

Peter's Tomb Recently Discovered in Jerusalem

(Excerpts from personal account by F. Paul Peterson)

“While visiting a friend in Switzerland, I heard of what seemed to me one of the greatest discoveries since the time of Christ—that Peter was buried in Jerusalem and not in Rome. The source of this rumor, written in Italian, was not clear; it left considerable room for doubt, or rather wonder. Rome was the place where I could investigate the matter, and if such proved encouraging, a trip to Jerusalem might be necessary in order to gather valuable firsthand information on the subject. I therefore went to Rome. After talking to many priests and investigating various sources of information, I finally was greatly rewarded by learning where I could buy the only known book on the subject, which was also written in Italian. It is called *Gli Scavi del Dominus Flevit* printed in 1958 at the Tipografia del PP. Francescani, in Jerusalem. It was written by P. B. Bagatti and J. T. Milik, both Roman Catholic priests. The story of the discovery was there, but it seemed to be purposely hidden for much was lacking. I consequently determined to go to Jerusalem to see for myself, if possible, that which appeared to be almost unbelievable, especially since it came from priests who naturally, because of the existing tradition that Peter was buried in Rome, would be the last ones to welcome such a discovery or to bring it to the attention of the world.

“In Jerusalem I spoke to many Franciscan priests who all said, finally, though reluctantly, that the bones of Simon Bar Jona (St. Peter) were found in Jerusalem on the Franciscan monastery site called Dominus Flevit (where Jesus was supposed to have wept over Jerusalem) on the Mount of Olives ... where the names of Christian Biblical characters were found on the ossuaries (bone boxes). The names of Mary and Martha were found on one box and right next to it was one with the name of Lazarus, their brother. Other names of early Christians were found on other boxes. Of greatest interest, however, was that which was found within twelve feet from the place where the remains of Mary, Martha and Lazarus were found—the remains of St. Peter. They were found in an ossuary, on the outside of which was clearly and beautifully written in Aramaic, ‘Simon Bar Jona.’

...

“The story of the cave and the ossuaries and the regular cemetery just outside of the Convent site is this: It was a Roman custom that, when a person had died and after about ten years when the body had decomposed, the grave would be opened. The bones would be placed in a small ossuary with the name of the person carefully written on the outside front. These ossuaries would then be placed in a cave as in the case of this Christian burial ground and thus making room for others. But this cave or burial place where the ossuaries were found and which was created and brought about through the natural and disinterested sequence of events, without any reason to change facts or circumstances, was a greater testimony than if there were a witness recorded, stating that Peter was buried there. And yet, even that is unmistakably recorded in the three words in Aramaic of the ossuary, Simon Bar Jona....

“When Pope Pius XII declared the Assumption of Mary to be an article of faith in 1950, the Catholic Church in Jerusalem then quickly sold the tomb of Mary to the Armenian Church. Ex-priest Lavallo told me personally that there is another tomb of St. Mary in Ephesus. But the tomb of St. Peter is altogether different for they would rather that it never existed, and to buy or sell such a site would be out of the question. It fell upon them in this manner, as I was told by a Franciscan monk of the monastery of Dominus Flevit. One of their members was spading the ground on this site in 1953, when his shovel fell through. Excavation was started and there a large underground Christian burial ground was uncovered. The initial of Christ in Greek was written there which would never have been found in a Jewish, Arab or pagan cemetery. By the structure of the writings, it was established by scientists that they were of the days just before the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in 70 A.D....You can see then, how the Christians would be inclined to have their burial ground on the Mount, for here also had been a favorite meeting place of Jesus and His disciples. In all the cemetery, nothing was found (as also in the Catacombs in Rome) which resembles Arab, Jewish, Catholic or pagan practices....

“The Catholic Church says that Peter was Pope in Rome from 41 to 66 A.D., a period of twenty-five years, but the Bible shows a different story. The book of the Acts of the Apostles (in

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either the Catholic or Protestant Bible) records the following: Peter was preaching the Gospel to the circumcision (the Jews) in Caesarea and Joppa in Palestine, ministering unto the household of Cornelius, which is a distance of 1,800 miles from Rome (Acts 10:23, 24). Soon after, about the year 44 A.D. (Acts 12), Peter was cast into prison in Jerusalem by Herod, but he was released by an angel. Apparently, Peter left Jerusalem and went to Babylon. Peter is not mentioned again until the Jerusalem conference in 49 AD (Acts 15:7).

“Saul was converted in 33 A.D. and became Paul the Apostle (Acts 9). Paul tells us that three years after his conversion in 36 A.D., he ‘went up to Jerusalem to see Peter’ (Galatians 1:18), and in 49 A.D., fourteen years later, he again went up to Jerusalem (Gal. 2:1, 8), Peter being mentioned. Soon after that he met Peter in Antioch, and as Paul says he ‘withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed,’ Gal. 2:11. The evidence is abundant; the truth is clear from the Scriptures ... Very few, if any, have withstood a Pope and lived (except in these days when everybody seems to withstand him). If Peter were Pope it would have been no different. Paul does not only withstand Peter but he rebukes him and blames him of being at fault....

“This ancient Christian burial ground shows that Peter died and was buried in Jerusalem, which is easily understandable since neither history nor the Bible tells of Peter’s having been in Rome. To make matters more clear, the Bible tells us that Peter was the Apostle to the Jews. It was Paul who was the Apostle to the Gentiles, and both history and the Bible tells of his being in Rome. No wonder that the Roman Catholic Bishop, Strossniayer, in his great speech against papal infallibility before the Pope and the Council of 1870 said, ‘Scaliger, one of the most learned men, has not hesitated to say that St. Peter’s episcopate and residence in Rome ought to be classed with ridiculous legends.’ Eusebius, one of the most learned men of his time, wrote the Church history up to the year 325 A.D. He said that Peter never was in Rome....

“Mark you, all the priests agree that the Vatican and St. Peter’s were built over a pagan cemetery.... You realize surely that Christians would never bury their dead in a pagan cemetery, and you may be very sure that pagans would never allow a Christian to be buried in their cemetery. So, even if Peter died in Rome, which is out of the question, surely the pagan cemetery under St. Peter’s Basilica would be the last place in which he would have been buried....

“... But they have said that after all these years of excavation under the Vatican, they have discovered Greek words which read, ‘Peter is buried here,’ and it gives the date 160 A.D. First of all, the very structure of the sentence immediately gives one the impression that either quite recently or long ago, someone put the sign there hoping that it would be taken as authentic in order to establish that which then, and even now, has never been proven. Then there is a discrepancy in the date, for Peter was martyred around the year 62 A.D. and not 160 A.D. Thirdly, why is it that they mention nothing about finding bones under or around the sign? While visiting the Catacombs, one sees a few things which are not becoming to Christians but which tend to indicate that the Christians had some pagan practices similar to those of Rome today. Nothing is said about them, and only after persistent questioning will the Roman Catholic priest, who acts as guide, tell you that those things (images, etc.) were placed there centuries after the early Christian era.

“In 1950, just a few years prior to the discovery of the Christian burial ground in Jerusalem, the Pope made the strange declaration that the bones of St. Peter were found under St. Peter’s in Rome. Strange it was, for since beginning to build the church in 1450 (finished in 1626) they erected St. Peter’s Tomb (?) under the large dome and Brandini serpentine columns. Since then multiplied millions were thereby deceived into believing that the remains of St. Peter were there, which the hierarchy had all along known was not true, as is proven by the late Pope’s declaration. The following was published in Newsweek of July 1, 1957:

‘It was in 1950 that Pope Pius XII in his Christmas message announced that the tomb of St. Peter had indeed been found, as tradition held, beneath the immense dome of the Cathedral (there was, however, no evidence that the bones uncovered there belonged to the body of the martyr).’ ...

“To make an announcement of such importance when there is absolutely ‘no evidence’ is rather ridiculous as was also brought out in Time Magazine of October 28, 1957 ...

‘A thorough account in English of the discoveries beneath St. Peter’s was now available ... by British archaeologists Jocelyn Toynbee and John Ward Perkins. The authors were not members

Peter's Tomb Recently Discovered in Jerusalem

of the excavating team, but scholars Toynbee (a Roman Catholic) and Perkins (an Anglican) pored over the official Vatican reports painstakingly and examined the diggings. Their careful independent conclusions fell short of the Pope's flat statement.' (The Pope's statement that the remains of St. Peter were found under St. Peter's in Rome.) The excavation under St. Peter's for the remains of St. Peter was still going on secretly, in spite of the Pope's declaration of 1950.

"Then in 1965, an archaeologist at Rome University, Prof. Margherita Guarducci, tells of a new set of bones belonging to Peter. The story was fantastic but lacked common sense and even bordered on the infantile ... the Palo Alto Times (California), May 9, 1967, came out with an article on the subject, and I quote, 'Other experts, among them Msgr. Joseph Ruyschaert, vice prefect of the Vatican Library, are not convinced by Miss Guarducci's evidence. "There are too many unknowns," he told reporters on a recent tour of the Vatican grottoes, "There is no continuous tracing of the bones. We lack historical proof. They could be anyone's bones." The Vatican would seem to be on the monsignor's side because so far it has taken no steps to officially recognize the bones as St. Peter's,' continues the article.

"... In spite of the statements by the high Papal authority above and the resultant lesson that should have been learned, the Pope, a year later claimed the Prof. Margherita bones as those of St. Peter. When the bones were found there was little importance placed upon them and they were filed away as such. But when the first set of Peter's bones turned out so tragically, there was a vacuum left, and something had to be done. Again they turned their thoughts to the filed-away bones, the only hope they had of success. In them there was a ray of hope for the bones were minus a skull, which could go along with the story of the supposed skull of St. Peter which had for centuries been guarded in the church of St. John Lateran in Rome. With a generous mixture of ideas, suppositions, theories and wishful thinking, a fairly logical story emerged. It was then declared by Pope Paul as the Gospel truth that these now were the genuine bones of St. Peter, and most of the faithful accepted them as such. For a while all was well until another hitch developed. This time, as fate would have it, the bones in connection with the skull which was guarded for centuries as that of St. Peter, were found incompatible to the more recent bones of St. Peter. The dilemma was terrible....It was a choice of claiming these bones championed by Prof. Margherita as fake, or claiming as fake the skull accepted by hundreds of Popes as that of St. Peter. They rejected the past rather than expose themselves to the ridicule of the present.' Prof. Margherita claims in this article, which appeared in the Manchester Guardian in London, as well as the S. F. Chronicle of June 27, 1968, concerning the long accepted skull of St. Peter, as 'it is a fake.' Then the article continues, 'The hundreds of Popes and millions of Roman Catholics who have accepted and venerated the other skull were innocent victims of another early tradition.'

"But the most astounding statement in the long article found in the above mentioned newspaper was, 'The professor did not submit them to modern scientific tests, which would have determined the approximate age, because, she feared the process would have reduced them to dust.' How could any scientific study of bones be carried out without first scientifically determining the age of the person, or bones? This would be of the greatest interest and the most important for further research. Also any scientist or chemist knows that you do not have to submit the whole skeleton for testing to determine the age. A part of the shin bone or a rib would be sufficient. It appears that she was protecting her 'Peter's bones' from another possible disaster, which a wrong age would have caused. The Vatican and others have calculated through all existing evidence that Peter lived to be around 80 and 82 years and that he died around the years 62 to 64 A.D. These figures go along perfectly, as does everything else in the case, with the remains found in the Christian burial ground on the Mount of Olives and in the ossuary on which was clearly and beautifully written 'Simon Bar Jona' in Aramaic....

"The great historian, Schaff, states that the idea of Peter being in Rome is irreconcilable with the silence of the Scriptures, and even with the mere fact of Paul's epistle to the Romans. In the year 57, Paul wrote his epistle to the Roman church but does not mention Peter, although he does name 28 leaders in the church at Rome (Rom. 16:7). It must, therefore, be concluded that if the whole subject is faced with detached objectivity, the conclusion must inevitably be reached that Peter was never in Rome. Paul lived and wrote in Rome, but he declared, 'only Luke is with me.'"