

# Questionable Authority

by J.K. McKee posted 01 September, 2000 www.tnnonline.net

For centuries, the Roman Catholic Church had been the epicenter of European politics, economics, and social structure. Although most of modern-day Europe has become atheist or agnostic, the Church still has a large influence over both it and the world. When one considers that the Roman Catholic Church is probably both the world's richest and most influential organization, with over 1 billion constituents, it should pose some concern, especially in light of current events and for those of us who study end-time prophecy.

What is the true nature of Roman Catholicism? Is the pope truly the "vicar of Christ" on Earth? Why are many Catholics proposing unity with Protestants and tolerance of those of "other faiths"? How do these phenomena play into any end-time scenario? These and other questions are some that have greatly intrigued those who study end-time prophecy.

## Build or Strengthen?

Generally speaking, many in Protestant Christianity are not aware of how Roman Catholicism began. The Roman Catholic position has always been that the Church started through a divinely appointed line of popes, beginning with the Apostle Peter. This position is Scripturally supported in Catholicism with Yeshua saying "upon this rock I will build My church." Quoted from The New American Bible, a Roman Catholic translation, Matthew 16:17-19 reads,

"Jesus said to him... 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.'"

Suffice it to say, this is a very controversial passage of Scripture as far as Protestants are concerned. Did "the Church" begin with the Apostle Peter? What did our Lord mean when He said that He would *build* it upon "this rock"? Perhaps the answers can be found when we delve into the original text.

The Greek verb used in Matthew 16:18 for "build" is *oikodomeō* (οἰκοδομέω). According to Thayer, *oikodomeō* can mean, "to build (up from the foundation)," "to restore by building, to rebuild, repair," and "to promote in Christian wisdom, affection, grace, virtue, holiness, blessedness" (Thayer).<sup>1</sup> When examining the original word translated in English as "build," one should wonder, was the Messiah speaking of something new or something *already existent*? Was His job to build or create something new—or was it to repair and strengthen something already in existence—to lead it to growth, wisdom, and further piety as this scholarly definition suggests?

Furthermore, the word translated "church" consistently throughout the Apostolic Scriptures (New Testament) and in Matthew 16:18, *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία), itself can mean "a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place; an assembly" (Thayer),<sup>2</sup> which includes both Believers and non-Believers alike. *Ekklēsia* is also used in the Septuagint, or ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, in reference to the assembly of the people of Israel to translate the Hebrew word *qahal* (קהל). So again, the key question remains: Is "the Church" (Catholic or otherwise) a new phenomenon? Or was something that was *strengthened* on Himself, the true Rock? If the *ekklēsia* ("church") is not a new phenomenon, then what does this do to so-called Roman Catholic authority? Specifically, what was Yeshua telling Peter in Matthew 16:18-19?

"I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven"

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 440.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 195-196.

The Messiah told Peter that on Himself the community of faith would be strengthened. Peter, the foremost of the Disciples, would be given the authority to bind and loose, a Hebraism meaning to restrict or to permit, by implication to loosen or strengthen restrictions.<sup>3</sup> This is exactly what happened with the first non-Jewish Believers in Acts 15, as Scriptural regulations were relaxed for unique needs of the assembly. However, according to Roman Catholic theology, the “keys” of Heaven belong to the pope.<sup>4</sup> The critical question that continues to remain for both Protestants and Catholics is this: Is “the Church” a new phenomenon? If so, then is Catholicism’s papal claim Biblically valid? But if not, then whose authority is the pope acting upon?<sup>5</sup>

## The Historic Church

According to Roman Catholic theology, the Apostle Peter began an unending line of papal succession that extends to this day, supposedly fulfilling the Messiah’s admonition in Matthew 16:18. We have already established that Yeshua was telling Peter that He would strengthen His *already existent assembly* through the Rock, Himself, and that the *ekklēsia* would be given the authority of God through Him. However, other than this passage, there exist no others that support so-called papal power. If this be the case, then how did Catholicism begin?

First and foremost, the word “catholic” in and of itself is not bad. It simply means “universal.” The Church Fathers employ this term frequently in the Second Century, predating the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church, and use it to refer to the universal assembly of faith.

When one looks at history, however, a person can see that Roman Catholicism did not actually begin until over three-hundred years following the Messiah’s ascension to Heaven. It began when the Roman Emperor Constantine allowed for toleration of Christianity in the Roman Empire with the Edit of Milan issued in 313 C.E. Although by this time many within the faith had distanced themselves from Hebraic practices of the Apostles as embraced by the First Century Believers, the “Romanization” of Christianity at this time created a hybrid religion not much unlike Greco-Roman paganism. The Church, once persecuted and hunted down for having faith in the Messiah by the Roman Empire, was now finding itself in a much more politicized role. As should be expected, intrigue and corruption quickly entered in.

Practices that were foreign to Biblical worship began to be integrated into the faith such as Catholic ritual baptism (not full water immersion), confession, ritual incense, a belief in purgatory, the selling of indulgences, and the belief in a mother goddess or the possible “divinity” of the virgin Mary.<sup>6</sup> It can also be said that many of the traditions associated with modern-day Christmas and Easter also extend from the pagan influence on Catholicism.<sup>7</sup>

The most unfortunate practice that was established through Catholicism was a belief in salvation by works, not the saving grace of Yeshua the Messiah alone. Unfortunately, since many Catholics today are under the *mistaken* impression that the pope has the authority of the Messiah on Earth to change, manipulate, or annul Scripture, they accept non-Biblical practices such as

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<sup>3</sup> Consult the article “Binding and Loosing” by Raymond F. Collins, in David Noel Freedman, ed. et. al., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:744.

<sup>4</sup> The “keys of Heaven,” supposedly belonging to the pope, are displayed on the Vatican flag.

<sup>5</sup> Please note that we fully reject the concept that “the Church” and Israel are separate entities of “elect,” but rather that the true “church” or assembly/congregation began at Mount Sinai and born again Believers become a part of Israel when they attain salvation in Messiah Yeshua. Consult the editor’s article “When Did ‘the Church’ Begin?” for a further discussion.

<sup>6</sup> Within Catholicism, Mary is known as both the “Queen of Heaven” and the “Mother of God.” In Jeremiah 44:15-27, God warned those of Ancient Judah against worshipping the “queen of heaven,” and this is given as one of the reasons for God sending the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem, Solomon’s Temple, and for the Southern Kingdom being taken into captivity for seventy years.

<sup>7</sup> Note that such traditions or practices adapted by heathen cultures were initially intended to be “Christianized” in the hope of gaining converts, however, many have since passed into both Catholic and Protestant practice as being “normal.”

rosary beads and the misappropriation of the Second Commandment (Exodus 20:4-5), which forbids worship or veneration of graven images.<sup>8</sup>

For centuries, Roman Catholic clergy guarded the only copies of Scripture that existed within Western Christianity closely. The Bible was typically read in Latin during mass (Roman Catholic worship), a language which most of the common people in Europe could not understand. Although many Roman Catholic monks meticulously preserved Scripture and other historical texts, those using religion for their own personal gain held the written Word of God back. During the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church became extremely wealthy and powerful through preaching salvation by (their) works and the premise that one could “buy” his way into Heaven or out of purgatory.<sup>9</sup>

It was only until the Reformation, which took massive hold in Europe during the early Sixteenth Century, that people in significant numbers began to question the supposed “authority” of the Roman Catholic Church and the pope.<sup>10</sup> For almost 1,200 years, the Catholic Church had held the only complete copy of the Biblical canon and had often used its power for its own organizational benefit, or the benefit of its clergy. The Roman Catholic Church was also responsible for launching the Crusades into the Middle East as well as massive persecution against European Jewry, further proving Catholic fallacy and non-Biblical authority.

The beginning of the Reformation is usually credited with the German monk Martin Luther’s stand against the selling of indulgences<sup>11</sup> after reading the Biblical admonition, “the just shall live by faith” (Galatians 3:11; cf. Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17). He nailed his protests or Ninety-Five Theses to a church door in Wittenburg Germany in Latin, only later to have his Theses translated into German and printed throughout Germany.

The primary purposes of the European Reformers of both the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries were to *protest* the authority of the pope (hence the name, Protestant), non-Biblical Roman Catholic practices, and to force the translation of the Bible into the common languages of the people. Consequently, as we should be aware from history, neither Luther’s nor the other Reformers’ protests were taken lightly, and many Protestants were martyred for their faith. Also during this time, the Spanish Inquisition was at its zenith in which Spanish Muslims and Jews were either forced to convert to Catholicism or be killed, with many escaping to the New World, as Spanish Catholicism tried to squash the Reformation.

Historically speaking, the Roman Catholic Church has exercised what it believes to be its “God-given” authority, which as we have previously discussed has been granted to the Body of Believers through the Messiah and not the pope. Unfortunately, the Catholic Church has demonstrated that it has a very questionable past be it through the Inquisition, the holding back of Scripture, or the persecution and killing of Protestants and Jews. In more recent history, the Roman Catholic Church did very little to stop the Jewish Holocaust during World War II.

What is historical about the Roman Catholic Church? It has used the Word of God to extort millions and exercise its will upon Planet Earth, even if it includes the killing or torturing of Protestants and Jews. Any good Protestant should want nothing to do with this religion, and pious Catholics true to our risen Lord and Savior should question the pope’s authority as well. But if this is truly the case, then why are so many Protestants and Catholics eager to reconcile their differences and unify in peace? I would urge the Roman Catholic reader to seriously reconsider their religion’s often blatant defiance of Holy Scripture.

<sup>8</sup> It is not uncommon in Roman Catholicism to see statues of Mary, Yeshua the Messiah, the Apostles, or other “saints” and the adoration or *worship* of such.

<sup>9</sup> Purgatory in Catholic theology is considered to be a “neutral” ground between Heaven and Hell. According to Catholic theology, souls of the deceased that had only a few sins would be transported to purgatory upon death for a time of penance, only to then be allowed access to Heaven.

<sup>10</sup> Many credit the Reformation beginning with Martin Luther in 1511. However, it should be noted that throughout Church history there were many other reformers before Luther including the Englishmen John Wycliffe and William Tyndale.

<sup>11</sup> An indulgence in Catholicism is a special certificate from the pope in which the buyer can be transported directly to Heaven upon death, not having to spend a time of penance in purgatory.

What do these phenomena signal? It signals that the prophesied apostasy (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2) is at hand and the return of the Messiah is forthcoming.

### The False Prophet and Catholic Eschatology

Many fundamentalist Protestants who study the end-times believe that Revelation's false prophet will be a pope. In March 2000, John Paul II made an historic visit to the Holy Land in which he hoped to reconcile the Vatican's relationship with the Jewish people and further the Middle East Peace Process.

Many expected the year 2000 to see the fulfillment of prophetic events either through the Y2k issue or through heated Millennium fears, especially since 2000 was the Roman Catholic "Year of Jubilee." One such phenomenon that was expected to have occurred was the Abomination of Desolation during John Paul II's visit to the Holy Land in March. Although nothing did happen, the pope's visit was quite monumental and we should expect more visits from future pontiffs.

I agree with other Protestants that the false prophet of Revelation will probably be a pope. However, neither John Paul II, nor his successor Benedict XVI, have invoked any feelings of high ecumenicism or the type of charisma one would expect from this prophesied figure. If anything, the current pope Benedict XVI is a fundamentalist pope who believes in the centrality and authority of the Roman Catholic Church.

"Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon. He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life. And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed" (Revelation 13:11-15).

It is not uncommon in Roman Catholicism to erect statues of those who are granted "sainthood" status. In this case, it would not be improbable if the prophesied false prophet is to be a Roman Catholic pope. Revelation 13:4 tells us that the beast or antimessiah/antichrist will receive a deadly wound that will be healed, and Revelation 13:11-15 (quoted above) states that the false prophet will demand that people worship the beast's image. If the antimessiah is to be religiously ecumenical as many believe, it is highly probable that he will have very strong relations with the Vatican. With this in mind, would a pope be responsible for erecting the statue of the antimessiah initiating the Abomination of Desolation (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15-20; Mark 13:14-19), in defiance of the Second Commandment?

Roman Catholic eschatology (or teachings of the end) is also very fascinating. Predominantly, it is amillennial, or it rejects the concept of a literal thousand year reign of the Messiah upon Planet Earth. Rather, the Earth is currently "in the millennium," or a pseudo-thousand figurative years. Currently, Satan has been bound in the pit,<sup>12</sup> and the pope, or the vicar (replacement) of the Messiah is ruling the planet. Eventually, amillennialism teaches us that the entire world will be "Christianized" and *get better*, and that Yeshua will one day return and we will enter into eternity.<sup>13</sup>

On the contrary, if the current mainstream ecumenical movements continue to embrace Roman Catholicism as the world's primary legitimate religion, the prophesied

<sup>12</sup> Revelation 20:20 records that Satan will be bound for a thousand years during the Messiah's Kingdom reign on Earth. However, if Satan is *already* bound, then how can Catholicism explain the morally decrepit state of our planet and the sin that exists in the world today?

<sup>13</sup> Of course, it is notable that amillennialism is not exclusively a Roman Catholic doctrine, and there are many Protestants who believe in forms of it.

antimesiah/antichrist could be viewed as the incarnate “anointed one” with a pope as his emissary. Unfortunately, Roman Catholic eschatology is both deceptive and uncertain. While looking for the world to be totally “Christianized,” what many in the Catholic Church have possibly done is set themselves up to receive the antimesiah as “Christ having returned.”

The Holy Scriptures do not teach that the world will be totally “Christianized,” but rather that “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). It only speaks of the gospel message being proclaimed, not of a massive revival, nor of the entire world coming under the reign of Yeshua *without* Him being personally present! Yeshua says that in the Last Days, “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father *his* child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death” (Mark 13:12). Does this sound like “things getting better”? 2 Timothy 3:1-5 properly elaborates, telling us that things will get much, much worse:

“But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; avoid such men as these.”

The Bible does not teach the amillennialism of the Catholic Church. There are too many references throughout the pages of Scripture that tell us that the end-times will be a time of God’s judgment and separation. Although they will result in the Lord restoring His Kingdom, His rule will certainly not be part of an authority established by Catholicism.

## Judging Catholics

It is not my intention to judge the heart condition or spirituality of Roman Catholics. Not unlike many Protestants, Catholics today believe what they believe because their priest (or pastor) tells them so. Just because one is a Catholic does not guarantee him a position in Heaven, and nor does it mean that he is destined to Hell following repentance. Equally so, unfair judging of Catholics by fundamentalist Protestants and Messianic Believers is against Scripture as Yeshua emphatically states, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

Truly, God has each and every one of us where He wants us. For some, that is in the Roman Catholic Church, for others, it is in a Protestant denomination. There are many pious Catholics that are true to *their* faith, but their current loyalty may be more toward an organization than it is to a holy and righteous God. If such Catholics are sincere in their faith, they will one day be delivered out of the Catholic Church.

There has been much speculation as to the Catholic Church’s involvement in the end-times. Currently, I am of the opinion that the Vatican is the woman that sits on the seven mountains detailed in Revelation 17.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, I believe that by the time the prophesied destruction of this city occurs, most mainline Protestant denominations will have been fused back into the Catholic Church in some form or another, or at the very least have much closer ties with it.

God has certainly had a place for the Catholic Church in His eternal plan. To say that all Catholics throughout the centuries are in Hell, or for that matter that all popes, bishops, priests and monks are in Hell, is *not* our job to determine. We must leave these judgments to the Lord alone. For almost twelve hundred years, Roman Catholicism was really the *only* vessel proclaiming Yeshua the Messiah to the world. Had it not been for the staunch piety of many Spanish Catholics during the Middle Ages, no matter how diluted and misguided they were, Europe could have been overrun by the Moors and many of us could be Muslim.

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<sup>14</sup> Consult the editor’s article “The Babylons of Revelation 17 & 18” for more details on the Vatican’s potential identity in the Bible.

Ultimately, the Believer, whether Protestant or Catholic, must recognize that his or her loyalty belongs to the Messiah and Him alone. (This will ultimately require *removal* from one's Catholic or Protestant assembly in the end-times when religious movements become fused together.) We must recognize the Scriptural concept that as Believers we have been made a part of the Commonwealth of Israel (Ephesians 2:11-12), and that Yeshua is coming to restore the Kingdom to Israel—not the “Kingdom of Catholicism.” Most important, we must love one another as the Messiah loves us, and not judge each other's eternal destiny, leaving that job to God alone.

## Conclusion

As far as we are concerned, the papal office has no Biblically based authority, and Protestants true to the Reformation should have no business wanting to reconcile or reunite with it. However, we also recognize the position of many Roman Catholics, and the fact that as non-Catholics we should love them with the love of Yeshua and this must be our testimony ever firm in Scripture. We must lead them to the truth by a positive example of faith.

With this in mind, we should be very aware of the path that ecumenecism has taken over the past years and where it is headed. Five hundred years ago, Protestants were calling the pope “antichrist” and were being tortured and killed for their possession of Bibles. Five hundred years later, many of the same are calling for unity with Catholicism and embrace the pope as a “valuable asset of Christianity.” Why have things suddenly changed? Perhaps we are nearing the return of Yeshua, or are at least seeing some things put in place for His return.

If you are a Roman Catholic or if you are Protestant and endorse ecumenecism, then I would urge you reconsider your position. Is it truly Biblical? Is the pope “Christ” on Earth? Does spiritual authority rest with a substitute or with **the Messiah alone**?

If the pope is truly “Christ on Earth,” then how can this messiah have gotten away with murder, lying, extortion, and a host of other deadly sins (no pun intended)? If the pope is truly “Jesus Christ” on Earth, then this messiah must truly be a lawless one and true Believers should not recognize him. Unfortunately, as is the case with many who claim Yeshua as Savior, many Catholics have followed the words of a man, rather than those of the Living Word of God.

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