

Drawing Aside the Purple Curtain

The Papal System Today: an Analysis of the News

Bones of Contention:

Have Paul's Bones Been Discovered in Rome?

by Shaun Willcock

The Vatican is in a froth of excitement. The pope of Rome, Benedict XVI, announced in June that the remains of Paul the apostle may indeed be inside what Rome has for centuries claimed to be the tomb of Paul, known as the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls. In 2006 excavations in the basilica brought to light a marble sarcophagus which had been resting on a layer of clay floor dating from 390 AD. Tests were conducted on the sarcophagus.

Presiding at the “Feast of Saints Peter and Paul”, which marked the conclusion of Rome’s “Year of St. Paul”, with the celebration taking place at the basilica, this is what Benedict XVI jubilantly announced: “An authentic scientific analysis seems to confirm the unanimous and uncontested tradition that these are the mortal remains of the Apostle Paul.

“A tiny hole was drilled into the sarcophagus – which over many centuries had never been opened – in order to insert a special probe, which revealed traces of costly purple coloured linen fabric, laminated with pure gold and a blue fabric with linen filaments. Grains of red incense and protein and chalk substances were also discovered. There were also tiny bone fragments, which were sent for carbon-14 testing by experts who were unaware of their origin. These were discovered to belong to a person who had lived between the first and second centuries.”¹

Following Benedict’s announcement, the media, ever on the lookout for sensational news stories, were quick to report that the remains of Paul *have* been authenticated in the sarcophagus, with headlines such as, “Tests verify bones are those of apostle Paul”.² But is this true? And is it even what the pope of Rome said? He certainly *wants* the world to believe that Paul is really buried there; but even so he chose his words carefully – speaking in such a way that the casual reader will be given the impression that Paul is really buried there, but nevertheless leaving himself with a bolt hole out of the difficulty should it ever become necessary to admit that the bones are not those of the apostle. Let us analyse Benedict’s words:

He said, “An authentic scientific analysis *seems* to confirm” that Paul’s remains are there. Even he doesn’t come out and claim it as an absolutely proven scientific fact! Something that “*seems*” to be confirmed is *not*, in fact, confirmed. He then immediately goes on to speak of “the *unanimous and uncontested tradition* that these are the remains of the Apostle Paul.” In other words, he is saying that although the scientific analysis *seems* to confirm it, Roman Catholic tradition *categorically* confirms it! It is unanimous and uncontested! In wording it like this, Benedict is making it clear that even if the scientific evidence does not definitively support the tradition that Paul is buried there, he definitely *is* buried there because the tradition of him being buried there is unanimous and uncontested! Rome has followed a similar “logic” with regards to the famous Shroud of Turin, which it continues to claim *is* the authentic shroud in which Jesus was buried even though scientific analysis has conclusively shown that it is *not*, and in fact *cannot* be.

As for the “unanimous and uncontested tradition” that Paul is buried there, tradition, quite simply, is not evidence. Furthermore, the fact that there may be no other contestants for the burial site, because none have been found which are supported by any evidence, does not give any credibility whatsoever to the basilica site. The basilica site is not automatically the correct one by default, merely because no

others have been put forward as possibilities!

Next, consider the traces of clothing found in the sarcophagus: costly purple coloured linen fabric, laminated with pure gold and a blue fabric with linen filaments. Although not conclusive evidence in itself, such clothing hardly seems to fit with what we know of the apostle to the Gentiles, who was far from being a wealthy man, nor with the likely burial customs of the early Christians, who were mostly poor.

As for the bone fragments which tests showed to belong to a person who had lived between the first and second centuries, well, that really narrows it down! What kind of pathetic “evidence” is this? What does it prove, even if accurate? (and carbon-14 dating is notoriously *inaccurate*). This is the sum total of what it actually proves: that a person who lived at some point during those *two centuries* is buried there! *Millions* of people lived and died during the first two centuries AD. And yet Rome wants us all to believe that these bones belonged to Paul? That is stretching credulity as if it were a giant elastic band!

In addition, although the Roman pope’s words were designed to give the masses the impression that the remains of Paul had definitely been found, Vatican officials were far more candid, and even contradicted what their pope had claimed. *They* said that although the investigation into the tomb does not contradict the tradition that it is in fact Paul who is buried there, it also does *not confirm* it!³

According to tradition, Paul was beheaded in Rome, and then supposedly buried at the place where, at a later date, the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls was erected. But although superstitious pilgrims used to visit the supposed original tomb of Paul (which may or may not have been authentic – there is just no way of knowing), over the centuries it disappeared from view and eventually could no longer be identified. So then there is absolutely no way whatsoever of being certain that the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls is built over the authentic spot where he was buried!

When the basilica was being reconstructed after being destroyed by fire in 1823, two marble plaques were found beneath the “confessio” altar, dating from the time of the pope, Leo “the Great”, who reigned in the fifth century (440-461). These plaques contained the inscription “Paolo Apostolo Mart” (“Paul the Apostle Martyr”). But does this prove anything at all? No. These plaques were inscribed in the *fifth century AD*, centuries after Paul had died! Of course it is *possible* that, in the fifth century AD, there was still real, solid evidence of where the apostle had been buried; but only *possible*, not *certain*. It is equally possible that nothing but very shaky tradition was behind the identification of his burial place back then. It is also equally possible, in fact very likely considering the greed of Roman popes, that nothing but the pope of Rome’s own desire for a great pilgrimage-site, which would attract large numbers and thus do much to fill the Papal coffers, was behind the establishment of this place as the supposed burial place of Paul.

It is certainly very likely that Paul was martyred in Rome under the emperor Nero. That he himself, in his old age and in prison in Rome, expected to be martyred there, is clear from 2 Tim. 4:6-8,16-18. And if he died in Rome, he would have been buried in Rome. But as to where he was buried, there is simply no strong historical evidence.

Tradition also holds that bone fragments from Paul’s head are in another basilica in Rome, St. John Lateran. Gruesome fellows, those relic-collectors of old. Dishonest, too, as there are so many “relics” of parts of various apostles’ and others’ bodies that, with all those superfluous body parts, they must have been frightening to behold! For example, in times past there were at least six locations in Roman Catholic places of worship where “genuine” heads of John the Baptist were supposedly deposited, with each one guaranteeing its authenticity by Papal bulls; at least six right index fingers of John the apostle; etc. And apparently each of the twelve apostles had at least two bodies apiece, if we were to go by the places where their bodies were supposedly kept as relics!

The fact that this “announcement” comes at the close of the Vatican’s “Year of St. Paul” is no coincidence. It has been deliberately timed for maximum effect. According to Jesuit priest and Vatican spokesman, Federico Lombardi, Benedict’s announcement “provoked an understandable emotion in the Catholic world at the close of the Pauline year.” He said that this “great emotion” was analogous to the reaction surrounding “the major archaeological investigations that took place beneath St. Peter’s

Basilica following the wishes of Pius XII, which confirmed beyond a shadow of a doubt that exactly beneath the central altar was the tomb of the Apostle Peter in the ancient Vatican necropolis.”⁴ Indeed, for the Vatican, the “discovery” of Paul’s tomb is second only to the “discovery” of Peter’s tomb; for Peter, according to Roman Catholic (but not biblical) theology, was the first pope, and Paul was (after Peter, according to Rome) the next greatest apostle of all. But in actual fact, this wily Jesuit priest was speaking with far more confidence about Peter’s tomb having been discovered beneath St. Peter’s Basilica than the evidence warrants. Far from being proved “beyond a shadow of a doubt” as the Jesuit claimed, there is *no* positive evidence that Peter is buried beneath the central altar in St. Peter’s Basilica in the Vatican. There is in fact no positive evidence that Peter was even ever *in* Rome, let alone martyred there.⁵ The biblical evidence indicates that he was never there. Consider the following:

Peter was the apostle to the Jews (Gal. 2:7,8); and as such he was ministering in *Jerusalem* at the very time when, according to Roman Catholic tradition, he was supposed to have been the bishop of *Rome* (Gal. 1:18; Gal. 2:1; Acts 10, 12, 15)! In addition, when Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome, he sent greetings to over 25 Christians by name (Rom. 16) – yet he never once even mentioned Peter! What a glaring omission and slap in the face, if indeed Peter was bishop of Rome. But he was not, and that is why Paul did not mention him. He was not even there. When Paul was in prison in Rome, he wrote, “Only Luke is with me” (2 Tim. 4:11) – Peter was not there in Rome with him, as the Papal system claims!

So what, precisely, lies beneath St. Peter’s Basilica?

Beneath the basilica, kept in transparent containers, were bones, which Rome fondly imagined were those of Peter. In 1939 the pope, Pius XII, ordered excavations to begin beneath the basilica. In December 1950 Pius announced that Peter’s tomb had been discovered far below the high altar. In 1951 the archaeological team declared in their report that Peter’s tomb had been found. They found that a tomb dedicated to Peter had been there since the first century – or so it was said (we are dealing with the headquarters of the Roman Catholic institution here, after all; truthfulness is not high on anyone’s priority). But it turned out that they had *not* found any ancient inscriptions containing the name “Peter”; nor did they find his bones!⁶ Even Pius XII admitted this. In his radio broadcast he said: “The tomb of the Prince of the Apostles has been found. Such is the final conclusion after all the labour and study of these years. A second question, subordinate to the first, refers to the relics of St. Peter. Have they been found? At the side of the tomb remains of human bones have been discovered. However, it is impossible to prove with certainty that they belong to the apostle.”⁷

Impossible indeed: later extensive study of the bones revealed that they actually belonged to an older man, a younger man, a woman, a pig, a chicken, and a horse!⁸

One member of the four-man archaeological team, a Jesuit priest named Antonio Ferrua, said in an article in a Rome paper on January 16, 1952, that a fragment of ancient wall plaster with the inscription, in Greek, “Petros eni” (“Peter is here inside”), had been found; however, the official report never mentioned this find. Ferrua apparently took the fragment to his room and kept it there, until Pius XII obliged him to restore the fragment to the Vatican office in charge of maintaining St. Peter’s Basilica, where, apparently, it is still kept. As to the precise meaning of the inscription, Ferrua himself admitted that the letters “en” and “i” are so far apart that they probably did not form part of the same word. He believed the inscription did not say “Peter is here”, but was rather a prayer to Peter!

But that was not all. The excavations had been carried out under the supervision of the administrator of St. Peter’s Basilica, a Roman Catholic monsignor named Ludwig Klaas. But as time went by he and the Jesuit archaeologists working under him increasingly did not see eye to eye; and he began to visit the site alone, when they were gone, guided by workmen who were sworn to secrecy. On one of these visits in 1942, he noticed that there was in fact a second tomb. It had been uncovered but not opened, so he ordered a workman to open it, and then he ordered the remains found in it to be removed and stored for safekeeping. Years later in the early 1950s these facts were discovered, by chance, by an epigraphist named Margherita Guarducci, who was studying the graffiti on the monument above the first tomb and who came upon the second tomb. Klaas had died by this time. And when a family friend of the Guarduccis became pope of Rome, taking the name of Paul VI, she informed him that she believed these remains from the second tomb were those of Peter. So the bones were brought from where Klaas

had stored them, and tested; and based on these tests Guarducci was convinced that they were those of Peter.⁹ But what was her “proof”? Simply this: they were those of a male, about 5 feet 5 inches tall, of robust constitution, between 60 and 70 years old.¹⁰ This was her proof? Nothing is proved by such “proof”, as no one knows how tall Peter was, or what his constitution was like. It is nothing but speculation. Literally hundreds of thousands of men who lived during that era would fit that description!

In 1968 the pope, Paul VI, said that the evidence *appeared* to be convincing; but the basilica’s administrative office said Paul VI was referring to the tomb area, not to the bones themselves! An official said, “It is certain that this is the tomb of St. Peter. But how can one say that these bones are those of St. Peter?”¹¹ Well, actually, one can’t; and nor can one say that it really was the tomb of Peter either. And note the similarity between the statements of Paul VI in 1968 and Benedict XVI in 2009: Paul said the evidence *appeared* to be convincing that Peter’s bones were beneath St. Peter’s Basilica, and Benedict said the evidence *seemed* to confirm that Paul’s bones were in the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls. Neither man was able to say so with any certainty! Note also the similarity between what Vatican officials said about Peter’s bones, and about Paul’s: in neither case were they at all certain, even though their boss made a virtually definitive announcement!

It turns out, in fact, that even many Roman Catholic archaeologists, including the Jesuits who worked on the excavation, did not accept the “evidence” that Peter’s bones were discovered beneath the basilica. And Paul Poupard, a cardinal and head of the Vatican Council for Culture, wrote in a book on Rome in 1991, “Scientific examination of the human bones found under the Red Wall [in the excavation under St. Peter’s] has not revealed any relationship with the apostle Peter.”¹²

But the Vatican has never let the real facts get in the way of a good propaganda piece.

So: what do the supposed “discoveries” of the remains of Peter and Paul in Rome do for the Roman Catholic religion? Answer: an immense amount.

Rome wants the world to think that God has bestowed upon it the task of ruling over the entire “Christian” world. From the very early centuries, the bishops of Rome have been telling the world that God has set *them* over all other churches. And the supposed “discovery” of Paul’s tomb in Rome is being used to highlight this false claim all over again, just as when it was claimed, decades ago, that Peter’s remains had been discovered beneath St. Peter’s Basilica. Vatican spokesman Lombardi affirmed that the supposed “discovery” of Paul’s remains confirms Rome’s centrality to Christianity! He said, “Rome is the centre of Christianity not because it was the capital of the ancient empire, but because in it the princes of the Apostles [Peter and Paul] suffered martyrdom and their tombs have always been looked after and venerated.” Actually, even if it was true that Peter and Paul were buried there, it would prove no such thing. All it would prove is that they died and were buried in Rome; nothing more. And as we have seen, Peter definitely was *not* buried there. The centrality of Rome to Christianity would have to be proved from the *Word of God*, not from the bones of Peter and Paul being buried there! And the Word of God teaches no such thing.

Additionally, it must be borne in mind that Roman Catholics *worship* at the shrines of those departed people it calls “saints”, whether they were real Christian saints, Roman Catholic heroes, or even people who never actually existed (Rome has made “saints” of all three classes). They worship before their shrines, and they worship *them*. Significantly, since 2007 visitors have been allowed to enter below the basilica’s altar to pray before the supposed tomb of Paul. This was permitted *before* the scientific analysis of the bones was ever concluded! It shows that as far as Rome is concerned, scientific proof of the remains being those of Paul is not as important as milking the faithful! There is absolutely no solid evidence that the remains are those of Paul, and yet pilgrims have been permitted to pray before the tomb as if it was a certainty that it was Paul’s remains in that sarcophagus!

But this is what Rome has always done: permitted its adherents to worship before all kinds of relics, regardless of whether they were even authentic or not (and never mind the fact that such a practice is utterly heathen and in no way scriptural, for worship must be directed to God alone, through Christ). What kind of a religion is this that permits its followers to venerate and pray before bone fragments? That claims that relics such as these are necessary to be placed under altars in its religious buildings? Answer: a *heathen* religion, masquerading as “Christian”.

The Vatican Jesuit spokesman, Lombardi, also said: “Peter and Paul, the rock and the light of proclamation, these disciples of Jesus... continue attracting our attention and our steps toward Rome ‘ad limina Apostolorum’ [‘to the thresholds of the Apostles’]”; and, “They remain alive among us to orient and impassion our faith and to re-launch it to the ends of the earth.” This is all nonsense. Peter is *not* the “rock” on which the Church is built, as Rome claims; Christ Jesus is. This is clear from many Scriptures (e.g. 1 Cor. 3:11; Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:4; Eph. 2:20; 1 Cor. 10:4; Deut. 32:4). It is even clear from the Papists’ favourite text – Matt. 16:18 – which is where Christ says, “thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church”. For “Peter” and “rock” are two distinct Greek words, and mean different things (the word for “Peter” meaning a stone: not the “rock” on which the Church is built, for this is Christ alone, but simply a stone within the spiritual temple of the Lord). And if he was not in Rome, then directing our steps to Rome is *not* directing them to the “threshold” of Peter.

But in one part of his statement the Jesuit was very right: beyond all doubt, the faith of millions of Roman Catholics will be “oriented” and “impassioned” anew by this supposed “discovery” of Paul’s tomb, just as the supposed “discovery” of Peter’s tomb did wonders for Rome decades ago. And it certainly will give a huge impetus to Roman Catholic evangelism worldwide. For Rome’s priests and people will now say to the world, “We are most definitely the true Church! The great apostles Peter and Paul died and were buried in Rome, confirming the centrality of the Church of Rome in the eyes of God!” And many in this benighted world will believe them, and be drawn to Popery.

These revelations couldn’t have come at a better time for the Vatican, still reeling as it is from the worldwide priestly sex scandals and other setbacks of recent years.

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ENDNOTES:

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5. *Pope Peter?* (tract), by Shaun Willcock. Bible Based Ministries, South Africa.
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