to the Gentiles (Gal 2:7-9) ... even though Peter went to Cornelius, Peter was not sent to the Uncircumcised but to the Circumcised; only now, according to Paul's gospel, the circumcision that matters is of the heart. So the lambs that Peter was to feed are those disciples who are newly circumcised of heart. Those who are not yet circumcised of heart remain as Gentiles to whom Paul was sent.

Peter was the little rock upon which Israel stood in the 1st-Century; he is the little rock upon which Israel stands today ... once a person has, by faith, begun to keep the precepts of the law, the person's heart is circumcised and this person is of Israel (Rom 2:29). By agreement, Paul was entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised while Peter was entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (Gal 2:7-8). And after Peter goes to Cornelius, Scripture does not record Peter again being sent to *the nations*.

When circumcision is of the heart, natural Israel's circumcision of the flesh has little value, especially when those of natural Israel became dull of hearing. They, too, like Gentile converts are in need of spiritual milk (*cf.* 1 Co 3:1-4; Heb 5:11-14). Only when they have made a journey of faith are they ready to go on to what Peter has to feed the lambs that will, if they continue in well-doing, become sheep.

Until a person from *the nations* or from *natural Israel* journeys by faith from the mental landscape of his or her nativity and arrives on the figurative plains of Moab where the person will spiritually choose life or death (*cf.* Deut 29:1, 30:1-18; Rom 10:6-

13), the person is not an Israelite circumcised of heart, but remains a person of *the nations* to whom the Apostle Paul was sent. Only when the person turns to God by faith and begins to keep the commandments from love for God, acknowledging that Jesus is Lord and that the Father raised Jesus from the dead (requiring that the person accept both the Father and Jesus as God), will the person enter into the Moab covenant and figuratively cross the Jordan to enter into God's rest (*cf.* Ps 95:10-11; Heb 3:16-4:11; Num chap 14). And only when the person has entered into God's rest as an infant spiritual Israelite is Peter to feed this "lamb." Therefore, until a person by faith begins to inwardly live as a Judean, the person is not part of the Church Jesus would build of Himself. And every person who traverses different ground from that which Jesus walked is false, is a false prophet and false teacher.

The nasty detail that is most commonly overlooked by the Latin Church is that Peter died. The little rock to whom was given the keys of the kingdom of heaven died in or about the same year as when Roman legions sacked Jerusalem (ca 70 CE). The Body of Christ, crucified with the Lord, died as the Lord died. And as the gates of Hades could not prevail over the physical body of Jesus, the gates of Hades will not prevail over the spiritual Body. As the first was resurrected, the second will also be resurrected. Therefore, in order for Peter to fulfill what Jesus commanded of him, he had to leave an inscribed record of what he fed both lambs and sheep ... if Peter had left the keys of the kingdom of heaven to his physical successors, he would not have had to write two epistles, the writing of which (any writer will confirm) was difficult for him.

The evidence of Scripture is that Peter continues to feed the lambs, shepherd the sheep, and feed the sheep through his two epistles. He did not turn his responsibilities over to others, especially to a "woman" whom Paul commands to remain quiet (1 Tim 2:12-15) ... the Church is the second or last Eve as Jesus is the second or last Adam. And it is the Church that has been deceived by that old serpent, Satan the devil, not the last Adam.

In the Latin Church's 10 July 2007 document, an amplification of *Dominus Iesus*, Benedict XVI seems to have returned to Boniface VIII's *Unam Sanctum* (ca 1302 CE), which would have neither salvation nor remission of sin available to humankind apart from the Latin Church. This doctrinal position would be amusing if not for the harm it has done to the name of Christ; for the Latin Church is a pagan theology that swallows its god, touches what it worships in its statuary, and prostrates itself before a human being. Truly, the 2nd-Century Church was a Trojan horse constructed by Greek philosophers to win an empire from Rome, whose legions Greece couldn't defeat in the field and whose navy Greece couldn't defeat at sea. If those Greeks could defeat Roman emperor worship, they would dissolve the glue that held together one of the two great empires then in the world. And these Greeks were successful beyond their wildest imagination.

As a Sabbatarian Christian, it would seem appropriate to ask God to forgive the papacy for its lawlessness and hubris, but the prophet Jeremiah is told not even to pray for lawless Israel (7:16; 11:14; 14:1), and the Lord tells Ezekiel that He will not be inquired of by the elders of Israel. Disciples are not to pray for the Latin Church, which is not the same nation of Israel as that to which Peter was/is sent.

Jesus sent the twelve to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 10:6). They were not to go to the Gentiles, or to the Samaritans (*v.* 5). Peter was not sent to *the nations* or to *false Israelites*. He was, instead, the little rock upon which Israel stood amidst the rushing waters of lawlessness that eventually drowned the 1st-Century Church. These waters were no longer restrained when Peter was out of the way (2 Thess 2:7).

To follow Jesus is to imitate Paul which will have the person living as a spiritual Judean and spurning the idolatry and lawlessness of the Latin Church, truly a synagogue of Satan that claims to have the spirit of God but lies, for this community remains in bondage to disobedience as evidenced by its sacraments. Peter condemns this lawless community when he writes, “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction [when judgments are revealed]” (2 Pet 2:1). These destructive heresies are firmly imbedded in their *Doctrines of the Church*, which has the woman usurping authority over the man she claims as her husband.

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