

Peter and the Papacy

Peter's primacy

There is ample evidence in the New Testament that Peter was first in authority among the apostles. Although St. Peter never called himself "pope" in Scripture, he did indeed have a special apostolic primacy and jurisdiction. The Scriptural evidence for this is substantial and explicit.

Of the Twelve Apostles, St. Peter is by far the one mentioned most often in Scripture. He appears 195 times. The next most often mentioned Apostle was St. John, who is named 29 times. St. James the Greater is mentioned 19 times, St. Philip 15, and the numbers dwindle rapidly for the others.

Among other things, we see that when the Twelve Apostles are listed by name (*Mt 10:2-5; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-17; and Acts 1:13*), St. Peter's name is always first – and Judas Iscariot is always listed dead last. Far more commonly, though, the New Testament refers to simply "Peter and the Twelve", as if to say that the tempestuous fisherman signified in himself the unity of the whole apostolic college. Peter was the one who generally spoke for the apostles (*Mt 18:21, Mark 8:29, Luke 12:41, John 6:68-69*), and he figured in many of the most dramatic scenes (*Mt 14:28-32, Mt 17:24-27, Mark 10:23-28*). St. Peter is the lone Apostle Christ calls out of the boat to walk on water (*Mt 1:28-29*). Christ preaches the Gospel to the crowds from St. Peter's fishing boat (*Luke 5:3*). It is Peter's faith that will strengthen his brethren (*Luke 22:32*) and Peter is given Christ's flock to shepherd (*John 21:17*). It was to Simon Peter first among the Apostles that God first revealed the Resurrection (*Mark 16:7*), and the risen Christ appeared to him first (*Luke 24:34*).

If Christ did make Peter primate, he should be seen acting in that capacity in the Infant Church, after Christ's Ascension. An examination of the Acts of the Apostles shows that Peter always appears in that position of primacy which our Lord assigned to him. Peter heads the meeting that elects Matthias to replace Judas (*Acts 1:13-26*). On Pentecost it was he who first preaches to the crowds (*Acts 2:14-40*), and receives the first converts (*Acts 2:41*). He works the first healing in the Church age (*Acts 3:6-7*). He inflicts the first punishment (*Acts 5:1-11*), and excommunicates the first heretic (*Acts 8:18-23*). He makes the first apostolic visitation of the Churches (*Acts 9:32*). It is to Peter that the revelation comes that Gentiles are to be baptized and accepted as Christians (*Acts 10:46-48*). He leads the first council in Jerusalem (*Acts 15*), and announces the first dogmatic decision which still binds us today – compared with James' decision which was merely disciplinary (*Acts 15:7-11*). Despite having received Christ's revelation directly, Paul went to Jerusalem to confer with St. Peter and have his teachings confirmed by him (*Gal. 2:2*).

Upon this Rock

When he first saw Simon, "Jesus looked at him, and said: 'So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas (which means Peter)'" (*John 1:42*). The word *Cephas* is merely the transliteration of the Aramaic *Kepha* into Greek. Later, after Peter and the other disciples had been with Christ for some time, they went to Caesarea Philippi, where Peter made his profession of faith: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (*Mt 16:16*). Jesus told him that this truth was specially revealed to him, and then He solemnly reiterated: "And I tell you, you are Peter" (*Mt 16:18*). To this was added the promise that the Church would be founded, in some way, on Peter (*Mt 16:18*). The startling thing was that – aside from the single time that Abraham is called a "rock" (Hebrew: *Tsur*; Aramaic: *Kepha*) in Isaiah 51:1-2 – in the Old Testament only God was called a rock. The word rock was not used as a proper name in the ancient world. If you were to turn to a companion and say, "From now on your name is Asparagus", people would wonder: Why Asparagus? What is the meaning of it? What does it signify? Indeed, why call Simon the fisherman "Rock"? Christ was not given to meaningless gestures, and neither were the Jews as a whole when it came to names. Giving a new name meant that the status of the person was changed, as when Abram's name was changed to Abraham (*Gen. 17:5*), Jacob's to Israel (*Gen. 32:28*), Eliakim's to Joakim (*2 Kgs. 23:34*), or the names of the four Hebrew youths – Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (*Dan. 1:6-7*). But no Jew had ever been called "Rock." The Jews would give other names taken from nature, such as Barak "lightning", (*Judg. 4:6*), Deborah ("bee", *Gen. 35:8*), and Rachel ("ewe", *Gen. 29:16*), but never "Rock." In the New Testament James and John were nicknamed Boanerges, meaning "Sons of Thunder", by Christ, but that was never regularly used in place of their original names, and it certainly was not given as a new name. But in the case of Simon-bar-Jonah, his new name Kephias (Greek: *Petros*) definitely replaced the old.

Look at the scene

Not only was there significance in Simon being given a new and unusual name, but the place where Jesus solemnly conferred it upon Peter was also important. It happened when "Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi" (*Mt 16:13*), a city that Philip the Tetrarch built and named in honor of Caesar Augustus, who had died in A.D. 14. The city lay near cascades in the Jordan River and near a gigantic wall of rock, a wall about 200 feet high and 500 feet long, which is part of the southern foothills of Mount Hermon. The city no longer exists, but its ruins are near the small Arab town of Baniyas; and at the base of the rock wall may be found what is left of one of the springs that fed the Jordan. It was here that Jesus pointed to Simon and said: "You are Peter" (*Mt 16:18*).

Who is the rock?

Now take a closer look at the key verse: "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church" (*Mt 16:18*). To whom, or to what, does it refer? Since Simon's new name of Peter itself means rock, the sentence could be rewritten as: "You are Rock and (not but) upon this very rock I will build my Church". The play on words seems obvious, but commentators wishing to avoid what follows from this – namely the establishment of the papacy – have suggested that the word rock could not refer to Peter but must refer to his profession of faith or to Christ.

From the grammatical point of view, the phrase "this rock" must relate back to the closest noun. Peter's profession of faith ("You are the Christ, the Son of the living God") is two verses earlier, while his name, a proper noun, is in the immediately preceding clause.

The fact that Christ is elsewhere, called the cornerstone and the foundation (*Eph. 2:20, I Cor. 3:11, I Pet. 2:4-8*) does not disprove that here Peter is the foundation. Christ is naturally the principal and, since he will be returning to heaven, the invisible foundation of the Church that he will establish; but Peter is named by Him as the secondary and, because he and his successors will remain on earth, the visible foundation.

In short,

Christ is the *Rock* (*Eph. 2:20; I Pet. 2:4-8*), and so is Peter by participation (*Jn 1:42; Mt 16:18*);

Christ has the *keys* (*Rev. 1:18; 3:7*), and so has Peter by participation (*Mt 16:19*);

Christ is the *Shepherd* (*Ezech. 34; Jn 10*), and so is Peter by participation (*Jn 21:15-17*).

Look at the Aramaic

Opponents of the Catholic interpretation of Matthew 16:18 sometimes argue that in the Greek text the name of the apostle is *Petros*, while "rock" is rendered as *petra*. They claim that the former refers to a small stone, while the latter refers to a massive rock; so, if Peter was meant to be the massive rock, why isn't his name Petra?

Note that Christ did not speak to the disciples in Greek. He spoke Aramaic, the common language of Palestine at that time. In that language the word for rock is *kepha*, which is what Jesus called him in everyday speech (note that in John 1:42 he was told, "You will be called *Cephas*"). What Jesus said in Matthew 16:18 was: "You are *Kepha*, and upon this *kepha* I will build my Church." When Matthew's Gospel was translated from the original Aramaic to Greek, there arose a problem which did not confront the evangelist when he first composed his account of Christ's life. In Aramaic the word *kepha* has the same ending whether it refers to a rock or is used as a man's name. In Greek, though, the word for rock, *petra*, is feminine in gender. The translator could use it for the second appearance of *kepha* in the sentence, but not for the first because it would be inappropriate to give a man a feminine name. So he put a masculine ending on it, and hence Peter became Petros.

Furthermore, the premise of the argument against Peter being the rock is simply false. In first century Greek the words *petros* and *petra* were synonyms. They had previously possessed the meanings of "small stone" and "large rock" in some early Greek poetry, but by the first century this distinction was gone, as Protestant Bible scholars admit (see D. A. Carson's remarks on this passage in the *Expositor's Bible Commentary*).

Some of the effect of Christ's play on words was lost when his statement was translated from the Aramaic into Greek, but that was the best that could be done in Greek. In English, like Aramaic, there is no problem with endings; so an English rendition could read: "You are Rock, and upon this rock I will build my church."

Consider another point: If the rock really did refer to Christ (as some claim, based on I Cor. 10:4: "and the Rock was Christ" – and this presumes, of course, that I Corinthians was written after Matthew's Gospel), why did Matthew leave the passage as it was? In the original Aramaic, and in the English which is a closer parallel to it than is the Greek, the passage is clear enough. Matthew must have realized that his readers would conclude the obvious from "Rock . . . rock."

Beyond the grammatical evidence, the structure of the narrative does not allow for a downplaying of Peter's role in the Church. Look at the way Matthew 16:15-19 is structured:

Simon Peter answered and said:

"Thou art the Christ,
... the Son of the living God."

Jesus answered and said:

"...Thou art Peter,
"and upon this Rock I will build my Church..."

After Peter gives a confession about the identity of Jesus, the Lord does the same in return for Peter. Jesus does not say: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are *an insignificant pebble* and on this rock I will build my Church. . . . I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven". Jesus is giving Peter a three-fold blessing, including the gift of the keys to the kingdom, not undermining his authority. To say that Jesus is downplaying Peter flies in the face of the context.

Promise of infallibility

Two important things were told the apostle: "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" and "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (*Mt 16:19*). Here Peter was singled out for the authority that provides for the forgiveness of sins and the making of disciplinary rules. Later the apostles as a whole would be given similar power (*Mt 18:18*), but here Peter received it in a special sense. And Peter alone was promised the keys.

Let us speak of the first promise.

Christ says: 'Whatever you bind, Peter, will be bound in heaven'. [Peter is the binding authority, since the Church is "the pillar of truth" (*I Tim. 3:15*), not Scripture.]

Now, we know that God "does not lie" (*Tit. 1:2*), which means that He cannot confirm a lie either.

Therefore, this verse proves that Peter speaks infallibly. Which, interestingly enough, he did authoritatively at that very moment (*Mt 16:16*), in the midst of a multiplicity of opinions, by proclaiming Christ divinity, under a special inspiration of God.

The keys of the kingdom

In the Eastern kingdoms, the sovereign king of the realm would delegate the authority and administration of his kingdom to a steward (also called "vizier" or "majordomo"), who managed the kingdom – virtually ruling for the king – especially in his absence. The person who was "over the house" had the whole of the domestic affairs of the sovereign under his superintendence. He made decisions which carried royal authority and could not be appealed (cf. *Gen 24:2; 39:4; I Kg 3:1; 4:1-6; 16:9; 18:3-16; 18:3; II Kg 10:5; 15:5; II Chron. 28:7; Esther 3:1-2; 8:1-2*).

Israel imitated the nations around her (especially Egypt) and adopted their forms of government (*I Sam. 8:5*). The image of the kingdom keys (*Mt 16:19*) was therefore a well-known figure to Our Lord's listeners, because in ancient Israel, for centuries, there was a divine kingdom established by God with the covenant with David (*II Sam. 7:12-13*). And we know that the key holder was the son of David, the king of Israel, who held "the keys of the House of David" (*Is. 22:22*). He was the key holder, as the king of Israel, but he would entrust to the Prime Minister the keys for administration. Just as the master of the house would set the chief steward over all the household possessions, so the king, as the one who holds the keys, would give them to his Prime Minister.

So Jesus, “the Son of David” (*Lk 1:30-31*), the royal heir of the Davidic Kingdom, the key holder (*Rev. 1:18; 3:7*), quoting almost verbatim from this passage in Isaiah, is installing Peter as a form of chief steward or Prime Minister by giving him the keys to the kingdom. He is raising Peter up as a father figure to the household of faith (*Is. 22:21; 1 Tim. 3:15*), to lead them and guide the flock (*John 21:15-17*). Under the new and eternal covenant (*1 Cor. 11:25; Heb 13:20*) extended to all men, Christ the King, to Whom “all power in heaven and on earth has been given” (*Mt 28:18*), puts Peter as his Prime Minister to govern the whole world in his absence.

Joseph and Peter

In order to understand Peter’s appointment, in accordance with the principle *Scripture interpreting Scripture*, let us take a close look at Joseph’s appointment as the vizier of Egypt.

“And Pharaoh said to them: ‘Can we find such another man that is full of the spirit of God?’ He said therefore to Joseph: ‘Seeing God has shown you all that you have said, can I find one wiser and one like unto you? You shall be over my house and at the commandment of your mouth all the people shall obey: only in the kingly throne will I be above you’.

And again Pharaoh said to Joseph: ‘Behold, I have appointed you over the whole land of Egypt’. And he took his ring from his own hand, and gave it into his hand: and he put upon him a robe of silk, and put a chain of gold about his neck. And he made him go up into his second chariot, the crier proclaiming that all should bow their knee before him, and that they should know he was made governor over the whole land of Egypt. And the king said to Joseph: ‘I am Pharaoh: without your commandment no man shall move hand or foot in all the land of Egypt’. And he turned his name, and called him Zaphenath-paneah” (*Gen. 41:38-46*).

What was the basis for Joseph’s royal appointment? It was a divine revelation in response to a question from the king. What about Peter? Was he not appointed steward based upon a divine revelation in response to a question of Jesus, the King of Israel?

Joseph was given the sign of official authority, which in Egypt was the signet ring of Pharaoh. Peter received the keys of the kingdom, these being the corresponding sign of authority in Israel.

Pharaoh issued Joseph his second chariot, giving him the status, power, and means to travel throughout the land, governing and ruling the entire land. Joseph was given the charism of infallible interpretation from God and therefore the final word in legal and judicial matters by the king. “The king made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his possessions, to instruct the princes at his pleasure, and to teach his elders wisdom” (*Ps. 104:21-22*). Peter’s power to “bind” and “loose” in the visible Church on earth was ratified by the King Himself in heaven. Peter was appointed shepherd to feed (care for, teach) the sheep and to tend (govern, rule) the lambs (*Jn 21:15-17*) in a universal or Catholic sense.

As soon as Joseph was appointed vizier of Egypt, Pharaoh changed his name to Zaphenath-paneah (which means either “God has spoken and He shall live” or “Savior of the world”). Simon’s name was changed to Peter (“Rock”) by Christ the King to signify a change of status – from fisherman to royal steward – a new calling, a commission. Wherever Joseph traveled, the crowd was asked to bow the knees. Catholics honor Peter with respect and obedience.

Moses and Peter

“On the morrow Moses *sat* to judge the people, and the people *stood* about Moses from morning till evening... And Moses said to his father-in-law: ‘Because the people come to me to inquire of God; when they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between a man and his neighbor, and I make them know the statutes of God and His decisions’” (*Ex 18:13, 15-16*). Moses was the official teacher of Israel – the lawgiver, interpreter and judge (No *Sola Scriptura* therefore!). Moses also had a direct revelation from God while standing at a huge rock, Mount Sinai. Moses was also infallible in his teachings and his judgments.

The Church Fathers, those Christians closest to the apostles in time, culture, and theological background, clearly understood that Jesus promised to build the Church on Peter, as the following passages from St. Cyprian of Carthage show:

“On him [Peter] He builds the Church, and to him He gives the command to feed the sheep [*John 21:17*], and although He assigns a like power to all the apostles, yet He founded a single chair [*cathedra*], and He established by His own authority a source and an intrinsic reason for that unity. Indeed, the others were that also which Peter was [i.e., apostles], but a primacy is given to Peter, whereby it is made clear that there is but one Church and one chair. . . . If someone does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he imagine that he still holds the faith? If he [should] desert the chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, can he still be confident that he is in the Church?” (*The Unity of the Catholic Church* 4; 1st edition [A.D. 251]).

“There is one God and one Christ, and one Church, and one chair founded on Peter by the word of the Lord. It is not possible to set up another altar or for there to be another priesthood besides that one altar and that one priesthood. Whoever has gathered elsewhere is scattering” (*Letters* 43[40]:5 [A.D. 253]).

Was Peter in Rome?

At first glance, it might seem that the question, of whether Peter went to Rome and died there, is inconsequential. And in a way it is. After all, his being in Rome would not itself prove the existence of the papacy. In fact, it would be a false inference to say he must have been the first pope since he was in Rome and later popes ruled from Rome. With that logic, Paul would have been the first pope, too, since he was an apostle and went to Rome.

On the other hand, if Peter never made it to the capital, he still could have been the first pope, since one of his successors could have been the first holder of that office to settle in Rome. After all, if the papacy exists, it was established by Christ during his lifetime, long before Peter is said to have reached Rome. There must have been a period of some years in which the papacy did not yet have its connection to Rome.

What the Bible Says

Admittedly, the Bible nowhere *explicitly* says Peter was in Rome; but, on the other hand, it doesn’t say he wasn’t. In fact, very little is said about where he, or any of the apostles other than Paul, went in the years after the Ascension (cf. *Acts 12:17*). For the most part, we have to rely on books other than the New Testament for information about what happened to the apostles, Peter included, in later years.

Boettner is wrong when he claims: “There is no allusion to Rome in either of [Peter’s] epistles”. There is, in the greeting at the end of the first epistle: “The Church here in Babylon, united with you by God’s election, sends you her greeting, and so does my son, Mark” (*I*

Pet. 5:13). Babylon is a code-word for Rome. It is used that way six times in the last book of the Bible and in extra-biblical works like the *Sibylline Oracles* (5:159f), the *Apocalypse of Baruch* (2:1), and *4 Esdras* (3:1). Eusebius Pamphilus, in *The Chronicle*, composed about A.D. 303, noted that “It is said that Peter’s first epistle, in which he makes mention of Mark, was composed at Rome itself, and that he himself indicates this, referring to the city figuratively as Babylon”. Consider now the other New Testament citations: “Another angel, a second, followed, saying, ‘Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of her impure passion’” (*Rev. 14:8*). See also *Rev. 16:19; 17:5; 18:2; 18:10; 18:21*). These references can’t be to the one-time capital of the Babylonian empire. That Babylon had been reduced to an inconsequential village by the march of years, military defeat, and political subjugation; it was no longer a “great city”. It played no important part in the recent history of the ancient world. From the New Testament perspective, the only candidates for the “great city” mentioned in Revelation are Rome and Jerusalem.

“But there is no good reason for saying that ‘Babylon’ means ‘Rome’”, insists Boettner. But there is, and the good reason is persecution. The authorities knew that Peter was a leader of the Church, and the Church, under Roman law, was considered organized atheism. (The worship of any gods other than the Roman was considered atheism.) Peter would do himself, not to mention those with him, no service by advertising his presence in the capital – after all, mail service from Rome was then even worse than it is today, and letters were routinely read by Roman officials. Peter was a wanted man, as were all Christian leaders. Why encourage a manhunt? We also know that the apostles sometimes referred to cities under symbolic names (cf. *Rev. 11:8*).

Early Christian Testimonies

Once St. Peter had been martyred, the testimonies of his sojourn in Rome with St. Paul poured forth in a flood from the early Christian writers.

William A. Jurgens, in his three-volume set *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, a masterly compendium that cites at length everything from the *Didache* to John Damascene, includes 30 references to this question, divided, in the index, about evenly between the statements that “Peter came to Rome and died there” and that “Peter established his See at Rome and made the bishop of Rome his successor in the primacy.”

Perhaps the most detailed of these early accounts came from St. Irenaeus of Lyons (d. 200) in his apologetics work, *Against Heresies*. He gave a detailed account of succession of the bishops of Rome, from St. Peter down to his own day. He referred to Rome as the city “where Peter and Paul proclaimed the gospel and founded the Church.” Clement wrote his *Letter to the Corinthians* perhaps before the year 70, just a few years after Peter and Paul were killed; in it he made reference to Peter ending his life where Paul ended his. Other notable early examples were St. Ignatius of Antioch (d. 107), who referred to the Church at Rome as “the Church of Peter and Paul” (*Letter to the Romans*); St. Cyprian (d. 251), who described Rome as “The place of Peter” (*Epistle 52*); and St. Jerome (d. 420), who called Rome “the See of Peter” (*Epistle 15, to Pope Damasus*). Around A.D. 166, Bishop Dionysius of Corinth wrote to Pope Soter, “You have also, by your very admonition, brought together the planting that was made by Peter and Paul at Rome...” (quoted in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2:25).

No ancient writer claimed Peter ended his life anywhere other than in Rome. On the question of Peter’s whereabouts they are in agreement, and their cumulative testimony carries enormous weight.

What Archaeology Proved

There is much archaeological evidence that Peter was at Rome; to the point that Pope Paul VI was able to announce officially something that had been discussed in archaeological literature and religious publications for years: that the actual tomb of the first pope had been identified conclusively, that his remains were apparently present, and that in the vicinity of his tomb were inscriptions identifying the place as Peter’s burial site, meaning early Christians knew that the prince of the apostles was there. The story of how all this was determined, with scientific accuracy, is too long to recount here. It is discussed in detail in John Evangelist Walsh’s book, *The Bones of St. Peter*. It is enough to say that the historical and scientific evidence is such that no one willing to look at the facts with an open mind can doubt that Peter was in Rome. To deny that fact is to let prejudice override reason.

Peter’s successors

The Catholic Church has consistently taught from the first centuries that the office of Peter is an office that continues to exist and exercise the authority of the keys.

Did Christ the King need a royal steward only during Peter’s lifetime, only until A.D. 67? Did the kingdom end and therefore no longer need the vizier? Did the office of royal steward lie vacant after Peter with the keys put in cold storage? So, if Christ did set up such an organization, he must have provided for its continuation (cf. *Mt 7:24-25*).

The vizier was an office of supreme importance to the kingdom of Egypt. When the vizier died the office did not: another man would be appointed to fill the vacant office. In the kingdom of the Medes and the Persians, when Haman, the wicked vizier was hung by the neck, Mordecai succeeded to his office and, as a sign, was given the royal seal (*Esther 8:1-2*). In Israel, this appears clearly in Isaiah 22 in which God announces that Eliakim will be Shebna’s successor. The Scriptures (especially I & II Kg) show that the office of steward was one of succession – it was always filled. Since Jesus restored the throne of David, he also restored the office of royal steward.

Moses’ teaching authority (symbolized by “the seat of Moses” *Mt 23:1-3*) continued through the centuries, through succession, and was still prominent in the synagogues almost two thousand years later.¹

“Bible Christians” do not think Christ established a visible Church, which means they do not believe in a hierarchy of bishops headed by the pope.

However, the New Testament shows the apostles setting up, after their Master’s instructions, a visible organization and provide for their successors (*Acts 1:15-20; Titus 1:5; II Tim. 1:6; 2:2*), something all Christians until the Reformation fully recognized.

¹ “Moses and Aaron, when this priesthood was theirs, suffered much; and Caiphas, when he had their chair, persecuted and condemned the Lord... Afterwards Moses was succeeded by Peter, who had committed to his hands the new Church of Christ, and the true priesthood” (St. Macarius [ca. 300-390] Homily 26).

Pope Clement

The earliest account we have of a bishop of Rome exercising authority in another diocese comes from St. Clement's Epistle to the Corinthians. It was written by Clement, bishop of Rome, around the year A.D. 80. In it he responds to the Corinthians' plea for his intervention. The entire letter is written in a fatherly, kind way, but it is also clear that Clement was quite aware he had a special authority. Two key phrases stand out as testimony of this: "But if any disobey the words spoken by Him [Christ] through us, let them know that they will involve themselves in sin and no small danger"; and "For you will give us joy and gladness if, obedient to what we have written through the Holy Ghost, you root out the lawless anger of your jealousy" (59, 63). Clearly, this early bishop of Rome wrote as one who expected his words to be obeyed.

Pope Victor I

One of the best examples, perhaps, of papal authority in the Early Church is Pope Victor I's (189-199) who worked to settle a dispute among the bishops of the East and West over when to celebrate Easter. Most of the bishops followed his decision to celebrate it on the first Sunday after Passover. Bishop Polycrates of Ephesus resisted on the grounds that his custom was derived from St. John the beloved Apostle. For this, Pope Victor excommunicated him. (Then, at the urging of St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, he withdrew the excommunication.) But the facts to be noted are that Pope Victor took for granted his right to punish by excommunication and that that right was never questioned either by the victims of its use, the Christians of Asia Minor, or by St. Irenaeus, who disagreed with the advisability of using it on this occasion.

St. Irenaeus

"The blessed apostles [Peter and Paul], having founded and built up the Church [of Rome] . . . handed over the office of the episcopate to Linus" (*Against Heresies* 3:3:3 [A.D. 189]).

Tertullian

"This is the way in which the apostolic churches transmit their lists: like the church of the Smyrneans, which records that Polycarp was placed there by John, like the church of the Romans, where Clement was ordained by Peter" (*Demurrer Against the Heretics* 32:2 [A.D. 200]).

St. Cyprian of Carthage

"If someone [today] does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he imagine that he still holds the faith? If he [should] desert the chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, can he still be confident that he is in the Church?" (*The Unity of the Catholic Church* 4; first edition [A.D. 251]).

"Cornelius was made bishop by the decision of God and of his Christ, by the testimony of almost all the clergy, by the applause of the people then present, by the college of venerable priests and good men, at a time when no one had been made [bishop] before him – when the place of [Pope] Fabian, which is the place of Peter, the dignity of the sacerdotal chair, was vacant. Since it has been occupied both at the will of God and with the ratified consent of all of us, whoever now wishes to become bishop must do so outside. For he cannot have ecclesiastical rank who does not hold to the unity of the Church" (*Letters* 55:[52]:8 [A.D. 253]).

St. Jerome

"[Pope] Stephen . . . was the blessed Peter's twenty-second successor in the See of Rome" (*Against the Luciferians* 23 [A.D. 383]).

St. Ambrose of Milan

"They [the Novatian heretics] have not the succession of Peter, who hold not the chair of Peter, which they rend by wicked schism; and this, too, they do, wickedly denying that sins can be forgiven [by the sacrament of confession] even in the Church, whereas it was said to Peter: 'I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatsoever thou shall loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven' [Mt 16:19]" (*Penance* 1:7:33 [A.D. 388]).

St. Augustine

"If all men throughout the world were such as you most vainly accuse them of having been, what has the chair of the Roman Church done to you, in which Peter sat, and in which Anastasius sits today?" (*Against the Letters of Petilani* 2:118 [A.D. 402]).

"If the very order of episcopal succession is to be considered, how much more surely, truly, and safely do we number them from Peter himself, to whom, as to one representing the whole Church, the Lord said, 'Upon this rock I will build my Church' . . . [Mt 16:18]. Peter was succeeded by Linus, Linus by Clement, Clement by Anacletus, Anacletus by Evaristus . . ." (*Letters* 53:1:2 [A.D. 412]).

Papal infallibility

Christ, the Master, the Rabbi sent by the Father (*Mt* 7:28-29; 23:8-10; *Jn* 1:17-18; 13:13-15) handed over to the Apostles his own mission (*Jn* 17:18; 20:21). He instructed the Church to preach everything He taught (*Mt* 28:19-20) and promised the protection of the Holy Ghost to "guide you into all the truth" (*Jn* 16:13). That mandate and that promise guarantee the Church will never fall away from his teachings, even if individual Catholics might. The Church is indeed "the pillar and foundation of the truth" (*1 Tim.* 3:15). If the Church is the foundation of religious truth in this world, then it is God's own spokesman. As Christ told His disciples: "He who hears you hears Me, and he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me" (*Lk* 10:16). Since Christ promised that the gates of Hell shall never prevail against His Church (*Mt* 16:19), that the Holy Ghost, "the Spirit of truth" (*Jn* 15:26) shall teach her all things (*Jn* 14:26; 16:12-13), and that He Himself will be with her all days, even to the consummation of the world (*Mt* 28:20; *Acts* 1:8), we hold for certain that the Catholic Church is infallible, i.e. that she cannot err in what she teaches as to faith or morals.

Infallibility belongs in a special way to the pope as head of the bishops (*Mt* 16:17-19; *Jn* 21:15-17). It is a charism the pope enjoys in virtue of his office, when, as the supreme shepherd and teacher of all the faithful, who confirms his brethren (the bishops) in their faith

(Luke 22:32), he proclaims by a definitive act some doctrine of faith or morals. Therefore his definitions, of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church, are justly held irreformable, for they are pronounced with the assistance of the Holy Ghost, an assistance promised to him in blessed Peter.

Christ said to Peter: 'Whatever you bind, will be bound in heaven'. Based on this divine authority, Pope Pius IX defined 4 necessary conditions for papal infallibility, in *Pastor Aeternus* (1870):

1. the Pope must speak *ex cathedra*, i.e. as Pastor and Doctor of all Christians;
2. he must define a doctrine;
3. regarding faith and morals;
4. to be held (as binding) by the Universal Church;

Although the individual bishops do not enjoy the prerogative of infallibility, they can nevertheless proclaim Christ's doctrine infallibly. This is so, even when they are dispersed around the world, provided that while maintaining the bond of unity among themselves and with Peter's successor, and while teaching authentically on a matter of faith or morals, they concur in a single viewpoint as the one which must be held conclusively. This authority is even more clearly verified when, gathered together in an ecumenical council, they are teachers and judges of faith and morals for the universal Church. Their definitions must then be adhered to with the submission of faith.

Infallibility: recent Roman prerogative?

The infallibility of the Pope is not a doctrine that suddenly appeared in Church teaching; rather, it is a doctrine which was implicit in the early Church. For example, Cyprian of Carthage, writing about 256, puts the question this way: "Would the heretics dare to come to the very seat of Peter whence apostolic faith is derived and whither no errors can come?" (Letters 59 [55], 14). In the fifth century, St. Augustine said in regard to the Pelagians: "...two councils have sent to the Apostolic See, whence also reports have come; *the case is closed*" (Sermon 131, 10). Based on this, an oft-quoted dictum was derived: "*Roma locuta, causa finita*. Rome has spoken, the case is closed".

Common Protestant misconceptions of Papal infallibility

Fundamentalists and other "Bible Christians" often confuse the charism of papal "infallibility" with "impeccability." They imagine Catholics believe the Pope cannot sin. Others, who avoid this elementary blunder, think the pope relies on some sort of amulet or magical incantation when an infallible definition is due.

Some ask how Popes can be infallible if some of them lived scandalously. This objection of course, illustrates the common confusion between infallibility and impeccability. There is no guarantee that Popes won't sin or give bad example. (The truly remarkable thing is the great degree of sanctity found in the papacy throughout history; the "bad Popes" stand out precisely because they are so rare.)

Actually, the sacred writers upon writing what was inspired to them by God were infallible. Even King David, not long before an adulterer and a murderer! Moses was infallible in his judgments; yet, he offended God by not believing in Him (*Num. 20; Dt 32:51-52*). And Caiphas, though a wicked man, uttered inspired prophecy, in his position as a high priest (*Jn 11:49-55*). In spite of their sins, God still was able to use them to teach infallibly. Other people wonder how infallibility could exist if some popes disagreed with others. This, too, shows an inaccurate understanding of infallibility, which applies only to solemn, official teachings on faith and morals, not to disciplinary decisions or even to unofficial comments on faith and morals. A Pope's private theological opinions are not infallible, only what he solemnly defines is considered to be infallible teaching.

Even Fundamentalists and Evangelicals who do not have these common misunderstandings often think infallibility means that Popes are given some special grace that allows them to teach positively whatever truths need to be known, but that is not quite correct, either. Infallibility is not a substitute for theological study on the part of the pope. What infallibility does do is prevent a Pope from solemnly and formally teaching as "truth" something that is, in fact, error. It does not help him know what is true, nor does it "inspire" him to teach what is true. He has to learn the truth the way we all do - through study- though, to be sure, he has certain advantages because of his position.

Pope fictions

John Henry Newman, a Protestant scholar who converted to Catholicism in 1845 and became a leading apologist and later a cardinal, said in his book *Apologia*: "When I was young, I thought the pope to be the anti-Christ. At Christmas 1824 I preached a sermon to that effect." If Newman could be brought to see the truth, so anyone can.

It is clear that Peter was married (Mt 8:14; Mk 1:30; see also I Cor 9:5). *Celibacy was not a requirement for an Apostle of Christ. Were Peter to come back on earth, he would not qualify as a candidate for papacy.*

Among the Apostles, only St. Peter is known to have been married due to the fact his mother-in-law is mentioned in the Gospels. Some of the others might have been married but there is a clear indication that all of them left everything, including their families, to follow Christ.

Thus, in the Gospels, one reads that St. Peter told Our Lord: "We left all we had to follow you". In return, the Divine Master said: "I tell you solemnly, there is no one who has left house, wife, brothers, parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not be given repayment many times over in this present time and, in the world to come, eternal life" (*Lk 18:28-30; Mt 19:27-30*).

"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (*Mt. 10:37,38*).

"In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple" (*Lk. 14:33*).

When Peter was at Antioch, he refused to eat with Gentile Christians in order not to offend certain Jews from Palestine (Gal. 2:11-16). *For this Paul rebuked him. This biblically demonstrates papal fallibility.*

Not at all. Peter's actions had to do with matters of discipline, not with issues of faith or morals.

Furthermore, the problem was Peter's actions, not his teaching. The problem was that he wasn't living up to his own teaching. Thus, in this instance, Peter was not doing any teaching; much less was he solemnly defining a matter of faith or morals.

Fundamentalists must also acknowledge that Peter did have some kind of infallibility - they cannot deny that he wrote two infallible epistles of the New Testament. So, if his behavior at Antioch was not incompatible with this kind of infallibility, neither is bad behavior contrary to papal infallibility in general.

Pope Zosimus (417-418) supported Pelagius' heresy and, armed with his Papal authority, condemned the African bishops among whom stood Augustine of Hippo; but they resisted him.

Pelagius was condemned by the bishops of North Africa for his heresy on grace. On Jan. 27, 417, Pope Innocent expressed his agreement with the African decisions, asserted the necessity of inward grace, rejected the Pelagian errors about original sin, and declared Pelagius and Coelestius excommunicated until they should return to orthodoxy. In about six weeks more he was dead: but Zosimus, his successor, was scarcely installed in his place before Coelestius appeared at Rome in person to plead his cause; while shortly afterwards letters arrived from Pelagius addressed to Innocent, attempting to enlist Rome in his favor. Pope Zosimus, went over to Coelestius at once, upon his profession of willingness to anathematize all doctrines which the pontifical see had condemned or should condemn; he then wrote a sharp letter to Africa, proclaiming Coelestius "Catholic," and requiring the Africans to appear within two months at Rome to prosecute their charges, or else to abandon them. The Pope had been deceived by the two clever heretics. The African bishops stood firm and informed the Pope of the deceitfulness of Pelagius and Coelestius. He finally agreed to condemn them publicly.

In this case, Pope Zosimus made a mistake of appreciation; but he did not profess in any way the heresy of pelagianism. Moreover, it is interesting to see that all, the two heretics and the African bishops, had recourse to Rome to settle the question: clear sign that they believed in papal infallibility.

Pope Honorius (625-638) held a heretical view of Jesus (that He had only one will) and was later on condemned by the 6th Ecumenical Council (680) as a heretic.

The Council of Chalcedon (451) taught that in Christ there are two natures, divine and human. A heresy named *Monothelism* sprang up, that believed that Christ had only will, a combination of the divine and the human. Sergius, the patriarch of Constantinople, gained to the heresy, wrote to the Pope regarding this issue. Pope Honorius, in a passing expression of his private answer to Sergius, imprudently approved the heresy. This is History (cf. Mansi, vol. 11, p. 285).

Pope Agatho (678-681) condemned Pope Honorius as a heretic, and Pope Leo II (682-683) confirmed that decision, and the three councils did the same. Moreover, Pope Agatho said that Pope Honorius could be classed as a heretic and yet his condemnation would not infringe on papal infallibility due to the simple fact that Honorius' statement to Sergius was not a universal and binding teaching of the papal office.

Remember, Vatican Council I found 44 instances of papal error (Honorius was one of them) before they defined papal infallibility. All those errors were not regarded as being in the class of infallible statements that Vatican Council I deemed infallible.

In the middle ages, there was a "Pope Joan", a woman who hid her gender and rose through the ranks of the Church, became a cardinal and was elected pope. No one knew she was a woman until, during a papal procession through the streets of Rome, she went into labor and gave birth to a child. She and the baby were killed on the spot by the mob, enraged at her imposture.

A lot of things are said about the alleged "Pope Joan". Depending on who is telling the story, she was a courageous feminist, a clever opportunist, a brilliant scholar who couldn't make it as a woman in a man's world. She is said to have been a wise ruler and an astute theologian, though, oddly, no decree or theological teaching purporting to have come from her has made its way down to our day. In any case, the fact is, there was no Pope Joan. She exists only as pure legend. The primary proofs that this is all just a fable are these: First, the earliest point that we can trace the legend to is the mid-13th century, but the legend didn't really gain wide currency until the late 14th century. No evidence of any kind exists from the ninth century (when Pope Joan was alleged to have reigned), nor do we see any in the 10th through 12th centuries. None of the annals or acts of the Popes that were written between the ninth and 13th centuries (and none after that, either) mention her.

Church historian J.P. Kirsch wrote that "Not one contemporaneous historical source among the papal histories knows anything about her; also, no mention is made of her until the middle of the 13th century. Now it is incredible that the appearance of a 'popess,' if it was a historical fact, would be noticed by none of the numerous historians from the 10th to the 13th century. In the history of the Popes, there is no place where this legendary figure will fit in. Between Leo IV and Benedict III, where Martinus Polonus places her, she cannot be inserted..." (Article on Pope Joan, Catholic Encyclopedia, 1913).

So where did the legend come from? There are two likely possibilities. The first is that the Roman population became disgusted with the corrupt influence wielded over Pope Sergius (reigned 904-911) by the powerful and wealthy Theodora Theophylact, and more specifically by her young daughter Morozia, a cunning and exceptionally attractive woman. It appears that Morozia was Sergius' mistress and bore him at least one son (the future Pope John XI). The fabulously wealthy and prestigious Theophylact family wielded immense power in Rome during the 10th century, even, sadly, over several Popes. This is a sorry episode in the history of the Church, one which displayed a decadence and immorality that even Popes, at times, could fall prey to - a reminder to us all that men, even the holiest of men, are not invulnerable to temptation and personal weakness. Despite their sins, Christ's promise that the Church would be protected from error was not, nor has it ever been, broken.

From the details of Sergius III's pontificate, it seems clear that he was a vain, violent and sensuous man. It's quite possible that the disgusted faithful took to mocking him or one of his immediate successors because he was perceived to have been under the influence of the Theophylact women. Some historians trace the legend of a female pope to Morozia, saying the people called her "Pope Joan" to mock

the weak popes she controlled, in the same way some American first ladies have been called "president" to mock their perceived weak husbands.

Another possible explanation for the Pope Joan legend lies in the conduct of the much maligned Pope John VIII (reigned 872-882). He appears to have had a very weak personality, even perhaps somewhat effeminate. Cardinal Baronius, in his Church history Annals, suggests that John VIII's reputation as effeminate gave rise to the legend. Indeed, it would seem that over time, the common folk added ever more lurid embellishments until the vulgar jokes about the hapless (and certainly male) Pope ballooned and metamorphosed into a female "popessa".