

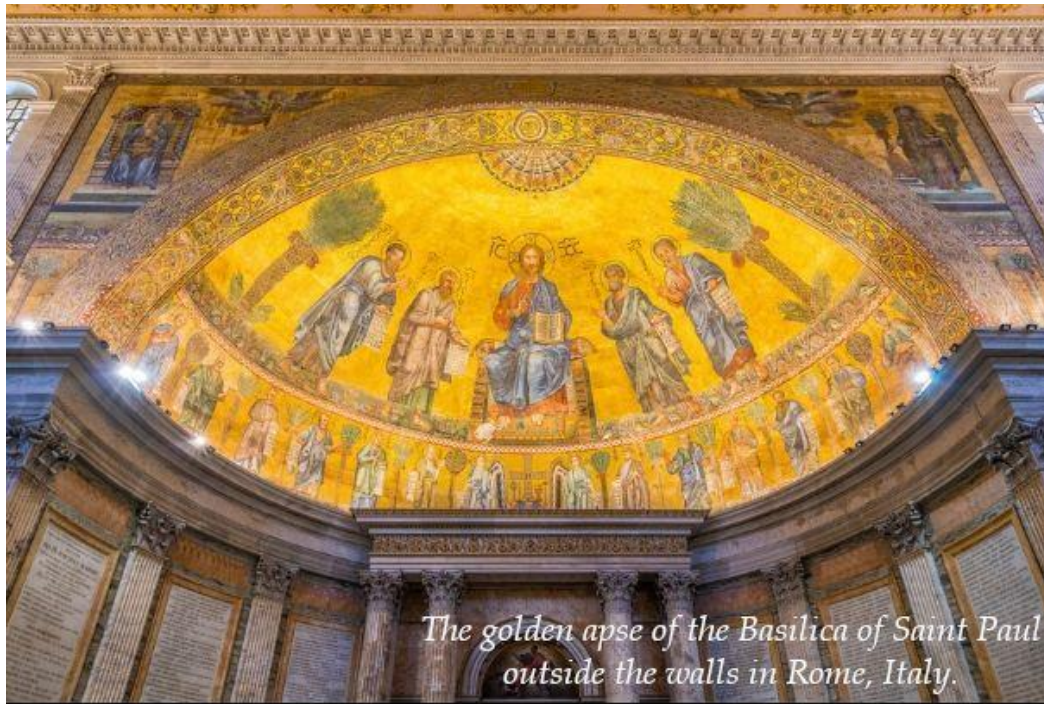
# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## What Think Ye of Rome—Part 4

### The Catholic-Protestant Debate on Papal Infallibility

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1



*The golden apse of the Basilica of Saint Paul  
outside the walls in Rome, Italy.*

#### SYNOPSIS

Papal infallibility was formalized at the First Vatican Council, A.D. 1870. It is required belief for Roman Catholics but is rejected by evangelicals. On examination, the major biblical texts used to defend this dogma do not support the Catholic position. Further, there are serious theological and historical problems with the doctrine of papal infallibility. Infallibility stands as an irrevocable roadblock to any ecclesiastical union between Catholics and Protestants.

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According to Roman Catholic dogma, the teaching magisterium of the church of Rome is infallible when officially defining faith and morals for believers. One manifestation of this doctrine is popularly known as “papal infallibility.” It was pronounced a dogma in A.D. 1870 at the First Vatican Council. Since this is a major bone of contention between Catholics and Protestants, it calls for attention here.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## THE DOCTRINE EXPLAINED

Roman Catholic authorities define infallibility as “immunity from error, i.e., protection against either passive or active deception. Persons or agencies are infallible to the extent that they can neither deceive nor be deceived.”<sup>1</sup>

Regarding the authority of the pope, Vatican I pronounced that

all the faithful of Christ must believe “that the Apostolic See and the Roman Pontiff hold primacy over the whole world, and that the Pontiff of Rome himself is the successor of the blessed Peter, the chief of the apostles, and is the true [vicar] of Christ and head of the whole Church and faith, and teacher of all Christians; and that to him was handed down in blessed Peter, by our Lord Jesus Christ, full power to feed, rule, and guide the universal Church, just as is also contained in the records of the ecumenical Councils and in the sacred canons.”<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, the Council went on to speak of “The Infallible ‘Magisterium’ [teaching authority] of the Roman Pontiff,” declaring that

when he speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when carrying out the duty of the pastor and teacher of all Christians in accord with his *supreme apostolic authority* he explains a doctrine of faith or morals to be held by the Universal Church, through the divine assistance promised him in blessed Peter, *operates with that infallibility* with which the divine Redeemer wished that His church be instructed in defining doctrine on faith and morals; and so such definitions of the Roman Pontiff from himself, but not from the consensus of the Church, *are unalterable*. [emphases added]<sup>3</sup>

Then follows the traditional condemnation on any who reject papal infallibility: “But if anyone presumes to contradict this definition of Ours, which may God forbid: let him be anathema” [i.e., excommunicated].<sup>4</sup>

### Qualifications

Roman Catholic scholars have expounded significant qualifications on the doctrine. First, they acknowledge that the pope is not infallible in everything he teaches but only when

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<sup>1</sup> Avery Dulles, “Infallibility: The Terminology,” in *Teaching Authority and Infallibility in the Church*, Paul C. Empie, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1978), 71.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, Roy J. Deferrari (London: B. Herder Book Co., 1957), no. 1826, 454.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 1839, 457.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 1840.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics

he speaks *ex cathedra*, as the official interpreter of faith and morals. Avery Dulles, an authority on Catholic dogma, states for a pronouncement to be *ex cathedra* it must be:

- (1) in fulfillment of his office as supreme pastor and teacher of all Christians;
- (2) in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, i.e., as successor of Peter;
- (3) determining a doctrine of faith and morals, i.e., a doctrine expressing divine revelation;
- (4) imposing a doctrine to be held definitively by all.<sup>5</sup>

Dulles notes that “Vatican I firmly rejected one condition...as necessary for infallibility, namely, the consent of the whole church.”<sup>6</sup>

Second, the pope is not infallible when pronouncing on matters that do not pertain to “faith and morals.” On these matters he may be as fallible as anyone else.

Third, although the pope is infallible, he is not *absolutely* so. As Dulles observes, “absolute infallibility (in all respects, without dependence on another) is proper to God. ... All other infallibility is derivative and limited in scope.”<sup>7</sup>

Fourth, infallibility entails irrevocability. A pope cannot, for example, declare previous infallible pronouncements of the church void.

Finally, in contrast to Vatican I, many (usually liberal or progressive) Catholic theologians believe that the pope is not infallible *independent* of the bishops but only as he speaks in one voice with and for them in collegiality. As Dulles noted, infallibility “is often attributed to the bishops as a group, to ecumenical councils, and to popes.”<sup>8</sup> Conservatives argue that Vatican I condemned this view.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Dulles, 79-80.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> They appeal to Denzinger 1839 to support their view.

<sup>9</sup> Eastern Orthodoxy is willing to accept the bishop of Rome as “first among equals,” a place of honor coming short of the total superiority Roman Catholics ascribe to the pope.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## A PROTESTANT RESPONSE

Not only Protestants but the rest of Christendom — Anglicans and Eastern Orthodox included — reject the doctrine of papal infallibility.<sup>10</sup> Protestants accept the infallibility of Scripture but deny that any human being or institution is the infallible interpreter of Scripture. Harold O. J. Brown writes: “In every age there have been those who considered the claims of a single bishop to supreme authority to be a sure identification of the corruption of the church, and perhaps even the work of the Antichrist. Pope Gregory I (A.D. 590-604) indignantly reproached Patriarch John the Faster of Constantinople for calling himself the universal bishop; Gregory did so to defend the rights of all the bishops, himself included, and not because he wanted the title for himself.”<sup>11</sup>

4

### Biblical Problems

There are several texts Catholics use to defend the infallibility of the bishop of Rome. We will focus here on the three most important of these.

**Matthew 16:18ff.** Roman Catholics use the statement of Jesus to Peter in Matthew 16:18ff. that “upon this rock I will build my church...” to support papal infallibility. They argue that the truth of the church could only be secure if the one on whom it rested (Peter) were infallible. Properly understood, however, there are several reasons this passage falls far short of support for the dogma of papal infallibility.

First, many Protestants insist that Christ was not referring to Peter when he spoke of “this rock” being the foundation of the church.<sup>12</sup> They note that: (1) Whenever Peter is referred to in this passage it is in the second person (“you”), but “this rock” is in the third person. (2) “Peter” (*petros*) is a masculine singular term and “rock” (*petra*) is feminine singular. Hence, they do not have the same referent. And even if Jesus did speak these words in Aramaic (which does not distinguish genders), the inspired Greek original *does* make such distinctions. (3) What is more, the same authority Jesus gave to Peter (Matt. 16:18) is given later to all the apostles (Matt. 18:18). (4) Great authorities, some Catholic, can be cited in agreement with this interpretation, including John Chrysostom and St. Augustine. The latter wrote: “On this rock, therefore, He said, which thou hast confessed. I will build my Church. For the Rock (*petra*) is Christ; and on this foundation was Peter himself built.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Harold O. J. Brown, *The Protest of a Troubled Protestant* (New York: Arlington House, 1969), 122.

<sup>11</sup> See James R. White, *Answers to Catholic Claims* (Southbridge, MA: Crowne Publications, 1990), 104-8.

<sup>12</sup> Augustine, “On the Gospel of John,” Tractate 12435, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series I* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983), 7:450, as cited in, n. 106.

<sup>13</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960) 4:6,4, p. 1105.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Second, even if Peter is the rock referred to by Christ, as even some non-Catholic scholars believe, he was not the *only* rock in the foundation of the church. Jesus gave all the apostles the same power (“keys”) to “bind” and “loose” that he gave to Peter (cf. Matt. 18:18). These were common rabbinic phrases used of “forbidding” and “allowing.” These “keys” were not some mysterious power given to Peter alone but the power granted by Christ to His church by which, when they proclaim the Gospel, they can proclaim God’s forgiveness of sin to all who believe. As John Calvin noted, “Since heaven is opened to us by the doctrine of the gospel, the word ‘keys’ affords an appropriate metaphor. Now men are bound and loosed in no other way than when faith reconciles some to God, while their own unbelief constrains others the more.”<sup>14</sup>

Further, Scripture affirms that the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone” (Eph. 2:20). Two things are clear from this: first, all the apostles, not just Peter, are the foundation of the church; second, the only one who was given a place of uniqueness or prominence was Christ, the capstone. Indeed, Peter himself referred to Christ as “the cornerstone” of the church (1 Pet. 2:7) and the rest of believers as “living stones” (v. 4) in the superstructure of the church. There is no indication that Peter was given a special place of prominence in the foundation of the church above the rest of the apostles and below Christ. He is one “stone” along with the other eleven apostles (Eph. 2:20).

Third, Peter’s role in the New Testament falls far short of the Catholic claim that he was given unique authority among the apostles for numerous reasons.<sup>15</sup>

- (1) While Peter did preach the initial sermon on the day of Pentecost, his role in the rest of Acts is scarcely that of the chief apostle but at best *one of* the “most eminent apostles” (plural, 2 Cor. 21:11, NKJV).
- (2) No one reading Galatians carefully can come away with the impression that any apostle, including Peter, is superior to the apostle Paul. For he claimed to get his revelation independent of the other apostles (Gal. 1:12; 2:2) and to be on the same level as Peter (2:8), and he even used his revelation to rebuke Peter (2:11-14).
- (3) Indeed, if Peter was the God-ordained superior apostle, it is strange that more attention is given to the ministry of the apostle Paul than to that of Peter in the

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<sup>14</sup> Many of these arguments are found in White, 101-2.

<sup>15</sup> One cannot, as some Catholic scholars do, dismiss this dominant focus on St. Paul rather than Peter on the circumstantial fact that Luke wrote more about Paul because he was his travel companion. After all, it was the Holy Spirit who inspired what Luke wrote.



# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Book of Acts. Peter is the central figure among many in chapters 1-12, but Paul is *the* dominant focus of chapters 13-28.<sup>16</sup>

(4) Furthermore, though Peter addressed the first council (in Acts 15), he exercised no primacy over the other apostles. Significantly, the decision came from “the apostles and presbyters, in agreement with the whole church” (15:22; cf. v. 23). Many scholars believe that James, not Peter, exercised leadership over the council, since he brought the final words and spoke decisively concerning what action should be taken (vv. 13-21).<sup>17</sup>

(5) In any event, by Peter’s own admission he was not *the* pastor of the church but only a “*fellow* presbyter [elder]” (1 Pet. 5:1-2, emphasis added). And while he did claim to be “*an* apostle” (1 Pet. 1:1) he nowhere claimed to be “*the* apostle” or the chief of apostles. He certainly was a leading apostle, but even then he was only one of the “pillars” (plural) of the church along with James and John, not *the* pillar (see Gal. 2:9).

This is not to deny that Peter had a significant role in the early church; he did. He even seems to have been the initial leader of the apostolic band. As already noted, along with James and John he was one of the “pillars” of the early church (Gal. 2:9). For it was he that preached the great sermon at Pentecost when the gift of the Holy Spirit was given, welcoming many Jews into the Christian fold. It was Peter also who spoke when the Spirit of God fell on the Gentiles in Acts 10. From this point on, however, Peter fades into the background and Paul is the dominant apostle, carrying the gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 13-28), writing some one-half of the New Testament (as compared to Peter’s two epistles), and even rebuking Peter for his hypocrisy (Gal. 2:11-14). In short, there is no evidence in Matthew 16 or any other text for the Roman Catholic dogma of the superiority, to say nothing of the infallibility, of Peter. He did, of course, write two infallible books (1 and 2 Peter), as did other apostles.

**John 21:15ff.** In John 21:15ff. Jesus says to Peter, “Feed my lambs” and “Tend my sheep” and “Feed my sheep” (vv. 15, 16, 17). Roman Catholic scholars believe this shows that Christ made Peter the supreme pastor of the church. This means he must protect the church from error, they say, and to do so he must necessarily be infallible. But this is a serious overclaim for the passage.

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<sup>16</sup> See F. F. Bruce, *Peter, Stephen, James and John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 86ff.

<sup>17</sup> This is the literal rendering given in the Roman Catholic *New American Bible* of Galatians 2:11.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

First, whether this text is taken of Peter alone or of all the disciples, there is absolutely no reference to any infallible authority. Jesus' concern here is simply a matter of pastoral care. Feeding is a God-given pastoral function that even nonapostles have in the New Testament (cf. Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Pet. 5:1-2). One does not have to be an infallible shepherd in order to feed one's flock properly.

Second, if Peter had infallibility (the ability not to mislead), then why did he mislead believers and have to be rebuked by the apostle Paul for so doing? The infallible Scriptures, accepted by Roman Catholics, declared of Peter on one occasion, "He clearly was wrong" and "stood condemned."<sup>18</sup> Peter and others "acted hypocritically...with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy." And hypocrisy here is defined by the Catholic Bible (NAB) as "pretense, play-acting; moral insincerity." It seems difficult to exonerate Peter from the charge that he led believers astray. And this failing is hard to reconcile with the Roman Catholic claim that, as the infallible pastor of the church, he could never do so! The Catholic response — that Peter was not infallible in his actions, only his *ex cathedra* words — rings hollow when we remember that "actions speak louder than words." By his actions he was teaching other believers a false doctrine concerning the need for Jewish believers to separate themselves from Gentile believers. The fact is that Peter cannot be both an infallible guide for faith and morals and also at the same time mislead other believers on the important matter of faith and morals of which Galatians speaks.

Third, in view of the New Testament terminology used of Peter it is clear that he would never have accepted the titles used of the Roman Catholic pope today: "Holy Father" (cf. Matt. 23:9), "Supreme Pontiff," or "Vicar of Christ." The only vicar (representative) of Christ on earth today is the blessed Holy Spirit (John 14:16, 26). As noted earlier, Peter referred to himself in much more humble terms as "*an* apostle," not *the* apostle (1 Pet. 1:1, emphasis added) and "*fellow*-presbyter [elder]" (1 Pet. 5:1, emphasis added), not the supreme bishop, the pope, or the Holy Father.

**John 11:49-52.** In John 11:49-52 Caiaphas, the High Priest, in his official capacity as High Priest, made an unwitting prophecy about Christ dying for the nation of Israel so that they would not perish. Some Catholics maintain that in the Old Testament the High Priest had an official revelatory function connected with his office, and therefore we should expect an equivalent (namely, the pope) in the New Testament. However, this argument is seriously flawed. First, this is merely an argument from analogy and is not based on any New Testament declaration that it is so. Second, the New Testament affirmations made about the Old Testament priesthood reject that analogy, for they say explicitly that

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<sup>18</sup> See John Jefferson Davis, *Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994). Also see Ott, 238.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

the Old Testament priesthood has been abolished. The writer to the Hebrews declared that “there is a change of priesthood” from that of Aaron (Heb. 7:12). The Aaronic priesthood has been fulfilled in *Christ* who is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 7:15-17). Third, even Catholics acknowledge that there is no new revelation after the time of the New Testament function. So no one (popes included) after the first century can have a revelatory function in the proper sense of giving new revelations. Finally, there is a New Testament revelatory function like that of the Old, but it is in the New Testament “apostles and prophets” (cf. Eph. 2:20; 3:5), which revelation ceased when they died. To assume a revelatory (or even infallible defining) function was passed on after them and is resident in the bishop of Rome is to beg the question.

8

In addition to a total lack of support from the Scriptures, there are many other arguments against papal infallibility. We will divide them into theological and historical arguments.

## Theological Problems

There are serious theological problems with papal infallibility. One is the question of heresy being taught by an infallible pope.

***The Problem of Heretical Popes.*** Pope Honorius I (A.D. 625-638) was condemned by the Sixth General Council for teaching the monothelite heresy (that there was only one will in Christ<sup>19</sup>). Even Roman Catholic expert, Ludwig Ott, admits that “Pope Leo II (682-683) confirmed his anathematization...”<sup>20</sup> This being the case, we are left with the incredible situation of an infallible pope teaching a fallible, indeed *heretical*, doctrine. If the papal teaching office is infallible — if it cannot mislead on doctrine and ethics — then how could a papal teaching be heretical? This is misleading in doctrine in the most serious manner.

To claim that the pope was not infallible on this occasion is only to further undermine the doctrine of infallibility. How can one know just when his doctrinal pronouncements are infallible and when they are not? There is no infallible list of which are the infallible pronouncements and which are not.<sup>21</sup> But without such a list, how can the Roman

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<sup>19</sup> Ott, 150.

<sup>20</sup> Catholic apologists claim there are objective tests, such as: Was the pope speaking (1) to all believers, (2) on faith and morals, and (3) in his official capacity as pope (*see* Ott, 207). But these are not definitive as to which pronouncements are infallible for several reasons. First, there is no infallible statement on just what these criteria are. Second, there is not even universal agreement on what these criteria are. Third, there is no universal agreement on how to apply these or any criteria to all cases.

<sup>21</sup> Ott, 150.



# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Catholic church provide infallible guidance on doctrine and morals? If the pope can be fallible on one doctrine, why cannot he be fallible on another?

Further, Ott's comment that Pope Leo did not condemn Pope Honorius with heresy but with "negligence in the suppression of error" is ineffective as a defense.<sup>22</sup> First, it still raises serious questions as to how Pope Honorius could be an infallible guide in faith and morals, since he taught heresy. And the Catholic response that he was not speaking *ex cathedra* when he taught this heresy is convenient but inadequate. Indeed, invoking such a distinction only tends to undermine faith in the far more numerous occasions when the pope is speaking with authority but not with infallibility.

Second, it does not explain the fact that the Sixth General Council did condemn Honorius as a heretic, as even Ott admits.<sup>23</sup> Was this infallible Council in error?

Finally, by disclaiming the infallibility of the pope in this and like situations, the number of occasions on which infallible pronouncements were made is relatively rare. For example, the pope has officially spoken *ex cathedra* only one time this whole century (on the Bodily Assumption of Mary)! If infallibility is exercised only this rarely then its value for all practical purposes on almost all occasions is null. This being the case, since the pope is only speaking with fallible authority on the vast majority of occasions, the Catholic is bound to accept his authority on faith and morals when he may (and sometimes has been) wrong. In short, the alleged infallible guidance the papacy is supposed to provide is negligible at best. Indeed, on the overwhelming number of occasions there is no infallible guidance at all.

***The Problem of Revelational Insufficiency.*** One of the chief reasons given by Catholic authorities as to the need for an infallible teaching magisterium is that we need infallible guidance to understand God's infallible revelation. Otherwise it will be misinterpreted as with the many Protestant sects. To this the Protestant must respond, How is an infallible interpretation any better than the infallible revelation? Divine revelation is a disclosure or unveiling by God. But to claim, as Catholics do, that God's infallible unveiling in the Bible needs further infallible unveiling by God is to say that it was not unveiled properly to begin with.

To be sure, there is a difference between objective disclosure (revelation) and subjective discovery (understanding). But the central problem in this regard is not in the *perception* of God's truth. Even His special revelation is "evident" and "able to be understood"

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 66. See also, A. Mercati, "The New List of the Popes," in *Medieval Studies*, ix (1947), 71-80.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

(Rom. 1:19-20). Our most significant problem with regard to the truth of God's revelation is *reception*. Paul declared that "the natural person does not *accept* [Gk: *dekomai*, welcome, receive] what pertains to the Spirit of God..." (1 Cor. 2:14). He cannot "know" (*ginosko*: know by experience) them because he does not receive them into his life, even though he understands them in his mind. So even though there is a difference between objective disclosure and subjective understanding, humans are "without excuse" for failing to understand the objective revelation of God, whether in nature or in Scripture (Rom. 1:20).

In this regard it is interesting that Catholic theology itself maintains that unbelievers should and can understand the truth of *natural* law apart from the teaching magisterium. Why then should they need an infallible teaching magisterium in order to properly understand the more explicit *divine* law?

It seems singularly inconsistent for Catholic scholars to claim they need another mind to interpret Scripture correctly for them when the mind God gave them is sufficient to interpret everything else, including some things much more difficult than Scripture. Many Catholic scholars, for example, are experts in interpreting classical literature, involving both the moral and religious meaning of those texts. Yet these same educated minds are said to be inadequate to obtain a reliable religious and moral interpretation of the texts of their own Scriptures.

Furthermore, it does not take an expert to interpret the crucial teachings of the Bible. The New Testament was written in the vernacular of the times, the trade-language of the first century, known as *koine* Greek. It was a book written in the common, everyday language for the common, everyday person. Likewise, the vast majority of English translations of the Bible are also written in plain English, including Catholic versions. The essential truths of the Bible can be understood by any literate person. In fact, it is an insult to the intelligence of the common people to suggest that they can read and understand the daily news for themselves but need an infallible teaching magisterium in order to understand God's Good News for them in the New Testament.

***The Problem of Indecisiveness of the Teaching Magisterium.*** There is another problem with the Catholic argument for an infallible teaching magisterium: if an infallible teaching magisterium is needed to overcome the conflicting interpretations of Scripture, why is it that even these "infallibly" decisive declarations are also subject to conflicting interpretations? There are many hotly disputed differences among Catholic scholars on just what *ex cathedra* statements mean, including those on Scripture, tradition, Mary, and justification. Even though there may be future clarifications on some of these, the problem remains for two reasons. First, it shows the indecisive nature of supposedly infallible pronouncements. Second, judging by past experience, even these future declarations will not settle all matters completely. Pronouncements on the inerrancy of Scripture are a case

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

in point. Despite “infallible” statements, there is strong disagreement among Catholics on whether the Bible is really infallible in all matters or only on matters of salvation.

## Historical Problems

In addition to biblical and theological problems, there are serious historical problems with the Catholic claim for infallibility. Two are of special note here.

11

*The Problem of the Antipopes.* Haunting the history of Roman Catholicism is the scandalous specter of having more than one infallible pope at the same time — a pope and an antipope. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* says, “there have been about thirty-five antipopes in the history of the Church.”<sup>24</sup> How can there be two infallible and opposing popes at the same time? Which is the true pope? Since there is no infallible list of popes or even an infallible way to determine who is the infallible pope, the system has a serious logical problem. Further, this difficulty has had several actual historical manifestations which bring into focus the whole question of an infallible pope.<sup>25</sup>

Catholic apologists claim that there were not really two popes, since only one can be infallible. However, since the faithful have no way to know for sure which one is the pope, which one should they look to for guidance? Each pope can excommunicate the other (and sometimes have). This being the case, claiming that only one is the real pope is at best only a theoretical solution. It does not solve the practical problem of which pope should be followed.

*The Problem of Galileo.* Perhaps one of the greatest embarrassments to the “infallible” church is its fallible judgment about Galileo Galilei (A.D. 1564-1642), generally known as Galileo. In opposition to Galileo and the Copernican solar-centric theory he adopted, the Catholic church sided with the scientifically outdated Ptolemaic geocentric universe.

In A.D. 1616, the Copernican theory was condemned at Rome.<sup>26</sup> Aristotelian scientists, the Jesuits, the Dominicans, and three popes (Paul V, Gregory XV, and Urban VIII), played key roles in the controversy. Galileo was summoned by the Inquisition in 1632, tried, and on June 21, 1633, pronounced “vehemently suspected of heresy.” Eventually Pope Urban VIII allowed Galileo to return to his home in Florence, where he remained under house arrest until his death in 1642.

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<sup>24</sup> See Jarislov Pelikan, *The Riddle of Roman Catholicism* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), 40.

<sup>25</sup> *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 15 vols., prepared by an editorial staff at the Catholic University of America, Washington, DC (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1967), vol. 6, 252.

<sup>26</sup> Brown, 177, n. 4.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

After the church had suffered many centuries of embarrassment for its condemnation of Galileo, on November 10, 1979, Pope John Paul II spoke to the Pontifical Academy of Science. In the address titled, "Faith, Science and the Galileo Case," the pope called for a reexamination of the whole episode.<sup>27</sup> On May 9, 1983, while addressing the subject of the church and science, John Paul II conceded that "Galileo had 'suffered from departments of the church.'"<sup>28</sup> This, of course, is not a clear retraction of the condemnation, nor does it solve the problem of how an infallible pronouncement of the Catholic church could be in error.

Roman Catholic responses to the Galileo episode leave something to be desired. One Catholic authority claims that while both Paul V and Urban VIII were committed anti-Copernicans, their pronouncements were not *ex cathedra*. The decree of A.D. 1616 "was issued by the Congregation of the Index, which can raise no difficulty in regard of infallibility, this tribunal being absolutely incompetent to make a dogmatic decree."<sup>29</sup> As to the second trial in 1633, which also resulted in a condemnation of Galileo, this sentence is said to be of lesser importance because it "did not receive the Pope's signature."<sup>30</sup> Another Catholic authority states that although the theologians' treatment of Galileo was inappropriate, "the condemnation was the act of a Roman Congregation and in no way involved infallible teaching authority."<sup>31</sup> Still another source observes, "The condemnation of Galileo by the Inquisition had nothing to do with the question of papal infallibility, since no question of faith or morals was papally condemned *ex cathedra*."<sup>32</sup> And yet another Catholic apologist suggests that, although the decision was a "regrettable" case of "imprudence," there was no error made by the pope, since Galileo was not really condemned of heresy but only strongly suspected of it.

None of these ingenious solutions is very convincing, having all the earmarks of after-the-fact tinkering with the pronouncements that resulted from this episode. Galileo and his opponents would be nonplussed to discover that the serious charges leveled against him were not "*ex cathedra*" in force. And in view of the strong nature of both the condemnation and the punishment, he would certainly be surprised to hear Catholic

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* See also "Discourse to Scientists on the 350th Anniversary of the Publication of Galileo's 'Dialoghi,'" in J. Neuner, S.J. and J. Dupuis, S.J., eds., *The Christian Faith: Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* (New York: Alba House, 1990), 68.

<sup>28</sup> Charles G. Herbermann, et al., *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 15 vols. and index (New York: Robert Appleton Co., 1909), vol. 6, 345.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 346.

<sup>30</sup> *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 6, 254.

<sup>31</sup> "Galileo Galilei," in John J. Delaney and James E. Tobin, *Dictionary of Catholic Biography* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1961), 456.

<sup>32</sup> See William G. Most, *Catholic Apologetics Today: Answers to Modern Critics* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books and Publishers, 1986), 168-69.

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

apologists claim that he was not really being condemned for false teaching but only that “his ‘proof’ did not impress even astronomers of that day — nor would they impress astronomers today”!<sup>33</sup> <sup>33</sup>

At any rate, the pope’s condemnation of Galileo only leads to undermine the alleged infallibility of the Catholic church. Of course, Catholic apologists can always resort to their apologetic warehouse — the claim that the pope was not really speaking infallibly on that occasion. As we have already observed, however, constant appeal to this nonverifiable distinction only tends to undermine the very infallibility it purports to defend.

## AN IMPASSABLE ROADBLOCK

Despite the common creedal and doctrinal heritage of Catholics and Protestants, there are some serious differences.<sup>34</sup> None of these is more basic than the question of authority. Catholics affirm *de fide*, as an unchangeable part of their faith, the infallible teaching authority of the Roman church as manifested in the present bishop of Rome (the pope). But what Catholics affirm “infallibly” Protestants deny emphatically. This is an impassable roadblock to any ecclesiastical unity between Catholicism and orthodox Protestantism. No talk about “first among equals” or “collegiality” will solve the problem. For the very concept of an infallible teaching magisterium, however composed, is contrary to the basic Protestant principle of *sola Scriptura*, the Bible alone (*see* Part Three). Here we must agree to disagree. For while both sides believe the Bible is infallible, Protestants deny that the church or the pope has an infallible interpretation of it.

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<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, the problem areas for evangelicals have also been addressed by some well-known Roman Catholic authorities, such as Athanasius, Jerome, and Aquinas. The evangelical case could be made for these writers on a number of issues. For example, Jerome did not accept the Catholic apocryphal (deuterocanonical) books and Aquinas rejected the doctrine of the immaculate conception of Mary.



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