

## Some Answered Questions, Peter and the Papacy

'Abdu'l-Bahá

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### Peter and the Papacy

Question: In the Gospel of Matthew Christ says to Peter: "thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church". What is the meaning of this verse?

Answer: This utterance of Christ is an affirmation of Peter's reply, when Christ asked: "Whom do ye believe Me to be?" and Peter answered: "I believe that Thou art the Son of the living God." Then Christ said to him: "thou art Peter"—since "Cephas" in Aramaic means "rock"—"and upon this rock I will build my church". For others, in answer to Christ, had said that He was Elias, or John the Baptist, or Jeremiah, or one of the Prophets.

Christ meant, through metaphor and allusion, to affirm the words of Peter. And so, since the latter's name meant "rock", He said: "thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church". That is, your belief that Christ is the Son of the living God will become the foundation of the religion of God, and upon this belief the foundation of the church of God—which is the Law of God—shall be established.

As to the existence of Peter's tomb in Rome, it is doubtful and disputed; some say that it is in Antioch.

Moreover, let us measure the deeds of certain popes against the religion of Christ. Christ, hungry and destitute, subsisted on the herbs of the wilderness and would not consent to see any heart saddened. The pope rides in a gilded carriage and passes his days in the utmost majesty, occupied with such pleasures and pursuits as to surpass the opulence and self-indulgence of all the kings of the earth.

Christ did not harm anyone, but certain popes put many innocent souls to death. Refer to the history books. How much blood have the popes spilled merely to secure their temporal authority! How many thousands of servants of humanity, among them learned men who had discovered the mysteries of the universe, have they tortured, imprisoned, and slain, all for mere differences of opinion! How vehemently have they opposed the truth!

Consider the admonitions of Christ and investigate the customs and conduct of the popes: Is there any resemblance between the admonitions of the former and the administration of the latter? We do not like to find fault, but the pages of the history of the Vatican are indeed astounding. Our meaning is that the instructions of Christ are one thing and the conduct of the



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papal government is quite another: They do not agree in the slightest. See how many Protestants have been slain by order of the popes, what wrongs and cruelties have been countenanced, what tortures and punishments have been inflicted! Can the sweet fragrances of Christ be at all inhaled from these actions? No, by the righteousness of God! Such people did not obey Christ, while Saint Barbara, whose portrait is before us, obeyed Him, walked in His path, and acted upon His admonitions.

Among the popes there have indeed been some blessed souls who followed in the footsteps of Christ, particularly in the early centuries of the Christian era when earthly means were lacking and heaven-sent trials were severe. But when the means of temporal sovereignty were secured, and worldly honour and prosperity were obtained, the papal government entirely forgot Christ and occupied itself with earthly dominion and grandeur, with material comforts and luxuries. It put people to death, opposed the diffusion of learning, persecuted men of science, obstructed the light of knowledge, and gave the order to slay and to pillage. Thousands of people, men of science and learning and innocent souls, perished in the prisons of Rome. With such ways and deeds, how can the claim of the vicarship of Christ be accepted?

The Holy See has consistently opposed the expansion of knowledge, to such a degree that in Europe it has come to be held that religion is the enemy of science and that science is the destroyer of the foundations of religion. Whereas the religion of God is the promoter of truth, the establisher of science and learning, the supporter of knowledge, the civilizer of the human race, the discoverer of the secrets of existence, and the enlightener of the horizons of the world. How then could it oppose knowledge? God forbid! On the contrary, in the sight of God knowledge is the greatest human virtue and the noblest human perfection. To oppose knowledge is pure ignorance, and he who abhors knowledge and learning is not a human being but a mindless animal. For knowledge is light, life, felicity, perfection, and beauty, and causes the soul to draw nigh to the divine threshold. It is the honour and glory of the human realm and the greatest of God's bounties. Knowledge is identical to guidance, and ignorance is the essence of error.

Happy are those who spend their days in the pursuit of knowledge, in the discovery of the secrets of the universe, and in the meticulous investigation of truth! And woe to those who content themselves with ignorance, who delight in thoughtless imitation, who have fallen into the abyss of ignorance and unawareness, and who have thus wasted their lives!