

“Is the Pope Catholic?”

Having seen that the Roman Catholic Church defines dogma on the basis of what James White calls *Sola Ekklesia* (“the Church alone”), we now turn to the question of papal authority, and will survey what the RC Church teaches regarding the Pope and how it stands up to the scrutiny of church history and the Bible.

I. Roman Catholic Papal Dogma.

A. *Unam Sanctam* by Pope Boniface VIII (1302)

Boniface, Bishop, Servant of the servants of God. For perpetual remembrance:

Urged on by our faith, we are obliged to believe and hold that there is one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. And we firmly believe and profess that outside of her there is no salvation nor remission of sins, as the bridegroom declares in the Canticles, ‘My dove, my undefiled, is but one; she is the only one of her mother; she is the choice one of her that bare her.’ And this represents the one mystical body of Christ, and of this body Christ is the head, and God is the head of Christ. In it there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. For in the time of the Flood there was the single ark of Noah, which prefigures the one Church, and it was finished according to the measure of one cubit and had one Noah for pilot and captain, and outside of it every living creature on the earth, as we read, was destroyed. And this Church we revere as the only one, even as the Lord saith by the prophet, ‘Deliver my soul from the sword, my darling from the power of the dog.’ He prayed for his soul, that is, for himself, head and body. And this body he called one body, that is, the Church, because of the single bridegroom, the unity of the faith, the sacraments, and the love of the Church. She is that seamless shirt of the Lord which was not rent but was allotted by the casting of lots.

Therefore, this one and single Church has one head and not two heads—for had she two heads, she would be a monster—that is, Christ and Christ’s vicar, Peter and Peter’s successor. For the Lord said unto Peter, ‘Feed my sheep.’ ‘My,’ he said, speaking generally and not particularly, ‘these and those,’ by which it is to be understood that all the sheep are committed unto him. So, when the Greeks and others say that they were not committed to the care of Peter and his successors, they must confess that they are not of Christ’s sheep, even as the Lord says in John, “There is one fold and one shepherd’ (emphasis added).

...if the earthly power deviate from the right path, it is judged by the spiritual power; but if a minor spiritual power deviate from the right path, the lower in rank is judged by its superior; but if the supreme power [the papacy] deviate, it can be judged not by man, but by God alone. And so the Apostle testifies, ‘He that is spiritual judges all things, but he himself is judged by no man.’ But this authority, although it be given to a man, and though it be exercised by a man, is not a human but a divine power given by divine word of mouth to Peter and confirmed to Peter and to his successors by Christ himself, whom Peter confessed, even him whom Christ called the Rock. For the Lord said to Peter himself, ‘Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth,’ etc. Whoever, therefore, resists this power so ordained by God, resists the ordinance of God, unless perchance he imagines two principles to exist, as did Manichaeus, which we pronounce false and heretical. For Moses testified that God created heaven and earth not in the beginnings but ‘in the beginning.’

Furthermore, that every human creature is subject to the Roman Pontiff,—this we declare, say, define, and pronounce to be altogether necessary to salvation. (Taken from Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910), Volume VI, pp. 25-27)

B. Vatican I (1870)

Therefore faithfully adhering to the tradition received from the beginning of the Christian faith, for the glory of God our Savior, the exaltation of the Christian religion, and the salvation of Christian people, the sacred Council approving, we teach and define that it is a dogma divinely revealed: that the Roman Pontiff, when he speaks ex cathedra, that is, when in discharge of the office of pastor and doctor of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme Apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith and morals to be held by the universal Church, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine redeemer willed that his Church should be endowed for defining doctrine regarding faith or morals; and that therefore such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church. But if anyone—which may God avert—presume to contradict this our definition: let him be anathema—This is the teaching of Catholic truth, from which no one can deviate without loss of faith and salvation...The first condition of salvation is to keep the rule of the true faith. (Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper, 1877), *Dogmatic Decrees of the Vatican Council*, Chapter 4, pp. 266-71)

C. Vatican II (1963-1965)

Bishops, teaching in communion with the Roman Pontiff, are to be respected by all as witnesses to divine and Catholic truth. In matters of faith and morals, the bishops speak in the name of Christ and the faithful are to accept their teaching and adhere to it with a religious assent of soul. This religious submission of will and mind must be shown in a special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking ex cathedra. That is, it must be shown in such a way that his supreme magisterium is acknowledged with reverence, the judgments made by him are sincerely adhered to, according to his manifest mind and will. His mind and will in the matter may be known chiefly either from the character of the documents, from his frequent repetition of the same doctrine, or from his manner of speaking.

Although the individual bishops do not enjoy the prerogative of infallibility, they can nevertheless proclaim Christ's doctrine infallibly...This infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed His Church to be endowed in defining a doctrine of faith and morals extends as far as extends the deposit of divine revelation, which must be religiously guarded and faithfully expounded. This is the infallibility which the Roman Pontiff, the head of the college of bishops, enjoys in virtue of his office, when, as the supreme shepherd and teacher of all the faithful, who confirms his brethren in their faith (cf. Lk. 22:32), he proclaims by a definitive act some doctrine of faith or morals. Therefore his definitions, of themselves, are not from the consent of the Church, are justly styled irreformable, for they are pronounced with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, an assistance promised to him in blessed Peter. Therefore they need no approval of others, nor do they allow an appeal to any other judgment. For then the Roman Pontiff is not pronouncing judgment as a private person. Rather, as the supreme teacher of the universal Church, as one in whom the charism of the infallibility of the Church herself is individually present, he is expounding or defending a doctrine of Catholic faith. (*The Documents of Vatican II* [Chicago: Follett, 1966], Walter M. Abbott, S.J., General Editor, pp. 47-49)

II. The Early Church and Papal Infallibility.

A. The Testimony of Cyprian.

Roman Catholic historian Johannes Quasten, Catholic patristic scholar, commented, (*Patrology*, vol. 2, p. 375), "Thus he (Cyprian) understands Matthew 16:18 of the whole episcopate, the various members of which, attached to one another by the laws of charity and concord, thus render the Church universal a single body." Quasten cites the words of an African Synod, led by Cyprian, which said:

No one among us sets himself up as a bishop of bishops, or by tyranny and terror forces his colleagues to compulsory obedience, seeing that every bishop in the freedom of his liberty and power possesses the right to his own mind and can no more be judged by another than he himself can judge another. We must all await the judgment of our Lord Jesus Christ, who singly and alone has power both to appoint us to the government of his Church and to judge our acts therein.

Quasten then comments:

From these words it is evident that Cyprian does not recognize a primacy of jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome over his colleagues. Nor does he think Peter was given power over the other apostles....No more did Peter claim it: 'Even Peter, whom the Lord first chose and upon whom He built His Church, when Paul later disputed with him over circumcision, did not claim insolently any prerogative for himself, nor make any arrogant assumptions nor say that he had the primacy and ought to be obeyed.'

B. The 6th Ecumenical Council of 680-681

This Council is well known in Church history for its official condemnation of a number of leading Eastern Bishops as well as a Bishop of Rome for embracing and promoting heretical teachings. Pope Honorius, who reigned as bishop of Rome from 625 to 638 was personally condemned as a heretic by the Sixth Ecumenical Council. This was ratified by two succeeding Ecumenical Councils. He was also condemned by name by Pope Leo II, and by every pope up through the eleventh century who took the oath of papal office. In his classic and authoritative series on the history of the Councils, Roman Catholic historian Charles Joseph Hefele affirms this verdict in relating the following irrefutable facts regarding Honorius and the Sixth Ecumenical Council:

*It is in the highest degree startling, even scarcely credible, that an Ecumenical Council should punish with anathema a Pope as a heretic! ...That, however, the sixth Ecumenical Synod actually condemned Honorius on account of heresy, is clear beyond all doubt... (Charles Joseph Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church* [Edinburgh: Dark, 1896], Volume V, p. 181)*

These facts are highly significant. Von Dollinger was the leading Roman Catholic historian of the nineteenth century, who taught Church history for 47 years. He makes these comments:

*This one fact, that a Great Council, universally received afterwards without hesitation throughout the Church, and presided over by Papal legates, pronounced the dogmatic decision of a Pope heretical, and anathematized him by name as a heretic is a proof, clear as the sun at noonday, that the notion of any peculiar enlightenment or inerrancy of the Popes was then utterly unknown to the whole Church. (Johann Joseph Ignaz von Dollinger, *The Pope and the Council* [Boston: Roberts, 1870], p. 61).*

III. Papal Infallibility: “Unanimous Consent of the Fathers?”

Recall that Vatican I made its official pronouncement regarding papal infallibility in 1870 (see p. 23). This same council declared that belief in the primacy of the pope is "the clear doctrine of Holy Scripture", has been "ever understood by the Catholic Church", that those who say otherwise have "perverse opinions" and are in eternal danger because "this is the teaching of Catholic truth, from which no one can deviate without loss of faith and salvation."

A. The pronouncements of Vatican I.

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 any one, 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 the same our Lord Jesus Christ a primacy of honor only, and not of true and proper jurisdiction: let him be anathema. (Session IV, First Dogmatic Constitution of the Church of Christ, Chapter I: Of the Institution of the Apostolic Primacy in blessed Peter)

If, then, any should deny that it is by institution of Christ the Lord, or by divine right, that blessed Peter should have a perpetual line of successors in the Primacy over the universal Church, or that the Roman Pontiff is the successor of blessed Peter in this primacy: let him be anathema. (Chapter II: On the Perpetuity of the Primacy of blessed Peter in the Roman Pontiffs)

This is the teaching of Catholic truth, from which no one can deviate without loss of faith and salvation.

If, then, any shall say that the Roman Pontiff has the office merely of inspection or direction, and not full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the universal Church, not only in things which belong to faith and morals, but also in those which relate to the discipline and government of the Church spread throughout the world; or assert that he possesses merely the principal part, and not all the fulness of this supreme power; or that that power which he enjoys is not ordinary and immediate, both over each and all the churches, and over each and all the pastors and the faithful: let him be anathema.
(Chapter III: On the Power and Nature of the Primacy of the Roman Pontiff)

The above quotations taken from *Dogmatic Decrees of the Vatican Council* as found in *The Creeds of Christendom* by Philip Schaff, Chapters I, II, III.

B. Vatican II (1963-1965).

In order that the episcopate itself might be one and undivided. He [Christ] 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. (Quoted in James White, *The Roman Catholic Controversy*, pp. 104-105).

C. The Early Church's Interpretation.

Of the three passages used to support the claims of Vatican I (Luke 22:31-32, John 21:15-17, and Matthew 16:13-20), *none* is interpreted by the early church consensus as Vatican I requires.

1. Luke 22:31-32.

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”

Of this passage, George Salmon says:

This prayer for 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. (George Salmon, *The Infallibility of the Church*, quoted in White, p. 119)

2. John 21:15-17.

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep.

In commenting on this passage, Cyril of Alexandria (c. 370-444) 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 place of his triple denial, contrasting the former with the latter, and compensating the fault with the correction. (Quoted in White, pp. 113-114).

3. Matthew 16:13-19.

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And 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. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

James White comments:

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 seventeen 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. (White, p. 120)