

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The Claims of the Papacy

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Our discussion of Rome's claims of authority would not be complete if we did not at least briefly examine Roman assertions regarding the Papacy.¹ If *sola scriptura* is not true, what does Rome offer in its place? As we saw in the previous chapter, Rome offers the teaching Magisterium of the church, and the pinnacle of the Magisterium is the Pope. As the new *Catholic Catechism* put it, "The task of interpreting the Word of God authentically has been entrusted solely to the Magisterium of the Church, that is, to the Pope and to the bishops in communion with him."²

The claims of the Papacy are extensive. There is no need to quote any of the personal statements of the various Popes who have spoken highly of themselves and their position. Plenty of official, dogmatic statements exist from which to draw to carefully and honestly define the claims of the Roman Catholic Church regarding the office and person of the Pope. For example, I offer as evidence the words of the First Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution entitled *Pastor aeternus*, given April 24, 1870:

We, therefore, for the preservation, safekeeping, and increase of the Catholic flock, with the approval of the sacred Council, do judge it to be necessary to propose to the belief and acceptance of all the faithful, in accordance with the ancient and constant faith of the universal Church, the doctrine touching the institution, perpetuity, and nature of the sacred Apostolic Primacy.

Please note that the Council claims that the teaching it will present is in full accord with the "ancient and constant faith of the universal Church." We continue:

We therefore teach and declare that, according to the testimony of the Gospel, the primacy of jurisdiction over the universal Church of God was immediately and directly promised and given to blessed Peter the Apostle by Christ the Lord. For it

¹ While an examination of the historical data that is opposed to modern Roman Catholic claims would be most useful, space does not allow it. The reader is strongly encouraged to read the fine presentations available on this topic. See William Webster, *The Church of Rome at the Bar of History* (Banner of Truth, 1995) as well as his fuller work on Matthew 16:18 titled *Peter and the Rock* (Battle Ground, Wash.: Christian Resources, 1996); George Salmon, *The Infallibility of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959), and the relevant sections of Philipp Schaff's *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

² Section 100.

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was to Simon alone, to whom he had already said, “Thou shalt be called Cephas,” that the Lord after the confession made by him, saying, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,” addressed these solemn words: “Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona, because flesh and blood have not revealed it to thee, but my Father who is in heaven. And I say to thee that thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatever thou shalt bind on earth, it shall be bound also in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven.” And it was upon Simon alone that Jesus after his resurrection bestowed the jurisdiction of chief pastor and ruler over all his fold in the words: “Feed my lambs; feed my sheep.” At open variance with this clear doctrine of Holy Scripture as it has been ever understood by the Catholic Church are the perverse opinions of those who, while they distort the form of government established by Christ the Lord in his Church, deny that Peter in his single person, preferably to all the other Apostles, whether taken separately or together, was endowed by Christ with a true and proper primacy of jurisdiction; or of those who assert that the same primacy was not bestowed immediately and directly upon blessed Peter himself, but upon the Church, and through the Church on Peter as her minister.

If anyone, therefore, shall say that blessed Peter the Apostle was not appointed the Prince of all the Apostles and the visible Head of the whole Church Militant; or that the same directly and immediately received from our Lord Jesus Christ a primacy of honor only, and not of true and proper jurisdiction: let him be anathema (*anathema sit*).

This position remains valid to this day. The Second Vatican Council borrowed directly from the language of the first in saying,

In order that the episcopate itself might be one and undivided, He placed blessed Peter over the other apostles, and instituted in him a permanent and visible source and foundation of unity of faith and fellowship. And all this teaching about the institution, the perpetuity, the force and reason for the sacred primacy of the Roman Pontiff and his infallible teaching authority, this sacred synod again proposes to be firmly believed by all the faithful.

The Roman Catholic writer Cardinal Gibbons wrote regarding the Papacy:

The Catholic Church teaches that our Lord conferred on St. Peter the first place of honor and jurisdiction in the government of his whole church, and that same spiritual authority has always resided in the popes, or bishops of Rome, as being

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the successors of St. Peter. Consequently, to be true followers of Christ all Christians, both among the clergy and laity, must be in communion with the See of Rome, where Peter rules in the person of his successor.³

What do these statements mean? What is Rome claiming concerning the Papacy? We will limit ourselves to an examination of the claims Rome makes regarding what she asserts to be the alleged biblical basis for the Papacy. Since the concept of the Papacy is central to a denial of *sola scriptura*, we need to examine any proposal that the Bible actually teaches or supports the concept itself. Also, an examination of the methods of biblical interpretation utilized by Rome in pressing the claims of the Papacy will show what is meant by the assertions that those teachings are at least “implicitly” contained in Scripture. Vatican I claimed that this is the “clear doctrine of Holy Scripture as it has been ever understood by the Catholic Church” (emphasis added). This document gives us an excellent opportunity for finding out how Rome comes to such “clear” conclusions based upon the biblical text.

The Roman Catholic Position

The Roman Catholic Church claims that Peter was placed in a position of primacy by the Lord Jesus. This primacy is one of honor, jurisdiction, and rulership.

According to the dogmatic teachings of the Church of Rome, this primacy given to Peter is presented in Matthew 16:18–19 and John 21:15–17. Peter is the rock of Matthew 16, and Christ, in conferring a primacy upon Peter, intends this to be understood to apply to Peter’s successors as well. They claim Christ is, in this passage, instituting the office of the Pope for the Christian Church. Rome further teaches that when Christ spoke to Peter and said “feed my sheep,” He was setting Peter apart as the pastor of all Christians in a manner different from all the other Apostles.

Further, Roman Catholicism teaches that Peter was the first bishop of Rome. Because of this, they avow that this primacy was passed on to his successors, the succeeding bishops of Rome.

And finally, this viewpoint has presumably been the ancient and constant faith of the Christian Church. Supposedly the Church has *always* believed this to be true. Anyone who would express a different perspective is holding to perverse opinions, and is, in fact, anathema. This is crucial: Roman Catholic theology makes this statement in an infallible document that places the curse of God upon anyone who would say otherwise. If we find that the Church has *not* always understood this doctrine as Rome now defines it, and that

³ John Cardinal Gibbons, *The Faith of Our Fathers* (Rockford, Ill.: TAN Books and Publishers, 1980), p. 78.

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the modern Roman Catholic doctrine of the Papacy is the result of centuries of theological and political development, we find an obvious and glaring error in an allegedly *infallible* pronouncement.⁴ And if the claim that the Papacy is the ancient and constant faith of the Church is in error, what other claims of Rome are likewise contradicted by the historical evidence?

The Burden of Proof Falls on Rome

In light of the preceding claims, it seems obvious that Rome must bear a tremendous burden of proof if it is to substantiate such broad and sweeping assertions. I feel it is incumbent upon the defender of Roman Catholic teaching to demonstrate the following:

- (1) Jesus is without question speaking to Peter in Matthew 16, and in so doing is identifying him as the rock upon which the Church is built.
- (2) The words the Lord Jesus speaks establish Peter as the “prince of the Apostles,” the very first pope, the head of the Christian Church.
- (3) These words of Jesus *necessarily* indicate the creation of an office of Pope, replete with successors and the associated powers.
- (4) And finally, that the Christian Church has always held this to be her constant and unchanging faith.

We must note that defenders of the Roman Catholic Papacy cannot merely demonstrate that the Roman position is *probably* true, or that it is *likely* to be true, but that it is true *beyond question*. Rome claims absolute authority in spiritual matters over all believers in Jesus Christ. She claims infallible teaching authority. The Papacy is not an issue about which one can be neutral. Pope Boniface made this quite clear in the papal bull, *Unam Sanctam*, promulgated November 18, 1302:

⁴ We recognize that the position that the Papacy was in fact founded directly by Jesus Christ, in the sense that it was functioning from the days of Peter onward, is not held by all Roman Catholics today. While this is certainly the position that has been held historically by Rome, and is plainly the assertion of Vatican I, modern apologists have realized that there are deep problems with this perspective. Therefore, we recognize that there are Roman Catholics who would not assert that we can find the Papacy functioning in the New Testament, for, as John Henry Cardinal Newman said in his book, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989),

While Apostles were on earth, there was the display neither of Bishop nor Pope; their power had no prominence, as being exercised by Apostles. In course of time, first the power of the Bishop displayed itself, and then the power of the Pope (p. 149).

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Consequently we declare, state, define, and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff.

A few moments of reflection on this statement will reveal how tremendously wide the claims of Rome for the Papacy are, and how, in reality, the denial of *sola scriptura* is absolutely *necessary* in order to establish this claim of absolute religious authority centralized in the person of the bishop of Rome, the Pope.

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Examination of the Roman Position

Before addressing the few passages cited by defenders of the Papacy, we must step back and ask the first and most necessary question: Does the New Testament as a whole lead us to believe that Peter was considered the head of the Church? Was Peter viewed as the Vicar of Christ on earth? Did Christians of his day think of him as the Holy Father? Did the other Apostles recognize Peter as their spiritual head and leader? Did they instruct people to obey Peter as the Pope? Does the New Testament lead us to believe that there was an office of Pope to which all Christians looked for guidance and on which the Church's unity itself was founded? And do we find in the words, actions, and writings of Peter evidence that he interpreted Jesus' words in Matthew 16:18–19 in the way modern Roman Catholics do?

We begin our brief New Testament survey by recognizing those truths that are not in dispute. Peter's name is prominent in the Gospel accounts. He is clearly the leading disciple. His name occurs more often than any other and almost always appears first in any listing given, which may simply reflect his being the oldest, or the first called. He is impetuous, often the first person to open his mouth—sometimes with God's blessing, sometimes to Peter's detriment.

For example, immediately after receiving the revelation from the Father concerning the identity of Jesus Christ in Matthew 16, Peter demonstrates his great fallibility by standing in the way of God's very plan of salvation. When the Lord Jesus begins to speak to His disciples concerning His coming death, Peter takes Him aside and begins to rebuke the Lord! Jesus' bold rebuke of Peter shows us Peter was not one to think through what he had to say before speaking.

The same thing happens on the Mount of Transfiguration. Luke records in the ninth chapter of his gospel that Peter spoke up in the presence of the glory of God, and of Moses and Elijah, saying, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Luke is kind to report at this point that Peter did not realize what he was saying (v. 33). If speaking up carelessly in the presence

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of Moses, Elijah, the transfigured Christ, and the glory of the Father is not indicative of impetuosity, I don't know what is.

No one disputes that Peter takes a prominent role in the Gospel records. However, to leap from prominence to primacy is wholly unwarranted on two counts. First, the Gospels themselves deny that any of the Apostles held a position of primacy. Secondly, the rest of the New Testament shows that Peter did not actually end up taking any supposed position of primacy.

In support of the first point, I call our attention to Luke 22:24–30. In this passage we are told that even as the disciples walked toward the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of Christ's betrayal, they got into an argument about who among them would be considered the greatest. This discussion comes right on the heels of the establishment of the Lord's Supper. Might the argument have arisen because John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, had been leaning on the Lord's breast immediately prior to this? Indeed, if the course of history had been different, and political and geographical factors had turned out to favor a church established by the Apostle John rather than one claiming Peter as its founder, we might be debating whether the description of John as the "disciple whom Jesus loved" does not establish Johannine primacy rather than Petrine.

Be that as it may, in light of the recurring arguments about who would be the greatest, it does not seem that the disciples understood the words of Matthew 16 to establish Peter as the foundation of the Church, the first Pope, the Vicar of Christ on earth. If that were indeed Christ's meaning, the argument would for all practical purposes be over. And we would find the Lord rebuking the remaining disciples and informing them that He had already chosen Peter as the first Pope, the head of the Church, the prince of the Apostles. But we do not hear this. Instead, He treats all the disciples alike and speaks of conferring on them all—not on Peter alone—a kingdom in which they would judge the twelve tribes of Israel. Indeed, immediately after this we find the Lord specifically praying for Peter's faith, because Peter, more obviously than any of the other disciples, would dishonor his Lord that evening in betrayal.

The second reason that leaping from Peter's prominence in the Gospel accounts to the Roman concept of primacy is improper and illogical is because the rest of the New Testament does not give us a hint of Peter's supposed supremacy. Let us look briefly at some of this evidence.

First, nowhere in the epistles of Paul or John or James or Jude do we find them ever referring their readers to Peter as a Pope, by name or description. At no time do they give us any indication whatsoever of the existence of an institution known as the Papacy.

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Peter, in his own letters, fails to give us the slightest suggestion that he views himself as a Pope, as the head of the Church on earth. On the contrary, he says in his first epistle:

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness (1 Peter 5:1–2).

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Peter does not speak as a Pope, but as a fellow elder. He does not speak as the chief pastor, but as a fellow pastor. There is no reference to Rome, the Papacy, or any other element of Roman Catholic claims in this epistle.

In Peter's second epistle the same is true. One would expect to find Peter, writing at the end of his life, directing Christians to follow his successor in the office of Pope, if indeed the Roman position were true. But no such exhortation appears. We have no evidence from Peter's pen that he views himself as a Pope or that he was even the bishop of Rome, for that matter. When Paul wrote to the Church at Rome in A.D. 55–57, it is plain that Peter was not there. When Paul was in Rome and was writing the prison epistles, he never mentioned Peter. In fact, in one place, those epistles make it clear that either Peter was not in Rome, or he had actually abandoned Paul! In 2 Timothy 4:16, written close to the end of his life, Paul writes that "no one supported me" at the first defense—a devastating charge against Peter *if* Peter had been at Rome at this time, for Paul asks that the Lord "not hold it against them." Indeed, if we take the view that Peter was the bishop of Rome, but was absent from the Church much of the time, it seems strange that either Peter never wrote to his own church, for we have no such letter, or that they did not think enough of the letter to keep it around as in the case of Paul's epistle to the Romans.⁵

If there is no evidence for the Papacy from Peter himself, we should hardly be surprised that none exists in Paul's writings. Instead, we find statements and actions that are contrary to the Roman position had it existed in the primitive Church. For example: Paul indicates that he was in no way inferior to the very chiefest Apostles in 2 Corinthians 12:11. Even if Paul had in mind here someone other than the real Apostles of Christ, we can see plainly that he did not have any concept of the Papacy in the structure of the Church, for he wrote to the Corinthians that God had placed in the Church "first apostles, second prophets, third teachers ..." (1 Corinthians 12:28). First the Pope, Peter, and *then*

⁵ The early tradition of the Church associates Peter with Rome throughout. Anyone going solely on the basis of the reports of the Fathers must conclude Peter was in Rome, at the very least at his death. But Rome has yet to seriously deal with the many biblical and chronological problems that face the assertion that Peter was there for any long period of time *functioning* as the bishop of the church in that city.

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the Apostles is simply not the biblical order. We hardly need to be reminded that in all of Paul's letters, in which we find discussions of Apostles, bishops, deacons, and all sorts of other positions of ministry in the Church, never is a word said about the most important office of all, the supposed office of the Pope. And the reason is plain: no such office existed.

Paul provides further evidence that he did not view Peter as Roman Catholics do today when he says in 2 Corinthians 11:28 that "apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches." If the care of all the churches was in fact Peter's responsibility, Paul would have been meddling in another man's work. But, of course, we see from his epistles that Paul had no concept of Peter as the appointed universal pastor of all Christians.

We might take Paul's epistle to the Galatians as a test case and ask, "Does this letter lead us to believe the Roman claim that Peter functioned as a Pope in the early Church?" The answer seems too obvious for comment. We begin by noting Paul's statement in Galatians 2:7: "But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised ..." In this verse we have a specific delineation of Peter's calling as an Apostle, and it is as an evangelist to the Jews. Had he not been used also to speak to the Gentiles? Indeed he had, but God was using Paul in that role at this time, and Peter was content to speak to the Jewish people. Nothing in this passage even hints that Peter is viewed as the prince of the Apostles, the Vicar of Christ on earth.

This is seen even more clearly in Galatians 2 in Paul's willingness to directly rebuke Peter's errant behavior at Antioch, when Peter withdrew from table fellowship with the Gentiles. Surely if Paul viewed Peter as the Pope, the head of all Christians, he would be far out of line to publicly rebuke him and accuse him of not walking in accord with the truth of the Gospel. But this is fully in line with all of the Pauline writings, in which you will not find a shred of evidence to support Roman claims concerning Peter. Epistle after epistle can pass in review without the slightest evidence of Petrine primacy. Even the Pastoral Epistles, with their extensive instruction on ecclesiastical matters, speak not a word about the Papacy or Peter or anything even remotely similar to Rome's assertions.

We cannot pass by the most crucial evidence with regard to Roman claims: The Book of Acts gives us the clearest insight into the function of the early Church. Here if anywhere we would find clear and unequivocal evidence of Petrine primacy and the function of the Papacy. Is such evidence there? No, we find just the opposite.

When the need arises to investigate what has happened in Samaria, is Peter acting as a Pope and directing the actions of the Church? No. In Acts 8:14 we read, "Now when the

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apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John..." Here Peter does not function as Pope, but as one of the apostles who is *sent* to investigate the situation.

In Acts 11 Peter is called to answer for his actions in going to Cornelius' house. Does he give evidence of Papal prerogatives here? Does he answer as Innocent III would have answered, or Alexander VI? Hardly. There is no mention of his position as Pope. Instead, rather than pleading his position as Vicar of Christ, Peter relates the supernatural vision and direction that had been given to him to proclaim the Gospel message to the Gentiles. This no more makes Peter a Pope than Paul's guiding vision in Acts 16.

In Acts 15 we read about a council of the early Church held at Jerusalem. Much has been made of this council and its relevance for claims of Petrine primacy. Let us note the important features of this account. In verse 6 we read, "The apostles and the elders came together to look into this matter." It does not say that the Pope and the apostles and the elders met. Peter is plainly considered an Apostle, as all the rest. The council is not under the direction of Peter. As the bishop of Jerusalem, James directs the proceedings. Peter addresses the group not as a Pope, but as an Apostle used by God to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. He concludes his speech as follows: "We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are" (v. 11, NIV).

The deliberations do not end with Peter's speech. Instead, we read in verse 12, "All the people kept silent, and they were listening to Barnabas and Paul as they were relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles." Paul and Barnabas address the group and confirm Peter's opinion by relating God's wondrous work in their own ministries. At this point James speaks up and, using the imperative mode (v. 13),⁶ commands the assembly to listen to his words. He confirms Peter's words through the citation of Scripture, then gives his judgment in verse 19. Here we have the conclusion of the affair. The letter is written at James' suggestion, but again in the name of the Apostles and elders, not in the name of Peter the Pope.

The words of Peter in Acts 15:11 are his final ones in this book. In fact, from this point on no mention is made of him who is said to be the very head of the Church Universal, the

NIV New International Version

⁶ James says, "Hear me!" using the imperative mode of the verb ἀκούω, ἀκούσατέ μου. He is also the only one who gives a judgment, as seen in verse 19, "I judge," in the Greek, ἐγὼ κρίνω, which is variously translated as "it is my judgment" (NASB), "my sentence is" (KJV), and "I have reached the decision" (NRSV). The other use of κρίνω in Acts is in chapter 7, verse 7, where God *judges* the nation that enslaves Israel.

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founder of the Church at Rome! Even when Paul's arrival in Rome is mentioned at the end of the book, Peter is not around.

And so we conclude our initial overview of the New Testament evidence with the plain fact before us that the concept of a Papacy, with Peter as its initial office holder, is nowhere to be found. Not only does the term itself not appear, but the office is not mentioned at all. Instead we find data from the pages of inspired Scripture showing that the early Christians did not look to Peter or to any bishop of Rome as the head of all Christians.

In light of the testimony of the entire New Testament, the Roman apologist must be able to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the few passages to which he appeals prove the establishment of the Papacy. We cannot accept the mere *possibility* that the Roman position is correct. Given the absence of the Papacy from all the rest of the New Testament, the few passages cited by Roman apologists such as Matthew 16 and John 21 *must* plainly and unequivocally establish Petrine primacy and succession in the office of the Pope. But do these passages accomplish this?

John 21:15–17

So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Tend My lambs." He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd My sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep."

Cyril of Alexandria (c. 370–444) demonstrates that the earliest and most logical understanding of this passage is that held by Protestants, not Roman Catholics. In commenting on this passage he said,

If anyone asks for what cause he asked Simon only, though the other disciples were present, and what he means by "Feed my lambs," and the like, we answer that St. Peter, with the other disciples, had been already chosen to the Apostleship, but because meanwhile Peter had fallen (for under great fear he had thrice denied the Lord), he now heals him that was sick, and exacts a threefold confession in

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place of his triple denial, contrasting the former with the latter, and compensating the fault with the correction.⁷

Here we have the gracious Lord restoring the Apostle who, in his brash impetuosity, had promised to follow Him even to death yet had denied Him three times. The threefold question of Peter, followed by the command to feed or shepherd Christ's sheep, is restorative in nature. Nothing in the passage even begins to suggest that Jesus' words mean that the other Apostles were not likewise commissioned to feed and pastor Christ's flock on an equal basis with Simon Peter. There is no indication that *only* Peter is told to shepherd God's flock. Indeed, if such were the case, Paul seems to have been ignorant of this injunction, for he instructed the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28: "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

Paul does not say, "Since Peter is the chief shepherd, you act as undershepherds of the flock of God." Let me reiterate. The only way that such an understanding can be found is if we take a much later development and read it back into the texts, as our Roman Catholic friends are forced to do. This passage in no way sets Peter apart as the prince of the Apostles. Instead, it shows that he was in need of special pastoral care on the part of Christ.

Luke 22:31–32

The next passage said to teach the concept of the Papacy is Luke 22:31–32, which reads:

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

Again we see that Peter's denial of the Lord is mentioned. The Lord warns Peter specifically that he is in danger, yet Peter replies rashly in verse 33, "Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!" To which the Lord replies that Peter will, in fact, deny Him three times. Roman Catholics have cited this passage as confirming once again the preeminence of Peter. Some have even gone so far as to say that the Lord's prayer for Peter's faith extends to Peter's successors, the bishops of Rome, so that their dogmatic teachings are infallible! This passage, like John 21, shows us nothing more than that Peter

⁷ As cited by George Salmon, *The Infallibility of the Church*, pp. 345–346, (B. C. Butler, *The Church and Infallibility: A Reply to the Abridged "Salmon"* [New York: Sheed and Ward, 1954], pp. 190–191) can only point to another reference in Cyril (Migne, *Patrologiæ Græcæ*, lxxii: 424) that refers not to John 21, but Matthew 16, which says the Lord appointed Peter "shepherd." Of course He did: just as He appointed the rest of the Apostles.

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needed pastoral care by the Lord due to his impetuosity. The Lord's prayer was fulfilled, for even having denied Christ, Peter, unlike Judas, went out and wept bitterly. But his faith did not fail completely, and he was restored and humbled, but wiser. To take this as indicating Petrine primacy, however, goes beyond anything the text says.

Some have said that Peter is set apart from the others by the phrase "and when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." Yet even here we find no basis for reading Papal prerogatives into the passage, for such terminology is common in the New Testament. For example, the term used here⁸ (14:22; 15:32; 15:41; 18:23) is used of Paul's confirming the churches of Syria and Cilicia, of Judas and Silas's confirming the brethren at Antioch, and of Timothy's confirming the Thessalonian Church. Amazingly, Paul uses the same Greek term in writing to the Church of Rome: "For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established" (Romans 1:11). And in Romans 16:25 Paul praises God, who is able to strengthen them according to *his* [Paul's] gospel! No mention is made of Peter at all!

So Peter is simply being instructed to strengthen his brothers after he himself is restored and strengthened by Christ. We all know that we are better able to share with others when we ourselves have gone through trials, which Peter most assuredly did after being restored to fellowship after his fall. No primacy or Papacy is found here.

The Key Passage and Final Refuge

Few would argue that the foundational passage on which the entire Roman Catholic claim for the Papacy rests is found in Matthew 16:13–20, verses 18–19 in particular. We are told that their *plain* meaning supports the concept. It should be noted that Rome has *infallibly* interpreted these verses in the words of Vatican I. It is one of the few passages of Scripture that have in fact been infallibly interpreted by the Roman Catholic Church (John 20:25–27 being another). Let's look at Matthew's record.

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

⁸ Greek: στηρίζειν is used four times in Acts.

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No one will deny that this is a singularly important passage. Here the Lord Jesus leads His disciples to a confession of faith in himself; the Father from heaven reveals the true nature of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Yet we find these verses being used to support a concept seen nowhere else in Scripture. We are asked to believe that not only is the impetuous and frail Peter made the very foundation of the Church itself, but that this foundational position creates an office of Pope, and that this office involves successors who will sit in the seat of bishop in the city of Rome, 1,500 miles distant.

Before we can discuss this passage, it is necessary to address the claim often made by Roman Catholic apologists: They say that we should imagine how Matthew's words would appear in Aramaic, assuming that they were spoken in that language. Some even go so far as to say that Matthew was originally written in Aramaic, though the modern opinion on the subject has changed over the past decades. We could spend much time arguing about whether Matthew was written in Aramaic; I could cite Alexander Bruce,⁹ G. H. Schodde,¹⁰ D. A. Carson,¹¹ and Robert Gundry.¹² But I shall simply allow the leading New Testament textual scholar, Kurt Aland, to summarize my position: "There is no longer any doubt that Greek was the language in which all the parts of the New Testament were originally written...."¹³

Much has been said by Roman Catholic apologists about what Matthew 16:18 would read in Aramaic. Some have asserted with complete confidence that they can tell us exactly what the Aramaic would be. Yet, is it not strange that when dealing with the central passage used to support the Papacy, they must appeal to a nonexistent, unknown "Aramaic original" that no one—no matter how great their scholarship—can possibly claim to be able to re-create with certainty?¹⁴

⁹ *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 1:11.

¹⁰ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 3:2010.

¹¹ *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:11–12.

¹² *A Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), p. 82.

¹³ *The Text of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 52.

¹⁴ If you are convinced that Jesus would have been speaking Aramaic at the time of this discussion, I would like to suggest for your reading the recent work of Chrys Caragounis, available in English translation under the title *Peter and the Rock* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1990). Caragounis provides compelling documentation against the theory that we have here in Matthew 16 a repetition of the Aramaic term *Kepha*, demonstrating that the evidence would more likely favor the use of the Aramaic term *minrah* for the phrase, "upon this rock I will build my church." In any case, the fact is plain that any supposed recreation of a supposed Aramaic original is merely supposition, and cannot in any way be taken as conclusive in any argument. The Gospel of Matthew with which we have to work is written in Greek, not in Aramaic. Since Roman Catholics claim that the Church decides the canon, and since the

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Anyone familiar with the comments of scholars on this passage is aware of the multitude of differing positions taken about it. I would first like to provide a straightforward interpretation of the verses, and then discuss some of the areas of dispute.

The central theme is the Messiahship of Jesus Christ. Any interpretation that takes the focus off of Jesus as Messiah is missing the point. Jesus' questions to the disciples about the opinions of the multitudes, and then their own viewpoints, are all directed toward His own person, His own identity. When Peter speaks up and confesses that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, he is confessing the faith of all the disciples, not merely his own. He often spoke for them all. Jesus' pronouncement of blessing upon Peter is not because of any inherent goodness in Peter but rather his being the recipient of a great blessing from the Father. To Peter has been revealed the true identity of Jesus Christ. And, of course, this revelation was given to the other Apostles as well. We can hardly think that they all sat there amazed at Peter's words, never having thought that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. The point of Jesus' words is that to reveal the Son requires the enlightening work of the Father. The same theme is seen in John 6, where no man can come to the Son unless drawn by the Father. In that same context, when all the disciples turned away from Jesus, save the twelve, it was Peter who spoke for the disciples again, saying, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68–69, emphasis added).

When the Lord says, "I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it," the focus does not change. The subject of the passage *remains* the identity of Christ, found in the confession of Peter. Jesus is not speaking of the identity of Peter; He is still talking about himself and His Church. This is evident by continuing on through verse 20, where we read, "Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ." Some modern scholars, having missed the fact that the focus remains on Christ all the way through, are so puzzled by this passage that they suggest that it is not original! But such conjecture is not necessary.

The rock of which the Lord speaks is that common confession made by all who are part of the Church: Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.¹⁵ This is seen, I believe, in the

Gospel of Matthew that Rome accepts as canonical is the *Greek* version of Matthew (no other being known), why should we need to appeal to some other unknown, unexaminable gospel to establish the Roman position?

¹⁵ Now it is true that there are many Protestant interpreters who identify Peter as the rock in Matthew 16. For example, Dr. William Hendrickson (*New Testament Commentary: The Gospel of Matthew*, [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973], p. 645) follows this course. However, he and the other Protestant interpreters that

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fact that while the Lord is addressing Peter directly, He changes from direct address to the third person, “this rock,” when speaking of Peter’s confession. He does not say, “Upon you, Peter, I will build my church.” Instead, you have a clear distinction between Peter, the Πέτρος (*Petros*), and the demonstrative pronoun preceding πέτρα (*petra*), the confession of faith, on which the Church is built.

This statement is followed by the promise to give the keys of the kingdom of heaven to Peter at some time in the future, so that what he binds on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever he looses on earth will be loosed in heaven. I emphasize this is a promise, for the verb is future in tense.¹⁶ Yet when we see this authority given in Matthew 18:18, it

might be cited are quick to reject any Papal pretensions that are placed upon this passage. Dr. Hendrickson presented three views that, he said, “must be rejected,” one view that is to be appreciated, and the one that he takes himself. The second view presented that “must be rejected” is that “This passage ... proves that Peter was the first Pope.” He then quotes the same passage from Cardinal Gibbon’s book *The Faith of our Fathers* that I cited at the beginning of this chapter, and responds to it as follows: “The passage does not support any such bestowal of well-nigh absolute authority on a mere man or on his successors.”

Similarly we find Dean Alford identifying Peter as the rock, but following this with the statement:

We may certainly exclaim with Bengel, “All this may be said with safety; for what has this to do with Rome?” Nothing can be further from any legitimate interpretation of this promise, than the idea of a perpetual primacy in the successors of Peter; the very notion of succession is precluded by the form of the comparison, which concerns the person, and him *only*, so far as it involves that direct promise. In its other and general sense, as applying to all those living stones (Peter’s own expression for members of Christ’s Church) of whom the Church should be built, it implies, as Origen excellently comments on it, saying, that all this must be understood as said not only to Peter, as in the letter of the Gospel, but to every one who is such as Peter here showed himself, as the spirit of the Gospel teaches us (*The New Testament for English Readers*, [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983], Vol. I, p. 119.)

Protestant interpreters who see Peter as the rock are clear in denying the Roman interpretation of the passage, insisting instead that this passage must be taken historically. Cullmann in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) Vol. I, p. 99, follows other Protestants in saying Peter is this, “only and not otherwise than as the Simon whom Christ has taken in hand,” that is, the *elected* Peter. They emphasize, as Dr. Frederick Dale Bruner in his work, *Matthew: A Commentary*, (Dallas: Word, Inc., 1990),

... the uniqueness, the historical once-for-allness, of Peter’s commission as rock. The text does *not* say “on this rock *and on his successors* I will build my church.” *Solus Petrus*. To take this text *literally* is to honor Peter only. Peter was given the first place by Jesus as the one who first confessed Jesus Christ the divine Son, and so Peter is made the first rock of the church. For the church is “built upon the foundation of the apostles [like Peter] and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20) (2:575).

These Protestants’ identification of Peter as the rock is of little assistance to the Roman position, for the fulfillment of Peter’s commission, as they see it, is directly *contradictory* to the Roman concept; that is, they see Peter using the keys in a *declaratory* manner in preaching the Gospel first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. No basis is admitted by these interpreters for an *office* of Pope in this passage.

¹⁶ Greek: δώσω, future of δίδωμι.

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is given not to Peter alone or even primarily to him. It is conferred on all the Apostles, using the *exact* same language¹⁷ regarding binding and loosing. If someone wishes to say that Peter receives the keys in distinction from the other Apostles, as their superior, they are also forced to admit that the actual giving of these keys is never recorded for us anywhere in Scripture, a strange thing indeed for something supposedly so fundamental to the constitution of the Church.

Now, a Roman Catholic may disagree with my interpretation. But my interpretation makes perfect sense. It does not require giant leaps of illogic to see how I have come to my conclusions. This position has been held by Christians from the earliest days of the Christian faith. If the Roman Catholic Church can present an equally likely interpretation, I believe it would fail. Because, as we have seen, Matthew 16 is the last bastion¹⁸ of the Roman cause. If concrete support for the Papacy is not here, then it is nowhere at all. And Rome cannot simply provide a possible alternative. She must be able to prove, beyond all question, the *impossibility* of all other interpretations. And she cannot do this.

The Early Church's Understanding

Rome's claim regarding John 21 and Matthew 16 is that these passages clearly teach Petrine primacy *in the sense given that phrase by Rome*. I note again the words of Vatican I:

¹⁷ Note a comparison of the words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 16:19 and 18:18. The only differences are due to the use of the singular in 16:19 and the plural in 18:18; the root words are identical:

Matthew 16:19: ὁ ἐὰν δήσῃς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται δεδεμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, καὶ ὁ ἐὰν λύσῃς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται λελυμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς

Matthew 18:18: ὅσα ἐὰν δήσητε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται δεδεμένα ἐν οὐρανῶ, καὶ ὅσα ἐὰν λύσητε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται λελυμένα ἐν οὐρανῶ.

¹⁸ I comment briefly on the novel attempt by Roman Catholic apologists to apply Isaiah 22 and the key to the house of David to Peter himself in Matthew 16. Such an attempted connection is logically necessary for the Roman position, for there must be some effort made to establish succession in this passage, for Matthew's words make no mention of it. Yet, upon what basis do we identify the *keys* (plural, Greek: κλειδας) of the kingdom of heaven, which are associated plainly with the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, with the *key* (singular, Greek: κλεῖν as cited in Rev. 3:7; some LXX manuscripts have "glory" instead of "key," while other manuscripts have the singular form of the term "key" κλείδαν. The Hebrew of Isaiah 22:22, מֶלֶךְ is singular as well) of the house of David, which is Messianic in nature? And should we not instead accept the interpretation given by the Lord Jesus himself, when he cites Isaiah 22:22 of *himself* in Revelation 3:7, "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this." Jesus has, present tense (Greek: ὁ ἔχων), the key of David. He does not say that He gives this key to anyone else. Indeed, when we look at how the Lord introduces himself in each of these letters, the descriptions set Him apart from all creatures. Should we not then reject such an obvious attempt at exegesis, and instead stay with the plain meaning of Scripture? I am unaware of a single Father of the Christian faith in the first 700 years of the Christian era who ever connected Isaiah 22:22 with Matthew 16, and then applied this to Peter's supposed successors.

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“At open variance with this clear doctrine of Holy Scripture as it has been ever understood by the Catholic Church are the perverse opinions of those who ... deny that Peter in his single person ... was endowed by Christ with a true and proper primacy of jurisdiction.” Is this the understanding of everyone down through Church history?

We begin with Luke 22:31–32, where the Lord prays for Peter’s faith and instructs him, when he has turned back, to strengthen his brothers. We see that the New Testament does not indicate that this made Peter a Pope, or the prince of the Apostles. Dr. Salmon notes with reference to the patristic aspect of the interpretation of this passage:

This prayer to Peter is so clearly personal that some Roman Catholic controversialists do not rely on this passage at all. Neither can they produce any early writers who deduce from it anything in favor of the Roman See. Bellarmine can quote nothing earlier than the eleventh century, except the suspicious evidence of some Popes in their own cause, of whom the earliest to speak distinctly is Pope Agatho in his address to the sixth general council, A.D. 680.¹⁹

We do not find the modern Roman interpretation of this passage in any of the writings of the early Church. But what of John 21? We have read the words of Cyril of Alexandria written in commentary on this passage, who provided not the Roman interpretation but the Protestant one. Remember that Vatican I tells us that the Catholic Church has *always* understood these passages, specifically Matthew 16 and John 21, in the way presented by Rome today. This is manifestly untrue. The existence of different interpretations, without the slightest evidence that those giving those interpretations were attempting to rebel against Apostolic doctrine, or to be perverse in their opinions, refutes the Roman contention. It also shows that these commentators did not find the constitution of the Church itself in these passages, as later claimed by Rome.

When we examine the early church writings that address the pivotal passage of Matthew 16:18–19, we find just as wide a variety of interpretations as we find in scholarly literature.²⁰ It is easy to understand why many Roman Catholic scholars felt it necessary to leave communion with Rome following Vatican I. Those who were even slightly familiar with patristic interpretation and concerned about truth could never say that the Church has *always* interpreted this passage as it is interpreted by that council. But before documenting this, I wish to quote an important passage from Dr. Salmon. After going through the various interpretations found in the patristic sources, he writes,

¹⁹ Salmon, *The Infallibility of the Church*, pp. 343–344.

²⁰ Webster provides a wonderfully complete survey of the patristic interpretation of the passage in *Peter and the Rock* (Battle Ground, Wash.: Christian Resources, 1996).

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But none of these can be reconciled with the interpretation which regards this text as containing the charter of the Church's organization. A charter would be worthless if it were left uncertain to whom it was addressed or what powers it conferred. So that the mere fact that Fathers differed in opinion as to what was meant by "this rock," and that occasionally the same Father wavered in his opinion on this subject, proves that none of them regarded this text as one establishing a perpetual constitution for the Christian Church.²¹

It is vital to note, then, that when the Roman Catholic advocate makes Matthew 16 the charter of the Papacy, he is separating himself from the early Church, which saw no such thing in this passage but instead allowed for a multiplicity of interpretations.

The French Roman Catholic Launoy surveyed the patristic evidence and found seventeen citations supporting the concept that Peter is the rock of Matthew 16. Please note that this does not mean that all sixteen of these Fathers also felt that this meant that the bishop of Rome was a Pope, but only that they saw Matthew 16 and the phrase "this rock" as referring to Peter. However, Launoy found sixteen citations that identified the rock as Christ. He found eight that identified all the Apostles together as forming the rock of Matthew 16. And he found forty-four citations indicating that the rock of Matthew 16 was the confession of faith made by Peter in Jesus Christ. If we add these numbers together, we find that the Roman position, which claims to have *always* been the faith of the Catholic Church, in Launoy's survey actually represents twenty percent of the Fathers. Eighty percent of the time, then, the early Fathers expressed, in Vatican I's words, "perverse" opinions at the very best.²² I might note that even as late as the Council of Trent it was said this passage was referring to the faith that Peter expressed.

Should one Roman Catholic's survey not be enough, we turn to the Jesuit Maldonatus, who writes,

There are among ancient authors some who interpret "on this rock," that is, "on this faith," or "on this confession of faith in which thou hast called me the Son of the living God," as Hilary, and Gregory Nyssen, and Chrysostom, and Cyril of Alexandria. St. Augustine, going still further away from the true sense, interprets

²¹ Ibid., p. 337.

²² Butler in his response to Salmon attempted to defuse this difficult reality by citing the work of Fr. Joseph Crehan. Crehan gave as those in favor of Peter as the rock, 16; in favor of the apostolic college, 6; in favor of Peter's faith, 17, and in favor of Christ, 4. This still adds up to 27 out of 43 (62.8%) giving a "perverse" opinion on the passage. Crehan's most intriguing attempt to explain *why* this is, found in Butler's footnote (pp. 190–191), is most instructive with reference to the lengths to which some will go to attempt to keep modern Roman statements "true."

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“on this rock,” that is, “on myself Christ,” because Christ was the rock. But Origen “on this rock,” that is to say, “on all men who have the same faith.”²³

Was Maldonatus correct? Most definitely so. Let’s look, for example, at Hilary’s statement regarding Matthew 16:18, as found in his work *De Trinitate*, book 6, chapter 37, written between A.D. 356 and 359:

This faith it is which is the foundation of the Church; through this faith the gates of hell cannot prevail against her. This is the faith which has the keys of the kingdom of heaven (p. 112).

Indeed, as one reads all of chapter 37, one finds Hilary referring to each of the prime texts on which the Papacy is built, including John 21 and Luke 22, and yet not once mentioning the Papacy! Can you imagine a modern Roman apologist citing all three of these passages and *not* mentioning the Papacy? How could Hilary be ignorant of such a basic truth? And how could he be joined by the likes of John Chrysostom or Gregory Nazianzus? How could these great men and preachers be ignorant of such a basic truth? Where does this “perverse notion” come from that the passage refers to the faith of Peter’s confession, and not to Peter himself? Was it not the common belief of Christians for centuries before that this passage referred to Peter, thus establishing the Papacy? Unless, perhaps, it was not a basic truth at all?

And what of the great Augustine? His most famous commentary on the passage is found in his *Retractiones*, written toward the end of his life. He writes,

I have somewhere said of St. Peter that the church is built upon him as the rock.... But I know that I have since frequently said that the word of the Lord, “Thou art *Petrus*, and on this *petra* I will build my church,” must be understood of him, whom Peter confessed as Son of the living God; and Peter, so named after this rock, represents the person of the church, which is founded on this rock and has received the keys of the kingdom of heaven. For it was not said to him: “Thou art a rock” (*petra*), but, “Thou art Peter” (*Petrus*); and the rock was Christ, through confession of whom Simon received the name Peter. Yet the reader may decide which of the two interpretations is the more probable.²⁴

I would point out that Augustine left his readers to decide how they would interpret the passage. We should think seriously about what it means that Augustine, the great bishop of Hippo, could think that how one views this passage is a matter of freedom, when

²³ Salmon, p. 335.

²⁴ As cited by Schaff, 3:306.

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Vatican I tells us it is a matter upon which the *anathema* can and should be used. Notice the huge movement in thought that has taken place between the early part of the fifth century and the latter part of the nineteenth.²⁵

A Brief Word on the Issue of Papal Infallibility

The great Princeton theologian Charles Hodge wrote regarding Papal Infallibility:

There is something simple and grand in this theory. It is wonderfully adapted to the tastes and wants of men. It relieves them of personal responsibility. Every thing is decided for them. Their salvation is secured by merely submitting to be saved by an infallible, sin-pardoning, and grace-imparting Church.... We know that when Christ was on earth men did not believe or obey him. We know that when the Apostles were still living, and their authority was still confirmed by signs, and wonders, and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, the Church was distracted by heresies and schisms. If any in their sluggishness are disposed to think that a perpetual body of infallible teachers would be a blessing, all must admit that the assumption of infallibility by the ignorant, the erring, and the wicked, must be an evil inconceivably great. The Romish theory, if true, might be a blessing; if false, it must be an awful curse.²⁶

And yet there is a great attraction toward the concept of an infallible guide in the person of the Pope. The idea that God has a “spokesman” of a sort on earth, to which the really tough questions can be addressed, attracts many faithful followers. The terminology used of the Pope reveals how deeply this desire is found in the heart of humankind. For example, the Pope is called the “Vicar of Christ on earth.” A vicar is a substitute, as in the term *vicarious*. The Pope functions in the place of Christ as the *earthly* head of the Church as Christ is the *heavenly* leader. This idea at first sight provides a sense of security and assurance. But when one considers it in the light of biblical teaching, one is struck by the

²⁵ In fact, I might note in passing that Dr. Fröhlich (in Pelikan, 3:47 as cited by Bruner, *Matthew: A Commentary*, 2:575) said, “The most astonishing fact is that in the entire Middle Ages, in contrast with the polemical literature of the period, specifically exegetical literature universally made the equation ‘rock-Christ’ not ‘rock-Peter.’ I am inclined to agree with William Cathcart in his work, *The Papal System* (Watertown, Wis.: Baptist Heritage Press, 1989) who wrote with reference to the patristic interpretation of the rock as Christ,

The same view of this Scripture was taken by other leading Fathers of the Church. And, outside of Rome, for the first five centuries of our era, no Christian Father of any note dreamt that this saying gave Peter the sovereignty of the Church (p. 77).

²⁶ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 1:130, 150.

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fact that the “Vicar of Christ” on earth, according to the Lord himself in John 14 and 16, is the Holy Spirit, not the bishop of Rome.

What of the concept of infallibility on the part of the Pope? The official declaration of this concept came out of the first Vatican Council that convened in 1870. The idea that the Church as a whole could not err is far older; only after the idea of the Pope as the universal head of the Church became fully established could the concept of infallibility move toward fulfillment in the person of the Pope. The specific claim limits the Pope’s infallibility to teachings addressed to the whole Church on matters of faith and morals. Some apologists use this to so limit the concept as to reduce the number of infallible teachings to a bare handful. Others recognize that this makes the entire concept rather meaningless and allow for a much wider application of Papal Infallibility.²⁷

If the biblical evidence for the Papacy is nonexistent, we should not be overly surprised that the concept of Papal Infallibility is likewise without support in the inspired Scriptures. It is, to borrow a phrase, a *theological novum* in the history of the Church, a concept unknown to the Apostles and the early Fathers of the Church. What is more, it stands inalterably opposed to the facts of history. Though space does not allow even a discussion of the historical reality of errors on the part of the Pope,²⁸ such is the case, and

²⁷ One could number Pope John Paul II in this group, for he said just recently to the staff of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (English translation taken from “Inside the Vatican” (January 1996), p. 13):

It is not possible, however, to overlook one of the decisive aspects that lies at the base of the malaise and uneasiness in certain parts of the ecclesiastical world: it is a question of the way authority is conceived. In the case of the Magisterium, authority is not exercised only when the charism of infallibility is invoked; its exercise has a wider field, which is required by the appropriate defense of the revealed deposit.

For a community based on shared adherence to the Word of God and on the resulting certainty of living in the truth, *authority for determining the content to be believed and professed is something that cannot be renounced* (emphasis added)... However, this does not entitle one to hold that the pronouncements and doctrinal decisions of the Magisterium call for irrevocable assent only when it states them in a solemn judgment or definitive act, and that, consequently, in all other cases one need only consider the arguments or reasons employed.

²⁸ The literature on this subject is vast. Almost any unbiased historical work on the history of the Church will provide the reader with more than sufficient data illustrating the errors of Popes of the past. I note the following areas to direct the reader toward useful information. I cannot do anything more than list these topics, knowing full well that Roman Catholic apologists have developed explanations for them—explanations that I strongly encourage the reader to examine, for I am confident that the reader will find them wanting. But I simply note the examples of Liberius, bishop of Rome, who signed the Arianized Sirmium Creed; of Pope Honorius, the monothelite who was anathematized by Councils and Popes as a heretic for centuries; of the condemnation by Popes of Galileo and his theories concerning the movement of the planets, etc.; and of Pope Sixtus and his “infallible” *Vulgate* version of the Bible (which ended up being anything but infallible). These examples were all raised by those Roman Catholic delegates at

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the attempts of Roman apologists to find ways of excusing these errors is most instructive.

Papal Infallibility is really the capstone of the entire denial of *sola scriptura*. We are told we can find an infallible guide in the person of the Pope, one who can speak for the Church without question on matters of faith and morals. It is impossible not to point out the simple fact that in this doctrine one finds the final step in a process that began with the first addition of a human tradition to the Scriptures: the process of replacing the Holy Spirit of God with a structure of man's making. Before one reacts too strongly to that statement, consider well to what I refer. Who is to take Christ's place when He ascends to heaven? The Holy Spirit. Who is to teach Christians and lead them into truth? The Holy Spirit. Who is to guide Christians and enlighten their minds to the truths of God? The Holy Spirit. It is not enough to say, "Well, the Church does all these things with the help of the Spirit." The truth of the matter is that the Holy Spirit's role has been taken over by the hierarchy of the Church, and the individual Christian is subject to that authority as a matter of his eternal salvation.

But the person who is subject to the authority of the Word of God cannot be subject to the Pope, having seen that the Papacy as an institution has no real basis in the Scriptures. I invite the individual Roman Catholic to look to the Scriptures *as the sole infallible source of God's revealed truth* so as to determine just how he or she *can* have peace with God. We come back, then, to the Gospel of peace, and we seek to come to the Scriptures not to find in them what we *want* to find, or what we are *told* to find by a Church, but what the Holy Spirit of God placed there when He breathed out those sacred words. To these we now turn, praying with the Psalmist,

Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law (Psalm 119:18).²⁹

Vatican I who opposed the definition of infallibility. But by various means the supporters of the doctrine silenced them, and the doctrine was promulgated despite their protests.

²⁹ White, J. R. (1996). *The Roman Catholic Controversy*, 103–124. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers.