

The Rock:

Pope Leo believed that Peter was commanded by God to be the foundation of His church. Matthew 16:18 is the verse used to back up this belief. Leo also believed that the successors of Peter would also have this position. Catholics believe that Peter died in Rome, however there is no Scriptural evidence for this. Though it is entirely possible that Peter died in Rome, or at least visited there, it does not necessarily have anything to do with the importance of Rome. Peter visited many places, and we certainly have no evidence of him being a bishop or anything in Rome. In fact, Peter mostly preached to the Jews. However, the primary flaw in the Catholic belief that Rome is the “Eternal City” and that the Pope has his power because he is the “successor to Peter”, is that Matthew 16:18 seems to mean something different than what Catholics say it does.

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” – Matthew 16:18, NKJV.

‘Peter’ derives from the Greek: *petros*, which means “piece of rock” (or small stone, which in the dictionary is defined as a “piece of rock”). In John 1:41, Jesus changes Simon-Peter’s name to Cephas, which means stone as well. So Peter’s name is literally stone, which means “piece of rock”. Now, after Jesus calls Simon-Peter a piece of rock, he goes on to say that upon this rock (*not* ‘upon this piece of rock’) I will build my church. So Jesus is saying that Simon-Peter is a part of the church. This refutes the Catholic use of this verse. Jesus was not bestowing upon Peter any special authority over the rest of the church, but merely stating that he was a part of it. In the preceding verse, Jesus specifically says that Peter came up with this because of what the Father revealed to him, not from his own mind. Thus it would be very odd for Jesus to exalt Peter himself since he just said that it wasn’t Peter that said this inspired statement. Jesus also goes on to say in the next verse that “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven”. He was speaking to Peter as a believer, not Peter as the new leader of the church. This verse is showing the power that God gives to his church, not only to Peter.

Peter places himself at the level of other elders in 1 Peter 4:14. He does not claim superiority because of what Jesus said to him in Matthew 16. Thus, if Peter was the first pope, he sure didn’t know it! In 1 Peter 4-5, Peter speaks of himself as a “living stone” and goes on to refer to the believers he was writing to as “living stones” as well. He didn’t place himself at a higher position than them in any way. Nor did he believe he should have been. And as I said earlier, even if Peter did visit Rome, or even die there, we have no reason to believe that he ministered out of there, or that he held any position of authority there.

Thus, Pope Leo's claim that Rome should be the center of the Church and that the Pope received his power from Peter seems to be seriously flawed. For as I have said, Peter was just a part of the Church, a great man who did help get the church started, but who was not the rock upon which the church was built. Rather, he was merely a *part* of the rock on which the church stands, that rock being comprised of all believers.

Some links that were helpful in doing this paper:

- http://carla_b.tripod.com/realfacts/id3.html
- http://members.aol.com/_ht_a/adb4jesus/CATHOLICBELIEFSANDTHESCRIPTURES1.htm