

The Origin and Claims of the Papacy

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Recently, Pope Francis came to the United States to spread his ideas and to call on the American civil magistrate and people to be concerned about certain things such as poverty, global warming, refugees, and so on. He was hailed in both “conservative” and liberal media as the leader of Christendom, the holiest man alive, a loving and compassionate leader, etc. Even many evangelical leaders are praising him as a great Christian and a wonderful, loving, pious leader. All of this excitement and praise raises some important questions. How should Protestants who truly accept the authority of the Word of God (i.e. Bible believing Christians) view Pope Francis? Is he really a godly Christian? Is he truly the head of the Christian church? Can his doctrines be trusted? We will answer these questions by comparing the doctrines of the papacy and Roman Catholic Church with those of the inspired, infallible, fully authoritative Word of God—the Bible. We will also examine church history in order to shed light on how certain doctrines of the papal church that explicitly contradict the Scriptures.

The Term “Pope” as a Title

The word “pope” which is the title of the head of the Roman Catholic Church and the word “papacy,” which is the system of government where the pope is recognized as supreme over all, are not terms that are *ever* applied to Christian ministers, elders, or even Apostles in the Word of God. It is a post-apostolic development of a church in serious declension. The word pope comes from the Medieval Latin *papatia*, meaning father. As the churches grew more corrupt the term was applied to ministers, then only to bishops, and finally only to the Bishop of Rome. Priests in the Roman Catholic Church are called “father” in the native tongue of each particular nation but only the head of the Roman Catholic Church is called “pope.”

In Italy the term “pope” came to be applied to all bishops as a title of honor, and then to the bishop of Rome exclusively as the universal bishop. It was first given to Gregory I by the wicked emperor Phocas, in the year 604. This he did to spite the bishop of Constantinople, who had justly excommunicated him for having caused the assassination of his (Phocas’) predecessor, emperor Mauritius. Gregory, however, refused the title, but his second successor, Boniface III (607) assumed the title, and it has been the designation of the bishops of Rome ever since.¹

This title is not only *not* used of the disciples of Christ or ministers or elders in the New Testament but is *explicitly forbidden* by Christ Himself. Jesus said, “Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven” (Mt. 23:9). The context of this passage indicates that our Lord is not speaking of the sphere of the family where children commonly call their male parent “father,” dad, or papa. He is remarking on the corrupt Jewish religious leaders (the scribes and Pharisees) who took upon themselves the name of father (*abba*) as a title of honor and respect. The Savior tells His religious leaders that they must never demand or accept such a designation. For the Roman Catholic church to do so is to imitate the corrupt and apostate Pharisees who exalted themselves in the eyes of their deluded followers. The papal church, in open defiance of Jesus Christ and God the

¹ Loraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962), 125.

Father, has many fathers under the one great papa—the pope. “Already, in our Saviour’s time, an element of *popery* was stealthily lurking, and vigorously germinating, in the use of the designation.”² Thus, even in the pope’s title, we see the supposed leader of Jesus’ church on earth openly repudiating the clear teaching of Christ. Pope Francis carefully cultivates the image of a humble servant while taking upon himself the name and the dress of meglomaniacal false teachers.

There are a few other names that the Roman Catholic Church applies to the pope. One is “Pontifex Maximus” which has been taken directly from Roman paganism. The emperor of Rome as the high priest, who at times was even regarded as divine, was viewed as the connecting link or the bridge between this realm and the realm of the gods. As the *supposed* supreme representative of Christ on earth, the pope is said to be the mediator between God and man. He is said to have the ability to issue indulgences or remit sins and can even release those who are suffering the tortures of purgatory and admit them to heaven. Such a title and its doctrinal implications are blasphemous and thoroughly anti-Christian.

The Bible explicitly teaches that Christ *alone* is the Head of the church. He founded it and redeemed it with His own precious blood. He rules over it and all creation from the right hand of God. Church officers (pastors and ruling elders) are directly under Christ’s authority and can *only* rule in accordance with the teaching of God’s Word. In other words, their rule is purely ministerial and declarative, not autonomous or intrinsic. All the traditions, additions, inventions, doctrines, and practices of the papal church that are *not based directly* on the Word of God are unauthorized, sinful, wicked, and dishonoring to Christ.

In addition, the Roman Catholic concept of the pope as a mediator between God and man, or the church and heaven, is unscriptural, arrogant, and exceedingly wicked. The Bible says, “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). “It is observable that the unity of God is asserted, and joined with the unity of the Mediator; and the church of Rome might as well maintain a plurality of gods as a plurality of mediators.”³ The fact that Jesus Christ is the one and only mediator between God and man implies that He is something unique that other men can never be. He is God of very God—the second person of the Trinity. Moreover, He is a sinless man who as the theanthropic Mediator shed His own precious blood to purchase His church. He rose from the dead victorious over Satan, sin, and death as the second Adam—the New Man (who at the same time is Jehovah). As the victorious Savior, Messiah, and Lord, all prayers must be offered in His name and His intercession is efficacious, for God accepted His sacrifice and gave Him the name above every name (Phil. 2:9). Christ is the only one who can stand between an offended God and sinful man because, as both God and man in one person, He achieved a perfect redemption.

The pope is also called the “universal bishop.” In other words, he is said to have authority over all other bishops. When this title was first used, Gregory I (590-604) condemned it as arrogant and anti-christian.⁴ He preferred the expression the “servant of the servants of God.” After Gregory I, popes happily accepted the title and it became an official title used by the Roman Catholic Church. Church historians regard the reign of Gregory I (590-604) as the transition period between the patriarchal system and the strict papacy of the Middle Ages.

² James Marison, *A Practical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Minneapolis, MN: Klock & Klock, [1984] 198), 430.

³ Matthew Henry, *A Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: MacDonald, n.d.), 6:813.

⁴ Given Pope Gregory I’s views and actions, it is highly unlikely that his statements against the title “universal bishop” were based on humility or sincerity. Roman Catholic scholars have argued since the days of Calvin that Gregory was only arguing against an abuse of the title, not against the title itself (see Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, (1910) 1989], 3:329, footnote 2).

How the Papacy Came into Being

To understand how the papacy came into being, a brief overview of the rise of the papacy is in order. During the apostolic period (i.e. the period of history when apostles were still living and writing the New Testament Scriptures, around A.D. 30-68), the government of the New Covenant church consisted of apostles, evangelists, pastor/teachers, ruling elders, and deacons. A study of the New Testament reveals that apostles and evangelists were extraordinary officers who had sign gifts (e.g., the ability to prophesy and write inspired Scripture as well as work miracles). These offices were unique and temporary and were necessary to start the first churches and establish the canon of the New Testament Scriptures. Once the last of these evangelists and apostles died, their offices ceased. We do not have miracle working, Scripture writing apostles or evangelists today. There are pastors today, but they are not miracle workers or prophets like the evangelists in the book of Acts. The office of deacon, which consisted of mature, responsible men, continues today as well. These men, however, do not teach or rule in the church. Their concern is helping the poor within the church and oversight of the church's finances.

The only offices that have judicial authority within the church after the death of the apostles is pastors and elders or bishops (i.e. overseers).⁵ Each congregation would have a pastor or minister and a

⁵ William Cunningham describes the nature of this authority and its limitations in his classic work on historical theology: "There is, indeed, a clear distinction kept up in the New Testament between the office-bearers and the ordinary church members of the church: the one class being described as rulers and governors, and of course being invested with a certain kind and degree of authority; and the other being bound to render a certain measure and degree of submission and obedience. There are some obvious and important limitations of the authority to be exercised by the one party, and of the obedience to be rendered by the other. First, The authority of the office-bearers, while restricted exclusively to the affairs of the church, - to the administration of the ordinary necessary business of Christ's house, - is even there not lordly, or legislative, or discretionary, but purely ministerial, to be exercised in Christ's name, *i.e.*, in entire subjection to His authority and to His word. Christ is the church's only King and Head; and this implies that its affairs must be regulated by His mind and will revealed in His word. The constitution and laws of His kingdom have been fixed by Him, and cannot by any human or uninspired authority be altered, abrogated, or extended. The office-bearers of the church are not lords over God's heritage: they have no dominion over men's faith; they are the mere interpreters of Christ's word, the mere administrators of the laws which He has enacted. Secondly, Even within their proper sphere of simply interpreting and administering Christ's laws - *i.e.*, applying them to the actual regulation of the affairs of the church as occasion may require - the office-bearers of the church are not, as Papists allege, infallible, so as to be entitled to exact implicit and unquestioning obedience. No such privilege has been promised to, or conferred upon, them; and to claim it, is to put themselves in Christ's stead, and to usurp dominion over the conscience. Thirdly, The office-bearers of the church have no *exclusive* right to interpret Christ's laws. Upon scriptural and Protestant principles, every man has the right of private judgment, - *i.e.*, he is entitled to interpret the word of God for himself upon his own responsibility, for the regulation of his own opinions and conduct, for the execution of his own functions and the discharge of his own duties, *whatever these may be*; and Christ has conferred upon no class of men any power that interferes with the exercise of this right. This right of private judgment belongs to all men in their different capacities, public and private, and ought to be exercised by them with a view to the discharge of their own duties and functions, whatever these may be. Civil rulers are, on this ground, entitled and bound to interpret the word of God for themselves, with a view to the right discharge of any duties, competent to them in their own sphere and province, with respect to the word of God affords any data for decision; and every private individual enjoys the same right or privilege. The same principle, in this general mode of stating it, applies equally to ecclesiastical office-bearers; but in their case it must be viewed in connection with this additional Scripture truth, that they are Christ's ordinance for the ordinary government of His visible church, - that it is *their* function and duty, while it is *not* the function and duty of any other party, to administer His laws for the management of the ordinary necessary business of His church, - for deciding and regulating all those matters which require to be regulated and decided wherever a church of Christ exists and is in full operation. This being their function and duty, they are of course entitled and bound to interpret the word of God for themselves, in the exercise of their own judgment, and upon their own responsibility, for the execution and discharge of it. Christ has not vested the government of His church - *i.e.*, the management of its ordinary necessary business - either in civil rulers or in the body of ordinary

body of ruling elders. The pastor and elders are called a session or congregational presbytery. In the Bible, the pastor and the elders have equal authority in judicial matters. When there is a difficult matter or a judicial case in a local congregation that has resulted in an appeal, then all the pastors and elders in a geographical area meet as a presbytery and deal with the issue at hand. In such meetings, ministers and ruling elders have the *same authority* and *no one* man (e.g., an episcopal bishop or a pope) has an authority over other men. This point is clearly implied in Acts 16:4: “And as they went through the cities, they [Paul and Barnabas] delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.” After the apostles and elders (teaching and ruling elders; see 1 Tim. 5:17) made up their minds (*corporately* as a governing body – as office-bearers) as to what the will of God was in this matter, their final decision was brought before each congregation or all the people. The decision was explained to each congregation and the laity could ask questions and ask for explanations. They, however, (contra to congregationalism) had no judicial authority over the matter.

This rule by a plurality of elders (teaching and ruling elders) unfortunately was abandoned quickly after the close of the canon by the time of Ignatius (ca. 112 A.D.) and the pastor of each congregation was exalted far above the ruling elders. By the early second century, he was regarded as the head and center of a single congregation. By the end of the second century (ca. 180, two generations after Ignatius of Antioch), the church father Irenaeus was advocating the bishopric as a diocesan office (this means the bishop has authority over everyone [even local pastors and elders] within a geographical area.⁶ “This father represents the institution as a diocesan office, and as the continuation of the apostolate, as the vehicle of the catholic tradition, and the support of doctrinal unity in opposition to heretical vagaries. He exalts the bishops of the original apostolic churches, above all the church of Rome, and speaks with great emphasis of an unbroken episcopal succession as a test of apostolic teaching and a bulwark against heresy.”⁷

The old catholic episcopalianism reached its maturity in the writings and example of Cyprian (ca. 210-258) of Carthage (he was arrested, condemned, and beheaded under the persecution of

members; and therefore they are not entitled to interpret the word of God *for the purpose of executing this function*. He has vested the ordinary administration of the affairs of His church in ecclesiastical office-bearers; ad to them, therefore, and to them alone, belongs the right of interpreting and applying *His laws for the attainment of this object, the accomplishment of this end*. In so far as the decisions of ecclesiastical office-bearers affect other men collectively or individually, these men are fully entitled to judge for themselves whether or not the decisions pronounced are in accordance with the mind and will of Christ; and by the judgment which they form upon this point to regulate their own conduct, in so far as they have any function to execute, or any duty to discharge” (*Historical Theology: A Review of the Principle Doctrinal Discussions in the Christian Church since the Apostolic Age* [Edmonton, AB: Still Waters Revival Books, (1882) 1991], 1:50-51).

⁶ Regarding the developments of this period (the ante-Nicene period about A.D. 170-325) Andrew C. Zenos writes, “In the government of the Church the distinction begins to be drawn sharply between clergy and laity. The clergy is likened to the Old Testament priesthood and so the Christian ministry assumes a sacerdotal character. Further the distinction between the title of bishop and that of presbyter becomes emphasized, until the name bishop is applied exclusively to that one of the presbyters in a church who stands at the head of the body of presbyters. This differentiation of the episcopate along with the ascription of priestly functions to the ministry reaches its highest point for this age in the ideas of Cyprian. According to this father the bishop is the visible head of the community and the organ of the Holy Spirit. By him uninterrupted connection is maintained with the Lord, and through him spiritual blessings reach the flock. He is the successor of the apostles and the vicar of Christ. Without submission to him there can be no true membership in the Church. The exaltation of the bishop naturally put presbyters into the position of assistants and counselors, who also assumed complete control and exercised all the bishop’s functions in case of a vacancy in the office. The deacons were also attached to the bishop’s office, but in a more indirect and subordinate way, preserving the specific function of servants in external matters. They were, however, by virtue of their association with the bishop classed with the higher clergy along with presbyters and commissioned to preach and perform other religious services” (*Compendium of Church History* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1940], 60-61).

⁷ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 2:150.

Emperor Valerian). He taught that bishops are the direct successors to the apostles and like them are specially endowed with the Holy Spirit. Cyprian worked to check presbyterial power as he exalted the episcopal office. Cyprian taught the supremacy of Peter over the other apostles in representing the unity of the church, but still regarded the bishop of Rome as a colleague, not a pope. “If with Ignatius the bishop is the center of Christian unity, if with Irenaeus he is the depository of apostolic tradition, with Cyprian he is the *absolute vicegerent of Christ* in things spiritual.”⁸ Cyprian, unlike medieval bishops, respected presbyters and believed (as other bishops of this time) that decisions should be made with the concurrence of the lower clergy.

There are a number of developments that led to the rise of the papacy. First, over time the bishops over capital cities of the provinces were exalted above the other bishops. This led to what is called the metropolitan system. This system was in full operation by the council of Nicea in 325. Second, in conjunction with the rise of the metropolitan system, the bishops in what were regarded as apostolic mother churches (in such cities as Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome) were regarded as the most important bishoprics of all. Of these cities, Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome were the most important because they were capitals and three chief cities of the Roman empire and were centers of trade, commerce, and political power. The exaltation of the bishops in these cities goes all the way back to Irenaeus and Tertullian. The rise of an office above bishops was first applied to the bishoprics of Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome when the western church referred to these bishops as *patriarch* (an honorary title applied to all bishops in the east). In the Nicene age, the bishop of Jerusalem was made an honorary patriarch due to the antiquity of his diocese. In the middle of the fourth century, the bishop of Constantinople (the new capital of the empire) was designated patriarch. He became the church patriarch of the eastern churches and for a time was a rival to Rome.⁹

This arbitrary idea of exalting certain ministers above others and of bestowing special titles and honors upon them has absolutely no warrant from the Word of God. The Roman bishop came to have

⁸ Lightfoot (257), as quoted in *Ibid*.

⁹ Regarding the developments of this period, Andrew C. Zenos writes, “The patriarchates which were developed, but somewhat dimly defined, before the dawn of this epoch, were distinctly outlined and formally recognized in the ecumenical councils. Their boundaries were fixed, and the rights of precedence of their incumbents discussed and adopted. In Egypt the see of Alexandria was easily declared the chief and supreme seat of authority. Antioch retained its central and dominant position in Asia, but was limited on one side by the recognition of Jerusalem as an independent patriarchate after some struggle. On the other side the see of Constantinople grew in importance and became the center not only of the Church in Thrace, but also in Asia Minor, and even in the dioceses of Pontus and Cappadocia. The effect of this was not simply to reduce the patriarchate of Antioch, but to raise that of Constantinople so far, that at the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) it was recognized as equal in rank with the see of Rome. The title “patriarch” was now fixed upon to designate the bishops of these churches. They were empowered to ordain the metropolitans and simple bishops in their respective territories. An occasional exception to the rule of subordination to the patriarchs was made, as in favor of the bishop (metropolitan) of Salamis in Cyprus, who claimed and maintained his independence at the council of Ephesus (A.D. 431). Such were called *autocephali* (self-governing). The bishop of Rome was in the East numbered and ranked among the patriarchs, but the name did not prevail in the West. Neither were the bishops of Rome satisfied with a position which was geographically analogous to the patriarchates of the East. They early put forth the claim that their see was of apostolic origin. A little later this was modified to the effect that all the churches in the West were the offshoots of the only western apostolic see, - that of Rome. The antiquity and apostolicity of the Roman Church was not disputed in the East. On the contrary, deference was paid to the Roman bishops, and the weight of their prestige was sought after by parties, in questions discussed in the East only. Their position in ecumenical councils was equal, if not superior, to that of any other bishops. But their right to dictate or interfere was denied when Julius (A.D. 337-352) proposed to bring the question of the deposition of Athanasius before a Roman council, though an eastern council had decided it. The eastern bishops, assembled at Antioch in council, declared that he had no right to interfere in the affairs of the Eastern Church. But the claim to primacy, instead of being abandoned by such resistance, was reasserted more and more clearly by the successors of Julius. Most important for his forcible presentation of this claim was Leo (A.D. 440-461.)” (*Compendium of Church History* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1940], 80-82.

supremacy above all other bishops because of historical circumstances, human traditions, and pragmatism, as well as a rejection of sola Scriptura (i.e. the Bible is the sole authority and standard for all matters of faith and life). It arose because of a pharisaical desire to exalt certain prominent ministers above presbyters and other ministers. We have clearly noted that the rise of the papacy was not biblical but was an invention of men over time. The bishop of Rome progressively came to have prominence over a period of over 300 years and the early claims of supremacy met widespread dissent. At the Council of Nicea (325), the bishop of Rome is only mentioned incidentally and the early councils of the church were not convened or presided over by the bishop of Rome or his legates. The authority resided in the decision of the councils which had a large plurality of churchmen. Even as late as the Council of Chalcedon (451), the patriarch of Constantinople was declared the official equal to the bishop of Rome (the bishop of Rome disagreed and protested this declaration). The fall of the Roman Empire in the West in 476 (when Odoacer deposed Romulus Augustulus) brought more of a separation between the eastern and western church and increased the bishop of Rome's power and enlarged his doctrinal influence over a greater area. The power vacuum created in the West by the fall of Rome greatly aided the Roman bishops in their quest to attain superiority even over earthly civil rulers.

Although there is a disagreement among scholars over exactly when the papacy as a distinct system arose, history makes it clear that it was a perversion of biblical church government and authority that *took centuries to come to fruition*. As Loraine Boettner points out,

The papal system has been in process of development over a long period of time. Romanists claim an unbroken line of succession from the alleged first pope, Peter, to the present pope, who is said to be the 262nd member in that line. But the list is in many instances quite doubtful. The list has been revised several times, with a considerable number who formerly were listed as popes now listed as anti-popes. It simply is not true that they can name with certainty all the bishops of Rome from Peter to the present one. A glance at the notices of each of the early popes in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* will show that they really know little or nothing about the first ten popes. And of the next ten only one is a clearly defined figure in history. The fact of the matter is that the historical record is so incomplete that the existence of an unbroken succession from the apostles to the present can neither be proved nor disproved.

For a period of six centuries after the time of Christ none of the regional churches attempted to exercise authority over any of the other regional churches. The early ecumenical councils were composed of delegates from the various churches who met as equals. There is not a scholar anywhere who pretends to show any decree, canon, or resolution by any of the ecumenical councils which attempts to give pre-eminence to any one church. *The first six hundred years of the Christian era know nothing of any spiritual supremacy on the part of the bishops of Rome*. The papacy really began in the year 590, with Gregory I, as Gregory the Great, who consolidated the power of the bishopric in Rome and started that church on a new course. We quote two contemporary church historians, one a Protestant and the other a Roman Catholic, concerning the place of Gregory in this development. Says Professor A.M. Renwick, of the Free Church College, Edinburgh, Scotland:

“His brilliant rule set a standard for those who came after him and he is really the first ‘pope’ who can, with perfect accuracy, be given the title. Along with Leo I (440-461), Gregory VII (1073-1085), and Innocent III (1198-1216), he stands out as one of the chief architects of the papal system” (*The Story of the Church*, p. 64).

And the Roman Catholic, Philip Hughes, says that Gregory I,

“...is generally regarded as the greatest of all his line...It was to him that Rome turned at every crisis where the Lombards [the invaders from the north] were concerned. He begged his people off and he bought them off. He ransomed the captives and organized the great relief services for widows and orphans. Finally, in 598, he secured a thirty years' truce. It was St. Gregory who, in these years, was the real ruler of Rome and in a very real sense he is the founder of the papal monarchy” (*A Popular*

The Roman Catholic Proof Text

During the rise of the papacy, the Roman Catholic Church came up with a proof text to support their position, but it is Scripture twisting of the worst kind. The chief proof text is from Matthew 16:18-19, “And I say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” The Roman Catholic Church teaches that, in this section of Scripture, Jesus appointed Peter to be the first pope and thus they argue that Christ Himself established the papacy. They then argue that Peter became the bishop of Rome and his authority has been transmitted to each bishop of Rome or pope after him (this is the idea of direct succession discussed earlier). The Roman Catholic notes to their Confraternity Version say in relation to this passage: “Peter has the power to admit into the Church and to exclude therefrom. Nor is he merely the porter; he has complete power within the Church...In heaven God ratifies the decisions which Peter makes on earth, in the name of Christ.”¹¹ In an official publication of the Roman Catholic Church, Cardinal Gibbons (a former archbishop of Baltimore) in his popular pro-

¹⁰ Ibid, 126-127. If a church historian or scholar does not chose Gregory I, the most common alternative is Leo I (440-461). For example, in McClintock and Strong we read, “The first pope, in the real sense of the word, was Leo I (440-461). Being endowed by nature with the old Roman spirit of dominion, and being looked upon by his contemporaries, in consequence both of his character and his position, as the most eminent man of the age, he developed in his mind the ideal of an ecclesiastical monarchy, with the pope at the head, and endeavored with great energy to transform the constitution of the Church in conformity with his ideal. As a theological writer, he used nearly all the arguments which the defenders of the papacy up to the present time have adduced from the Bible. As bishop of Rome, he carried through his claims to supreme power over the whole Church with a greater energy than any of his predecessors. The bishops of the African and Spanish churches submitted to his demands. Bishop Anastasius of Thessalonica applied to him to be confirmed, and when Leo granted his prayer, and extended his jurisdiction over all the Illyrain churches, Roman supremacy thereby gained an important foothold even in the East. In Gaul, however, he met with a most determined resistance on the part of Hilarius, the metropolitan of Arles; and though he procured from the emperor Valentinian III an edict which unconditionally subjected all bishops of the West Roman Empire to the primacy of Rome, he obtained only a partial victory. At the fourth ecumenical Council of Chalcedon (451) Leo’s legates protested against the famous twenty-eighth canon, which elevated the patriarch of New Rome, or Constantinople, to official equality with the pope. But this protest, as well as that of Leo’s successors, remained without effect, and the Eastern half of the Christian Church learned to look upon the bishop of Constantinople as its highest dignitary, whose claims were supported by a council which Rome herself recognises as ecumenical. After the death of Leo, the papal chair was for nearly one hundred and fifty years filled by weak, insignificant men, who reasserted the papal claims of Leo without possessing his energy to enforce them, and who encountered the unanimous resistance of the Eastern patriarchs. When Felix II (483-492) ventured to excommunicate the patriarch of Constantinople, a complete schism between the Western and Eastern Church took place, which lasted over thirty years. Gelasius I (492-496) mockingly called the patriarch of Constantinople the bishop of the [Greek word] of Heraclea, and proclaimed the principle that the pope’s authority was higher than that of kings and emperors. When pope Symmachus (501 or 503) was acquitted by a synod held in Rome of the charges of adultery, of squandering the property of the Church, and other crimes, the partisans of the pope at this council declared that it did not behoove the council to pass judgment respecting the successor of St. Peter; and one deacon, Ennodius (subsequently bishop of Padua), vindicated this decision by asserting that the Roman bishop is above every human tribunal, and is responsible only to God himself” (John McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* [Grand Rapids: Baker, (1867-1887), 1981], 7:29).

“In favor of Leo I as the first pope, one can find things such as ‘the shout,’ Peter has spoken through Leo, ‘with which the bishops at Chalcedon greeted Leo’s *Tome*’ indicating that the bishops of Chalcedon (451) believed that St. Peter’s authority was mystically transmitted to, and as a result present in his successors in the Roman see” (J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 408).

¹¹ As quoted in Boettner, 104-105.

papal doctrinal book *Faith of Our Fathers*, writes,

The Catholic Church teaches that our Lord conferred on St. Peter the first place of honor and jurisdiction in the government of His whole church, and that the same spiritual supremacy has always resided in the popes, or bishops of Rome, as being the successors of St. Peter. Consequently, to be true followers of Christ all Christians, both among the clergy and laity, must be in communion with the See of Rome, where Peter rules in the person of his successor.¹²

This position rests on their interpretation of Matthew 16:18-19, as well as their view of church history. There are a number of serious problems with the Roman Catholic viewpoint.

First, their interpretation of Matthew 16:18-19 explicitly *contradicts* the teaching on church government found throughout the whole New Testament. This can be observed by noting a number of passages.

(1) In Acts 15, we have a record of a council or presbytery meeting in which the apostle Peter was in attendance. Throughout this chapter, those who have the authority to consider the issue of false teaching from the Judaizers are described as the apostles (plural) and elders (plural). In verse 2, we read, “Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.” Verse 6 says, “Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.” In the account, Peter (vs. 7-11), Paul, and Barnabas (v. 12), James (vs. 14-21), and others (v. 7) discussed the issue. If anyone played a leading role, it was James and not Peter. The final decision was a concurrence of all the apostles and all the elders present, who passed on their decision to the church at Jerusalem; who then in agreement with the presbytery, sent an official letter to all the churches (vs. 22-29). It is obvious from this account that Peter did not have any special authority over the other apostles. This explains Acts 8:14 where after hearing that the gospel had been received in Samaria (a non-Jewish area), the apostles as a corporate body sent Peter and John to Samaria to investigate the matter. They sent Peter, not vice versa.

(2) When writing to the church, Peter placed himself among the elders, rejected the Romanist idea of bishops as lords over the flock for the ministerial view, and noted that Christ alone is the Chief Shepherd of the church: “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” (1 Pet. 5:1-5). Peter himself writing under divine inspiration penned one of the most anti-papal passages in the New Testament. Loraine Boettner writes,

Here Peter refers to himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ, an elder (the word in the Greek is *presbuteros*), which of course has nothing to do with a sacrificing priesthood. He does not claim the highest place in the church as some would expect him to do or as some would claim for him. He assumes no ecclesiastical superiority, but with profound humility puts himself on a level with those whom he exhorts. He makes it clear that the church must be democratic, not authoritarian [i.e., decisions are made on the basis of a consensus or majority vote of the elders (both teaching and ruling overseers), not on the basis of a pope or a bishop (read Acts 15:1-31; Mt. 18:17, etc.)]. He forbids the leaders to lord it over the people...or to take money unjustly. He says that they are to serve the people willingly, even eagerly, and that by their general lives they are to make themselves examples for the people.

¹² As quoted in Boettner, 105.

But the fact is that the Church of Rome acts directly contrary to these instructions. Can anyone imagine the proud popes of later times adopting such a role of humility? It was several centuries later, when the church had lost much of its original simplicity and spiritual power and had been submerged in a flood of worldliness, that the autocratic authority of the popes began to appear. After the fourth century, when the Roman Empire had fallen, the bishops of Rome stepped into Caesar's shoes, took his pagan title of Pontifex Maximus, the supreme high priest of the pagan Roman religion, sat down on Caesar's throne, and wrapped themselves in Caesar's gaudy trappings. And that role they have continued ever since...

Peter refused to accept homage from men – as when Cornelius the Roman Centurion fell down at his feet and would have worshiped him, Peter protested quickly and said, “Stand up; I myself also am a man” (Acts 10:25, 26). Yet the popes not only accept, but demand, such homage, even to the extent that men, including even the highest cardinals, prostrate themselves on the floor before newly elected popes or when making ordination vows before him and kiss his foot. The popes accept the blasphemous title of “Holy Father” as theirs as a matter of right. And how the cardinals, bishops, and priests do like to set themselves apart from the congregation and to lord it over the people!

Surely if Peter had been a pope, “the supreme head of the church,” he would have declared that fact in his general epistles, for that was the place of all others to have asserted his authority. The popes have never been slow to make such claims for themselves, or to extend their authority as far as possible. But instead Peter refers to himself only as an apostle (of which there were eleven others), and as an elder or presbyter, that is, simply a minister of Christ.¹³

(3) In two passages where Paul lists the officers that God has given the New Covenant church, he fails to mention the offices of pope, cardinal, archbishop, and bishop (in the Romanist sense). In 1 Corinthians 12:28 we read, “And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that...administrations.” Ephesians 4:11-12 is unambiguous: “And He gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastor and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” If the papacy was the chief office in the New Covenant church and the pope had the authority of Christ on earth, would Paul neglect to mention it? In addition, where Paul mentions the church officers, who in their ministries are foundational to the New Covenant church, he (once again) does not mention the papacy: “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone” (Eph. 2:19-20). This passage proves that even if we interpret Peter as the rock in Matthew 16:18, Jesus is speaking of all the faithful apostles of which Peter is a spokesman, not Peter alone. The apostles and New Testament prophets are foundational to the church not only because they planted the first churches throughout the Roman Empire and beyond, but *primarily* because they gave us the New Testament Scriptures. The New Covenant canon explains the person and the work of Christ and sets forth the government and ordinances of the New Covenant church. By *departing* from the New Testament's teaching on salvation, the sacraments, sanctification, church government, and worship, the Roman Catholic Church has proved that it is *not built* on the foundation of Peter and the holy apostles but rather on human traditions. It is no longer the church of Christ but a synagogue of Satan; an organization staffed by anti-Christ.

(4) Paul said that any group who attached themselves to Peter as special or any other apostle or teacher instead of directly to Jesus Christ were carnal and schismatic (1 Cor. 1:10-16; 3:21-23). He specifically identifies Peter or Cephas among those we are not to attach ourselves to instead of Christ (1 Cor. 1:12). How could this be possible if Peter was the pope or the only one on earth who holds the

¹³ Ibid, 112-113.

place of Christ and God? This explains why even though Paul mentions Peter six times in his epistles, he never gives him a special title (such as pope or vicar of Christ) or treats him as holding a unique office above the other apostles. Paul had even publicly rebuked Peter when his behavior was inconsistent with the gospel message (Gal. 2:11-14).

(5) Paul taught that in not one area was he behind the eminent apostles, including Peter (2 Cor. 12:11). This statement would be totally untrue if Peter was the pope. He also explicitly denied the Romanist doctrine of the papacy when he said that what Peter was to the Jews, he was to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:7-8).

In addition, when Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans (ca. 57 or 58), his extensive list of greetings in chapter 16 does not mention Cephas or Peter. This proves that at this date Peter was not living or ministering in Rome. His ministry was primarily to Jews and thus he was probably still in Jerusalem or Antioch.

If Peter were the sole head of Christ's church on earth, then Paul and all the other apostles were obligated to acknowledge this position of eminence and submit to it. But as one carefully reads the whole New Testament, one will not find a shred of evidence that a papal office existed or that Peter was the first pope. The reason for this is simple. The papacy arose long after the death of the apostles and the close of the New Testament canon. It is a human tradition that is contrary to the explicit teaching of Scripture.

After the close of the canon of Scripture and the death of the apostles and the first evangelists (who had the prophetic gift), we only have two *continuing*, authoritative church offices: (1) pastor/teachers and (2) elders (*presbuterio*). Both of which are also called overseers (*episcopoi*) which is where the words *episcopal* or *bishop* originate. Pastors and elders have equal judicial authority in the New Covenant church. The idea of a bishop who ruled over all other pastors and elders of a city or geographical area is completely absent from the New Testament. The episcopal concept of church government is ancient but unbiblical.

Second, the view of the Roman Catholic church that Peter was the first bishop of Rome and reigned there as the supreme pontiff over the whole church from A.D. 42 to 67 (a period of twenty five years) is not only false but is rooted in the apocryphal writings of heretical groups (the pseudo-Petrine and pseudo-Clementine fictions). The early traditions of the eastern and western churches only say that Peter came to Rome and preached there and was martyred in the Neronian persecution. The highly speculative witness of the church fathers who speak to this issue is called into question by the fact that a number of them teach that the church in Rome was founded by both Paul and Peter, which is certainly false. The Roman church existed before Paul or Peter ever came to the city. It was almost certainly started by Jews who were converted to Christ on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 2:10 where we are told that Peter preached to "visitors from Rome, both Jews and [Gentile] proselytes"). When Paul writes to the Roman church in A.D. 58, some things become clear: (1) He did not found the church and had yet to visit Rome (see Rom. 1:7-13); (2) Peter was not there, for he is not mentioned in the opening salutation or the final (sign off) greeting. If Peter had been working there for some 16 years and was the pope or leader of the whole church, Paul would certainly have acknowledged Peter and his authority; (3) No apostle had yet been in Rome for all apostles had special abilities to impart gifts and Paul says: "For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established" (Rom. 1:11). If Peter had been there for 16 years, such an expressed desire would be an insult to Peter, as if Peter did not have the apostolic ability to impart spiritual gifts.

Peter was not in Rome as late as A.D. 61, for Paul's prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon) written from Rome, which often contain lists of his fellow workers in Rome, does not mention Peter even once. If Peter had been living there for almost two decades and was the bishop of Rome and the head of the whole church, this silence would be inexcusable. Paul was a

prisoner in Rome for more than two years and loved to receive Christian visitors (see Acts 28:30), yet Peter is never mentioned. Paul tells us in circa A.D. 64 that all men forsook him (2 Tim. 4:16). One must argue that Peter also forsook him or was not there. In 2 Timothy 4:11, Paul says that only Luke was with him. Obviously, in A.D. 64, Peter was not in Rome and was not the bishop of Rome. Philip Schaff summarizes the New Testament evidence regarding the later labors of Peter:

Afterwards we find Peter again in Jerusalem at the apostolic council (A.D. 50); then at Antioch (51), where he came into temporary collision with Paul; then upon missionary tours, accompanied by his wife (57); perhaps among the dispersed Jews in Babylon or in Asia Minor, to whom he addressed his epistles. Of a residence of Peter in Rome the New Testament contains no trace, unless, as the church fathers and many modern expositors think, Rome is intended by the mystic 'Babylon' mentioned in 1 Pet. 5:13 (as in the Apocalypse), but others think of Babylon on the Euphrates, and still others of Babylon on the Nile (near the present Cairo, according to the Coptic tradition). The entire silence of the Acts of the Apostles, in ch. 28, respecting Peter, as well as the silence of Paul in his epistle to the Romans, and the epistles written from Rome during his imprisonment there, in which Peter is not once named in the salutations, is decisive proof that he was absent from that city during most of the time between the years 58 and 63. A casual visit before 58 is possible, but extremely doubtful, in view of the fact that Paul labored independently and never built on the foundation of others; hence he would probably not have written his epistle to the Romans at all, certainly not without some allusion to Peter if he had been in any proper sense the founder of the church of Rome. After the year 63 we have no data from the New Testament, as the Acts close with that year, and the interpretation of 'Babylon' at the end of the first Epistle of Peter is doubtful, though probably meant for Rome. The martyrdom of Peter by crucifixion was predicted by our Lord, John 21:18, 19, but no place is mentioned.

We conclude then that Peter's presence in Rome before 63 is made extremely doubtful, if not impossible, by the silence of Luke and Paul, when speaking of Rome and writing from Rome, and that his presence after 63 can neither be proved nor disproved from the New Testament, and must be decided by post-biblical testimonies.¹⁴

In addition, the greeting of 1 Peter where the apostle writes to Jewish and Gentile Christians in five districts of Asia Minor (Pontus, Galatia, Capadocia, Asia, and Bithynia) implies that sometime after his release from prison (Acts 12:1-17), he spent a great deal of time preaching and ministering to sections of Asia Minor. When not in Jerusalem or Antioch, Peter seems to have spent many years, not in Rome, but in Asia Minor or what is today known as modern Turkey.

Regarding Peter's greeting ("She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you" [1 Pet. 5:13]), the argument that this is a cryptic way of saying the epistle is from Rome is actually weak. While it is true that John may have used the term "Babylon" in the book of Revelation (Rev. 17:5; 18:2) as a symbol of Rome who was persecuting Christians, Revelation was *apocalyptic* and was written *after* 1 Peter. 1 Peter is *not* apocalyptic and he may be speaking *literally* of Babylon. Moreover, the expression Babylon could have been applied by Peter to other persecutors such as Israel or Jerusalem. While it is true that the expression Babylon was used in extra-biblical Jewish literature to describe Rome, this occurred after the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. Rome was compared to Babylon because both empires had destroyed the holy city. Even if Peter does mean Rome, 1 Peter was written A.D. 64 or 65 and thus the Roman Catholic understanding of history is still erroneous. In short, the evidence that Peter lived in Rome for 25 years and was the first bishop of that city and the head of all Christendom is contradicted by the clear testimony of Scripture, has no real historical support whatsoever, and is merely a human tradition.

¹⁴ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 1:250-251.

Lorraine Boettner also tells us that there is no archaeological evidence that Peter ever even lived in Rome, let alone ruled there for 25 years:

Exhaustive research by archaeologists has been made down through the centuries to find some inscription in the Catacombs and other ruins of ancient places in Rome that would indicate that Peter at least visited Rome. But the only things found which gave any promise at all were some bones of uncertain origin. L. H. Lehmann, who was educated for the priesthood at the University for the Propagation of the Faith, in Rome, tells us of a lecture by a noted Roman archaeologist, Professor Marucchi, given before his class, in which he said that no shred of evidence of Peter's having been in the Eternal City had ever been unearthed, and of another archaeologist, Di Rossi, who declared that for forty years his greatest ambition had been to unearth in Rome some inscription which would verify the papal claim that the apostle Peter was actually in Rome, but that he was forced to admit that he had given up hope of success in his search. He had the promise of handsome rewards by the church if he succeeded. What he had dug up verified what the New Testament says about the formation of the Christian church in Rome, but remained absolutely silent regarding the claim of the bishops of Rome to be the successors of the apostle Peter (cf., *The Soul of a Priest*, p. 10).

And after all, suppose Peter's bones should be found and identified beyond question, what would that prove? The important thing is, Does the Church of Rome teach the same Gospel that Peter taught? Succession to Peter should be claimed, not by those who say they have discovered his bones, but by those who teach the Gospel that he taught – the evangelical message of salvation by grace through faith.¹⁵

Third, the Roman Catholic interpretation of Peter as being appointed the pope by Christ is not supported by Matthew 16:13-19. Interpreters have pointed out for centuries that since Peter (*Petros*) is masculine singular and rock (*petra*) is feminine, it refers not back to Peter but to the apostles' declaration "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). The church and its discipline are rooted solely on Jesus Christ and the infallible Word of God. Because the church is founded on Jesus, who is the Messiah and God of very God, it can never fail. The truth that Peter confessed, faithfully held, and taught through history would spiritually conquer this whole fallen world and defeat the purposes of the devil and his minions. This interpretation is supported by the messianic passages which teach that the Messiah is the rock or stone in which we must place our faith and trust.

It is also supported by the New Testament. Jesus told the multitudes that to believe His teaching was like the wise man who built his house on solid rock which no storm could destroy (Mt. 7:24-25). Paul said that the rock from which the Israelites drank in the wilderness typified Christ (1 Cor. 10:4) and that Jesus is the chief cornerstone of the church (Eph. 2:20). Take away the cornerstone and the whole building crumbles. While it is true that the apostles had a foundational role, their role was totally dependent on Christ's Spirit sent from heaven to them. In addition, in the book of Revelation, the foundation has the names of the twelve apostles, of which Peter is only one. Let us also not forget that Paul wrote far more of the New Testament than Peter and planted many more churches. To those who object that this is simply a Protestant interpretation, we need to point out that this view was held by some of the church fathers including the greatest of the first theologians, Augustine, and the originator of the Latin Vulgate, Jerome.

In addition, even if we accept the interpretation that applies *petra* to Peter, we have demonstrated that Peter is not being appointed the first pope with unique authority and powers but is being addressed as the spokesman for all the apostles. The apostles and all ministers of the gospel have the keys of the kingdom of heaven, not because of some autonomous power within themselves, but

¹⁵ Boettner, 118-119.

because they proclaim the gospel and no man can enter heaven without believing in Christ. Moreover, in church discipline the apostles, ministers, and elders of the church had the authority to exclude unrepentant sinners from membership and the holy supper. Peter *did not* say that whoever bows the knee to me as the pope shall enter heaven but rather, “whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21), and, “whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43). The New Testament teaches that the power of the keys is a *declarative* power that can only be based on the teaching of God’s infallible Word; that only Jesus Christ who rules from the right hand of God in heaven has ultimate authority: “He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens” (Rev. 3:7).

The idea that the pope has the keys of heaven and God must ratify whatever the pope says or does when speaking officially is absurd and blasphemous. It is the spiritual equivalent of the divine right of kings. If held consistently, one could argue that the pope could send anyone to hell he pleased. Kings and princes of the high Middle Ages believed this and cowered in fear. If it is true then why do not the popes empty purgatory at once? Why did they demand money before issuing indulgences? It explicitly contradicts the whole Bible which teaches that we are to place our faith in Christ and His infallible, authoritative Word. Nowhere are men instructed to bow before the apostle and kiss their ring or their feet or hands and give them adoration. In the Bible, submission to lawful authority is always “in the Lord.” We can never be required to submit to anything that contradicts the Bible or cannot be proved from the Bible. This was Luther’s argument against the papal church and Luther was right.

As I write this small monograph, Pope Francis has been in the United States almost one week. Before we turn our attention to the claims of the papacy in more detail, we need to make a few observations regarding this visit. First, one thing noticeable is the complete lack of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The pope has been giving his opinions on global warming, immigration, the death penalty, the poor, and capitalism, but he does not tell us about the sacrificial death of Christ and the absolute need to believe in Him as He is revealed in Scripture if we are to be saved. The reason for this glaring absence is simple. Roman Catholics do not believe in the gospel and do not really think it is even important. This point is proved by the pope’s attendance at an ecumenical worship service with Muslim Imams, a Jewish rabbi, a Shinto priest, and so on. Roman Catholicism teaches (at least since the 1994 catechism) that people of all faiths will go to heaven as long as they are sincere and faithful in their beliefs. Not only is this position totally irrational, but it is also heretical and blasphemous. There is only one way to God the Father and that is through faith in the person and work of Christ (Jn. 14:6; Ac. 4:12; etc). Why is this statement true? Because in order to have fellowship with God and stand in His favorable presence, all of our sin and guilt (past, present, and future) must be washed away by the sacrificial blood of Christ. He endured the curse of God (for our violations of his perfect and holy law) on the cross in the place of His elect. In addition, to enter heaven one must be clothed with the wedding garment of Christ’s perfect righteousness. His obedience or righteousness is reckoned to the believing sinner’s account. We are saved not by anything we do such as works, law keeping, or good deeds but solely by the righteousness of Christ. Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Shintos, Animists, New Age mystics, and Buddhists all reject this teaching. They all reject the gospel of Jesus Christ for their own particular human traditions. Therefore, for the pope and Roman Catholics to say that they are all going to heaven if they are “good” and “sincere” is an explicit rejection of the gospel for an irrational type of existentialism.

Second, all this attention of the media, the Roman Catholic Church, and the masses recently, has not been on Jesus Christ but on the pope. He is treated like a rock star or like royalty. News anchors and reporters praise him and glorify him while the masses strive to be in his presence and touch him or his garments. This proves that he is a false Christ, an anti-Christ. We know that this assertion is true, for

the purpose of the teaching and ruling ministries of the church is to point men to Christ and glorify Him. Paul said, “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). “For the Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:22-23). “Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, ‘He who glories, let him glory in the LORD’ [Jer. 9:24]” (1 Cor. 1:30-31). The Roman Catholic Church, along with our media, glorifies the pope because he is anti-Christian and has allied himself with this world. His message primarily is in full harmony with secular humanism, communism, socialism, statism, and pluralism.

If the pope preached the truth like the original apostles and faithful gospel ministers, the world would hate him. But since he, for the most part, preaches antinomian concepts of love and advocates popular left wing causes, he is beloved. He needs to listen to James and repent, “Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of this world makes himself an enemy of God” (Jas. 4:4). John says, “Do not love the world, or the things of the world” (1 Jn. 2:15). Atheists, abortionists, homosexuals, feminists, wicked politicians, evil lying news anchors, and false religious leaders all love the pope, even though they hate Jesus Christ and His holy Word. Paul says, “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:12-13).

The Claims of the Papacy

There are certain claims that the Roman Catholic Church makes about the pope that need to be analyzed biblically. One claim is that the pope is the vicar of Christ, Christ’s personal representative on earth, and has all authority over both church and state. When a new pope is elected to office by the College of Cardinals, at his “coronation” ceremony a special triple-decked crown worth over 3 million dollars is placed on his head. As this bejeweled gold crown is placed on the new pope’s head, the officiating cardinal says: “Receive the tiara adorned with three crowns, and know that thou art the Father of Princes and Kings, Ruler of the World, the Vicar of our Saviour Jesus Christ...” (*National Catholic Almanac*). The New York Catechism says,

The pope takes the place of Jesus Christ on earth...By divine right the pope has supreme and full power in faith and morals over each and every pastor and his flock. He is the true Vicar of Christ, the head of the entire church, the father and teacher of all Christians. He is the infallible ruler, the founder of dogmas, the author of and the judge of councils; the universal ruler of truth, the arbiter of the world, the supreme judge of heaven and earth, the judge of all, being judged by no one, God himself on earth.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994) concurs, “The *Pope*, Bishop of Rome and Peter’s successor, ‘is the perpetual and visible source and foundation of unity both of bishops and the whole company of the faithful.’ ‘For the Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered;’” (254). Pope Leo XIII, in an official letter addressed to all Roman Catholic bishops throughout the whole world (an encyclical) called *The Reunion of Christendom* (1885), authoritatively asserted that the pope holds “upon this earth the place of God almighty.”

These claims are very comprehensive. According to Roman Catholic dogma, the pope is the absolute head over the church and is the ruler of the world. His authority is over all civil magistrates.

This view is called an ecclesiocracy because the church or pope has authority over kings, princes, presidents, and prime ministers. McClintock and Strong describe how this doctrine came into its full dogmatic being:

In 1073 Hildebrand, after being for about twenty-five years the guide of the papal policy, ascended himself the papal chair under the name of Gregory VII. He is commonly regarded as the greatest pope of all times. He clearly and boldly set forth the theory of a theocratic rule of the pope over all nations of the world. The priesthood was regarded by him as the only power directly instituted by God, the power of secular rulers as the product of human agencies. The pope, as vicar of God, was to stand in times of violence between princes and their people, enforcing the law of divine right by his spiritual power, and able either to humble the people or to depose princes. The papacy he represented as the sun from whom all secular authority, also the empire, derived their light like the moon. He sternly enforced the law of priestly celibacy, in order that all priests by renouncing the delights and cares of domestic life, might devote their exclusive labors to promoting the cause of the Church. To the claims which his predecessors had based upon the Isidorian decretals, Gregory added the doctrine of the infallibility and sanctity of the pope, and his right to depose princes and absolve subjects from the oath of loyalty. The period from Gregory VII to Innocent III and Innocent IV is an almost continuous conflict between the popes and the secular governments, during which the former, with an iron firmness, endeavored at first to destroy the direct influence of princes upon the government and offices of the Church and secondly to subject all secular governments to the pope and the Church. Only two years after his elevation to the papal see (1095) Gregory held a synod in Rome, which condemned all simony, and laid every one under excommunication who should confer or receive an ecclesiastical office from the hands of a layman. After lasting about fifty years, the controversy regarding the investiture of bishops was ended by the Concordat of Worms (1122), by which emperor Henry V, after the precedence of the governments of England and France, surrendered “to God, to St. Peter and Paul, and to the Catholic Church, all right of investiture by ring and crosier,” and granted that elections and ordinations in all churches should take place freely in accordance with ecclesiastical laws. These provisions were confirmed as valid for the entire Church by the first General Council of Lateran, and completed the emancipation of the Church from secular governments. The struggle now following for the supremacy of the popes over secular governments was chiefly carried on by the popes Alexander III, Innocent II, and Innocent IV against the emperors of the house of Hohenstaufen. In the progress of this conflict the papacy obtained grand triumphs – the extinction of the house of Hohenstaufen, the penance of Henry II of England at the tomb of Becket, the oath of homage taken by John Lackland and a number of petty princes, the foundation of the Latin empire at Constantinople. Boniface VIII (1294-1303), in his struggle against Philip IV of France, meant to crown this edifice of papal absolutism by the bull *Unam sanctam* (Nov. 18, 1302), which declared that “for every human creature it is a condition of salvation to submit to the Roman pontiff” (*subesse Romano pontifici omni humanae creaturae declaramus esse de necessitate salutis*).¹⁶

For much of church history, the papacy held vast political territories and ordered kings and princes how to rule as subjects under the pope’s authority. If a king did not obey the pope’s arbitrary orders, authorities would be ordered to attack his territory and remove him. The king’s subjects would be told to disobey him and help remove him from office. The church, according to papal teaching, held not only the keys of the kingdom but the physical sword as well. In the latter Middle Ages, the papal church employed assassins and had opponents murdered. This view of the papacy (as holding power over civil magistrates) developed over time between the 5th and 9th centuries. After Charlemagne, or Charles the Great (771-814), king of the Franks, took control of most of Christian western Europe in

¹⁶ John McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1867-1887] 1981, 7:630-631.

800 A.D., kings were crowned by the pope himself. The claim of papal authority over the whole civil realm was supported by a forgery known as *The Donation of Constantine*. It appeared sometime toward the end of the 8th century (circa A.D. 315). Using textual analysis, Lorenzo Valla in c. 1440 proved the document to be a philological forgery from the 8th century.

The papacy's lust for both spiritual and temporal power in the Middle Ages knew no bounds. The popes during this period were obsessed with worldly power, money, riches, and were exceptionally corrupt. The focus of the papacy was not on Christ, the gospel, or the truth but raw power. Boettner writes,

The pope thus demands a submission from his people, and indeed from all people in so far as he is able to make it effective, which is due only to God. Sometimes that submission takes a particularly servile form, with even the cardinals, the next highest ranking officials in the Roman Church, prostrating themselves before him and kissing his feet! The popes have gone so far in assuming the place of God that they even insist on being called by His names, e.g., "the Holy Father," "His Holiness," etc. Such titles applied to a mere man are, of course, blasphemous and unchristian. We cannot but wonder what goes through the mind of a pope when people thus reverence him, carrying him on their shoulders, kissing his hands and feet, hailing him as the "Holy Father," and performing acts of worship before him. By such means this so-called "vicar of Christ" accepts the position of ruler of the world which the Devil offered to Christ, but which Christ spurned with the command, "Get thee hence, Satan!"

The triple crown the pope wears symbolizes his authority in heaven, on earth, and in the underworld—as king of heaven, king of earth, and king of hell—in that through his absolutions souls are admitted to heaven, on the earth he attempts to exercise political as well as spiritual power, and through his special jurisdiction over the souls in purgatory he pleases from further suffering and those whom he refuses to release are continued in their suffering, the decisions he makes on earth being ratified in heaven.

It is impossible to denounce strongly enough the folly and guilt of such glorification of man. The papacy, however, is the direct consequence and end result of the exaltation of the priests as necessary mediators between God and men.¹⁷

The contrast between Jesus and the popes of Rome reveals the worldliness and fraudulent nature of the papal office. Jesus (although God of very God) was a humble man without riches. Peter and John were humble fishers of men who could honestly say, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6). But the popes fly around in jet airplanes and live in the lap of luxury. They have a huge palace full of servants in Vatican City. While the popes wear a bejeweled crown of gold, Jesus wore only a crown of thorns (Jn. 19:2). In various Roman Catholic ceremonies, the pope is carried on a chair by twelve men. Yet Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. Christ was worshiped but He was the Son of God and the worship offered to Him was totally appropriate and biblical. The popes are worshiped (Romanists call this veneration) as people kiss his feet and hands and bow before him as if he were God. This worship is rank idolatry and if the popes were true Christians, they would recoil in horror and rebuke such idolatry (see Rev. 22:8-9; Ac. 14:14-15).

¹⁷ Loraine Boettner, *Roman Catholicism*, 128. One of the most famous power struggles between church and state took place in 1077, at Canossa, in Italy. The emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, Henry IV, in order to remove the papal excommunication, was required by Pope Gregory VII to stand bareheaded for three days in the snow outside the walls of the castle to demonstrate his submission to papal authority in political matters. Interestingly, the papal claims of earthly political power have been greatly downplayed for at least two generations. But they have never denied, revoked, or rejected their claims of absolute papal power even in the civil realm.

Jesus Christ was and is sinless and absolutely righteous. The New Testament apostles, although far from perfect, were holy and humble men who sacrificed almost all to serve Christ. Most of the popes of the Middle Ages were immoral men, unfit even to serve as deacons. The popes of the high Middle Ages were grossly immoral. They had many mistresses, children out of wedlock, and used their position to gain riches and power. For generations, the papacy was essentially a criminal enterprise which was run like the mafia.

The first half of the 10th century is known as the period of “pornocracy,” during which the papal chair was filled by a succession of reprobates, for which the history of few, if any, episcopal sees of the Christian world furnishes a parallel...The vigorous interference of emperor Otho I, who had the last papal representative of “pornocracy,” John XII, cited before a synod of Rome (963), which convicted him of murder, blasphemy, and all kinds of lewdness, and deposed him from his office.¹⁸

In the 15th century, the Borgia family controlled the papacy for many years. They were criminals and murderers as well as habitual adulterers. There was so much treachery, greed, violence, lust, and murder that the four popes prior to the Protestant Reformation are known in history as the four wicked popes. Philip Schaff gives us an example of what the Vatican was like during his time: “[T]wo years before Alexander’s death [pope Alexander VI (Borgia) 1492-1503], October 31, 1501, an orgy took place in the Vatican by Caesar’s [i.e., Caesar Borgia the civil leader (the pope’s son) and a known murderer] appointment whose obscenity the worst of the imperial revels could hardly have surpassed. 50 courtesans spent the night dancing, with the servants and others present, first with their clothes on and then nude, the pope and Lucretia [the pope’s daughter who had been given control of the college of cardinals]¹⁹ looking on. The women, still naked, and going on the hands and feet, picked up chestnuts thrown on the ground, and then received prizes of cloaks, shoes, caps and other articles. To Alexander nothing was sacred, - office, virtue, marriage, or life.”²⁰

In a previous section, we have noted that the idea that the pope is the head over the whole church and even the civil magistrate is not taught in Scripture and thus does not have divine warrant. The claim he makes of possessing total power contradicts the true nature of the church. Pastors and elders only have a ministerial power and not an intrinsic, arbitrary power. The power of the church consists in teaching the Word of God and disciplining according to its strict teachings. To depart from what the Bible says to the right or to the left is sinful and destructive of true ministry. No pope, bishop, or so-called priest has a right to impose man-made rules or regulations or interdict individual freedoms without exegetical proof from the Word of God.²¹ The papal church has substituted human traditions and ecclesiastical dictators for the Bible because they reject the sufficiency, perfection, and finality of

¹⁸ McClintock and Strong, 7:630.

¹⁹ “Her son, Hercules, who reigned till 1559, was the husband of Renee, the princess who welcomed Calvin and Clement Marot to her court” (Schaff, 6:459).

²⁰ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 6:460.

²¹ James Bannerman’s words are right on the mark: “No judgment of any church whatsoever can bind the conscience, except in so far, and no further than, it is grounded upon the word of God...The acts of the Church are binding and valid only in so far as they are ratified by Christ, and in accordance with his Word” (*The Church of Christ*, 1:220, 221). The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the pope and bishops have legislative or decreetive powers. In other words, they can simply make stuff up out of thin air. They justify this teaching with the arbitrary and unbiblical theory that alongside of written revelation there is a body of unwritten traditions deposited with and preserved in the Roman Catholic Church. The fact that the majority of these traditions explicitly contradict the Word of God is proof that their theory is totally wrong. In addition, the Romanist traditions can be traced back to certain points in church history. If the church had this deposit of sacred and infallible tradition from the beginning, why reveal them a little at a time over two millennia? Also, how could doctrines that at one time were rejected all of a sudden become authoritative traditions?

biblical revelation. Because they believe the Bible is not enough for faith and life, they add human philosophies, laws, and wisdom to it and in the process, obscure it with a mountain of human traditions. But we are to teach *only* what the Scriptures teach and we are to remain silent when the Bible is silent. Whenever a human authority is set alongside of the Word of God and is made co-equal, it soon sets itself over the Word and replaces the Bible as the foundation of the Church. It is for this reason that the papal church denies justification by faith alone and has substituted idolatry in the place of biblical worship. Only the Bible deserves an unconditional faith and obedience. Church officers are to be obeyed only when their doctrine or ethics is in agreement with Scripture. The Bible's authority *alone* calls for an instantaneous and unqualified acceptance of its doctrines and directives. When the popes make up doctrines or regulations out of thin air on the supposed basis that they hold the place of Christ and God on earth, they commit idolatry and blasphemy. They have followed Satan's own philosophy which is to doubt or deny God's Word so that we can determine for ourselves what to believe and how to live (human autonomy).

Earlier, we also noted that the church is to be ruled by all the ordained elders and pastors, not by one man. This position is eloquently summarized by Dr. Harris:

The fact is that the early church had no head on earth. Christ was their head and they all were brothers. They did have an organization, however, and Presbyterians point to Acts 15 as a splendid example of how it operated. There was a doctrinal question at Antioch. What should the church of Antioch do to settle it? Should they write a letter to Peter asking his decision? This would be the Romanist position. But they did not. Should they write a letter to the "college of Apostles"? This is the episcopal position that the bishops by apostolic succession have the whole authority in the church. But Antioch did not do that. Should they call a congregational meeting of the church at Antioch and have the matter decided by the vote of the congregation? That would be the independent theory of church government. But they did not do this either. Rather they sent representatives to a synod meeting held at Jerusalem where the apostles and elders came together to consider the matter. They considered it carefully with prayer and Scripture study. Finally the apostles and elders decided on a policy and gave out decrees to which all the churches were expected to submit (Acts 16:4). There was no primacy of Peter or of anyone else. There was instead a democratic meeting of the ordained leaders of the churches judging matters according to God's Word. This is the Scriptural answer to Roman Catholic pretensions on Peter.²²

The Doctrine of Papal Infallibility

If the pope is said to be as God on this earth with absolute authority over both church and state, then it is only logical to attribute a claim of infallibility to the pope when he speaks according to his official office. The Roman Catholic Catechism says, "The Roman Pontiff, head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful...he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals" (891). This doctrine was accepted for centuries in the papal church and was vigorously advocated by the Jesuits before it was officially adopted in 1870 under Pope Pius IX. The Vatican Council which met in 1870 defined this doctrine as follows:

...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 him in blessed Peter, is possessed of that

²² *The Bible Presbyterian Reporter*, Jan. 1959.

infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed that His church should be endowed for defining doctrines regarding faith and morals, and that therefore such definitions of the Roman Pontiff of themselves – and not by virtue of the consent of the Church – are irreformable.

The teaching is so obviously unscriptural and non-factual historically that popes go out of their way not to tell us when they are speaking *ex cathedra*. Were the popes since the 1960s speaking *ex cathedra* when they condemned the death penalty (even for first and second degree murder) as immoral? Obviously, they were not, for God demands the death penalty for first and second degree murder (see Ex. 21:12). Was the current pope speaking *ex cathedra* when he condemned capitalism or when he made statements about global warming? A brief overview of church history reveals that the doctrinal statements of popes have been unreliable and contradictory. Woodrow writes,

Let us notice a few of the hundreds of contradictions to this doctrine of papal infallibility:

Pope Honorius I, after his death, was denounced as a heretic by the Sixth Council in the year 680. Pope Leo confirmed his condemnation. Now if Popes are infallible, how could one condemn the other?

Pope Vigilius, after condemning certain books, removed his condemnation, afterward condemned them again and then retracted his condemnation, then condemned them again! Where is infallibility here?

Dueling was authorized by Pope Eugenius III (1145-53). But later Pope Julius II (1509) and Pope Pius IV (1506) forbade it.

In the eleventh century there were three rival popes at the same time, all of which were deposed by the council convened by the emperor Henry III. Later in the same century, Clement III was opposed by Victor III and afterwards by Urban II. How could popes be infallible when they opposed one another?

Then came the “great schism” in 1378 that lasted for fifty years. Italians elected Urban VI and the French cardinals chose Clement VII. The popes cursed each other year after year until a council deposed both and elected another!

Pope Sixtus V had a version of the Bible prepared which he declared to be authentic. Two years later Pope Clement VIII declared that it was full of errors and ordered that another be made!

Pope Gregory I repudiated the title of “universal bishop” as being “profane, superstitious, haughty, and invented by the first apostate” (Epistola 5:20-7:33). Yet through the centuries, other popes have claimed the title. How then can we say that popes are infallible in defining doctrine, if they directly contradict one another?

Pope Hadrian II (867-872) declared civil marriages to be valid, but Pope Pius VII (1800-1823) condemned them as invalid.

Pope Eugene IV (1431-1447) condemned Joan of Arc to be burned at the stake as a witch. Later, another pope, Benedict IV, declared her to be a “saint.” Could this be papal infallibility?

How could all popes be infallible when a number of popes themselves denied such a teaching? Vigilinus, Innocent III, Clement IV, Gregory XI, Hadrian IV, and Paul IV all rejected the doctrine of papal infallibility. Could an infallible pope be infallible and not know it? Such inconsistency.²³

Was the pope infallible when he made up the absurd doctrine of the assumption of the virgin Mary in 1950? Was the pope infallible when siding with the wicked dictators Mussolini and Franco?

The effect of this doctrine has been to make the whole Catholic Church a slave of only one man and his arbitrary opinions. As the pope goes, so goes the whole church. With an infallible pope, church councils are practically superfluous. The pope is a wicked dictator who has usurped the crown rights of Jesus Christ and has rendered true biblical church government irrelevant. All voices are silenced and protests are crushed or ignored. Dissenters are thrown out of the church or excommunicated. During

²³ Ralph Woodrow, *Babylon Mystery Religion* (Riverside, CA: 1966), 102-103.

the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, godly Christians were persecuted, tortured, murdered, and burned at the stake by the orders of the pope simply because Bible believing Christians upheld salvation through Christ alone, not through the Roman Catholic Church. They were burned alive because they believed that the Bible was the sole standard for faith and life, not the arbitrary opinions of the pope and his minions.

This study has revealed the papacy is not Christ ruling on earth but rather is a masterpiece of Satan. The pope is not a minister of Christ but a servant of the devil. He does not preach the true gospel of Jesus but a satanic counterfeit. Because he denies justification by faith, *sola Scriptura, solo Christo*, and many other fundamental doctrines of Christianity, he is an anti-Christ. Because he is regarded as the head of Christendom and the shepherd of shepherds, he is the worst and most dangerous anti-Christ of all. If you are a Roman Catholic, you need to search your heart and ask yourself some crucial questions. Should I give my allegiance to an anti-Christ or should I serve Jesus and His Word alone? Am I a Roman Catholic because I have studied the Bible and found that its doctrine is identical with that of the church? Or am I a Roman Catholic because I was raised in the church? Should I trust my soul to a church that practices idolatry? Should I trust the salvation of myself and my family to a church which changes its doctrine to cater to the surrounding culture (e.g., Vatican II) when biblical doctrine never has and never will change? Should I trust my place in eternity to a church which explicitly denies the biblical doctrine of salvation (e.g., the Council of Trent)? Are you willing to read the Bible and obey what it says, even when it runs contrary to what your family and friends believe? Jesus said that you must love and serve Him more than your own family, even more than your own self (Lk. 14:2).

You can leave behind the heavy yoke of doubt, fear, and bondage to ritual and man-made regulations by trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for your salvation. Believe that Jesus Christ lived a perfect, sinless life in your place. Believe that He died a sacrificial atoning death in order to cover your sins with His blood, thus satisfying God's wrath against your sin. Believe that He rose from the dead, victorious over sin and death for you. Believe that He ascended to the right hand of God in order to intercede for you. Ask God to send the Holy Spirit to regenerate you (make you born again) and help you follow Him. Repent of your past sinful lifestyle. True faith in Christ *must* issue forth into a life of godliness and good works; otherwise you do not have true faith and are still in darkness (Jas. 1-2). Remember, holiness and good works do not contribute in any way to your salvation; they are evidence that salvation has already taken place.

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