

The Church Founded on Christ, the Rock

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INTRODUCTION

Drawn from *De Ecclesia*, composed in 1413 while its author was in exile from Prague and awaiting the summons to Constance that would end at the stake, this excerpt takes up the disputed exegesis of Matthew 16:18. Hus dismantles the papal reading of the "rock" by distinguishing three senses of foundation — the builder, the ground, and the confession — arguing that Christ alone is the church's cornerstone and Peter's faith, not his person, the pattern of belonging. The reasoning here would be carried forward by Luther a century later, and much of the Reformation's ecclesiology can be read as a footnote to these paragraphs. Expect close scriptural argument pressed with the deliberateness of a man who knew what his conclusions would cost him.

The third foundation, included in the proposition (Matt. 16 : 18) is touched upon in the words: "On this rock I will build my church." And in view of the fact that in their utterances the popes most of all use this saying of Christ, wishing to draw from it that they themselves are the rock or the foundation upon which the church stands, namely upon Peter, to whom it was said, "Thou art Peter," — in view of this fact, in order to understand the Lord's word it must be noted that the foundation of the church by whom it is founded is touched upon in the words: "I will build," and the foundation in which it is laid is referred to in the words, "on this Rock," and the foundation wherewith the church is founded is referred to in the words, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Christ is therefore the foundation by whom primarily and in whom primarily the holy catholic church is founded, and faith is the foundation with which it is founded — that faith which works through love, which Peter set forth when he said: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." The foundation, therefore, of the church is Christ, and he said: "Apart from me ye can do nothing," John 15 : 5; that is, apart from me as the prime and principal foundation. But Christ grounds and builds his church on himself, the Rock, when he so influences her that she hears and does his words, for then the gates of hell do not prevail against her. Hence Christ says: "Every one that cometh unto me and heareth my words and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who built a house deep and laid the foundation on a rock : and when the flood arose, the stream brake against that house, and could not shake it : for it was founded on the rock," Luke 6 : 47. And what this foundation is, the apostle Paul shows in I Cor. 3 : 11: "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus"; and I Cor. 10 : 4: "But

the rock was Christ." Therefore, it is in this foundation and on this rock and from this rock up that the holy church is built, for he says: "Upon this Rock I will build my church."

And on this foundation the apostles built the church of Christ. For not to themselves did they call the people, but to Christ, who is the first, the essential and most effectual foundation. For this reason the apostle said : "Other foundation can no man lay." Therefore this apostle, seeing how the Corinthians might err concerning the foundation, condemned them, saying: "Each one of you saith I am indeed of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ. Is therefore Christ divided, or was Paul crucified for you, or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" I Cor. 1 : 12, 13. It is as if he said, No ! Therefore, neither Peter nor Paul nor any other besides Christ is the chief foundation or head of the church, so that later the holy apostle said: "What then is Apollos and what is Paul? His ministers whom ye believed and each one as the Lord gave to him" to minister to the church, I Cor. 3:5. He said: "I planted," that is by preaching; "Apollos watered," that is by baptizing; "but God gave the increase," that is through the founding by faith, hope, and love. Therefore, "neither he that planteth," as Paul, "is anything, nor he that watereth," like Apollos, "is anything," that is anything upon which the church may be founded, but only God who giveth the increase; He is the church's foundation. And the words follow: "Let every one take heed how he buildeth thereon, for other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Christ Jesus."

Now, this foundation is the rock of righteousness of which Christ spoke in the Gospel to St. Peter: "Thou art Peter, and upon this Rock I will build my church." On these words St. Augustine says, in his Sermons on the Words of the Lord, 13 [Nic. Fathers, 6 : 340]: "Our Lord Jesus Christ thus spake to Peter, Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church — on this Rock, which thou hast confessed, on this Rock which thou hast recognized, when thou saidst, 'Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God ' — ' I will build my church ' : I will build thee upon myself, not myself upon thee. For wishing that men should be built upon men, they were saying, 'I am of Paul, I of Apollos, and I of Cephas/ that is, Peter. And others who did not wish to be built upon Peter — Petrum — but upon the Rock — Petram — said, 'I am of Christ.' " Again, in his last Homily on John [Nic. Fathers, 7 : 450], Augustine says: "Peter the apostle, because of the primacy of his apostleship, had a symbolic and representative personality, for what belonged to him as an individual was that by nature he was one man, by grace one Christian, and by a more abundant grace he was one and the same chief apostle. But when it was said to him: 'I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven,' he represented the universal church which in this world is shaken by divers temptations, even as by torrents of rain, by rivers, and tempests, and yet doth not fall, because it is founded upon the Rock, the word from which Peter got his name. For Rock — Petra — does not come from Peter — Petrus — but Peter from Rock, just as the word Christ is not derived from Christian, but Christian from Christ.

"Hence the Lord said: 'On this Rock I will build my church,' because Peter had said before, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Upon this Rock which thou hast confessed, he said, 'I will build my church.' For Christ was the Rock. Therefore, the church, which is founded on Christ, received from him the keys of the kingdom of heaven in the person of Peter, that is, the power of binding and loosing sins. For what the church is essentially in Christ, that Peter is symbolically in the Rock — Petra —

by which symbolism Christ is understood to be the Rock and Peter the church. Therefore, this church which Peter represented, so long as she prospers among evil men, is by loving and by following Christ freed from evil, but much more does she follow in the case of those who fight for the truth even unto death."

These things Augustine teaches throughout, in agreement with the apostle, that Christ alone is the foundation and Rock upon which the church is built. To this the apostle Peter speaks, when he says: "Unto whom coming, a living stone, rejected indeed of men, but of God elect and precious, ye also, as living stones, are built upon into spiritual houses to be a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices unto God through Jesus Christ," I Peter 2:4[^]. For this reason the Scripture continues: "Behold I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he that believeth on Him shall not be put to shame. For you, therefore, that believe is the honor, but for such as disbelieve, the stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner and a stone of stumbling and a Rock of offense. For they stumble at the word and do not believe that whereunto they were appointed." Paul also said: "Israel following after a law of righteousness did not arrive at the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith but by works. They stumbled at the stone of stumbling, as is written, Behold I lay in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, and he that believeth on him shall not be put to shame," Romans 9:31 sqq. Behold how these two Roman apostles and bishops, Peter and Paul, prove from Scripture that the Lord Jesus Christ is himself the stone and the Rock of foundation, for the Lord says: "Behold I will lay for a foundation in Zion a cornerstone tried and precious, a stone of sure foundation," Isaiah 28 : 16. And also in the Psalms 118 : 22. "The stone which the builders rejected has been made the head of the corner."¹ Therefore, Christ himself is the foundation of the apostles and the whole church, and in him it is fitly framed together.

For this reason the apostle says: "So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, in whom each several building fitly framed together groweth into a holy temple unto the Lord," Eph. 2 : 19-21. Here St. Remigius says [Migne's ed., 117 : 711]: "The foundation of the apostles and prophets and of all the faithful is Christ because they are established and grounded in faith in him, just as he himself said, 'On this Rock' that is, 'on myself, I will build my church,' which consists of angels and righteous men. For every one that hath faith in Christ is founded upon him, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner-stone. How, then, is Christ the foundation and the chief stone? For this reason, that faith begins with him and is perfected and completed in him and by him so that all the elect are grounded in him." Thus Remigius Haymo.

From these things it is plain that Christ alone is the chief foundation of the church, and in this sense the apostle thought of that foundation, because he did not dare to speak of anything except what was built upon that foundation. Hence he says: "I will not dare to speak of any thing save those which Christ wrought through me by the obedience of God in word, and in deeds, and in the power of signs and wonders, in the power of the Holy Spirit. And so I have preached this Gospel not where Christ was already known, that I might not build upon another man's foundation," Romans 15: 18-20. Was not this that apostle, a vessel of election, who said he did not dare to preach anything save those things which Christ spoke through him; for otherwise he would not be building on Christ, the most effectual

foundation, if perchance he should say and teach or do anything which did not have its foundation in Jesus Christ. And from this it is plain, that not Peter but the Rock, Christ, was intended in Christ's Gospel, when Christ said: "On this Rock I will build my church."

But the objection is drawn from Ambrose, Dist. 50 [Friedberg, 1 : 198], where he says: "Peter became more faithful after he had wept over having relinquished his faith and so he found greater grace than he lost. For as a good shepherd he received the flock to care for it so that, as he had been weak to himself, he might become a buttress—firmamentum — to all, and he who faltered,² under the temptation of a question, might establish others by the steadfastness of his faith. Finally, in order to strengthen the devotion of the churches, he was called rock, as the Lord said: 'thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church.' For he is called *petra* — rock — because he was to be the first to lay the foundations of the faith among the nations,³ and, as an immovable boulder — *saxum* — he held up the structure and weighty edifice of the whole of Christ's work." So much Ambrose, showing that Peter is called the rock. The exposition of Augustine, the foremost of Scripture expositors, seems to me here to be more efficacious and is more efficacious because it is founded in the very words of Scripture which says that Christ is the Rock and the corner-stone and the effectual foundation. But nowhere in Scripture do we expressly read that Peter is a rock. Nor did Christ, who was able to say it easily — *leviter* — say: "Thou art the Rock, and on thee, the Rock, I will build my church." What he said was: "Thou art Peter," that is the confessor of the true Rock, "and upon this Rock, " which thou hast confessed, "I will build my church." But Christ builds the church upon himself, by faith, hope, and love. Hence we believe and hope in Christ and not in Peter, and we are bound to have more love and affection for Christ than for Peter. For the fathers of the Old Testament did not believe or hope in Peter, who was to come, but in the Rock. Nor did the saints of the New Testament believe and hope in Peter but in Christ, who is objectively [the object of] our faith and hope.

It must be granted that the apostles are foundations of the church but not in the same way as Christ is the foundation. For Christ is the foundation of foundations, as he also is the holiest of the holy. This is expressed by St. Augustine on Psalm 86 [Nic. Fathers, 8 : 420]: "His foundations are in the mountains," etc. Here he shows that the chief foundation of the New Jerusalem, the city of Zion, and also its corner-stone is Christ; and the mountains are the prophets and apostles in whom are the foundations of the church. And Augustine says: "That ye may come to know that Christ is the first and the great foundation, the apostle says, 'other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus.'" How, then, can the prophets and the apostles be foundations and at the same time Christ be the foundation beyond whom there is nothing? How do we think but figuratively of the foundation of foundations, except as he is expressly called the holiest of the holy? If, therefore, thou thinkest of the sacraments, Christ is the holiest of the holy; if thou thinkest of an obedient flock, Christ is the shepherd of shepherds; if thou thinkest of the edifice, Christ is the foundation of foundations.

And later he [Augustine] gives the reason for the prophets and apostles being called the foundations of the structure of the city of Jerusalem, and asks: "Why are they the foundations? Because their authority bears up — *portat* — our infirmity. How are they gates — *portae* ? Because by them we go into the kingdom of God, for they preach to us. And as we go in by them, so we go in by Christ, for he is the door. And there are said to be twelve gates of Jerusalem, and Christ is the one gate and Christ is the twelve gates, because Christ is in the twelve gates." Thus much Augustine. And on that text of Rev. 21 : 14, "The wall of the city having twelve foundations," the Gloss says: "that is the prophets in whose faith the apostles were grounded, for from them faith passed on by succession to the apostles, whose

preaching had the same belief as had the prophets who also said the same thing. Or let us accept the apostles as the foundations in whom the whole fortification of the church is grounded. Again, in this passage it is said: "All the foundations of the wall of the city are adorned with a precious stone, and the first foundation was jasper." The Gloss says: "The foundations, that is, the prophets and apostles, are adorned in themselves with graces of every kind."

Behold how Christ is the foundation of the church and the apostles are the foundations ! Christ is by a figure of speech — antonomastice — the foundation because the edifice of the church begins from him and is finished in him and through him. But the prophets and apostles are the foundations because their authority bears up our weakness. And this was the sense intended by Ambrose when he said: "That Peter was called the rock because he was the first to lay in the nations 1 the foundations of the faith; and, like an immovable rock," that is, by the steadfastness with which he endured to the other hand, St. Dionysius, *de divinis nominibus*, 3, calls St. Peter the peak, that is, the capital or captain. And in his book which he wrote on the death of the apostles Peter and Paul, he thus addresses Titus: "As Peter and Paul were being led to the place of martyrdom and were about to be separated, one from the other, Paul addressed to Peter these words: 'Peace be to thee, O foundation of the churches and shepherd of Christ's sheep and lambs!'" In the same way Augustine, in his *Questions on the Old and New Law*, says that "Peter was the first among the apostles." So likewise Pope Marcellus, 24 : 1, Rogamus [Friedberg, 1 : 970], 2 says: "We beseech you, brethren, that ye teach no otherwise than as ye have received from St. Peter and the other apostles, for he is the head of the whole church, to whom the Lord said: 'Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church. ' " Likewise Pope Anacletus, Dist. 21, 3 in novo [Friedberg, 1 : 69]: "In the New Testament after Christ's death, the priestly order began with Peter, because to him as the first was given the pontificate in Christ's church even as the Lord said to him: 'Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church.' He, therefore, was the first to receive from the Lord the power of binding and loosing and he was the first to lead the people to the faith by the power of his preaching. And truly the other apostles received with him in virtue of equal fellowship honor and power." Likewise, it is commonly said that Peter was the head of the church because he was called Cephas, which by interpretation is head.

By what was said above in Chapters II, III, IV, namely, that the holy universal church is one and consists of all the predestinate that are to be saved and that Christ alone is the head of the church, just as he alone is the most exalted person in the church, imparting to it and to its members motion and understanding unto the life of grace, so it is evident that Peter never was and is not now the head of the holy catholic church. And the dictum of St. Dionysius is true, that Peter was the captain among the apostles and was the foundation of churches, as is said in the next chapter of the apostles. And the dictum of Augustine is also true, that by a certain prerogative Peter was the first among the apostles. And the dictum of Marcellus is also true, that Peter was the head of the whole church which he ruled by his teaching and example. But he was not a person higher in dignity than Christ's mother; nor was he equal to Christ or made the governor of the angels who, at that time, were the church triumphant.

Therefore, it is not a matter of much doubt to the simple Christian — faithful — that Peter did not dare to claim to be the head of the holy catholic church, for the reason that he did not rule over the whole church and did not excel above the whole church in dignity, nor was he the bridegroom of the catholic

church. John the Baptist, than whom, according to the testimony of the truth in Matt. n : 11, "There hath not risen a greater among those born of women," did not dare to call himself the bridegroom, but in humility confessed himself the bridegroom's friend. And wThen his disciples in their zeal for him said, "Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan to whom thou hast borne witness, behold the same baptizeth and all men come to him," John answered them and said: "A man can receive nothing except it have been given from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness I have said I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but it is sufficient for me that I am the bridegroom's friend that standeth and heareth with joy the bridegroom's voice," John 3 : 27-29. And the bridegroom said: "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you, " John 15 : 14. Thus it is evident that it would be the highest arrogance and folly for any man, Christ excepted, to call himself the head and the bridegroom of the holy catholic church.

But the reason for Christ's appointing Peter after himself as captain and shepherd was the pre-eminence of virtues fitting him to rule the church. For otherwise the Wisdom of the Father would have unwisely appointed him the bishop of his church. And as all moral virtues are bound together in a class — in genere — it is evident that Peter had a certain pre-eminence in the entire class of virtues. But there were three virtues in which Peter excelled, namely, faith, humility, and love. Faith, which properly is the foundation of the church, excelled in Peter because of what the best of Masters ordained, Matt. 16 : 16, in answer to that question which he asked about himself: "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" To this Peter replied for all, saying: "Thou art the Son of the living God." Here he confessed Christ's humanity by which he meant that Christ was the Messiah promised to the fathers. The second part confesses Christ as the natural Son of the living God, and so Peter confessed Christ to be very God and very man. And among all the articles of faith, this one appertains most to the edification of the church, for, according to St. John, the Son of God overcometh the world: "Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" I John 5:5. For, when this foundation is laid, the belief follows that all things which Christ did or taught are to be accepted without any detraction by the whole church.

Mark 10 : 43 — how should he not be of an humble spirit, above others, in regard to the prerogative which he had from the Lord Jesus Christ? Hence it is said with probability that Peter asked questions and answered questions with humility just as he bore himself, above others, in humility to perform his ministry in the church. For, sent by the apostles to Samaria, he went humbly with John, Acts 8 : 14. And so, called to Joppa, he went humbly, and there for many days he tarried with Simon the tanner. Called by Cornelius from Joppa, he proceeded humbly to Caesarea, Acts 10 : 18. And also at the council of the apostles and the church [at Jerusalem, 51 A. D.], after he had finished his speech, when James stated the case and said: "Hearken unto me; Simon hath declared," etc. And then James adds a statement: "Wherefore my judgment is that we trouble not them that from among the Gentiles turn unto God," Acts 15 : 19. It is also narrated how Peter went everywhere throughout all parts, preaching humbly the Word of God, Acts 9 : 32. Being sharply rebuked by Paul, he bore it humbly, Gal. 2:11. And all these things he did, not for worldly honor and advantage but in an humble and obedient spirit and to support the honor of the law of Christ. Therefore, in these things we read the full greatness of Peter the apostle which is to be measured by the humility of his service, as appears from the definition of the Master: "Whoso humbleth himself shall be exalted," Matt. 23 : 12.

As for the third virtue, love, it is plain that Peter had this in certain respects above the others, as appears from the fervor of his acts which fittingly proceed from greater love. This is confirmed by the fact that otherwise he would have been ungrateful, if he had not loved his Master, in a way corresponding to Him who had loved him in so peculiar a way, and wiped him clean from his great blasphemy and graciously placed him over his sheep. Again it is confirmed by this, that otherwise there would have been no fitness in the

Master asking him, "Simon, son of John, lovest thou me more than these?" and then immediately committing to him his sheep to feed, John 21 : 15. But here it should be noted that the reasons for loving Christ are manifold. Some love Christ more than others on the ground of his divinity, as is believed to have been the case with John the Evangelist; others because of his humanity, as is believed to have been the case with Philip; and others love Christ because of his body which is the church, and so men love him for many other reasons, for which, in the case of a certain saint, they quote Ecclesiasticus 42: "No one has been found like unto him in keeping the law of the Most High." Peter's pre-eminence is manifest from his faith, humility, love, yea, and also from his poverty and endurance. For he said to the man asking an alms: "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee," Acts 3 : 6. And, because he heard from the Master the words, "In your patience possess ye your souls," Luke 21 : 19, it seems probable that, after his denial of the Master, Peter stood for that very reason more ready to endure martyrdom and especially for the reason that, recognizing his weakness, he had fresh in his mind the memory of his own frailty in denying his Master. And for this reason he stooped in humility to others and was more ready to suffer imprisonments, even unto death, for the Lord whom he denied. Nor is it to be doubted that he bore with an humble mind Herod's prison in Jerusalem, the prison of Theophilus in Antioch, and Nero's prison at Rome.

If he, who is called to be Peter's vicar, follows in the paths of the virtues just spoken of, we believe that he is his true vicar and the chief pontiff of the church over which he rules. But, if he walks in the opposite paths, then he is the legate of antichrist at variance with Peter and Jesus Christ. Therefore,

St. Bernard, *de consideratione*, IV,1 writes as follows: "Among these things thou walkest in the van a shepherd overornamented with gold even in the midst of an environment so varied. Why do they seize the sheep? If I may dare, I will say that these are the pasture grounds of demons rather than of sheep. Not in this way did Peter act, or Paul frisk about." And he adds: "Either deny to the people that thou art shepherd or show thyself such. Thou wilt not deny it lest he whose place thou holdest deny thee to be the heir. He is Peter who is not known to go about in processions, ornamented with gems or silks, not clad in gold or carried by a white horse, or compassed about with soldiers, and surrounded by bustling servants. Without such things, Peter believed he was able to fulfil sufficiently the salutary commandment: 'If thou lovest me, feed my sheep.' In things like these thou hast followed not Peter, but Constantine." Thus far Bernard.

That holy man knew that Pope Eugenius ought to be a vicar in poverty and humility, not in pride but in feeding the sheep, following Peter. For that man is a true vicar of him whose place he fills and from whom he has lawfully received the procuratorial power. But no one can truly and acceptably to Christ rule in Christ's stead or the stead of Peter without following him in his life — *moribus* 2 — since there is no other fitting way of following him except he receive subject to this condition from God procuratorial power. Thus quoted by Huss, also in other writings, and by the title *ad Eugenium*. Although Eugenius was his spiritual son, Bernard addressed him as "most holy father." He recalls the pope from the love of pomp and wealth to spiritual humility and the proper business of the pope who, although pastor of pastors, is greatest when he is servant of all. He is in the line of the primacy of Abel, Abraham, Moses, Aaron, and Peter.

There is required for such an office as that of vicar conformity of life and authority from the person instituting it, and to this one [such a vicar] the Saviour at the Last Supper committed the institution of the venerable sacrament. And constituting his disciples his vicars that they might so do in remembrance of him, he said: "I have given you an example that ye also should do as I have done to you," John 13 : 15. He also said: "Whosoever shall do and teach them he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven," Matt. 5:19

Likewise, we have this from the Acts of Boniface-Martyr [Friedberg, 1 : 146]: "If a pope neglect his own and his brother's salvation and be reprov'd as useless, remiss in his acts, and above all keeping silent about the good because he serves himself rather than the sheep, none the less he leads an innumerable company of people in flocks with himself to be beaten together with himself, as the property of hell, with many stripes throughout eternity." Nor is it necessary to refer to many saints, for the Chief Pontiff, the holiest of the holy said: "All that came before me are thieves and robbers," John 10 : 8. Again he said to his disciples: "Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt hath lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted . . . it is neither useful for the land nor for the dunghill, but it is cast out," Matt. 5 : 13; Luke 14 : 34.

Wishing to impose this judgment upon the minds of men, that most good Saviour and best of masters immediately added : "Who hath ears to hear let him hear." Therefore, let every priest see to it, if he has entered well, that he live pure of offense, with the sincere purpose of honoring God and profiting the church, and in case he demean himself well, that he lay little store by mundane honors and the world's

lucre. For, otherwise, he is a lying antichrist, and the higher his office the greater antichrist he is. Let the humble pilgrim look at Christ who said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life," John 14 : 6. Behold he who wants to go, hath the way, for Christ is the way, and whither he wants to go, for Christ is the truth, and where he wants to abide, for Christ is the life.

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