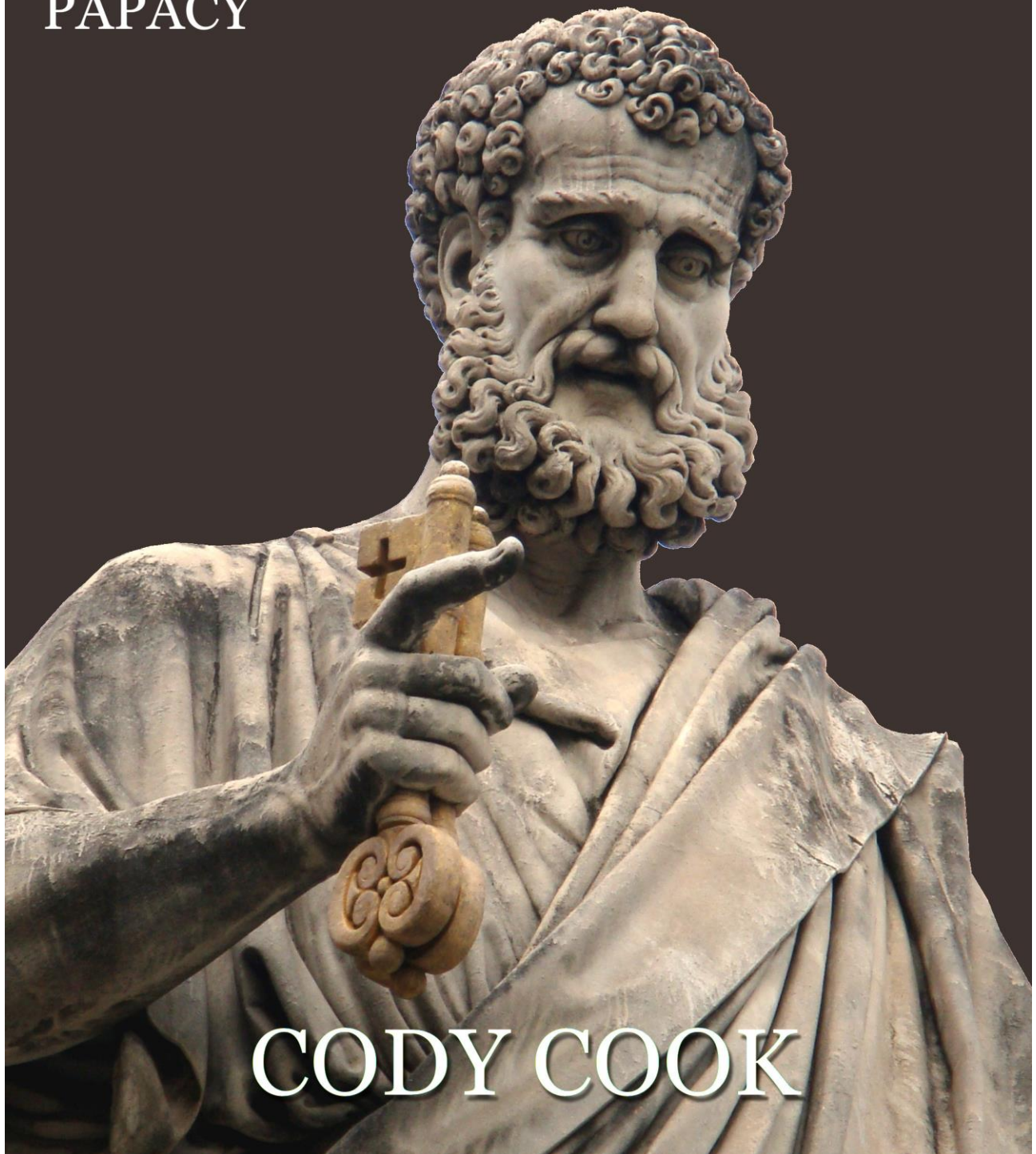


IS THE POPE THE
SUCCESSOR TO PETER?
EXAMINING THE BIBLICAL AND
PATRISTIC EVIDENCE FOR THE
PAPACY



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Second edition

by
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A Note on Methodology

When a Christian in the stream of Protestantism writes an essay of this nature, there are certain dangers to be avoided. First of all, he must be careful to avoid caricatures of the Roman Catholic position. Far too often, Protestants respond to Roman Catholic doctrine based on misunderstandings and their response to it is visceral and superficial. I hope and pray that I have avoided doing this.

Secondly, the Reformation tradition Christian must avoid characterizing Roman Catholics as outside of Christ. If there were no (or almost no) Christians between the Apostolic period and the Reformation, which would be the logical conclusion of such thinking, it's hard to imagine a better description for this period than the gates of hell prevailing against Christ's church. Yet Jesus promised to be with His church, despite its many flaws, to the end of the age.

But this does not mean that the Roman Catholic Church (or Protestant or Eastern Orthodox churches for that matter) is beyond correction. Roman Catholic tradition has much in it to be commended—a strong philosophical background, a communal view of anthropology, a strong emphasis on social justice, liturgical practices that make praise and doctrine central, as well as a more fully orbéd approach to worship that incorporates all of the worshiper's senses, just to cite a few examples. However, this doesn't mean that their official teachings and emphases aren't capable of falling short of what God has revealed in scripture or even of lacking in the historical support that is often claimed for them.

Because the pope and magisterium are considered to be infallible, this makes genuine reform on many important issues impossible within the Roman Catholic Church. By focusing on the papacy, I hope to provide evidence that its teaching authority is not on par with scripture, thus opening the door for those within the Catholic tradition to test all things in their tradition while being willing to hold on to that which is good.

In my approach to the issue of the papacy, I will assume the divine inspiration of scripture and its profitability for doctrine, reproof, and correction. I will also assume that the Holy Spirit has been with the church of all times and places and that what our spiritual forefathers taught needs to be heard and can be extremely beneficial for us today. However, I will not assume that tradition is equal to scripture in authority.

In the end, the Roman Catholic view of the authority of the pope is grounded upon four claims. If any one of these claims is shown to be false, the chain of argument is broken and the pope cannot have the authority that Catholics ascribe to him. These claims are as follows:

1. Peter had a primacy amongst the apostles.
2. He passes this authority on to his successors.
3. These successors are the bishops of Rome.
4. The Roman bishop is infallible (when defining faith and morals) as a result of receiving this office.

As such, I have split the essay into four major sections in order to address these claims.

I thank you for taking the time to read this essay, and I hope that it is as profitable for you to read as it was for me to write it.

“...the apostolic see and the Roman Pontiff hold a worldwide primacy, [and the] Roman Pontiff [the pope] is the successor of blessed Peter, the Prince of the apostles, true Vicar of Christ, head of the whole church and father and teacher of all Christian people. To him, in blessed Peter, full power has been given by our Lord Jesus Christ to tend, rule and govern the universal Church. All this is to be found in the acts of the ecumenical councils and the sacred canons”

(1st Vatican Council, Ch. 3).

Claim #1: Peter had a primacy amongst the apostles

The first plank in the Roman Catholic argument for the papacy is that the apostle Peter had a primacy amongst the apostles. While Peter is spoken of in the Gospels more than any other apostle, and he most certainly takes a leadership role amongst them, it is not the case that scripture records Peter as having a special authority that the other apostles do not share.

For instance, it is in numerous places recorded that the apostle Paul sees himself as equal in authority to Peter. In Galatians, Paul claims to have [seemingly publicly] challenged Peter to his face for his hypocrisy:

“But when Cephas [Peter] came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned” (Galatians 2:11, ESV).

Just before this verse, Paul writes in a way that suggests that he is unaware of Peter having a special rule of authority over the whole church, but seems to think of Peter’s ministry as focusing primarily on the Jews while Paul’s ministry was to the gentiles:

“And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do” (Galatians 2:2-10, ESV).

It was not only Paul who exercised authority (specifically the authority of the gospel) over Peter; we also see Peter standing aside to the authority of James at the Jerusalem Council (see Acts chapter 15).

But if Paul did not view Peter as an uncontestable source of truth for the church, what *did* he view as the church’s authority and source of truth? He seems to have provided the answer in his second letter to Timothy:

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:14-17, ESV).

It is not the authority of councils, Peter, or the bishop of Rome that Paul calls his readers to entrust themselves to for the knowledge which is *sufficient* and *complete* for leading to salvation, but the holy scriptures. Contrast this with the papal bull, *Unam Sanctam*, (dated November 18 1302) which says, “we declare state, define, and pronounce that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff.”

But what of the passages that Roman Catholics point to in order to establish Peter’s primacy over the apostles? There are two which are cited primarily.

The first is in John 21:

“When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you

love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’ He said to him a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Tend my sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ and he said to him, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep’” (John 21:15-17, ESV).

Roman Catholics have sometimes asserted that this passage demonstrates Jesus’ particular concern that Peter, more than the other apostles, feed the Lord’s sheep (his church). However the real significance of this threefold repetition (“Do you love me? Feed my sheep”) matches another threefold repetition—Peter’s threefold denial of Jesus:

“Jesus said to him, ‘Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times’” (Matthew 26:34, ESV).

This parallel strongly suggests that what is happening in John is Jesus restoring Peter to ministry after Peter’s denial of Jesus to save his own skin. Far from demonstrating Peter’s unique authority to lead the church, it demonstrates his inability to do so. That authority belongs to the God who restored Peter (and indeed every one of us) after his sin.

However, John 21 is not the passage cited most by Roman Catholics to establish Peter as the head of the church. That distinction belongs to Matthew 16:

“Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ And they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter replied, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ And Jesus answered him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven’” (Matthew 16:13-19, ESV).

In the First Vatican Council, the Roman Catholic Church stated quite bluntly that the understanding of this passage as claiming that Peter is the rock upon which the church is built, and that this establishes Petrine primacy, was the, “absolutely manifest teaching of the Sacred Scriptures, as it has always been understood by the Catholic Church.” Furthermore, it said to those who, “deny that Peter, in preference to the rest of the apostles... was endowed by Christ with a true and proper primacy of jurisdiction,” and to those who, “assert that this primacy was not conferred immediately and directly on blessed Peter himself, but rather on the Church, and that it was through the Church that it was transmitted to him in his capacity as her minister,” that they would be “anathema,” meaning accursed or perhaps even damned.¹ A brief look at some of the major voices in the early church demonstrate that the claim that this is how the passage has always been understood by the Catholic Church is simply and unequivocally false.

In fact, there seems to have been three major interpretations of this passage in the earliest centuries of the church:

1. Peter was the rock. This was not always understood to mean that this implied some kind of Petrine succession, though this is the official interpretation of the Roman Catholic Church which is used to establish the supremacy of the bishop of Rome.
2. Peter was called the rock as a representative of the apostles. This interpretation is popular among

Eastern Orthodox Christians today. It perhaps has support in passages like Matthew 18:18 where Peter says of all of the apostles (not just Peter) that they are given the power of binding and loosing that we read about back in Matthew 16:19. One might also look to Ephesians 2:20 where it is stated the church is, “built on the foundation [in other words, the rock] of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (ESV).

3. Christ is the Rock, or else Peter’s confession of Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the living God” is the rock upon which the church is founded. This could be justified by passages such as 1 Corinthians 3:11 and 10:4 which describe Christ as the rock of foundation for the church. This is the most popular protestant reading.

The first view finds support in Tertullian at around 220 A.D., though he denied any implication in this passage of succession:

“If, because the Lord has said to Peter, Upon this rock will I build My Church, to you have I given the keys of the heavenly kingdom; or, Whatsoever you shall have bound or loosed in earth, shall be bound or loosed in the heavens, you therefore presume that the power of binding and loosing has derived to you, that is, to every Church akin to Peter, what sort of man are you, subverting and wholly changing the manifest intention of the Lord, conferring (as that intention did) this (gift) personally upon Peter? On you, He says, will I build My Church; and, I will give to you the keys, not to the Church; and, Whatsoever you shall have loosed or bound, not what they shall have loosed or bound. For so withal the result teaches. In (Peter) himself the Church was reared; that is, through (Peter) himself.”²

In contrast, Pope Damasus I did, perhaps conveniently, in 382 A.D. claim that this passage did have implications for the bishop of Rome:

“although the universal catholic church diffused throughout the world is the single bride of Christ, however the holy Roman church is given first place by the rest of the churches without [the need for] a synodical decision, but from the voice of the Lord our saviour in the gospel obtained primacy: ‘You are Peter,’ he said, ‘and upon this rock I shall build my church...’”³

The second view, that Peter is the rock only insofar as he represents the apostles, has support in Origen, a church father who also wrote in the third century:

“But if you suppose that upon the one Peter only the whole church is built by God, what would you say about John the son of thunder or each one of the Apostles? Shall we otherwise dare to say, that against Peter in particular the gates of Hades shall not prevail, but that they shall prevail against the other Apostles and the perfect? Does not the saying previously made, ‘The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it,’ hold in regard to all and in the case of each of them? And also the saying, ‘Upon this rock I will build My Church?’ Are the keys of the kingdom of heaven given by the Lord to Peter only, and will no other of the blessed receive them? But if this promise, ‘I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven,’ be common to others, how shall not all things previously spoken of, and the things which are subjoined as having been addressed to Peter, be common to them?”⁴

The third view (that Christ is the rock) finds support in, for instance, Jerome, a fourth century scholar and priest who translated the Bible into the Latin Vulgate:

“Upon this rock the Lord founded the Church; from this rock also the apostle Peter was allotted his name... The foundation that the apostle, and the builder, laid is our one Lord Jesus Christ. Upon this foundation, stable and firm, and founded by its own robust mass, the church of Christ is being built.”⁵

Eusebius of Caesarea (4th century) also supported the third view, claiming:

“Scripture says: ‘Upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it’; and elsewhere: ‘The rock, moreover, was Christ.’ For, as the Apostle indicates with these words: ‘No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus.’”⁶

Augustine of Hippo, perhaps the west’s most influential church father, wrote in the early 5th century that he had a change of mind from the first view to the third in regard to the interpretation of this passage, but ultimately left it up to the individual to decide which interpretation was best:

“In a passage in this book, I said about the Apostle Peter: ‘On him as on a rock the Church was built’...But I know that very frequently at a later time, I so explained what the Lord said: ‘Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church,’ that it be understood as built upon Him whom Peter confessed saying: ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,’ and so Peter, called after this rock, represented the person of the Church which is built upon this rock, and has received ‘the keys of the kingdom of heaven.’ For, ‘Thou art Peter’ and not ‘Thou art the rock’ was said to him. But ‘the rock was Christ,’ in confessing whom, as also the whole Church confesses, Simon was called Peter. But let the reader decide which of these two opinions is the more probable.”⁷

Ambrose, a fourth century church father and mentor of Augustine, took something of a hybrid view, arguing that Peter was the rock, but only the sense that his confession was the rock:

“Faith, then, is the foundation of the Church, for it was not said of Peter’s flesh, but of his faith, that ‘the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’ But his confession of faith conquered hell. And this confession did not shut out one heresy, for, since the Church like a good ship is often buffeted by many waves, the foundation of the Church should prevail against all heresies.”⁸

This diversity of opinion among the most important theological figures in the early church demonstrates decisively that the Roman Catholic view is not the “absolutely manifest teaching of the Sacred Scriptures, as it has always been understood by the Catholic Church.” In fact, the Roman Catholic Church has actually anathematized views on this matter that are held by Christian thinkers to whom it owes its greatest theological debts.

Claim #2: Peter passed this authority on to his successors

It is claimed by the Roman Catholic Church (as well as in Eastern Orthodoxy and Anglican communions) that there must be apostolic succession for a church to be legitimate. In other words, leadership roles in the church are passed down in succession starting from the apostles. A biblical proof-text that is sometimes used to demonstrate this is Acts chapter 1 wherein, Peter decides that Judas' apostleship should move on to someone else. This allegedly tells us that Peter and the other apostles believed in the importance of having men sit (in perpetuity) in the places of the apostles in order to guide the church.

However, if you read the passage in context, you'll notice something very important—the criteria for succession:

“So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection” (Acts 1:21-22, ESV).

What was Peter's criteria for one who would replace one of the 12? He must be a faithful follower of Jesus who was an eyewitness of his life and especially of his resurrection. Peter felt that the church needed solid and trustworthy witnesses of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to lead it in this important early period. Someone who wasn't with them from the beginning simply wouldn't qualify. This is not about apostolic succession, but about what was necessary at that time for the proclamation of the gospel—faithful eyewitnesses.

In other words, no man today could qualify for this kind of role. So from whence did this concern for apostolic succession derive?

The evidence from church history seems to point to a developing need for authority as a means to ensure orthodoxy. By the time of the writing of Ignatius (in the early 2nd century), one can see a new emphasis in church—the need to have one man, called a bishop, lead each local church community—a concern not evident in the New Testament. Then, as heresies began cropping up in the church, and false gospels were written claiming to be written by apostles, orthodox Christians started to appeal to apostolic succession as a means of combating heresy. The reasoning went something like this:

1. It is the apostles who delivered to us the true Christian doctrine, so it is they whom we must appeal to for the content of the true faith.
2. These apostles are not alive today, but we have their works.
3. Unfortunately, the heretics claim to have works written by them as well.
4. However, our churches can be traced back to the apostles who founded them. The apostles would certainly have shared their doctrine with the local churches and their leaders, and they in turn would have passed this true doctrine down.
5. Thus, those who have succeeded the apostles in the churches which they founded have the true apostolic doctrine.

It's an interesting line of reasoning, but it seems quite obvious that it's not impervious to objections. After all, it isn't unimaginable that false doctrine could creep into the church over time and be mistakenly accepted in later generations as authentic, apostolic teaching. In sum, the idea of apostolic succession was a fallible, though useful means of combating heresies that were developing in the church. However, it is itself a later development that cannot find support in the apostolic writings.

This concern for having a living authority to respond to heresies eventually gave way, particularly in the western church, to appealing to the bishop of Rome as a unique authority among the rest of the bishops. The eastern church, whose approach to church leadership was more collegial than monarchical, held the bishop of Rome in high regard, but did not then and does not today see him in the same way that Roman Catholics do.⁹

Claim #3

Peter's successors are the bishops of Rome

This claim is problematic at best. Assuming that Peter had a higher position of authority over the apostles, and that he passed this position on, (assumptions that we have demonstrated to be in every way deserving of that ascription) why should one accept that it was passed on to the bishop of Rome alone? To begin with, though scripture is nowhere explicit that Peter was ever in Rome or founded a church there (1 Peter 5:13 may contain a coded reference to it), there is in fact a fair amount of tradition in the church's first few hundred years that he died there.

However, placing Peter in Rome at his death by no means demonstrates the claim that he founded a church there (Paul doesn't say anything of the kind in his letter to the church at Rome) or appointed a bishop there to take his place. The best primary evidence from the early church (including the letters of Paul) tells us that the earliest local churches functioned with a multiplicity of elders as leaders. Most scholars of the early church would contend that by the second century, this practice was giving way to a system of each church having a head elder (a bishop). But even though some churches in the beginning of the second century had monarchical bishops, it isn't clear that Rome was one of them.

1 Clement (written late 1st-early 2nd century) suggests strongly that the church in Rome was headed by multiple elders and did not have a monarchical bishop. This is further (implicitly) supported by Ignatius of Antioch, who also wrote in the late 1st-early 2nd century and argued strongly for the practice of a head bishop for every church. To emphasize his view that each church should have a head bishop, in his letters to local churches he tends to mention their bishop by name. Curious then, that when writing to Rome, he drops his usual formula of addressing the church's bishop—no bishop is mentioned.

Some later church fathers did make the claim that Peter established a bishop in Rome. Ireneaus in 189 A.D. stated that:

“...[the] Church [was] founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; ...The blessed apostles, then, having founded and built up the Church, committed into the hands of Linus the office of the episcopate.”¹⁰

What's interesting about this passage is that Ireneaus, like other early fathers, claimed that Rome's distinction was that *both* Peter *and* Paul established the church. Later writers would focus on Peter alone, claiming that Peter's unique authority was passed down to the bishop of Rome because Christ called him alone “the rock” on which the church was built. Yet in this early stage the focus appears to be on Rome's prominence because of its association with two major apostles as opposed to Peter's unique authority.

The premise that Ireneaus could have been passing on a confused tradition is strengthened by competing histories at roughly the same time, such as Tertullian's claim in 199 A.D. that Peter had ordained Clement (not Linus) as the first bishop of Rome.¹¹ Before long, at least in the west, it was widely accepted that the bishop of Rome had greater authority than any other bishop.

The ecclesiastical evolution from having multiple elders in local congregations to local monarchical bishops who appealed to a monarchical bishop in Rome for their own legitimacy must be accounted for somehow. When it is considered that Rome was the seat of the empire, a prestige that only grew greater as the other major cities of the empire fell, it makes sense that Rome would begin to take center stage in the church and that a rationalization of this greatness in theological terms would naturally follow. The 28th Canon of the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) illustrates that in this fairly early period it was widely understood that Rome's position in the empire was the reason for

its theological prominence:

“For the fathers rightly acknowledged the prerogatives of the throne of the Elder Rome because it was the Imperial City, and moved by the same consideration the 150 bishops beloved of God awarded the same prerogatives to the most holy throne of the New Rome [aka Constantinople], rightly judging that the city which is honored by the imperial authority and the senate and enjoys the same [civil] prerogatives as the imperial city of the Elder Rome, should also be magnified in ecclesiastical matters as she is, being second after her.”

Also of interest is canon 6 of the Council of Nicea (325 A.D.), which tells us that the authority of the bishop of Rome was limited to the churches in his jurisdiction:

“Let the ancient customs in Egypt, Libya and Pentapolis prevail, that the Bishop of Alexandria have jurisdiction in all these, since the like is customary for the Bishop of Rome also.”

Another difficult point for the claim of succession, particularly as it relates to the Roman bishop, is that at different points in history there have been competing claims to the papacy, and it is not always obvious who the “real” pope would be. This means that succession, if it ever actually existed, has very possibly been broken. This has been acknowledged by those within the Roman Catholic Church, as the semi-official Vatican publication Pontifical Yearbook demonstrates:

“At this point, as again in the mid-11th century, we come across elections in which problems of harmonising historical criteria and those of theology and canon law make it impossible to decide clearly which side possessed the legitimacy whose factual existence guarantees the unbroken lawful succession of the successors of Saint Peter. The uncertainty that in some cases results has made it advisable to abandon the assignation of successive numbers in the list of the popes.”¹²

Claim #4:

The Roman bishop is infallible (when defining faith and morals) as a result of receiving this office

The First Vatican Council says that the pope is preserved from error, “when, in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole Church.”¹³

Even if the last three premises were true, this one would not follow from them necessarily. Peter may be the leader of the apostles and his Roman successors the earthly heads of the church without it being claimed that what they teach cannot be corrected. In fact, for centuries this last claim was not made at all, and for more centuries still it was not considered official Roman Catholic Church teaching.

Brian Tierney in his Origins of Papal Infallibility has claimed that the 13th Century Franciscan priest Peter Olivi was the first person to claim infallibility for the pope. While the Roman Catholic Church has evolved slowly into its positions, so that assigning a doctrine to one specific point in time is misleading, there doesn't in fact seem to be an earlier reference to this claim. By the time of the Protestant Reformation, the view seemed to be widely held (although debates between Conciliarists and Ultramontanists at this time bear out that it was not universally accepted). It was only officially declared, however, at the 1st Vatican Council in 1870, and with this warning attached to it:

“should anyone, which God forbid, have the temerity to reject this definition of ours: let him be anathema” (1st Vatican Council, Sess. IV , Const. de Ecclesiâ Christi, Chapter iv). In other words, let him be cursed, cut off from the church, perhaps even damned.

For a doctrine that does not go back to apostles, and which allows for a man to declare dogmas which no other men may overturn, regardless of what scripture teaches, there certainly is a heavy penalty attached to those who disbelieve it. Is this an example of being a servant to scripture and to the church, or of unchristian hubris? Judging by the fruit of such a doctrine—a church which cannot be unified due to millions of Protestants, Anabaptists, and Eastern Orthodox Christians not wanting their consciences to be captive to one fallible man whose authority cannot be demonstrated from scripture or tradition—I don't think it would be uncharitable to assign it to the latter category.

Conclusions

In the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission's second statement on Authority in the Church, Anglicans and Roman Catholics acknowledged together that:

“the New Testament contains no explicit record of a transmission of Peter's leadership; nor is the transmission of apostolic authority in general very clear. Furthermore, the Petrine texts were subjected to differing interpretations as early as the time of the Church Fathers.”¹⁴

Since the case for the supremacy of the bishop of Rome is weak from scripture as well as early church history, the objective person is left with two options—either God has intentionally guided the development of the Roman Catholic Church in ways which scripture and tradition alone were not sufficient to direct it (something akin to Newman's Development Hypothesis), or it has at least partially developed to this state through the course of human events and might in fact be incorrect in its views on papal authority.

We established at the beginning that the Roman Catholic Church has to substantiate four claims for its authority:

1. Peter had a primacy amongst the apostles.
2. He passes this authority on to his successors.
3. These successors are the bishops of Rome.
4. The Roman bishop is infallible (when defining faith and morals) as a result of receiving this office.

If even one of these claims fails to be substantiated, the basis for papal authority crumbles. We have shown that all four (except perhaps, in a limited sense, the first) of these claims cannot pass muster.

Where does this leave the Christian who identifies as a Catholic? She has a number of church traditions that are familiar to her and feel comfortable, but she has the freedom, nay, the responsibility to reject those traditions which are not in the spirit of Christ and which contradict His holy scriptures. This does not require that she throws away everything the Roman Catholic Church has taught or believed, as many of its teachings, including those which Protestants often ignore to their spiritual detriment, are eminently worthy of the name “Christian.” But it does require that she recognize that no one replaces Christ as the head of His church on earth. She must look to Christ as preeminent over his church.

She must answer, as did the Protestant reformer Martin Luther during the heresy trial which could have cost him his life:

“Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures... and my conscience is captive to the Word of God... It is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen.”

1 Vatican I, Session 4, Chapter 1, 4-6.

2 Tertullian, *On Modesty*, Ch 21.

3 Damasus I, *Decretum Gelasianum De Libris Recipiendis Et Non Recipiendis*, 3.

4 Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, Book 12, Chapter 11.

5 *The Fathers of the Church*, Catholic University, 2008, Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, 7.25-26, p. 97-98.

6 Eusebius of Caesarea, *Commentary on the Psalms*, Psalm 18:14.

7 Augustine, *Retractions*, Chapter 20.1.

8 *The Fathers of the Church*, Catholic University, 1963, Saint Ambrose, *Theological and Dogmatic Works*, *The Sacrament of the Incarnation of Our Lord*, IV.32-V.34, pp. 230-231.

9 "Five great sees in the Church were held in particular honour, and a settled order of precedence was established among them: in order of rank, Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem. All five claimed Apostolic

foundation. The first four were the most important cities in the Roman Empire; the fifth was added because it was the place where Christ had suffered on the Cross and risen from the dead. The bishop in each of these cities received the title Patriarch... All bishops share equally in the apostolic succession, all have the same sacramental powers, all are divinely appointed teachers of the faith... Rome's mistake – so Orthodox believe – has been to turn this primacy or 'presidency of love' into a supremacy of external power and jurisdiction. This primacy which Rome enjoys takes its origin from three factors. First, Rome was the city where St Peter and St Paul were martyred, and where Peter was bishop. The Orthodox Church acknowledges Peter as the first among the Apostles: it does not forget the celebrated 'Petrine texts' in the Gospels (Matthew xvi, 18 – 19; Luke xxii, 32; John xxi, 15 – 17) – although Orthodox theologians do not understand these texts in quite the same way as modern Roman Catholic commentators. And while many Orthodox theologians would say that not only the Bishop of Rome but all bishops are successors of Peter, yet most of them at the same time admit that the Bishop of Rome is Peter's successor in a special sense. Secondly, the see of Rome also owed its primacy to the position occupied by the city of Rome in the Empire: she was the capital, the chief city of the ancient world, and such in some measure she continued to be even after the foundation of Constantinople. Thirdly, although there were occasions when Popes fell into heresy, on the whole during the first eight centuries of the Church's history the Roman see was noted for the purity of its faith: other Patriarchates wavered during the great doctrinal disputes, but Rome for the most part stood firm. When hard pressed in the struggle against heretics, people felt that they could turn with confidence to the Pope" (Ware, Timothy, *The Orthodox Church*, Kindle Edition).

- 10 Ireneus, *Against Heresies*, 3.3.2.
- 11 Tertullian, *Prescription Against Heretics*, Ch. 32.
- 12 *Annuario Pontificio* 2012.
- 13 Vatican I, chapter 4, 9.
- 14 *Authority in the Church II*, ARCIC, para 2, 6.