

**FINDING GENUINE CATHOLICISM
IN THE
ORTHODOX EAST**



**by
Fr. Kevin Kirwan**

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For quite some time I have wanted to put down in writing some of the reasons, based on historical discoveries, which led us to embrace Eastern Orthodoxy. It is something that family and friends have probably wondered about also. Perhaps by actually writing down why we, along with our three youngest sons, did so will shed some light on what is probably a mystery for most of those who know us.

I hope, as does anyone who undertakes such a project, not to be misunderstood or have my intentions mis-characterized. It is not my intention to disparage unfairly the Roman Catholic Church in which both Jane and I were raised, or even the Protestants with whom I got involved during college and early adulthood. Certain understandings or teachings will be scrutinized and even criticized. These are observations based on more honest and accurate historical information than that to which I had previously been exposed. It is, I believe, a much better informed position now that we have had an opportunity to study more closely the roots of our holy Catholic faith and the testimony of its ancient fathers. So, while some might say we have left Catholicism, or at least have become schismatic, I can show this is not the case. I think you will see by the end of this apologia that far from wanting to attack Catholicism or abandon her, we want only to experience her true worship and cling to her undefiled teachings. So I ask your patience and consideration of what is presented.

There is an old Catholic saying that one becomes Catholic in his first seven years of life. I believe there is much validity to that statement. I am not so sure it is the case today, however, for young Roman Catholics growing up with the ceaseless liturgical and theological experimentations to which they are constantly being subjected, but for someone like me who had the advantage of my early childhood being pre-Vatican II, it was very beneficial. I am confident that, especially in regard to my own eventual dislodging from Protestant fundamentalism, it was those early years making a profound influence on my own psyche that would help guide me back to genuine Orthodox Catholicism today. Even while wandering in that desert of protestant confusion with its thousands of denominations (each one being built upon some individual personal revelation or biblical emphasis) I would always miss the sense of the sacred and Catholicism's historical continuity. I always sensed that I was missing or had turned away from something

I shouldn't have. It required a former protestant minister to challenge me to look at the ancient Church with the sincerity to know what it really taught. Then began a journey that would eventually lead us to Catholic Eastern Orthodoxy, the Church of the holy apostles, and heroic martyrs.

A YOUTHFUL DETOUR TO PROTESTANT FUNDAMENTALISM

“Are you saved?” That was a question I heard posed for the first time by an upper classman at Sioux Falls College, a small Baptist affiliated institution I was attending to play football. I was sitting outside a laundromat not far from campus waiting for some clothes to dry when one of the campus’ “Jesus people” zeroed in on this lost looking freshman. I glanced up and managed to mutter something like “I’m Roman Catholic,” hoping somehow that would dissuade him. Saying that to a motivated and sincere protestant fundamentalist—unbeknownst to me at the time—was not going to be a very effective tactic for ending that conversation. It would be the first of many conversations with him and others about Christ, Scripture and what it meant to be a Christian.

To make a long story short, a couple of months later I would become a Bible-only- believing zealot. Looking back, I have to admit I met many wonderful and sincere people who seemed to love God with all their hearts. It was a period when I immersed myself in Scripture. It would also, sadly, be a time of throwing out the proverbial baby with the bathwater, as I did more than just become better acquainted with the teachings of Christ in sacred Scripture. During this period, I began to accept the innovative understandings of protestant fundamentalism as true and used them to distort the biblical testimony in ways that had nothing to do with what the apostles actually taught. Even as I insisted the Scripture alone contained all that we needed to understand Christ and His teaching, I systematically was rejecting and throwing out much of what it taught, especially regarding the sacraments and ecclesiology. So, while I became more proficient at quoting Scripture, I was, unfortunately, not believing and, in some cases, ignoring vast sections of it, in order to make it fit protestant perspectives never known in the ancient Church—all the while in my delusions thinking I was being faithful to its testimony.

Over the next few years, Jane and I would get married, have the first two of our six sons and do the best we could to recapture the essence of the Church as we thought it was portrayed and practiced in the Book of Acts. Being

young and ignorant was no hurdle when zeal and determination combined. Together with a few other like-minded visionaries, we started gathering together anyone who would listen to us, and before long, a small yet dedicated group of mostly young people came to believe that they were, in fact, recreating the biblical Church. As I said, ignorance and youthful arrogance were not going to be deterrents.

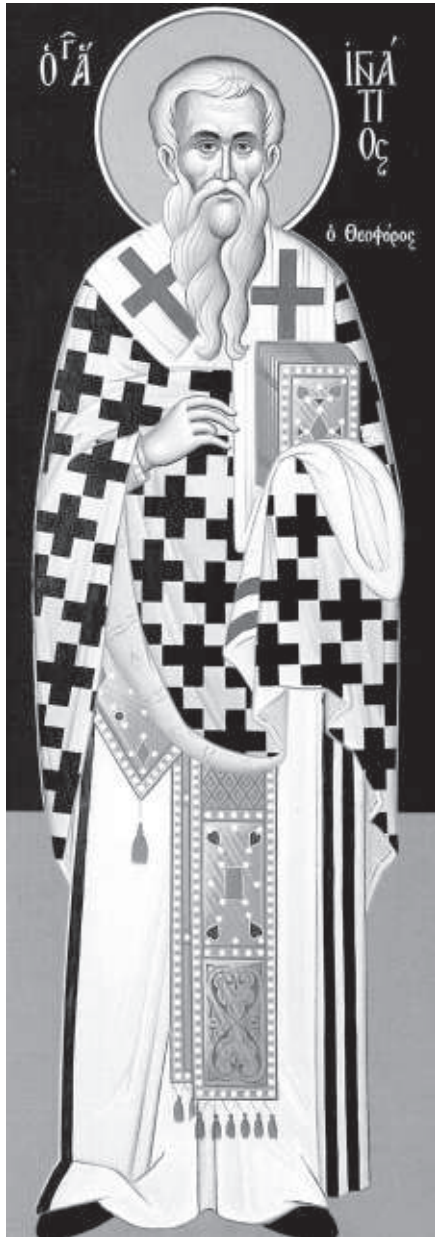
THE EVANGELICALS WHO FOUND THE ANCIENT FAITH

Janene was a young single woman who had somehow found her way to our Bible-believing only, non-denominational, making-it-up-as-we-go-along sect. Of course, none of us knew that at the time, as we were sure that we were probably the only true Christians in the area. I can only attribute such naïveté to youthful zeal without knowledge and, of course, the much more apparent cause, good old-fashioned arrogance. At this time, I was a supposed 26 year old elder being financially supported, along with a couple of others, by this group when Janene first appeared at one of our meetings.

Not too long after she first began fellowshiping with us, Janene approached me and suggested that I should meet with her older brother Ken who was doing some of the same things we were trying to do here. Ken lived in Indianapolis and was the leader of a much larger congregation of youthful believers. Soon plans were made to meet as he was returning home for a visit to his folks in Cleghorn, Iowa, just forty minutes or so from Sioux City. The meeting was arranged and Ken met with me and the other leaders of our group in our upstairs apartment on Jackson Street.

The one thing I will never forget about that initial meeting was a question posed by Ken. It was to be one of the most challenging things I had ever been confronted with. It went something like this: “You fellas are all very dedicated and eager to experience genuine Christianity and you no doubt value sacred Scripture as your rule of Faith. You also know that even the most dedicated and sincere holders of *sola scriptura* (Scripture alone) are often at odds with one another, often holding to and even promoting profoundly different understandings as to what the Scriptures actually teach.” He didn’t know, but that was really addressing a major concern in our own group, as that every man had his own interpretation of Scripture was causing constant tensions even in the leadership. “Tell me,” he continued, “Who do you think would have a better grasp of what Scripture actually taught and meant? You

and I sitting in this living room two thousand years removed from when it was written in another language by men of a completely different culture, or would those who were actually instructed in the Christian Faith personally by these apostles and appointed by them to assume leadership roles as their successors have better understanding about who they were, what they taught, and the meanings contained in their writings?”



SAINT IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH

This was startling, something I had never stopped to consider. Why, of course, if someone actually knew, spent time with and was trained by one of the original apostles for a leadership role in the Church, he would have a much better understanding of what the Apostles wrote or taught than some “Johnny-come-latelys” like us two thousand years removed. All of our prior assertions to the contrary, it was becoming painfully obvious that it was not the Holy Spirit giving us insight into what the Bible taught. After all, we could not determine the truth among ourselves on a whole list of doctrinal issues or biblical understandings. But who were these disciples of the apostles and what did they have to say, if anything, relevant to our situation? This would be the beginning of a quest for some of us and a departing point for others.

Soon we were considering the writings of St. Ignatius of Antioch who wrote a series of letters on his way to Rome where he was to receive a martyr’s crown by being thrown to the lions in the infamous Roman Arena. This man, ancient bishop, disciple of the apostles themselves and reputed to be the very child Christ held when He said, “Unless you become like this

child, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven,” revealed understandings in his letters that were awfully, and, to some of us, uncomfortably “Catholic,” even using that very term to describe the Church of which he was a bishop. He spoke of the unity of the Church being centered in the local bishop and even of the Eucharist or Holy Communion in unmistakably Catholic terms.

I was stunned and shaken and began to read as much as I could about the ancient Church and its early fathers, almost all of whom were martyred for their Faith. It was a Faith that our little experimenting sect and I knew nothing about. At the same time, I could almost hear familiar voices from my youth. Perhaps some of the same things the good nuns had tried to teach me in grade school were right, especially when put into historical context. Catholicism, from what I was beginning to see in the patristic writing, was not a medieval man-made superficial structure, but something alive and truly Christ-centered and it was becoming increasingly evident it was the very thing I was looking for, but was only now beginning to comprehend.

After some time had passed a few of us in that original group of house church devotees decided we too needed to start on that road to genuine biblical and historical Christianity—a journey that would finally bring us to the Church Christ founded. The Church that Christ established did not cease to exist when His apostles died or the canon of Scripture was completed. It not only survived but also flourished because He promised never to abandon or forsake Her even unto the end of time. (*Matthew 28:20*) The arrogance of our previous assumptions began to be torn down with the newly acquired understanding of Scripture, courtesy of the patristic testimony. No longer could we believe the previous nonsense we had held with such assurance. It would mean that Christ lied. If Christ was true to His word, His Church was to be perpetually under His divine protection and safeguarded. It would also mean that He would not need us to reinvent it, or start it over. We only would need to find it, and then be joined to it.

THE CHOICE: THE LATIN WEST OR THE ORTHODOX EAST?

Once it is understood that Christ is literally true to His word, and that He has established His Church, you are then faced with only two real alternatives — the Orthodox Catholic East or the Roman Catholic West. Both can and do trace themselves to apostolic origins. Both of them can produce lists of bishops with one preceding the other going all the way back



ST. GREGORY THE GREAT

to one of the apostles themselves. Antioch in present day Syria, where followers of Christ were first called Christians, claims Peter as its founder and first bishop. Peter lived and taught there some seven years prior to his ever making his way to the already thriving Christian Community in Rome.

Pope Gregory the Great, with whom we will deal at length later in this treatise, when writing to Eulogius the Patriarch of Alexandria, affirms that he, along with the Patriarch of Antioch, shared equally in the See of Peter. This "See" of Peter is not unique to Rome. This false and unhistorically based claim is often made by those attempting to place an incorrect emphasis on Roman papal authority.

According to the words of Pope Gregory, three bishops occupy that See. *"Wherefore though there are many apostles, yet with regard to the principality itself the See of the Prince of the Apostles alone has grown strong in authority, which in three places (Antioch, Alexandria and Rome) is the See of the one. For he exalted the See in which he deigned even to rest and end the present life. (Rome where Peter died) He himself adorned the See to which he sent his disciple as an evangelist. (Alexandria, where St. Mark his disciple went.) He himself established the See in which, though he was to leave it, he sat for seven years. (Antioch where, according to St. Gregory, St. Peter sat or ruled as bishop.) Since then it is the see of one, and one See, over which by Divine authority three bishops now preside."*¹

The Roman Apostolic See was never understood to be uniquely St. Peter's by the early fathers. In all the ancient documents this See is referred to as the Church of Peter and Paul, not Peter's alone as both of them, perhaps Paul even more so, helped to establish it in the Catholic Faith.

I suppose if someone feels it absolutely necessary to be aligned with the Primary See of Peter he will be compelled to join himself to the Church of Antioch. After all, according to Pope Gregory the Great, St. Peter was bishop of Antioch before ever setting foot in Rome. Antioch was a thriving Church and the original Petrine See long before the Gospel ever reached the Roman capital. It was also in Antioch that the followers of this Jesus of Nazareth were first called Christians, according to the book of Acts.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH OF THE FIRST MILLENNIUM

For most of the first thousand years of the Church, unity of the East and West was maintained. Mutual respect for each of their Apostolic origins and the desire of all to cling to genuine Holy Tradition as espoused by the ancient fathers and clarified by Ecumenical Councils would ensure unity and keep in check, for the most part, the ambitions of bishops who would think more highly of themselves than they ought. That is not to say there wasn't some trouble from time to time. Bishops and priests of even great Apostolic Sees would occasionally wander off into error and heresy, following their own inclinations rather than the consistent understandings of the Church.

One of the more interesting controversies involves Pope Gregory the Great, whom I have already briefly mentioned, who presided as Bishop of Rome at the end of the sixth century. It concerned a dispute he had with the Patriarch of Constantinople, John the Faster, over his appropriation of a title that no bishop should assume. Before we look at this conflict between Pope Gregory and the Patriarch, let's go back a century or so earlier and consider what the early Catholic Church understood to be the earmarks of a true Catholic. It may come as a shock for most loyal Roman Catholics, but nowhere will they find blind obedience to the Roman bishop or any other bishop to be the standard employed by the ancient Church in determining fidelity to Christ's Catholic Church.



ST. VINCENT OF LÉRINS

A GENERAL RULE FOR DISTINGUISHING CATHOLIC TRUTH

There is no better starting point than with one of the early Latin fathers, St. Vincent of Lerins. St. Vincent was of Gallic nationality (modern-day France) and a monk of the famous monastery of Lerins. About the year 434 this Latin father gave the Catholic Church one of its great apologetic works, *The Remembrancer* or *The Commonitory*, as it is now known.

It is the classic restating of apostolic understanding as to how one determines the genuine Catholic Faith. As you consider what he writes, understand that this approach was universally accepted and understood by both East and West all the way up to the 14th century.

According to Brian Tierney, a renowned modern day Roman Catholic historian, Duns Scotus, a Franciscan philosopher who lived in the early 14th century, building upon the ideas of Bonaventure, abandoned the ancient Catholic criteria and became the father of the new “living tradition”. Suddenly, the temporal historical dimension simply vanished from the Latin arguments, and it was not what the Church had always proclaimed that was crucial and necessary to believe, but rather what the Church was proclaiming then and there, in their own time.²

This dramatic and novel shift would be the precursor for all manner of baseless and unfounded teachings infiltrating the Latin Church. Holy Tradition was being replaced with the so-called “living tradition”. The abandonment of Catholic Tradition was now accelerating with alarming frequency.

Here are some excerpts from the aforementioned *The Commonitory*. You will be able to clearly see how the entire Catholic world, both East and West, determined what was, or was not, Catholic. This was the standard apologia for all Catholics well into the 14th century — and still is for those wanting to hold genuine Holy Tradition.

ST. VINCENT OF LERINS: *THE COMMONITORY*

Chapter II. [4] “I have often inquired earnestly and attentively of very many men eminent for sanctity and learning, how and by what sure and so to speak universal rule I may be able to distinguish the truth of the Catholic faith from the falsehood of heretical pravity; and I have always and in almost every instance, received an answer to this effect: That whether I or any one else should wish to detect the frauds and avoid the snares of heretics as they rise, and continue sound and complete in the Catholic Faith, we must, the Lord helping, fortify our own belief in two ways: first, by the authority of the Divine Law, and then by the Tradition of the Catholic Church.

[6] “Moreover, in the Catholic Church itself, all possible care must be taken that we hold that Faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all. For that is truly in the strictest sense “Catholic” which, as the name itself and the reason of the thing declare, comprehends all universally. This

rule we shall observe if we follow universality, antiquity, and consent. We shall follow universality if we confess that one Faith to be true, which the whole world confesses; antiquity, if we no wise depart from those interpretations which it is manifest were notoriously held by our ancestors and fathers; consent, in like manner, if like antiquity itself we adhere to the consistent definitions and determinations of all, or at least of almost all priests and doctors.”

Here is a concise and to-the-point patristic approach to determine what is “Catholic.” In order for something to be “Catholic,” the following three criteria must be evident: Universality, Antiquity, and Consent. These are the great pillars of Catholic truth, and if any understanding cannot find its basis in all three, then it is to be rejected as profane. St. Vincent in Chapter XX shows us now the traits of a true and genuine Catholic.

Chapter XX [48] ‘This being the case, he is the true and genuine Catholic who loves the truth of God, who loves the Church, who loves the Body of Christ, who esteems divine religion and the Catholic Faith above everything, above the authority, above the regard, above the genius, above the eloquence, above the philosophy, of every man whatsoever; who sets light by all of these, and, continuing steadfast and established in the Faith, resolves that he will believe that, and only that, which he is sure the Catholic Church has held universally and from ancient time; but that whatsoever new and unheard of doctrine he shall find to have been furtively introduced by some one or another, besides that of all, or contrary to that of all the saints, this he shall understand does not pertain to religion, but is permitted as a trial.’³

St. Vincent does two things here. First he shows it is incumbent upon every believer to attempt to understand the ancient and universally accepted dogmas of the Church. This is no small task and involves study and application, something few are willing to do today. The simplistic and dangerous admonition often espoused by present day Roman Catholics: “just follow the Pope and Magisterium,” is not evident here. There are serious reasons for this, which will become abundantly clear as we consider the historical facts about to be presented. We are told that if you truly love the Catholic Faith, you are to hold it, which must obviously involve personally knowing it. You are then to esteem it above “the authority, above the regard, above the genius, above the eloquence of every man whatsoever” whether he is a pope, bishop, priest, or television evangelist. We are to know the ancient Catholic Faith and then cling to it with all our strength, allowing no authority or eloquence to shake us from its firm foundation. Again and again we are reminded of the following: “resolving to believe that and only

that which he is sure the Catholic Church has held universally and from ancient time.” What a departure this is from modern attempts to reinvent and change everything under the pretext of fitting our time or special circumstance! The standard is not change but stability, not innovation but steadfast adherence to what has already been given and accepted as the Church’s genuine Tradition.

Many more examples of this Catholic approach are illustrated in his classic apologetic. It is an understanding that was commonly held in the Catholic East and Catholic West for over a millennium. Unfortunately, ambition and unrestrained arrogance would lead Rome away from Orthodoxy and she would find herself adrift in the innovations and novelties she once so stalwartly opposed.

Before those floodgates of innovation opened in the West, there were many shining examples of Roman popes who were steadfast in maintaining genuine Catholic understanding in the face of ambition, lust for power, or any other ill-conceived motivation. There is no greater champion of the Orthodox Catholic Faith than Pope Gregory the Great who would become the Bishop of Rome some hundred years after St. Vincent wrote his treatise. Though he was the Patriarch of the West and was recognized as having the primacy of honor amongst all the Apostolic Sees, he was a Roman bishop who understood the boundaries to which even patriarchs are subject, including Rome’s.

THE POPE WHO CONDEMNED A SINGULAR UNIVERSAL AUTHORITY IN CHRIST’S CATHOLIC CHURCH

When Pope Gregory the Great came to occupy the See of Rome it was a tumultuous time in the western regions of the Empire. The new capital for the last few centuries was Constantinople, not Rome. This transfer occurred in 324 when Constantine the Great moved the Roman Capital to this brand new city on the Bosphorus which would bear his name until overrun by the Moslems in the 1400’s. It is known today as Istanbul in modern day Turkey.

When Pope Gregory the Great became Rome’s bishop in 590 the eastern region was flourishing, while the western portion was under constant attack and threat from the barbarian hordes. Many in the western regions of the Empire believed they were living in apocalyptic times, including St. Gregory. So real was this belief that it would be expressed in many of the writings of this Roman bishop. It seemed that the end of the world was at hand and the old Roman capital about to be overrun.

It is in those unsettling times that St. Gregory came onto the scene and it was here that this able churchman would shine as one of the outstanding bishops of that, or any other age. St. Gregory has always been highly regarded in the Orthodox Catholic East not only for his correct understanding and defense of restrained and limited episcopal authority, but also for his keen theological mind and liturgical contributions still used by the Orthodox Catholic East to this very day, especially during Great Lent.

It is his understanding of episcopal authority that is of interest here. A seemingly harmless declaration of the then Emperor Maurice will allow us to see much more clearly the genuine Catholic understanding of limited episcopal authority or prerogatives, whether it be the Bishop of Rome, of Constantinople or of any other Catholic See. It was the decision of the Emperor that the “New Rome,” Constantinople, should have its Patriarch John the Faster raised to the same degree of honor as belonged to the one of ancient Rome, still keeping him in the second rank, but only in respect of seniority. The Emperor Maurice thus gave to John the Faster the title of Ecumenical or Universal Patriarch. It is Pope Gregory’s vehement denunciation of this action and title which is so interesting — not because he wanted it all to himself and that it somehow denied him prerogatives that he alone, along with his predecessors and successors, enjoyed. He had quite a different view altogether. It is a view that condemns not only John’s non-Catholic ambitions but those of any bishop who would dare assume what he saw as a usurpation of Christ’s unique headship in the Church.

Pope Gregory presents the most powerful denunciation imaginable opposing such arrogance and demonstrates how a bishop or priest can through the seduction of pride or self-importance, follow in the footsteps of the devil himself. It is an analogy, as you will see, that this ancient pope uses with great effect. Rather than to present this letter piecemeal with my commentary, I will first present it in its entirety. I urge a careful and considered reading of what Pope St. Gregory has to say. After reading the words of this ancient Latin Patriarch of the West, consider the titles, stated positions, and authority now assumed by his successors in Rome. Then honestly ask yourself: would he be any less severe in his comments to subsequent medieval and modern day popes who claim a singularity of authority or jurisdiction in Christ’s One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church?

**EPISTLE XVIII TO JOHN,
BISHOP OF CONSTANTINOPLE**

Gregory to John, Bishop of Constantinople: At the time when your Fraternity was advanced to sacerdotal dignity, you remember what peace and concord of the Churches you found. But, with what daring or with what swelling of pride I know not, you have attempted to seize upon a new name, whereby the hearts of all your brethren might have come to take offense. I wonder exceedingly at this, since I remember how thou wouldest fain have fled from the episcopal office rather than attain it. And yet, now thou hast got it, thou desirest to exercise it as if thou hast run to it with ambitious intent. For, having confessed thyself unworthy to be called a bishop, thou hast at length been brought to such a pass as, despising thy brethren, to covet to be named the only bishop. And indeed in regard to this matter a weighty letter was addressed to your holiness by my predecessor Pelagius of holy memory; in which he annulled the acts of the synod, which had been assembled among you in the case of our once brother and fellow bishop Gregory, because of that execrable title of pride, and forbade the arch-deacon, whom he had sent according to custom to the threshold of our lord, to celebrate the solemnities of mass with you. But after his death, when I, unworthy, succeeded to the government of the church, both through my other representatives and also through our common son the deacon Sabinanus, I have taken care to address your Fraternity, not indeed in writing, but by word of mouth, desiring to restrain yourself from such presumption. And, in case of your refusing to amend, I forbade his celebrating the solemnities of mass with you; that so I might first appeal to your Holiness through a certain sense of shame, to the end that, if the execrable and profane assumption could not be corrected through shame, strict canonical measures might be resorted to. And, since sores that are to be cut away should be first stroked with a gentle hand, I beg you, I beseech you, and with all the sweetness in my power demand of you, that your Fraternity gainsay all who flatter you and offer you this name of error, nor foolishly consent to be called by the proud title. For truly I say it weeping, and out of inmost sorrow of heart attribute it to my sins, that this my brother, who has been constituted in the grade of episcopacy for the very end of bringing back the souls of others to humility, has up to the present time been incapable of being brought back to humility; that he who teaches truth to others has not consented to teach himself, even when I implore him.

Consider, I pray thee, that in this rash presumption the peace of the whole Church is disturbed, and it is in contradiction to the grace that is poured out on all in common; in which grace doubtless thou thyself wilt have power to grow so far as thou determinest with thyself to do so. And thou wilt become by so much the greater as thou restrainest thyself from the usurpation of a proud and foolish title: and thou wilt make advances in proportion as thou art not bent on arrogation by derogation of thy brethren. Wherefore, dearest brother, with all thy heart love humility, through which the concord with all the brethren and the unity of the holy universal Church may be preserved. Certainly the Apostle Paul, when he heard some say, *I am of Paul, I of Apollo, but I of Christ (I Corinthians 1:12)*, regarded with the utmost horror such dilacerations of the Lord's body, whereby they were joining themselves, as it were, to other heads, and exclaimed, saying, *Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul (I Corinthians 1:13)?* If then he shunned the subjecting of the members of Christ partially to certain heads, as if beside Christ, though it were to the apostles themselves, what wilt thou say to Christ, who is the Head of the universal Church, in the scrutiny of the last judgment, having attempted to put all his members under thy self by the appellation of Universal? Who, I ask, is proposed for imitation in this wrongful title but he who, despising the legions of angels constituted socially with himself, attempted to start up to an eminence of singularity, that he might seem to be under none and to be alone above all? Who even said, *I will ascend into heaven, I will exult my throne above the stars of heaven: I will sit upon the mount of the testament at the sides of the North: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High (Isaiah 14:13-14)*.

For what are all thy brethren, the bishops of the universal church, but stars of heaven, whose life and discourse shine together amid the sins and errors of men, as if amid the shades of night? And when thou desirest to put thyself above them by this proud title, and to tread down their name in comparison to thine, what else dost thou say but *I will ascend into heaven; I will exult my throne above the heaven?* Are not all the bishops together clouds, who both rain in the words of preaching, and glitter in the light of good works? And when your Fraternity despised them, and you would fain press them down under yourself, what else say you but what is said by the ancient foe, *I will ascend above the heights of the clouds?* All these things when I behold with tears, and tremble at the hidden judgments of God, my fears are increased, and my heart cannot contain its groans, for that this most holy man the lord John, of so great abstinence and humility, has through the seduction of familiar tongues

broken out into such a pitch of pride as to attempt, in his coveting of that wrongful name, to be like him who, while proudly wishing to be like God, lost even the grace of the likeness granted him, and because he sought false glory thereby forfeited true blessedness. Certainly Peter, the first of the apostles, himself a member of the holy and universal Church, Paul, Andrew, John — what were they but heads of particular communities? And yet all were members of one Head. And to bind altogether with a short girth of speech the saints before the law, the saints under the law, the saints under grace, all these making up the Lord's Body, were constituted as members of the Church and not one of them has wished himself to be called universal. Now let your Holiness acknowledge to what extent you swell among yourself in desiring to be called by that name by which none presumed to be called who was truly holy.

Was it not the case, as your Fraternity knows, that the prelates of this apostolic See, which by the providence of God I serve, had the honor offered them of being called universal by the venerable council of Chalcedon, but yet not one of them has ever wished to be called by such a title, or seized upon this ill-advised name, lest if, in virtue of the rank of the pontificate, he took to himself singularity, he might seem to have denied it to all his brethren.

But I know that all arises from those who serve your Holiness on terms of deceitful familiarity; against whom I beseech your Fraternity to be prudently on your guard, and not to lay yourself open to be deceived by their words. For they are to be accounted the greater enemies, the more they flatter you with praises. Forsake such; if they must needs deceive, let them at any rate deceive the hearts of worldly men, and not of priests. *Let the dead bury their dead (Luke 9:60)* but say ye with the prophet, *let them be turned back and put to shame that say unto me, Aha, Aha (Psalm 69:4)*. And again, *But let not the oil of the sinner lard my head (Psalm 140:6)*

Whence also the wise man admonishes well, *Be at peace with the many: but have one counselor of a thousand (Ecclesiasticus 6:6)*. For, *Evil communications corrupt good manners (I Corinthians 15:33)* for the ancient foe, when unable to break into strong hearts, looks out for weak persons who are associated with them and, as it were, scales lofty walls by ladders set against them. So he deceived Adam through the woman who was associated with him. So, when he slew the sons of the blessed Job, he left the weak woman that, being unable of himself to penetrate his heart, he might at any rate be able to do so through the woman's words. Whatever weak and secular persons then are near you, let them be shattered in their own persuasive words and flattery, since they procure to themselves the eternal enmity of God from the very forwardness in being seeming lovers.

Of a truth it was proclaimed of old through the Apostle John, *Little children it is the last hour (I John 2:18)*, according as the Truth foretold. And now pestilence and sword rage through the world, nations rise against nations, the globe of the earth is shaken; the gaping earth with its inhabitants is dissolved. For all that was foretold has come to pass. The king of pride is near, and (awful to be said!) there is an army of priests in course of preparation for him, inasmuch as they who had been appointed to be leaders in humility enlist themselves under the neck of pride. But in this matter, even though our tongue protested not at all, the power of Him who in His own person peculiarly opposes the vice of pride is lifted up for vengeance against elation. For hence it is written, *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble (James 4:6)*. Hence again it is said, *Whoso exalteth his heart is unclean before God (Proverbs 16:5)*. Hence, against the man that is proud it is written, *Why is the earth and ashes proud (Ecclesiasticus 10:9)?* Hence the Truth in person says, *Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased (Luke 14:11)*. And that He might bring us back to the way of life through humility, He deigned to exhibit in Himself what He teaches us saying, *Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart (Matthew 11:29)*. For to this end, the only begotten Son of God took upon Himself the form of our weakness; to this end the Invisible appeared not only as visible but even as despised; to this end He endured the mocks of contumely, the reproaches of derision, the torments of suffering; that God in His humility might teach man not to be proud. How great then is the virtue of humility for the sake of teaching which alone He Who is great beyond compare became little even unto the suffering of death! For since the pride of the devil was the origin of our perdition, the humility of God has been the means of our redemption. That is to say our enemy having been created among all things, our Redeemer, remaining great above all things, deigned to become little among all things.

What then can we bishops say for ourselves, who have received a place of honor from the humility of our Redeemer, and yet imitate the pride of the enemy himself? Lo, we know our Creator to have descended from the summit of His loftiness that He might give glory to the human race, and we, created of the lowest, glory in the lessening of our brethren. God humbled himself even to our dust; and human dust sets his face as high as heaven, and with his tongue passes above the earth, and blushes not; neither is he afraid to be lifted up — even man who is rottenness, and the son of man that is a worm.

Let us recall to mind, most dear brother, this which is said by the most wise Solomon, *Before thunder shall go lightning, and before ruin shall the heart*

be exalted (Ecclesiasticus 32:10); where on the other hand it is subjoined, *Before glory it shall be humbled.* Let us then be humbled in mind, if we are striving to attain to real loftiness. By no means let the eyes of our heart be darkened by the smoke of elation, which the more it rises the more rapidly it vanishes away. Let us consider how we are admonished by the precepts of our Redeemer, who says, *Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3).* Hence also he says by the prophet, *On whom shall my Spirit rest, but on him, that is humble, and quiet, he that trembleth at my words (Isaiah 66:2).* Of a truth, when the Lord would bring back the hearts of His disciples, still beset with infirmity, to the way of humility, He said, *Whosoever will be chief among you shall be least of all (Matthew 20:27).* Whereby it is plainly seen how he is truly exalted on high who in his thoughts is humbled. Let us, therefore, fear to be numbered among those who seek the first seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the market, and to be called of men Rabbi. For contrawise, the Lord says to His disciples, *But be ye not called Rabbi: for one is your master and all ye are brethren. And call no man your Father upon the earth, for one is your Father (Matthew 23:8, 9).*

What then, dearest brother, wilt thou say in that terrible scrutiny of the coming judgment, if thou covet to be called in the world not only father, but even general father? Let then the bad suggestion of evil men be guarded against; let all instigation to offence be fled from. *It must needs be that offences come; nevertheless, woe to the man by whom the offence cometh (Matthew 18:7)* Lo, by reason of this execrable title of pride the Church is rent asunder, the hearts of all the brethren are provoked to offence. What has escaped your memory how the truth says, *Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believes in me, it were better for him that a mill stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea (Matthew 18:6)?* But it is written, *Charity seeketh not her own (I Corinthians 13:4).* Lo, your Fraternity arrogates to itself even what is not its own. Again it is written, *Have peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord (Hebrews 12:14)?* Where is that which is written, *Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God (Matthew 5:9)?*

It becomes you to consider, lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled. But still, though we neglect to consider, supernal judgment will be on the watch against the swelling of so great elation. And we indeed, against whom such and so great a fault is committed by this nefarious attempt — we, I say are observing what the truth enjoins when it says, *If thy brother shall sin against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.*

But if he will not hear thee, take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of one or two witnesses every word may be established. But if he will not hear them, tell it unto the Church. But if he will not hear the Church, let him be to thee as an heathen and a publican (Matthew 18:15-17). I, therefore, have once again through my representatives taken care to reprove in humble words this sin against the whole Church; and now I write myself. Whatever it was my duty to do in the way of humility I have not omitted. But, if I am despised in my reproof, it remains that I must have recourse to the Church.

Wherefore may Almighty God show your Fraternity how great love for you constrains me when I thus speak, and how much I grieve in this case, not against you, but for you. But the case is such that in it, I must prefer the precepts of the Gospel, the ordinances of the Canons, and the welfare of the brethren, to the person even whom I greatly love.

I have received the most sweet and pleasant letter of your Holiness with respect to the case of the presbyters John and Athanasius, about which, the Lord helping me, I will reply to you in another letter; for being surrounded by the swords of the barbarians, I am now oppressed by such great tribulations that it is not allowed me, I will not say to treat of many things, but hardly even to breathe. Given in the Kalends of January; Indiction 13. ⁴

POPE PIUS IX AND VATICAN I: IMPIETY BECOMES DOGMA

Many examples of successor bishops to Rome's episcopal throne, forgetting the words of Pope St. Gregory can, of course, be cited; but none are as heinous as those which came out of Vatican I in 1870 under the despotic reign of Pius IX. It was at this supposed Ecumenical Council, which was, in reality, a rubber-stamping committee orchestrated by Pius IX, that Rome finally attempted to set in stone these errors with a grand finality.

August Bernhard Hasler, a noted Roman Catholic historian, published a monumental work in 1978 titled, *How the Pope Became Infallible*. This insightful and no punches pulled exposé was a stunning indictment of the whole process manipulated by Pius IX. Having unprecedented access to the then recently opened Vatican archives, along with readily available sources from that era, Hasler revealed not only dark machinations, but a man in the person of the then present pope who was in all likelihood suffering from some very real mental and physical problems.⁵ While the person of Pius IX makes for some interesting reading and speculation, I will not dwell on these

personal aspects, alarming and disconcerting as they are. Instead I will only recount some of the pronouncements which issued forth from this assembly and ask that you compare them to the words of Pope Gregory the Great and the historical record. Ask yourself if these pronouncements reflect the understanding of Pope Gregory and genuine Holy Tradition, or would they be met with the same kind of direct and biting denunciations St. John the Faster, Patriarch of Constantinople, experienced from the pen of this ancient Pope of Rome?

PAPAL ARROGANCE DEFINED

“Hence we teach and declare that by the appointment of our Lord, the Roman Church possesses a superiority of ordinary power over all the other churches, and that this power of jurisdiction of the Roman Pontiff, which is truly Episcopal, is immediate; to which all, of whatever right and dignity, both pastors and faithful, both individually and collectively, are bound by their duty of hierarchical subordination and true obedience, to submit not only in matters which belong to faith and morals, but also in those which appertain to the discipline and government of the Church throughout the world, so that the Church of Christ may be one flock under one supreme pastor through the preservation of unity both of communion and of profession of the same faith with the Roman Pontiff. This is the teaching of Catholic truth, from which no one can deviate without loss of faith and salvation.”⁶

Pope Gregory condemns a much less obvious arrogance affecting his brother bishop in Constantinople. He compares this ambition to satanic pride and self-glorification for merely assuming a seemingly harmless honorific title.

Pope Pius IX will do this more than one better. With arrogant shamelessness he will orchestrate his own exaltation, even having this make-believe Ecumenical Council declare that if one does not accept this profane and impious dogma, he forfeits his faith and salvation! These anti-Catholic declarations continue with even more outrageous hubris.

“And since by the divine right of Apostolic primacy the Roman Pontiff is placed over the Universal Church, we further teach and declare that he is the supreme judge of the faithful, and that in all causes, the decisions which belong to the Church, recourse may be had to his tribunal, and that none may re-open the judgment of the Apostolic See, than whose authority there is no

greater, nor can any lawfully review its judgment. Wherefore they err from the right course that it is lawful to appeal from the judgments of the Roman Pontiffs to an Ecumenical Council, as to an authority higher than that of the Roman Pontiff. If, then, any shall say that the Roman Pontiff has the office merely of inspection or direction and not full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the universal Church, not only in things which belong to faith and morals, but also in those which relate to the discipline and government of the Church spread throughout the world; or assert that he possesses merely the principal part; or that this power which he enjoys is not ordinary and immediate, both over each and all the churches, and over each and all the pastors, let him be anathema.”⁷

RECALLING AGAIN THE WORDS OF POPE ST. GREGORY THE GREAT

Contrast and compare the words of Vatican I with its demands for subordination and rule with the sentiments of St. Gregory in his appeal to St. John the Faster, Patriarch of Constantinople. Just how far did the successors of Pope Gregory manage to deviate from this ancient pontiff’s instruction, while ignoring his dire warnings?

“And when your Fraternity despises them, (other bishops who, according to Gregory, are denied their rightful place when any bishop would dare assume a singular authority apart from their fraternal consensus) and you would fain press them down under yourself, what else say you but what is said by the ancient foe, “I will ascend above the heights of the clouds?” By such acts, whom does the offender imitate? It is, of course, the first one who because of pride and unlawful ambition attempted to ascend a place not his.

In yet another place he says “What wilt thou say to Christ, who is the Head of the universal Church, in the scrutiny of the last judgment, having attempted to put all His members under thyself by the appellation of Universal? Who, I ask, is proposed for imitation in this wrongful title, but he who in despising the legions of angels constituted socially with himself, attempted to start up to an eminence of singularity, that he might seem to be under none and to be alone above all?”

Is there truly any room for doubt that the succeeding Popes of Rome, especially after Pope St. Gregory the Great, started down that slippery slope of pride and ambition? We know that a few hundred years later Cardinal

Humbert, the infamous papal delegate of Pope Leo IX, would dare lay upon the altar of Hagia Sophia, the Cathedral of the Patriarchal See of Constantinople, a bull of excommunication directed at the Patriarch and those in communion with him. What was the crime and grave offense of the Orthodox East? It was the non-acceptance of the Roman bishop's usurpation of a unique and singular authority in Christ's Holy Catholic Church — the very thing condemned with bitter denunciations by Pope Gregory the Great, former occupant of Rome's episcopal throne.

This so-called Eastern Schism in 1054 was not a rebellion of wayward bishops in the East, as I was first taught at Immaculate Conception Grade School. Instead, it was merely the fruition of Roman papal arrogance finally making a break with its brother bishops in the East, who understood and held to the genuine Catholic Tradition and proper exercise of episcopal authority. It was, in fact, Rome falling from the heights she had wrongfully attempted to ascend, that would be the starting point for an ever-accelerating departure from the ancient Faith, as she continued to separate herself from Catholic unity, even as she arrogantly thought herself exercising a divine prerogative. Its origination was anything but divine. Indeed, it was nothing more than an imitation of the first apostate, the devil himself, as pointed out by Pope Gregory.

Of course, Vatican I and Pius IX would not be content with simply reasserting the error of Rome's unlawful singular authority and jurisdiction. It would see its conceit totally unrestrained, finding it necessary to declare something even more outrageous. Not content with a declaration of universal authority and jurisdiction over the entire Catholic episcopacy, which included the Orthodox bishops and patriarchs of the East from which she had estranged herself some centuries earlier, Pius IX would now literally go off the deep end. It was not enough that the Roman Pontiff simply act like God, but now in certain circumstances, he literally could be God.

VATICAN I ON PAPAL INFALLIBILITY

The Roman Pontiff, when he speaks *ex cathedra* — that is, when in the discharge of the office of the Shepherd and Teacher of all Christians in accordance with his supreme apostolic authority, defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals which must be held by the whole Church — by the divine assistance promised him in blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the divine Redeemer willed that His Church should be endowed in

defining doctrine regarding faith and morals; therefore, such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are irreformable of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church.⁸

All academically honest Church historians will, of course, point out the utter lack of evidence for such a claim as papal infallibility in the patristic record. Nowhere in antiquity can such a dogma be surmised or uncovered. Surprisingly, there is even a really damning indictment against this error from just a few hundred years prior to Pius IX — and from a Roman Pope. It is revealed during a fourteenth century conflict between the Pope and the Franciscans. It absolutely destroys the claims of Vatican I and shows that even post-schism Rome had not dared to assert such falsehood even as late as the 14th century. Pope John XXII condemns this heretical understanding of papal infallibility with the full weight of his own episcopal authority when he confronts a faction of wayward Franciscans.

POPE JOHN XXII (1316-1334) CONDEMNS PAPAL INFALLIBILITY

The background for Pope John's denunciation involves a controversy instigated by the Franciscan "Spirituals". This was one of two mutually antagonistic groups within the Order — the other being the party of the "Conventuals".⁹ In the first years of the fourteenth century, the long-simmering dispute between these two groups became even more agitated.

The Spirituals were the more radical and a minority within the Order. It was their contention that Franciscans could play a useful role in the Church only if they adhered to the primitive ideals of their founder, especially the ideal of poverty. This view, though held by all Franciscans, was moderated by that of the Conventuals, who argued that a vow of apostolic poverty was the renunciation of property rights and not necessarily the severe frugality or "poor use" of actual day-to-day living espoused by the "Spirituals".¹⁰

In the midst of these controversies, Pope John XXII became pope in 1316. He was a professional canonist, an expert administrator and a strict disciplinarian.¹¹ He also viewed the excesses of the Spiritualists with much apprehension and sought to moderate, if not outright suppress, their extremist views, which he saw as a threat to the ordered visible structure of the hierarchical Church. It soon became apparent that he viewed the Franciscans generally with much suspicion, even those of the more moderate Conventual party, because he believed even their seemingly more reasonable view still called for the absolute poverty of Christ and his apostles which, of

course, was a not too subtle criticism of the ever more powerful and affluent hierarchical Latin Church.

It was one of his predecessors, Pope Nicholas III, who in 1279 regulated and endorsed the life of the Franciscan Order in his decree *Exiit*, which caused John XXII much consternation. John concluded that Nicholas had made radical blunders in his dealings with the Franciscans — blunders concerning both church discipline and church doctrine. John was determined to use his sovereign authority as head of the Church to correct these blunders.¹²

In an unexpected move, Pope John assaulted the very core of Franciscan understanding. He started this by annulling the prohibition of his predecessor Pope Nicholas III which forbade the discussion of his decretal, *Exiit*. A Bull promulgated in March, 1322, introduced the theme that Pope John would maintain throughout the entire controversy, *i.e.*, the pope's absolute freedom to revoke the decrees of his predecessors whenever he saw fit.¹³

In November of 1323 John released his Bull, *Cum inter nonnullos*. On the surface at least this Bull constituted a flat condemnation of the whole Franciscan theory of evangelical poverty.¹⁴ This news was met with strenuous opposition by the Franciscans, who would seize upon the pronouncements of Nicholas III as being irreformable because of its favorable endorsement of Franciscan understanding. It would also cause some of the leaders of the Franciscans to label John XXII a heretic and would result in the first real theological pronouncement of a pope's personal infallibility from a group of dissident Franciscans who at the time were hiding themselves in the court of the excommunicated Emperor Lewis of Bavaria.

Keep in mind that the following bold pronouncement was not coming from any pope, but from those who were opposing one. What they said had never been uttered by any previous pontiff, but only by those engaged in a conflict with a current pope who was not sympathetic to their cause, as was Nicholas III. According to the renowned Roman Catholic historian Brian Tierney, their bold assertion is an entirely novel contribution made by rebellious friars in exile. It was a significant development born out of their desire to see Pope John XXII bound to the more favorable assertions of a previous pope regarding their own cause and understanding. Though some earlier Franciscan theologians like Pietro Olivi had intimated lesser versions of this new understanding, they had up until now been considered somewhat eccentric and not taken very seriously. It would now, because of this new escalation, be taken up and discussed by the leading canonists and theologians of the age. While still considered a novel and revolutionary doctrine,

from 1324 on the idea that the pope might be personally infallible would not be altogether absent from the ecclesiology of the West.¹⁵ Following are the words from an unnamed dissident friar speaking for his brother rebels from their place of exile in Bavaria.

*What the Roman Pontiffs have once defined in faith and morals through the key of knowledge is immutable because the Roman Church is unerring... what is once defined through the key of knowledge by the supreme pontiffs, the vicars of God, to be the truth of faith cannot be called into doubt by any successor, nor can the contrary to what is defined be affirmed without the one doing this be adjudged a heretic... what is once defined in faith and morals is true for all eternity and unchangeable by any one.*¹⁶

In *Quia Quorundum*, given on November 10, 1324, Pope John XXII confronted the errors of the dissident Franciscans and their false assertions regarding the irreformability of prior papal pronouncements even if they dealt with matters of faith or morals. John chastised and condemned those who would dare teach such heresy. John obviously recognized, among other things, the potential handcuffing of successor popes, and consistently insisted that he was not and could not be bound by any previous pope's declarations, no matter if they were disciplinary or supposedly binding in the realm of faith or morals. These assertions of papal irreformability John XXII rejected outright. So while Pope John in his dispute with the Franciscans was pressed by them to recognize the infallibility of a previous occupant of that See pronouncing on faith or morals, he resisted it as false and condemned those who dared hold such opinions.

Pope John called it a *pestiferous doctrine*. With further comment and agitation he said the following about the Franciscan claim. "On account of which, moreover, since it was previously mentioned in the aforesaid consideration, namely that, (according to the dissidents) it is not licit for their successors to call again into doubt those things which were once for all defined by the key of knowledge in faith or morals by supreme pontiffs, although it is otherwise, so they say, in regards to those things which have been ordained by supreme pontiffs by means of the key of power, it is evidently clear from the following things that this is directly contrary to the truth."¹⁷

While John XXII, a pope of the fourteenth century some three hundred years after the Great Schism, saw himself as the head of the Catholic Church (the error that led to Rome's separating herself from the Catholic and Orthodox East) he would not, under any circumstance, abide the notion that a pope had an infallible charism which made any declarations from the

episcopal throne of Rome irreformable. It would take another 500 years before there would be a pope daring (or crazed) enough to declare that impious doctrine. It is truly remarkable that Pius IX and Vatican I would then have the audacity to say it was a dogma implicitly understood in Christ's Catholic Church from the very beginning, when the historical record so blatantly contradicts them.

Details such as historical fact, the testimony of the Church fathers, and the complete absence of evidence to substantiate their novel claims would not be able to deter the Infallibists from forcing this deviant understanding upon the assembled Latin Hierarchy at Vatican I.

Even though such an outrageous lie had been exposed by the words of a not too distant predecessor and by the many more ancient testimonies, it still took hold and was finally elevated to dogma at Vatican I. Those who supported this novelty such as Archbishop Henry Edward Manning of Westminster, would proclaim without apology that "Dogma Has Conquered History".¹⁸ This was something that the learned Roman Catholic bishops attending that assembly found contemptible. Many of these brave adherents to Holy Tradition would pay dearly for their truthful opposition. In the end, however, most would eventually wear down and succumb, rather than face the ongoing and unrelenting wrath of Pius IX. There would be a few stalwart souls who would not yield to such errors, no matter the consequence, including priests and bishops; and it would bring yet another, though small, schism for the Latin West.

I was surprised to find out several years ago that my own grandfather on my mother's side was an Episcopalian, as a result of his own parents' leaving the Roman Catholic Church when their priest and entire parish left communion with Rome around this very time period in French Quebec. These events also spawned what is now known as the Old Catholic Movement. It would cause a considerable exit of many faithful priests and even bishops who would claim that they were still Roman Catholic even though they were no longer in union with the Roman bishop. There are remnants of Old Catholics to this day.

So why was it that this dogma needed to conquer history in the minds of the Infallibists? That answer is quite apparent when one becomes familiar with the historical record. It is because this understanding of a bishop — any bishop — having such a charisma or universal authority and jurisdiction just doesn't prove itself legitimate in light of the historical record and witness of the ancient fathers. The only alternative is to declare that the innovations they wish to impose no matter how contrary to how the ancient Church

understood episcopal authority and practice, trumps or conquers Holy Tradition and genuine Catholic understanding. What the Church has always held and taught is of no consequence to these innovators and is brushed aside for their own desire.

Here are some examples that must be conquered, but in truth by their new and innovative dogmas never will be; men who, unfortunately for Roman pretensions, disprove all her false assertions that Rome's bishop rules, and has always ruled the Catholic Church of Christ singularly, and that he cannot be defective when it comes to teaching on faith or morals.

POPES CAUGHT WANDERING FROM THE FAITH

Pope Liberius (352-366) occupied the Roman See during the time of the ongoing Arian controversies. This was a heresy introduced in Egypt initially by a priest named Arius. Arius taught that Christ, though the highest of God's creation, was not God. This false credo in essence proclaimed that Christ, though the Messiah, was a created being and "there was a time when He was not."

Constantine the Great, the Roman Emperor who moved the capital to Constantinople and who first afforded Christianity legal status, convened the Great Council of Nicæa in 325. There were assembled approximately 318 bishops of the Church, many of whom still bore in their bodies the maiming and injuries they had suffered for their faith in violent persecutions prior to Constantine's edict.

It was in this first great council of the post-persecution era that the Church assembled herself to determine what was in fact the apostolic understanding regarding the person of Christ. The Creed that we as Catholics now confess was a result of this and the subsequent Council of Constantinople in 381.

These councils condemned by name Arius and his impious teachings by reaffirming for the Church that Christ was not created but "God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, of one essence with the Father through Whom all things were made." The importance of this confession is such that if one cannot profess it, he does not hold the Catholic Christian Faith.

According to the assembled fathers of the Church, Arianism — by making Christ something less than God — renders it impossible for us to become like Christ or be joined to Him. Only if Christ is both God and man

can humanity be united with God, according to the venerable fathers. For none but God Himself can open to humans the way of union. The Council therefore declared Arius' teaching a heresy, unacceptable to the Church, and decreed that Christ is truly God. He is of the same essence *homoousios* with God the Father.

Even though the great Council of Nicæa condemned Arianism, the heresy still almost overwhelmed the Church and was a major concern for many more years. It was during these times that Liberius became pope. "Pope Liberius was initially a defender of the Nicene Faith, but the then Emperor Constantius II, an Arian himself, deposed and banished Pope Liberius. In the place of Liberius, the Roman clergy elected a new pope, Felix II. As a result of his See being taken by another, Liberius succumbed to Arian demands and signed a heretical confession of faith and agreed to the excommunication of Athanasius, the great champion of the Nicene Council." ¹⁹

It was under these circumstances that Liberius lost his See because of his Orthodoxy, to regain it again only through his apostasy. Liberius would flip-flop yet again when the winds were suitable and subscribe anew to Catholic Orthodoxy. However, this much cannot be denied. Pope Liberius held and taught heresy while a "legitimate" pope of Rome, and there was no special charism of "infallibility" that gave him either the courage, or the sense, to avoid erring on a crucial matter of the Faith.

Pope Zosimus (417-418). Pope Zosimus's brief pontificate was no hindrance to his finding himself wandering from the Faith. This pontiff wrote an embarrassing encyclical letter in which he spoke authoritatively from the Roman See. This infamous letter rebuked none other than St. Augustine and the rest of the North African church for their condemnation of Pelagius and his teachings.



ST. AUGUSTINE, BISHOP OF HIPPO



ST. ATHANASIUS THE GREAT
DEFENDER OF THE ORTHODOX DOGMA OF THE HOLY TRINITY
†373; COMMEMORATED 18 JANUARY
16TH CENTURY ICON FROM
THE MONASTERY OF THE TRANSFIGURATION, METEORA

Pelagius and his adherents held the false notion that perfection apart from the grace of God was obtainable, and that man was not really crippled by sin and its resulting negative effects — that enough effort on our own part was really all we needed to obtain union with Christ. This is by no means all there was to this heresy, but should give you the flavor of it.

What Zosimus did in addressing the North African Church is especially interesting, particularly given the understanding of his predecessor, Pope Innocent. Pope Zosimus rebuked St. Augustine and the other bishops of that region for declaring the Pelagian teachings to be heretical, especially since he, though erroneously, deemed them Orthodox. In response, these bishops warned Zosimus that he was being misled and that he should uphold the official judgment of Pope Innocent who was pontiff before him and who had also condemned the teachings of Pelagius. His response was that he had given the matter his thorough consideration and that was the end of it. Instead of rolling over and accepting the Roman bishop's directive, they openly resisted him.

In 418 they convened their own council of some 200-plus bishops and passed a number of canons condemning the teachings of Pelagius in direct contradiction of Pope Zosimus. This is not something done by bishops who believe the Roman bishop has an infallible teaching charism or universal authority in the Church. In fact, Zosimus buckled under their pressure and changed his position to be in line with theirs. These events prove to be yet another example of how Vatican I and its declarations had nothing to do with either historical facts or the genuine understanding of the ancient Catholic Church when it came to the person of the Pope of Rome, his teaching office, and the scope of his authority in the universal Church. It is also telling in that Pope Zosimus did not consider his immediate predecessor's statements on Pelagianism to be binding or authoritative either. This, in itself, also betrays the complete absence of this "dogma" in Holy Tradition, pronounced with such arrogant assurance at Vatican I.

Pope Vigilius (537-555) provides us with yet another example of the limitations of Rome's bishop when it came to his jurisdiction or teaching authority in the Catholic Church. The Emperor Justinian called the Fifth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in the year 553 A.D. He did so without either the approval or assent of Pope Vigilius. Like all early Ecumenical Councils, these gatherings were called by the Emperor, and only at Chalcedon in 451 and Constantinople in 680 did the papal legates preside. It is clear that the popes did not claim this as their exclusive right. Neither did the dogmatic nor disciplinary decisions of these councils require papal

confirmation, for their force and authority depended on the consent of the Church, as expressed in the Synod, and afterwards in the fact of their being generally received.²⁰

Here was the situation. Certain writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus, and Ibas of Edessa were troubling the peace of the Church. These writings were known as *The Three Chapters*. While the council that Pope Vigilius neither called nor attended looked into the matter, he issued an official papal decree that reversed an earlier official papal decree — *The Judicatum*, in which he condemned these writings. For reasons unknown he contradicted himself in his new decree, *The Constitutum*. This decree closes with the following words:

“We ordain and decree that it be permitted to no one who stands in ecclesiastical order or office to write or bring forward, or undertake, or teach anything contradictory to the contents of this *Constitutum* in regards to *The Three Chapters*, or after this declaration, to begin a new controversy about them. And if anything has already been done or spoken in regard of *The Three Chapters* in contradiction to this our ordinance, by any one whomsoever, this we declare void by the authority of the apostolic See.”²¹

Was the matter then irreformably settled? Pope Vigilius had spoken authoritatively from the throne of Peter regarding a matter of faith; he even says he did so by the authority of that Apostolic See. What choice did the council have but to pack up and go home? The choice it had and exercised was this: The assembled North African bishops disobeyed the papal decree and on their ecumenical authority condemned *The Three Chapters* in direct defiance of the very fallible Pope Vigilius.

Some seven months after the Council closed, Pope Vigilius again changed his mind and submitted to the decrees of this Council which defied his authority, now yielding himself to its judgment. He showed himself to be yet another glaring historical example of how popes were not above the consensus of even a local Council such as this, especially when they stood squarely on the back of Holy Tradition, while they themselves were exposed as having wandered from the Faith.

Pope Honorius (625-638) is the last, but by no means least, of the examples I will provide of popes who by their own teachings and actions completely destroyed the pretensions of Vatican I and its assertions that an infallible teaching charism resides somehow in the person of whoever happens to be occupying the Roman See. It is this particular pope who causes some of the most tortured explanations imaginable by apologists of Vatican I. The clear facts of history, however, provide little or no

opportunity for their manipulations of the record to sway any but those with blinders already on.

During the reign of Honorius, the heresy of Monothelitism was making the rounds. It teaches, contrary to genuine Holy Tradition, that Christ had only one will — the divine — and did not have a human will. The implication of this, as well as any other heresy, is to present a distortion of the Church's understanding that Christ was truly and fully human as well as truly and fully God.

In a series of events that included the Emperor Heraclius, Patriarch Sergius of Constantinople, and Pope Honorius of Rome, we become aware of Pope Honorius and his affirming of the one will in Christ (Monothelitism) in an official letter he sent to Sergius, his brother patriarch in Constantinople. In no uncertain terms and exercising his teaching authority as Rome's bishop, Honorius attested to and established this understanding of the one will which he held to be self-evident and beyond controversy.²²

The question now is how would history and, even more importantly, the Catholic Church of Christ, view the pronouncements of Honorius from the See of Peter? If there resides in the person of Rome's bishop an infallible teaching authority regarding faith, and if this particular gifting would never allow a pontiff to teach error in his capacity as Peter's successor, wouldn't the matter be settled? Of course, it would. Unfortunately for those who believe that to be the case, that was not the understanding of the Church, or the Ecumenical Council or the popes who would be successors of the now infamous Pope Honorius.

HONORIUS CONDEMNED BY NAME AT SIXTH ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

In the year 681 A.D., the Sixth Ecumenical Council convened in Constantinople. It was at this council that the true Faith of Christ's Holy Catholic Church was once again verified, and the promoters and teachers of heresy anathematized. It was here that at an Ecumenical Council in which the pope at that time concurred, and which the Roman Catholic Church has always accepted, Honorius former Pope of Rome was condemned as one who had both held and taught heresy.

Charles Joseph Hefele, a noted Roman Catholic historian and author of an authoritative history of the ancient Ecumenical Councils, pulls no punches in his assessing the clear record of those proceedings.

“It is in the highest degree startling, even scarcely credible, that an Ecumenical Council should punish with anathema a pope as a heretic! ...That, however the sixth Ecumenical Council actually condemned Honorius on account of heresy, is clear beyond all doubt, when we consider the following collection of the sentences of the Synod against him: At the entrance of the thirteenth session, on March 28, 681, the Synod says: ‘After reading the doctrinal letter of Sergius of Constantinople to Cyrus of Phasis (afterwards of Alexandria) and to Pope Honorius, and also the letter of the latter Sergius, we find that these documents were quite foreign to the apostolic doctrines, and to the declarations of the holy Councils and all the Fathers of note, and follow the false doctrines of heretics. Therefore, we reject them completely, and abhor them as hurtful to the soul. But also the names of these men must be thrust out of the Church, namely that of Sergius, the first who wrote this impious doctrine. Further that of Cyrus of Alexandria, of Pyrrhus, Paul, and Peter of Constantinople, and Theodore of Pharan, all of whom also Pope Agatho rejected in his letter to the Emperor. We punish them all with anathema. But along with them, it is our universal decision that there shall also be shut out from the Church and anathematized the former Pope Honorius of old Rome, because we found in his letter to Sergius, that in everything he followed his view and confirmed his impious doctrine.’

“Towards the end of the same session, the second letter of Pope Honorius to Sergius was presented for examination, and it was ordered that all the documents brought by George, the keeper of the archives in Constantinople, and among them the two letters of Honorius, should immediately be burnt as hurtful to the soul.

“Again, the sixth Ecumenical Council referred to Honorius in the sixteenth session, on August 9, 681, at the acclamations and exclamations with which the transactions of this day were closed. The bishops exclaimed: Anathema to the heretic Sergius, to the heretic Cyrus, to the heretic Honorius, to the heretic Pyrrhus.

“Still more important is that which took place at the eighteenth and last session, on September 16, 681. In the decree of faith which was now published, and forms the principal document of the Synod, we read: ‘The creeds (of the earlier ecumenical Synods) would have sufficed for knowledge and confirmation of the Orthodox Faith. Because, however, the originator of all evil still always finds a helping serpent, by which he may diffuse his poison, and therewith finds fit tools for his will, we mean Theodore of Pharan, Sergius, Pyrrhus, Paul, Peter, former bishops of Constantinople, also Honorius Pope of old Rome, Cyrus of Alexandria, so he failed not, by

them, to cause trouble in the Church by the scattering of the heretical doctrine of one will and one energy of the two natures of the one Christ.’

“After the papal legates, all the bishops and the Emperor had received and subscribed this decree of faith, the Synod published the usual *logos prosphonicos* which, addressed to the Emperor, says among other things: ‘Therefore, we punish with exclusion and anathema, Theodore of Pharan, Sergius, Paul, Pyrrhus, and Peter; also Cyrus and with them Honorius, formerly Bishop of Rome as he followed them.’”²³

In addition, the acts of this Council were confirmed by imperial decree, which reiterates the anathemas and states, as did the assembled fathers of this Ecumenical Council, that Honorius, Pope of Rome, when it came to the heresy of the Monothelites, agreed with it fully and strengthened it with his own teaching.

Pope Honorius was not, as some papal apologists would insist, some poor misunderstood man not really and truly holding and teaching these errors. Of course, that has to be their position now because Vatican I triumphed over the historical facts and voided them with its invented dogma that a pope cannot err on matters of faith or morals when exercising his office. In their thinking, no matter what history may show us or what the facts may be, this dogma cannot be disputed. One must reject the record — or at least distort it beyond recognition — to accommodate papal infallibility. History has to be ignored or completely reinvented in order to facilitate this new and baseless teaching.

I have been amazed by some of the explanations put forth by those defending papal infallibility, especially when confronted with Pope Honorius. It runs the gamut from being just a big misunderstanding to “he really didn’t understand what he was talking about, or didn’t mean what he actually said or wrote.” These excuses and protestations ring hollow and are meaningless in the light of actual events.

We have the continued and consistent testimony of Catholic Church history. In those centuries before the understanding of papal infallibility took root in the Latin Church, there was no need to ignore or distort the record. That is why you have successor popes for quite some time reaffirming matter-of-factly that Honorius was a heretic. They had nothing to protect because that which modern papal apologists attempt to protect was non-existent. Such an example is Pope Leo II who, writing back to the Emperor in May of 683, solemnly concurred in the acts of the Council and stated in his letter: “We anathematize the inventors of the new error, *to wit*, Theodore of Pharan, Cyrus of Alexandria, Sergius, Pyrrhus, Paul and Peter of

Constantinople, and also Honorius who instead of purifying this Apostolic Church by the doctrine of the apostles, has come near to overthrowing the Faith by an impious treason.”²⁴

Then there is this most interesting bit of forgotten practice found in the *Liber Diurnus* — the Formulary of the Roman Chancery (from the fifth to the eleventh century). Here is found the old formula for the papal oath — according to which every new Pope, on entering upon his office, had to swear that “he recognized the Sixth Ecumenical Council, which smote with eternal anathema the originators of the heresy (Monothelitism), Sergius, Pyrrhus, etc., together with Honorius.” So we have literally dozens of popes in succession stating in their very oath of office that one of their predecessors, while occupying the See of Peter, did not in his discharging of that teaching ministry maintain the purity of Apostolic Faith and was guilty of departing from it. In other words an Ecumenical Council declares Honorius guilty of teaching heresy and a multitude of his own successors took an oath and swore to it.

There is no rational way, despite the protestations to the contrary, to skirt these facts or deny that this understanding, as defined in 1870, bore any resemblance to that which the ancient Catholic Church held forth at her Ecumenical Councils. Almost without exception, all historians of any repute, whether Roman Catholic or not, understand that Vatican I and its new dogmas find no basis in the genuine Holy Tradition of the Catholic Church.

A TRUE ECUMENICAL COUNCIL NULLIFIES VATICAN I

The seventh great and ancient Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church was held in the East at Nicæa, 786/7. Its primary objective was to clarify the Church’s use of icons and their necessity in helping the Church preserve its doctrinal teaching. It served to establish once and for all that artistic depictions of Christ, the Theotokos and all the saints was not only proper but necessary in Christ’s holy Catholic Church. It condemned those who opposed their use as not fully embracing the mysteries of the Incarnation and, in effect, placing themselves outside the Catholic Tradition. Those who championed the Catholic understanding were known as “Iconophiles” and those who opposed the Catholic view, “Iconoclasts,” which literally means “the destroyers of images”.

In addition it laid out the Catholic criteria for determining the characteristics of a genuine Ecumenical Council. It is these pronouncements which put Vatican I in such a dubious light.

These would include:

1. Universal participation of the five Patriarchs.
2. Postconciliar reception.
3. A vertical consensus with genuine apostolic tradition.

I. There was only one “patriarch” in attendance at Vatican I in the person of the Pope of Rome, Pius IX. The four genuine patriarchs were all in the Orthodox East and they were neither invited nor, even if they had been, would they have been inclined to attend.

II. What of the post-conciliar reception? It was barely swallowed in the West and was, of course, an intolerable and onerous event for the entire Orthodox and Catholic East.

III. Finally it has nothing in common with, nor is it, in any way, shape, or form, tied to a consensus with genuine apostolic Tradition. This very point was made over and over again by some of the Roman Catholic bishops and theologians in attendance at Vatican I. These minority participants made powerful and historically convincing arguments, but their voices were of course quelled shamelessly by Pius IX and his cohorts, who were intent only on consolidating the illicit power and authority of the Roman Catholic pontiff.

Luis M. Bermejo, S.J., in his insightful *Infallibility on Trial: Church Conciliarity and Communion*, says the following in regards to Vatican I being somehow approved by Vatican II and thus legitimized in Roman Catholic understanding:

“And so, taking now a general, overall view of conciliar history, we come to the conclusion that whereas Vatican I is explicitly approved by Vatican II, it is indirectly — but authoritatively — demoted from the high level of ecumenicity by Nicæa II: approved by a successor and demoted by a predecessor of greater authority than either of them. This is certainly a strange situation, but it should be faced squarely and taken into consideration when considering the question of the reception of Vatican I. To solve the problem of reception by selectively quoting Vatican II and ignoring completely — as is done — the damaging testimony of Nicæa II is hardly proper. We have no right to loudly proclaim the ecumenicity and authority of Nicæa II while at the same time ignoring the clear criterion of conciliar

ecumenicity given by the same council. The conclusion, when applied to Vatican I, may be embarrassing, but it is unavoidable. Arbitrary selectivity is not the way to interpret history. If we quote Vatican II we should also, and with greater reason, quote Nicæa II” [*Infallibility on Trial: Church Conciliarity and Communion*, Luis M. Bermejo, Westminster, Md., Christian Classics, 1992, pg. 204.].

**“THOU ART PETER
AND UPON THIS ROCK I WILL BUILD MY CHURCH”**

He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matthew 16:15-19).

This particular passage of Scripture of course needs to be addressed whenever a discussion regarding Peter, his unique role in Christ’s Catholic Church, and its meaning for the current occupant of the Roman episcopate is considered.

Does this passage confer upon Peter and his supposed successors a universal authority and jurisdiction in Christ’s Holy Catholic Church? Does it also at the same time indicate an “infallible” teaching charism that is singularly and uniquely Rome’s? If indeed it does, it would also be undeniably evident in the ancient patristic record. We should then have an almost unanimous voice in the ancient Church, as St. Vincent says in *The Commonitory*. If the Bishop of Rome is the central figure for Catholic unity and is to be the unique and even in certain cases infallible spokesman for Christ in matters of the Faith, then why are there so many examples of popes who were neither?

If Christ is not appointing Peter the first pope, with all the prerogatives I have already shown to be wrongly usurped by Roman bishops who have gone beyond the boundaries of their limited authority, then what was He doing?

Let us examine the almost unanimous consensus of the ancient fathers (using St. Augustine as the prime example), who saw not a medieval papacy being established on a Roman bishop, but the Church of Christ upon the firm foundation of Peter's confession. The Church is founded on Christ. It is upon this foundation that the true meaning of these words of Our Lord come to light.

Has hades or the devil ever overpowered, because of his own sin and willingness, a pope of Rome? Without question, many have gone off into diverse heresies, to say nothing of the many more who were absolute moral degenerates. The Borgia popes, for instance, would shame modern day rock stars by their conduct. Did not even Peter, who professed that saving confession that Jesus is the Christ, end up denying Him during His passion?

Mercifully, Christ restored Peter through Peter's repentance. The same probably cannot be said for many of those who were said to succeed him. We have considered more than a handful of cases thus far who, though bishops of Rome, showed themselves to be neither infallible regarding their teaching office, nor recognized by their fellow bishops as having a universal authority and jurisdiction in Christ's Catholic Church.

So let's examine St. Augustine's understanding and read what he has to say regarding Matthew 16. Again compare his testimony to the novel understandings now attached to these passages and decide for yourself — who best reflects Catholic understanding: St. Augustine or Pius IX, who in the year 1870 attempted to establish as dogma that which a previous pope (John XXII) as late as the 14th century denounced as the worst kind of impiety?

Here is one of several places where St. Augustine comments on Matthew 16, and this is some 400 years removed from the time the Gospels were actually written. St. Augustine can hardly be described by any Roman Catholic as someone opposed to Catholic teaching. He is one of only a select few who is considered a Doctor of the Church. Study his own words.

*“But whom say ye that I am?” Peter answered. Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God. One for many gave the answer, Unity in many. Then the Lord said to him, Blessed art thou Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. Then he added, and I say unto thee, Thou art Peter. For before he was called Simon. Now this name of Peter was given him by the Lord, and in a figure, that he should signify the Church. For seeing that Christ is the rock (*petra*), Peter is the Christian people. For the rock (*petra*) is the original name. Therefore Peter is so called from the rock; not the rock from Peter; as Christ is not called Christ from the Christian, but the Christian from Christ. Therefore he*

saith, *Thou art Peter; and upon this Rock* which thou hast confessed, upon this rock which thou hast acknowledged, saying, *Thou art the Christ the son of the living God*, will I build My Church; that is upon Myself, not Myself upon Thee.

“For men who wished to be built upon men, said *I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas, who is Peter*. But others who did not wish to build upon Peter, but upon the Rock, said *But I am of Christ*. And when the Apostle Paul ascertained that he was chosen, and Christ despised, he said, *is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?* And, as not in the name of Paul, so neither in the name of Peter; but in the name of Christ: that Peter might be built upon the Rock, not the Rock upon Peter.”²⁵

These comments are consistent with practically every single Church Father preceding St. Augustine. Christ’s Church is not built upon any other rock except Christ who is the chief cornerstone of the Church. Any attempt somehow to usurp or replace Christ as the foundation stone of the Church is to end up with a structure that must eventually collapse. All else but the person of Christ Himself is shifting and unstable. It is upon Him and Him alone that the Catholic Church of Christ is built. St. Augustine, arguably the most prominent early Latin Father, affirms this when he says, in yet another place: *“There’s the rock for you, there’s the foundation, there’s where the Church has been built, which the gates of the underworld cannot conquer.”*²⁶

I can issue a challenge that no papal apologist (that is, one who defends the pope’s universal authority, jurisdiction and infallibility) can answer. That challenge is to find a single Church Father of the first 600 years who in his complete body of writings shows himself to hold such notions as these. There will be isolated excerpts which, taken out of their context or not explained in other places in their writings, can, on the surface, seem to support the contention for universal jurisdiction which, of course, they do not, but nothing — and I do mean nothing — can even be remotely inferred to demonstrate papal infallibility.

Again and again we must always return to genuine Holy Tradition and see if that which we hold to be true is consistent with that testimony. Granted, this is no small task — but Catholic Christianity, to be genuinely held, demands and expects this effort.

IN CONCLUSION

What started off as an attempt to explain our conversion to Holy Orthodoxy has become something more of an apologetic work. I understand that much of what I wrote may be misconstrued by those who have adopted the medieval and non-Catholic notion of a universally ruling infallible pope. Holding and adhering to such an understanding isolates that person from the true Catholic consensus as expressed by the ancient fathers and early bishops of Rome. It is and always will be my intent to hold to that and only that which I am sure the Catholic Church of Christ has always held from ancient times, and my only opposition is directed at those things which depart from genuine Catholic Tradition. I hope the material presented here does, in fact, convince the reader to take a closer look at the patristic and historical record, and is of use in determining whether or not their understandings now are, in fact, consistent with genuine Catholicism.

There is no general or “Universal Father” for the Catholic Church of Christ, or bishop of bishops. Such a concept is not only opposed by the Eastern Orthodox but, as so clearly shown by Pope Gregory the Great’s own words, is nothing but an invention of the devil himself. While a certain prestige or honor may be afforded to the more ancient Apostolic Sees (Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem, Alexandria, and of course Rome before she left communion with these other four), that in no way gives them the authority or license to usurp the individual prerogatives or dignities of other bishops. The only time when other bishops together may move against their brother bishop is if it is shown that he has departed from the Catholic Faith or fallen into immorality; then certain canonical proceedings may be imposed, including removal from office.

You may say that Rome did, in fact, hold the “primacy” in the ancient Church. This is absolutely correct. In her early and illustrious history, she was a bulwark of Catholic Orthodoxy. Too often various bishops and even patriarchs of Apostolic Sees in the East fell into heresy, while Rome shone forth with the purity of Catholic Faith and doctrine. However, as I have just shown, she did not in every instance show herself indefectible because every bishop, no matter who he is, is still a man and capable of falling. Roman bishops did fall and, like their counterparts in the East, fell into diverse errors and, of course, blatant immorality from time to time. As Pope Gregory has said, “If one assumes the mantle of universal and he falls, will not all fall with him?”

What is this “primacy” that Rome once had? It was a primacy of honor. That ancient See of Peter and Paul which saw them both martyred there and which was the seat of the Roman Empire did have a pre-eminence of honor, being the capital city until 324, when Constantine moved the capital, but it was never the See of the Catholic Church’s universal authority, and no man ever occupied its episcopacy who could be guaranteed to speak infallibly on matters of faith and morals. These things are mere inventions of — if we believe Pope Gregory the Great — the devil and ambitious men intent on holding power and authority in a way that Christ never gave, and which godly bishops would dare not assume for fear of following the first apostate in his arrogance.

Contrast the American constitutional “presidency” to its counterpart in Communist Cuba. You have two completely different entities, each giving its unique meaning to the same word. Our president holds a position of great prominence and is looked to as someone who leads the American people, but he is not someone who rules by authority based in his own person and is a law unto himself. He is accountable to the Constitution (and other branches of government) with its checks, balances, and separation of powers, and he has sworn to uphold it. He has boundaries that he cannot go beyond and if he were to do so, it would be an illegal usurpation of power. Likewise, bishops of Christ’s Holy Catholic Church are all bound by Holy Tradition and the consensus of understanding found in legitimate Holy Ecumenical Councils. Attempts by any one bishop to go beyond what is found in the true consensus of Catholic understanding, as shown by St. Vincent of Lerins and held by the Church for well over a millennium is nothing less than an assault on Catholic truth. Just as Castro brings different and ominous meanings to the word “president”, Roman Catholic papal apologists bring their own distorted understandings to the word “primacy”, giving it the same despotic sense that a ruthless communist like Castro gives to the title *el presidente*.

I have confronted what I believe are the two most crucial and fundamental differences between the Latin West and Orthodox East (Rome’s claim to universal jurisdiction, and the invented ability of the Roman Pontiff not to err in a matter of faith or morals when speaking from the papal Throne).

Everyone clamors for the reform of the papacy. Most of these voices, however, come from those not wanting a return to Holy Tradition but an acceleration of the “living tradition” process. It is nothing more than a call for further erosion of the ancient guidelines.

The truly Catholic and Orthodox East, on the other hand, calls for genuine reform, a reform that must be preceded by repentance. There is no other alternative, given the facts of history and the consistent and lucid witness of Holy Tradition. Anything less than a repudiation of the old transgressions would solve nothing and could not lend itself to constructive or meaningful reconciliation.

I have had the opportunity to speak with many sincere Roman Catholics involved with ecumenical endeavors. They all sincerely desire full and genuine union with the Orthodox East. They also, for the most part, recognize the obstacle presented by Vatican I and its endorsement of the two great lies sanctioned there. Some of their own respected historians and theologians have not been reticent with their own concerns in this regard.

While readily admitting that these were unfortunate, wrong and baseless declarations, they do not believe that Vatican I will ever be rescinded, or officially declared null and void. They only hold forth hope for some sort of barrier to be constructed around that conclave. The “fence” they hope to construct is redefinition. Using clever speech, they believe, will somehow make the plain statements of Vatican I of no effect. This, of course, changes nothing and is, at its core, dishonest. It would be nothing more than a mere band-aid placed upon a cancer, a treatment without medicinal use or ability to provide any true remedy.

There remains only one course of action. Rome must return to the original Catholic consensus and understanding, as expounded by St. Vincent who, speaking the true patristic mind of the ancients, said the following which bears repeating (Chapter XX 48): *This being the case, he is a true and genuine Catholic, who loves the truth of God, who loves the Church, who loves the Body of Christ, who esteems divine religion and the Catholic Faith above everything, above the authority, above the regard, above the genius, above the eloquence, above the philosophy, of every man whatsoever; who sets light by all of these and, continuing steadfast and established in the faith, resolves that he will believe that, and only that which he is sure the Catholic Church has held universally and from ancient time.*

In closing, I invite not only your sincere reflection on what I have said, but also invite you to come see for yourself. While my arguments may not adequately persuade, I do believe the experience of seeing, hearing, and even smelling the sweet incense of ancient Catholic worship can influence the heart, while words may sometimes only agitate it.

There is a powerful historical precedent for my saying this. It was this very exposure that led to the conversion of the Slavic people who make up

modern day Russia and much of Eastern Europe. Prince Vladimir (956-1015 A.D.), a man of intense spiritual yearnings, decided to send his personal envoys to investigate the great religions of that era. On their way home from encountering Judaism and Islam in the Mideast and Christianity as practiced in Rome and Germany, they finally made their way to Constantinople. Here an epiphany occurred, as they observed the Divine Liturgy in the great Cathedral of Hagia Sophia.

When reporting their findings to St. Vladimir and recounting all they witnessed and spiritually experienced, they said the following to their prince about worship of the Holy Trinity in that magnificent cathedral, in the city founded by St. Constantine the Great:

“Upon entering this temple, we saw and heard wondrous things and could not tell if this might be heaven, or were we still upon the earth? We cannot describe the beauty we beheld, except of one thing we are sure, God dwells there among men.”

Prince Vladimir, won over by their findings, was baptized in the Orthodox Catholic Faith along with his subjects. This began the millennium-long and enduring linkage of Russia and the peoples of Eastern Europe with Holy Orthodoxy.

I now invite you, the reader, to follow the example of the ancient envoys of Prince Vladimir and see for yourself. It is the place where the search for genuine Catholicism ends.



ENDNOES

- ¹ Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers* vol. 12 Epistles of Gregory the Great Book VII Epistle XL.
- ² *Origins of Papal Infallibility 1150-1350*, Brian Tierney, pg. 144.
- ³ *Commonitory*, St. Vincent of Lerins, *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, Series II, Vol. XI.
- ⁴ Gregory, Letter to John, *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, Book V Epistle XVIII.
- ⁵ *How the Pope Became Infallible*, August Hasler, pgs. 105-128.
- ⁶ *The Church of Rome at the Bar of History*, William Webster, pg. 171-172 Declarations of Vatican I Chapter III; On the Power and Nature of the Primacy of the Roman Pontiff, 2nd paragraph.
- ⁷ *The Church of Rome at the Bar of History*, William Webster, pg. 171-172 Declarations of Vatican I Chapter III; On the Power and Nature of the Primacy of the Roman Pontiff, 4th paragraph.
- ⁸ *The Church at the Bar of History*, William Webster, pg. 163 Documents of Vatican I.
- ⁹ *Origins of Papal Infallibility 1150-1350*, Brian Tierney pg. 96.
- ¹⁰ *ibid*, pg. 97.
- ¹¹ *ibid*, pg. 172.
- ¹² *ibid*, pg. 175.
- ¹³ *ibid*, pg. 173.
- ¹⁴ *ibid*, pg. 181.
- ¹⁵ *ibid*, pg. 185.
- ¹⁶ *ibid*, pg. 182.
- ¹⁷ “Quia Quorundam,” Pope John XXII, <http://ewtn.com/library/papaldoc/qquor-e.htm>.
- ¹⁸ *How the Pope Became Infallible*, August Hasler, pg. 177.
- ¹⁹ *The Church of Rome at the Bar of History*, William Webster, pg. 64.
- ²⁰ *ibid*. pg. 60.
- ²¹ *ibid*, pg. 66.
- ²² *Heresies, Heresy and Orthodoxy in the History of the Church*, Harold O.J. Brown pg. 190.
- ²³ *A History of the Councils of the Church*, vol. V, Charles Joseph Hefle pgs. 181-187.

²⁴ *The Papacy its Historic Origins and Relations with the Eastern Churches*, Abbé Guettée pgs. 248-250.

²⁵ Philip Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. VI, St. Augustine, Sermons on New Testament Lessons, Sermon 26. 1-2 (Eerdmans, 1956) pg. 340.

²⁶ John Rotelle, Ed., *The Works of St. Augustine* (New Rochelle: New City Press, 1993), Sermons, Vol. 6, Sermon 229P.1, pg. 327.



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