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PRIMACY OF THE APOSTLE PETER IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 16,18–19

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/SPLP.2020.005>

Prymat Apostoła Piotra w Ewangelii Mateusza 16,18–19

Streszczenie

Artykuł porusza problem właściwej interpretacji Piotrowego tekstu z Ewangelii Mateusza 16,18–19. Opiera się on głównie na protestanckich, ale także prawosławnych i katolickich komentarzach do tych wersetów. Jezus nadał apostołowi Piotrowi wyjątkową i najwyższą władzę w Królestwie Bożym. Syn Boży zmienił Szymonowi imię na Piotr, aby pokazać jemu i innym, że ten apostoł otrzymał nową godność i misję, która polega na byciu skałą dla przyszłej wspólnoty wierzących. Co więcej, Jezus powierzył Piotrowi „klucze Królestwa” w taki sam sposób, jak w Starym Testamencie król z rodu Dawida wyznaczył swojego własnego pierwszego ministra, królewskiego rządcę, przekazując mu „klucz rodu Dawida”. Dlatego Piotr zajmuje ten sam urząd, z tą samą najwyższą władzą pod rządami nowego żydowskiego króla, Jezusa Chrystusa. Oznacza to również, że urząd ten jest przechodni i przechodzi z jednego królewskiego rządcy na kolejnego. Ponadto Piotr otrzymał moc „wiązania i rozwiązywania” pod specjalną Bożą protekcją, zwaną nieomylnością. Z tych powodów katolicka interpretacja, która nie ignoruje żydowskiego kontekstu i starotestamentowych aluzji do tego fragmentu, w rzeczywistości rzuca nowe światło na właściwą interpretację tego Mateuszowego fragmentu i samej roli apostoła Piotra.

Słowa kluczowe: *prymat apostoła Piotra, prymat jurysdykcji, prymat honorowy, skała, opoka, wiązać i rozwiązywać, klucze Królestwa Niebieskiego*

Summary

The paper discusses the problem of correct interpretation of the Petrine text from the Gospel of Matthew 16, 18–19. It is based mainly on Protestant but also Orthodox and Catholic commentaries to these verses. Jesus Christ bestowed on Apostle Peter the unique and supreme authority in the Kingdom of God. He changed his name from Simon to Peter to show to him and to the others that this apostle had received a new dignity and mission which is to be the rock for the future community of believers. What is more, Jesus also entrusted to Peter the “keys of the Kingdom” in the same way as in the Old Testament the king of the house of David appointed his own prime minister, the royal steward, by giving to him the “key of the House of David”. Therefore, Peter occupies the same office with the same supreme authority under the new Jewish king, Jesus Christ. Hence, it also means that this office is transferred from one prime minister to the next. Furthermore, Peter was given the power of “binding and loosing” along with the special Divine assistance called infallibility. For these reasons, the Catholic interpretation, as it takes into account the Jewish context and the Old Testament references to the passage, truly sheds a new light on the correct interpretation of this Matthew’s fragment and the role of the Apostle Peter.

Keywords: *primacy of Peter, primacy of jurisdiction, primacy of honour, rock, binding and loosing, keys of the kingdom of heaven*

The Primacy of Peter and his successors, the bishops of Rome is a bone of contention between Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant scholars. The understanding of Peter’s role in the early Church is the main thing that divides the Eastern and the Western Church. In contemporary times, from a non-catholic perspective, Peter’s office, instead of being an office of unity, brings disunity and confusion among Christians.

The most important Petrine text comes from the Gospel of Matthew 16,18–19. There are various interpretations of these verses. Some theologians try to give answers for questions related to this passage. Who is the rock on which Jesus will build His Church? Why did Jesus give Simon a new name? Did Peter receive primacy among the apostles from Lord, and if so what kind of primacy did he receive? Does this passage contain an allusion to the succession of Peter’s office? What does the phrase “Keys of the Kingdom” mean? For answers to these questions primary focus will be put on Holy Scripture.

Contemporary state of research in this topic is enormous. After hundreds of years polemics and debates non – catholic scholars agreed on some catholic state-

ments about Peter's appointment, in particular who is the rock and what are the keys. However, there is no full consensus on this matter, which could unite all Christians groups and denominations. Unfortunately, there are still many mutually exclusive answers for the same questions, especially related to the limit of Peter's authority and succession¹.

This essay attempts to prove the Catholic thesis that Peter is the rock and foundation of the Church who received full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the whole Church with possibility of succession and also received divine assistance by a gift of infallibility².

1. PRIMACY OF PETER IN THE CATHOLIC AND EASTERN ORTHODOX TRADITIONS

The Eastern Orthodox and the Catholic Church recognize the significant role of Peter in the early Church. He is the first leader of the young community of believers, visible spokesman of apostles, enjoying a preeminent status among the Twelve³. New Testament, especially gospel accounts clearly support the prominence of Peter. After the Resurrection Christ appears first to Peter and then later to the rest of the apostles (Lk 24,34; 1 Cor 15,5). Only for Peter does Jesus pray that his faith may not fail, him to strengthen the other apostles (Lk 22,31–32). He is distinguished from the other disciples by the term “disciples and Peter” (Mk 16,7)⁴. Moreover, to Peter and not to the other Apostles, the collectors of the temple tax come to collect tax for their Master (Mt 17,24) and Jesus asks Peter to pay them only for both of them (Mt 17,27).

The main question is how far this primacy is extended? Is it only a primacy of honor like the Orthodox Church believes or there is something more – namely, primacy of jurisdiction as the Catholic Church believes? In other words, should Peter's authority be over the Twelve as the supreme pastor, governing the Universal Church in the name of Christ, or it ought to be understood as him being the first among equals whose authority and leadership is not different in kind from the other apostles⁵? We will find the answers for these questions trying to perform exegesis one of the most important text for the Petrine ministry.

¹ U. Luz, *Studies in Matthew*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, (July 13, 2005), p. 165–166.

² First Vatican Council, Pastor Aeternus, Session IV, chapters II, III and IV, Rome, July 18, 1870.

³ T. Stylianopoulos, *Concerning the biblical foundation of primacy*, “Greek Orthodox Theological Review” 49 ½(2004), p. 6 – 7.

⁴ S. Butler, N. Dahlgren, Rev. Mr. D. Hess, *Jesus, Peter and The Keys – A Scriptural Handbook on the Papacy*, Queenship Pub Co, Goleta, (April 1, 1997), p. 5.

⁵ T. Stylianopoulos, *Concerning the biblical foundation of primacy*, op. cit., p. 10.

2. PRIMACY OF PETER IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW 16,18–19

2A) Name change

In Matthew 16,18a Jesus called his apostle Peter. This is very interesting as from the beginning Peter was not Peter at all. His name was Simon and we know it from the Gospels, for instance, (Lk 5,1–11) and from Jesus words himself (Mt 16,17). Son of God changed his name from Simon to Peter. Change of the name finds their roots in the Old Testament. New name means the transmission of a new function in the community of believers. In the first book of the Bible, God assigns a new name to Abram calling him Abraham – “No longer shall you be called Abram; your name shall be Abraham, for I am making you the father of a host of nations” (Gen 17,5). By doing this, Almighty gave to him a new mission which means that from this time Abraham was not just an ordinary shepherd but the founder of the Jewish nation⁶. The same situation we can observe in the process of changing the name from Jacob to Israel in Genesis 32,28⁷. That is why, under the New Covenant incarnate God changed the name one of his apostles by giving him a special role of being the rock on which the Church will be built (Mt 16,18).

2B) Rock

Messiah will build his community of believers on the rock as he promised it in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 16,18). There are three main ways to understand the meaning of the rock:

- a) As a Jesus himself.
- b) As a confession of Peter’s faith or just the faith of Peter.
- c) As a Peter himself.

First two interpretations refuse the equality of name Peter (Greek *petros*) and rock (Greek *petra*). There are two separate realities. On the other hand, third interpretation identifies *petros* with *petra*, Peter with rock.

a) Some scholars argue that Peter cannot be the rock on which Jesus will build the Church as 1 Corinthians 3,11 says that there is only one foundation, Jesus Christ. For this reason, they conclude that the rock, foundation of the messiah’s Church must be the Savior himself. This interpretation was supported by the Reformers, for instance, John Calvin⁸.

⁶ S. Butler, op. cit., p. 6.

⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

⁸ R. Tkachenko, *The apostle Peter’s place in the ecclesiology of the Gospel of Matthew: An inquiry into the theological meaning of “the Rock” and “the Keys of the Kingdom” in Matthew 16:18–19*, “Theological Reflections” 14(2014), p. 72.

There are some serious problems with this interpretation. First and foremost, Jesus in the gospel of Matthew 16,18 identifies himself as a founder and builder of the Church – “I will build...” – not as a foundation. Furthermore, in the nearest context of this fragment, especially the previous and the next verse, is talking only about Peter. Jesus replies him by giving a new name and also the power of the keys. This short talk of Christ is primarily focused on Peter and there is no evidence that Jesus suddenly wants to say something crucial about himself⁹.

Secondly, argument that Christ is called the foundation in 1 Corinthians 3,11 does not necessary means that the members of his Mystical Body cannot be also called a foundation. We ought to remember that biblical metaphors could mean more than just a one thing, for instance, in the letter of Ephesians 2,20 saint Paul clearly states that apostles and prophets are the foundation of the Church. In the last book of the Bible, heavenly Jerusalem is established on the twelve foundation-stones which symbolize twelve apostles (Rev 21,14). Does the Bible contradict itself? Not at all. This is not a mistake as the apostles participate in life, ministry and death of Jesus. For this reason, Christ shares his names and titles with them. Jesus said that he is the light of the world (Jn 8,12) but at the sermon on the mountain he called crowds the light of the world (Mt 5,14). Example taken from 1 Corinthians 3,11 does not contradict the previous statement from Matthew 16,18 as it was used in a different context. We must be careful not to mix the metaphors. In the Pauline letter Jesus is the foundation and the apostles and other believers are builders. In the Matthew’s narrative Jesus is the builder and Peter is the foundation. On this account, Peter can be a rock on which Christ exclusively will build His Church.

In addition to that, one of the principal documents of the Second Vatican Council, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church called *Lumen Gentium* reconciled all these biblical metaphors by stating three main truths about the Church. Firstly, the Catholic Church is established on the apostles as we read this in the Book of Revelation. Second statement which complements the first is that the Universal Church is also build upon Peter. The third and most significance statement is that Christ is the supreme cornerstone which supports the entire Church building¹⁰.

b) The second interpretation identifies rock with confession of Peter. It is supported by a lot of Eastern Orthodox scholars, for instance, G. Galitis or J. Karavidopoulos¹¹. This view was traditionally opposed to the understanding the rock as a person of Peter. Contextually it is highly unlikely to see in *petra* Peter’s confession as the word “this” in Matthew 16,18 much more naturally fits to Peter

⁹ Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, no. 19.

¹¹ R. Tkachenko, op. cit., p. 72.

than to the more distant proclamation of Jesus's identity located two verses before¹². On the other hand, other scholars share the opinion that Peter's faith is the rock on which Jesus build his Church. This idea was supported by the father of the Reformation, Martin Luther. The main problem with this interpretation is the loss of the parallelism and the word play in greek between *petros* and *petra*¹³.

However, from the catholic and patristic point of view, there is a possibility of reconciling these three interpretations of rock as a Peter himself, his faith and confession. Simply we could not interpret this either/or but both/and. Indeed, Peter is the rock but he should not be opposed to his faith. On the contrary, he ought to be taken as a whole human person along with his faith which he confessed to Jesus. The Catechism of the Catholic Church agrees with this patristic interpretation and interpret it in the same way¹⁴.

c) The most appropriate and logical interpretation of the rock is identifying it with the person of Peter. There are several reasons defending this view but I will present just fourth of them. First and foremost, the language spoken in Israel at the time of Jesus by which he communicates with his apostles was Aramaic¹⁵. We have some tips in Gospels that Jesus uses Aramaic language, for instance, in the Gospel of Mark 5,41 or in the Gospel of Matthew 27,46. That is why, Christ originally called Peter *kepha* which means rock¹⁶. John the apostle in the Gospel of John 1,42 translated the future name of Simon, which is Kephias¹⁷, into greek *petros* (anglicized as Peter)¹⁸. It implies that in the first century, Peter [*petros*] means *kepha*. Therefore, there was no difference in the mother tongue of Jesus in Matthew 16,18 between the name of Peter and the rock on which the Church will be build. In Aramaic, these words spoken to the chief of the apostles sounds like "Thou art *Kepha*, and upon this *kepha*". Comparing it to the English it looks like this, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock".

In the original language of the New Testament, Koine Greek, we have two different words, *petros* and *petra*. The question arise, why author of the first Gospel did not use the same words two times – Thou art Peter [*petros*], and upon this Peter [*petros*] or Thou art Rock [*petra*], and upon this Rock [*petra*]? The answer is very simple as the word rock, *petra* is a feminine and the man in this case, Simon who was a big fisherman could not receive a female name in an ancient Greek language. For this reason, Matthew had to change a gender, by giving it a new

¹² S. Butler, op. cit., p. 30.

¹³ Ibid., p. 31–32.

¹⁴ See the Catechism of the Catholic Church 424, 552.

¹⁵ S. Butler, op. cit., p. 26.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁷ It is a transliteration of the Aramaic word *kepha*.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 26–27.

masculine form. Due to this fact, he created masculine name from feminine *petra* which is greek *petros*, Peter¹⁹. Hence, the old protestant counterargument that Peter cannot be the rock because *petros* means little stone is false. This is even acknowledge in XX and XXI centuries by among notable Protestant scholars²⁰.

Secondly, the background of dialogue between Jesus and Peter is very crucial. Christ took his apostles on a journey from the jewish land to a pagan territory of the region of Caesaera Philippi. For jews that kind of trip was dangerous and pointless. Question could arise, why Jesus took his apostles to a city which was originally dedicated to Pan, a false god of spring and shepherds who was worshiped here during the life of Jesus? In order to answer this question and see how it links with Peter being rock we must get to know more about the landscape of this place. The ancient Caesaera Philippi was truly a miracle of nature. There was a huge rock upon which stands the temple of Caesar Augustus. Next to it was a deep cave which was a sanctuary of Pan. It was called by the ancients “the gates of hades”. Therefore, in front of these remarkable images, Jesus uses them in his speech to Peter in order to teach his disciples that from this time one of them will be called not Simon but Peter, rock and on him as on a rock He will build His Church and “gates of hades” will not overcome it.²¹

Thirdly, there is significance parallel between Abraham and Peter. In the Old Testament Abraham like Peter in the new covenant was called rock. We read this in book of Isaiah 51,1–2 where prophet using a synonymous parallelism by repeating two times a phrase “Look to” completing it by different expressions “Abraham and “rock” which express the same thought. Abraham is a metaphorical rock. This understanding of the text is confirmed not only by the ancient rabbis which applied from these verses word rock to Abraham but also it is confirmed by protestant and catholic scholars. Professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism at the University of Glasgow, William Barclay wrote: “Whatever else this is [Simon’s new name “Rock”], it is a word of tremendous praise. It is a metaphor which is by no means strange or unusual to Jewish thought. The Rabbis applied the word rock to Abraham. They had a saying: ‘When the Holy One saw Abraham who was going to arise, he said, “Lo, I have discovered a rock (petra) to found the world upon”. Therefore he called Abraham rock (sur), as it is said: “Look unto the rock whence ye are hewn”. “Abraham was the rock on which the nation and the purpose of God were founded”²². To both Abraham and Peter the name was changed to point out a new status. In the time of Abraham, we are witnesses of the birth of the people of God, on the other hand, in the time of Peter, we are witnesses of the birth of the

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 20.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

²¹ S.K. Ray, *Upon this rock: St. Peter and the Primacy of Rome in Scripture and the Early Church*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, (March 1, 1999), p. 167, 172.

²² Ibid., p. 177.

new people of God and in each case God began with one person. What is most important in our studying that they were both assigned to being a rock.

Fourthly, majority of Protestant and also some Eastern Orthodox scholars accept the view about Peter being the rock of the Church of Christ. Veselin Kesich, the Serbian Orthodox biblical scholar and also retired professor of New Testament at St. Vladimir's Seminary is the first Orthodox theologian admitting that the Roman Catholic exegesis of Petrine text that Peter is the rock is absolutely correct²³. Kesich writes: "Jesus told Simon that a weak, mortal man, 'flesh and blood' could not perceive who he was. For this insight the disciple needed a special revelation by God. He conferred upon Simon Bar-Jonah the title Peter, and promised that he would build his church upon him. 'You are Peters (Petros), and on this rock (petra) I will build my church (mou ten ekklesian)'. These words are spoken in Aramaic, in which Cephas stands both for Petros and petra"²⁴. Gerhard Maier who is the leading conservative evangelical Lutheran theologian states very clearly that: "Nowadays a broad consensus has emerged which – in accordance with the words of the text – applies the promise to Peter as a person. On this point liberal (H.J. Holtzmann, E. Schweiger) and conservative (Cullmann, Flew) theologians agree, as well as representatives of Roman Catholic Exegesis"²⁵.

2C) Binding and loosing

Jesus gives to Peter keys to the kingdom of heaven and the power of binding and loosing. What does the phrase "binding and loosing" mean for the Jews living in the first century? This rabbinic usage corresponds to a teaching and a disciplinary function. The rabbis have power to give the binding interpretation of the Torah for people of God and they have authority to exclude or include someone to synagogue²⁶. Therefore, Peter singularly and the rest of the apostles in the plurality (Mt 18,18) received the power of pronouncing doctrinal judgments by giving the binding interpretation of the Word of God and to make a disciplinary decisions in the community of Christ's followers, for instance by forgiving or absolving the sins (excommunication and inclusion). Jesus expanded the essence of this power by giving them the same authority which he has, infallible authority. Proof for this we can see in fact that the solemn decrees enacted by Peter alone (Mt 16,19) or the apostles in union with him (Mt 18,18) will be ratify in heaven. It means that those decrees cannot contain errors as God who is in heaven cannot bind anything what is a lie and untruth (Heb 6,18; Tit 1,2). Thus, there is a wonderful argument

²³ T. Stylianopoulos, op. cit, p. 11.

²⁴ S. Butler, op. cit., p. 15–16.

²⁵ G. Maier, *The Church in the Gospel of Matthew: hermeneutical Analysis of the Current Debate*, in: *Biblical Interpretation and Church Text and Context*, ed. D.A. Carson, Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1984, p. 58.

²⁶ R. Tkachenko, op. cit., p. 78.

for infallibility of all the apostles especially when they gather together at the Council like at the Jerusalem Council in the Acts of the Apostles chapter 15 and proclaim the God's truth by the divine assistance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15,28). Furthermore, this is also a great biblical evidence for infallibility of Peter as decrees enacted by Peter alone without the rest of the apostles are infallible. In a similar way First Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ of the First Vatican Council *Pastor Aeternus* clearly teaches that Peter and his successors possesses "that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed his Church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals"²⁷. Rostislav Tkachenko analyzing Mt 16,19 states – "Peter receives the right to speak and pronounce authoritative decisions on behalf of God, and these decisions are in accord with God's will"²⁸.

What is more, it is interesting that chief of the apostles received this magnificent authority singularly and before the others. It was not coincidence that it happened in this order and not, for instance, that all of the apostles received it at the same time and place. Jesus wants to teach his disciples significant truth that one among them will be have a special authority.

2D) Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven

One of the main argument of Eastern Orthodox for Peter's being first among equals in Mt 16,19 is that Jesus granted to the other apostles the same authority like before to Peter alone. After Jesus's proclamation to his disciples – "Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Mt 18, 18) – Peter's authority from Mt 16,19 is now shared among all the apostles²⁹.

This concept fails for one main reason, namely that there is a deliberate absence of the Keys in Matthew 18,18. The reason for this is to be found in a deep understanding of the symbol of Key in the background of David's kingdom system of ruling the house of David. In the Old Testament, in David's dynasty kings have several ministers who helped them in governing the Kingdom. These servants were dependent on the king's authority³⁰. One of these ministers was a prime minister, chief of all the ministers and he was also called the major-domo of the palace. It was the highest office within the Davidic Kingdom – more prominent position held only the office of the Queen Mother – and the person holding it was directly under the King³¹. First instance of this office in the Holy Scripture is located during

²⁷ Pastor Aeternus chapter IV, in: <https://www.fisheaters.com/pastoraeternus.html> (25.07.2020).

²⁸ R. Tkachenko, op. cit., p. 79.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 82.

³⁰ S. Butler, op. cit., p. 48.

³¹ T. Marshall, *The Crucified Rabbi: Judaism and the Origins of Catholic Christianity*, Saint John Press, Dallas, 2009, p. 42–45.

the reign of Salomon, where Ahishar was palace administrator (1 Kgs 4,6)³². To recognize his office by other king's stewards, prime minister receives symbol of unique authority, Key of the House of David (Is 22,22). Under the reign of king Hezekiah, Shebna was replaced in the chief steward office by Eliakim. New prime minister with receiving the key, simultaneously receives authority over all ministers and even over all Kingdom being the vicar of the king. This supreme authority is represented by the symbol of key.

Jesus, the new King sitting on the throne of David (Lk 1,32), appointing his twelve ministers, apostles (Lk 22,29–30), established the similar office in his New Kingdom, the Church by giving to Peter "Keys of the Kingdom" and delegated to him full and supreme power over the Universal Church. In other words, Peter receives what later theological reflection calls the *primacy of jurisdiction*.

Furthermore, in the Old Testament when the prime minister died, the new one was chosen, therefore the power of the key could pass for the next person. The same principle of succession refers to the New Testament chief steward Peter. When he dies he will be replaced by another person and this office will be continued without any change in the authority and dignity.

There is even more parallel between these two offices. In the Old Covenant steward and his successors were called fathers (Is 22,21) by the inhabitants of Jerusalem, therefore Peter and his successors being a new chief stewards in a New Covenant were called popes which means fathers³³.

This connection between Matthew 16,18 and the Isaiah 22,22 was seen by a lot of prominent protestant and catholic scholars, for instance, one of the best Protestant Bible scholar living in the XX century, F.F Bruce in this topic wrote: "And what about the 'keys of the kingdom'? The keys of a royal or noble establishment were entrusted to the chief steward or major domo; he carried them on his shoulder in earlier times, and there they served as a badge of the authority entrusted to him. About 700 B.C. an oracle from God announced that this authority in the royal palace in Jerusalem was to be conferred on a man called Eliakim: 'I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open' (Isaiah 22:22). So in the new community which Jesus was about to build, Peter would be, so to speak, chief steward"³⁴.

Some protestant scholars and apologists, for instance, Dr. James White who argued that there is no connection between Isaiah 22,22 and Matthew 16,18 as in Isaiah text there is used a singular key and in Matthew text there are keys in plural³⁵. Problem with this kind of argumentation is that it ignores an opinion of vast majority of Protestant and Catholic scholars who are saying that Jesus in this main

³² S. Butler, op. cit., p. 49.

³³ S.K. Ray, op. cit., p. 177.

³⁴ F.F. Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus*, III.: InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, 1983, p. 143–144.

³⁵ J. White, *The Roman Catholic Controversy*, Bethany, Minneapolis, 1996, p. 249.

Petrine text appoints a new prime minister of the kingdom. In one of the most exhaustive commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, protestant scholars summed up the authority of Peter given by Christ by saying: “Major opinion of modern exegetes, which has it that Peter, as a sort of supreme rabbi or *prime minister of the kingdom*, is in 16,19 given teaching authority (...). Peter can decide by doctrinal decision what Christians must and must not do. This is the traditional Roman Catholic understanding (...).”³⁶.

Secondly, Jesus is not only an earthly heir to the Davidic Kingdom but also he is an eternal King, therefore his kingdom has an earthly and heavenly dimension. Jesus has not only Key of David in Revelation 3,7 but also he has “keys to death and the netherworld” in Revelation 1,18. The reason why Peter receives plural keys is not that to distinguish it from the key of the House of David but to highlight that Christ is a two – fold king of the earthly and heavenly kingdom. He is given plural keys to Peter which symbolized a delegation of a plenary authority to a chief steward in the Kingdom of God based on Isaiah 22, 15–25 where the old steward received full authority in the symbol of the key of David.

Thirdly, Gospel of Matthew was written by a Jew to Jews. Their way of thinking was strictly Jewish. Jews in the first century expect the messiah, who being the king of Israel, will restore the kingdom of David – „Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is to come!” (Mk 11,10). Jesus did not question their beliefs, on the contrary He agrees with it. Such a statement leads us to several conclusions, for instance, there cannot be a kingdom without a king. Therefore Jesus must be the king and he truly is. Moreover, king does not rule alone. He has ministers in ruling the kingdom (1 Kings 4,1–2). Likewise Jesus established twelve Apostles as Jewish ministers in his Kingdom who „will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Lk 22,30). He did it not as he need them as he is God but he did it to fully restore the kingdom of David. Like I wrote before that in a kingdom, especially Davidic kingdom, one of the ministers was a prime minister. That is why, Jesus behaved like every single Jewish king would behave. He appoints chief steward, in this case blessed Peter. There would be no kingdom of God based on the dynasty of David, if there was no chief steward there. This is in accordance with the context of the Old and New Testament. Therefore, there is a straight link between Isaiah and Matthew as in both cases there is an appointment of chief stewards by the symbol of key in singular or keys in plural. In order to strengthen this line of argumentation, in the Old Testament there are only two instances where the symbol of key appears. One of them occurs in the book of Judges 3,25 where Benjaminite Ehud stabbed Eglon, king of Moab in an upper room. The king’s servants just took a key to open the door to the king’s chamber. This is insignificant

³⁶ W.D. Davies, Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 8–18: Volume 2 (International Critical Commentary)*, T & T Clark International, Bournemouth, 2004, p. 638, (emphasis added).

and unrelated to what Jesus did to Peter. The second and the last time where the key is mentioned is precisely in Isaiah 22,22. We ought to ask the question what could thought a Jew rooted in the Scriptures by hearing a phrase key or keys giving by the king to one of his ministers? To which Old Testament fragment with the image of the key he will go? The answer is very simple. In this case he will go to the only theologically significant passage in the Old Testament and there are not too many of them as there is only one from Isaiah 22,22. For Jews this is something obvious and clear. For this reason, a lot of protestant and catholic scholars, analyzing this text in the light of the jewish tradition came to the same conclusion. Anglican scholar R.T. France in his exegesis of Matthew 16 confirms this point of view by saying – “In that case Peter’s ‘power of the keys’ declared in [Matthew] 16:19 is not so much that of the doorkeeper (...) but that of the steward (as in Is 22:22, generally regarded as the Old Testament background to the metaphor of the keys here)”³⁷.

CONCLUSION

This article was intended to show that by looking from the jewish context into the well known fragment of the Gospel of Matthew 16,18–19, we can see that Peter receives from the Lord four new things. First and foremost, he receives the new name *petros* which means Peter, Rock. Secondly, he was promised that the Church will be personally build on him. Thirdly, Peter alone receives the “Keys of the Kingdom” which symbolize on the one hand the supreme authority in the Kingdom of God which is the Church and on the other hand the permanent office with its own succession. Fourthly, the Prince and Head of the Apostles also receives the power of “binding and loosing” which points not only to the unique authority – which is also shared by the other Apostles – but also to an infallible authority of saint Peter concerning the proper interpretation of the deposit of faith. This is beyond the honorific understanding of the dignity of this apostle.

Although, this study underlines the significant role of the Apostle Peter in the context of the 1st century AD it also responds to some objections raised by orthodox and protestant scholars. Therefore, taking all this into consideration the Catholic interpretation of the Gospel of Matthew 16,18–19 is the most logical and rooted in the context of the Old and the New Testament.

³⁷ R.T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1989, p. 247.

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