

Upon This Rock

Ignatius Press, 1999 by Stephen Ray

Reviewed by Thomas J. Nash for Catholics United for the Faith

After “[Crossing the Tiber](#)” in his eponymous autobiography, Catholic convert Steve Ray makes a logical, literary progression in [Upon This Rock](#), a defense of the office of Vatican hill’s chief resident, the Pope. As is his custom in both print and oral presentations, Ray makes his case in *Upon This Rock* in overwhelming fashion, with an avalanche of more than 500 footnotes and effective commentary ready to give pause to even his most ardent opponent.

In seeking to win over our separated brethren, Ray frequently employs Protestant scholars to help make the Church’s case. Peter and the Church could have set up elsewhere, but Ray notes that, contrary to some modern, anti-Catholic apologists, F.F. Bruce and other serious Protestant scholars do not question whether the Apostle ministered and died in Rome. Concludes Bruce:

This event [the death of Peter in Rome] may justly be called *indubitable* because, in Hans Lietzmann’s words: “All the early sources about the year 100 A.D. become clear and easily intelligible, and agree with their historical context and with each other, if we accept what they plainly suggest to us—namely, that Peter sojourned in Rome and died a martyr there. Any other hypothesis regarding Peter’s death plies difficulty upon difficulty and *cannot be supported by a single document*” (p. 110, emphasis added).

Regarding the crucial issue of Peter’s primacy in Rome, Ray adds:

It must be remembered that the Scriptures are relatively silent on the later years of Peter’s and Paul’s lives, and it is here that the history and tradition of the early Church gives us the information that we need to fill in the gaps. This very tradition passed down through the writings of the Church was virtually unchallenged for 16 centuries. Serious attempts to discredit the presence and primacy of Peter in the See of Rome only began through the impetus of the - Protestant revolt (p. 108).

Ray’s analysis of the “early Church record on the primacy of Peter and his Roman successors constitutes the largest section of *Upon This Rock*, covering five centuries. Ray is at his best in refuting Protestant writers who selectively quote the Fathers to substantiate their position. For example, James White, author of *The Roman Catholic Controversy*, argues that Hilary of Portiers deviates from Catholic orthodoxy in his treatise *On the Trinity*, saying that Peter’s confession, not Peter himself, is the rock upon which the Church is built (footnote, 202). Ray informs us that several chapters earlier in the same treatise, Hilary affirmed Peter “as the foundation stone of the Church” who “received the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (pp. 201-02). Hilary taught, as the Church teaches today, that Matthew 16:18 can have more than one legitimate meaning (cf.

Catechism, nos. 424, 552). Similarly, Ray makes short work of White's misrepresentation of St. Augustine's *The Retractations* (pp. 231-32).

Ray also effectively counters White's exegesis. The Church teaches that she is the new kingdom of Israel (Catechism, no. 751), the restoration of the house of David, which has both a king and a royal steward to oversee Israel. White argues that Peter's having "keys" in Matthew 16:18 must mean that his keys have no relation to the singular, Davidic key mentioned with regard to the Old Covenant Israel (cf. Is. 22:22) and Jesus' Kingship (cf. Rev. 3:7). Actually, as Ray notes, Jesus also had multiple keys in exercising kingdom authority (cf. Rev. 1:18, 9:1, 20:1). He shared this authority with His disciples (cf. Mt. 28:18-20), meaning that Peter's authority in overseeing "the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 16:19) was more extensive than his Old Covenant counterpart's was in governing a more earthbound kingdom of Israel. In addition, in founding the Church, on Peter, Jesus—the Son of David and King of Kings—established *His* kingdom of heaven, not someone else's.

Ray briefly addresses the Old Testament roots of the papacy in an opening chapter, "Peter the Man, the Apostle, and the Rock," and then returns to the subject in an appendix on the primacy and succession of St. Peter. An opening chapter on the biblical background of the Church would both set up his book and serve his readers better in future editions, but there's no doubting that Ray covers the topical bases in his current format. In his oral presentation, Ray does an excellent job on the geographical and religious analysis of the pagan site at which Jesus commissioned Peter in Caesarea Philippi (cf. Matthew 16). This aspect of Ray's research unfortunately receives little coverage in *Upon This Rock* and, respectfully stated, it is superior to Fr. Stanley Jaki's treatment in his *And on This Rock*. It could serve well as its own appendix.

Lastly, Ray's extensive footnotes and his notes and commentary "outspace" general text on many pages. Don't be intimidated. The book is laid out well with excellent topical and biblical indexes to aid your selective reading, if you choose to tackle the book that way. If you're searching for one volume to learn about both the biblical and historical story of the papacy, look no further.

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