

The Power of the Catholic Popes

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Below is the sixth article in a ten-part series on Catholic Theology and Dogma. Almost all of the material quoted comes from books and articles approved by the Catholic Church. The first article (March 2000) dealt with the Catholic view of the Church. It is hoped that many Catholics will read these articles and arrive at a conviction of the unbiblical nature of Catholic Theology. It is also hoped that Evangelicals reading this material will understand why it's impossible for Catholics and Evangelicals to join hands in spiritual endeavors. The abbreviations for the references are explained at the end of the article.

In the December 2001 *Journal* article entitled "The Power of the Catholic Priesthood," we observed how the Catholic Church gave such awesome spiritual power to the priesthood. In some ways, this article is an extension of that discussion, because the Pope and the Bishops are elevated priests who have been given, supposedly by God, the leadership authority over the millions of souls within the autocratic stronghold of Catholicism.

The Human Need to be Led

Because of depravity, and the sense of helplessness in a cruel world, the human race more often than not turns to a visible strong man, or powerful system, in order to find refuge. Kings, emperors, and religious leaders, too often replace the God who made this universe in the lives of so many. This is one of the reasons the Pope through the centuries has held sway in the realm of religion, and also sometimes in history, even over the governmental powers that be.

The vast majority of people want someone to give them spiritual assurance and comfort. From the cradle to the grave, the Catholic Church has blindly led the followers of Catholicism. (It is one stop shopping at its best!) And at the head of that march, goes the Pope. To command such depth of loyalty, the Catholic Popes must cause millions to be awestruck with the argument that they have divine-like authority that goes all the way back to the apostle Peter.

Peter and Papal Authority

Catholics claim that Peter was the first bishop of the Church in Rome, and that all the later popes are his successors. But the best way to prove such a statement would be from the apostle himself, and no such hierarchical authority can be forthcoming. Neither in the book of Acts, nor in Peter's two epistles is it possible to support such a theory. About himself, Peter writes:

"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ ... The elders therefore among you I exhort, who am a fellow-elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, who am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not of constraint, but willingly, according to the will of God; nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;

neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves examples to the flock" (1 Peter 1:1; 5:1-3).

Here Peter only refers to himself as an apostle and an elder. He assumes no ecclesiastical power, but with lowliness he places the leadership of the churches on the same level as himself. Peter refused to accept glory or homage from men. When Cornelius the centurion fell at his feet and would have worshipped him, Peter quickly responded with "Stand up; I myself also am a man" (Acts 10:25, 26). Yet the popes not only expect but also demand certain homage from the leadership and the people in the Church.

Pontifex Maximus. Several centuries after the early church had suffered so much for the cause of Christ, the church establishment at Rome submerged itself into a flood of worldliness and arrogance. Following the fourth century, after the fall of the Roman Empire, the bishops of Rome stepped into Caesar's place and accepted the title *Pontifex Maximus*. *Pontifex* comes from the Latin meaning *path maker*, thus *the leader*.

The title *Pontifex* goes far back to when the Romans celebrated two religious colleges. The chief of the order was named *Pontifex Maximus*. These pontiffs had extraordinary power over the official Roman religion, and their role was the highest religious authority in the state. After Julius Caesar, the emperor became *Pontifex Maximus*. This title during the time of emperor Theodosius (died 395 AD), became equivalent to Pope. Popes that followed added the blasphemous name of "Holy Father" as their God-given right.

Some have rightly argued that if Peter had been a pope, or "supreme head of the church," he would certainly have stated the same in his general epistles. Popes through the centuries have never been reluctant to assert their authority.

How the Other Apostles Looked Upon Peter

The apostle Paul had no trouble rebuking Peter, as he mentioned in Galatians 2:11-14. Peter attempted to place the Gentiles under the same legal rigors as the Jews. Paul writes, "When Cephas came to Antioch, I resisted him to the face, because he stood condemned ... I said unto Cephas before them all, If thou, being a Jew, live as do the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, how do you compel the Gentiles to live as the Jews?" Thus, Peter "the Holy Father" in Catholic thinking, was put down by Paul for doctrinal error. Obviously Paul did not regard Peter as infallible in all matters, especially outside of his inspired writings. The council at Jerusalem, under the leadership of James, not Peter, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, led the apostles into a more complete understanding of grace. Interestingly, after the Jerusalem council led by John (Acts 15), Peter is never again mentioned in the book of Acts!

Who is the Head of the True Church?

Boettner points out: "Christ alone is the Head of the church. 'Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ' (1 Cor. 3:11). The church is 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief corner stone' (Eph. 2:20). Paul says that God 'gave Him (Christ) to be head over all things to the church,

which is His body' (Eph. 1:22 , 23). Besides Him there can be no earthly foundation or head of the church. Only a monstrosity can have two heads for one body.

Was Peter Ever in Rome?

Roman Catholic writers of their history try to argue that Peter should be the first Pope because he was the alleged bishop in the city, supposedly from 42 to 67 AD. They say he was there for that period, went back to the Holy Land for the Jerusalem council, after which he went to Antioch, and then returned to Rome.

But there is not one word in the New Testament that would back up that claim. There are no allusions to Rome in Peter's epistles, though Paul's journey to that city is recorded in great detail (Acts 27-28). There is no other historical proof; all rests simply on legend!

That is, unless one wishes to believe the heretical group known as the Ebionites, who rejected all the supernatural content of the New Testament. Their apocryphal story about Peter is not accepted by anyone.

The first reference that might be given any credence at all is found in the writings of Eusebius, and that reference is doubted even by some Roman Catholic writers. Eusebius wrote in Greek about the year 310, and his work was translated by Jerome.

The reason Jerome's quote of Eusebius is doubted is because there is no such statement found in the Greek copies of the works of Eusebius. To overcome this dark cloud of history about Peter being in Rome, the Catholic scholars decided to go underground and try to find the bones of Peter buried near Vatican City. Expert Roman archaeologist Marucchi gave an important lecture in which he stated, after all the diggings to find Peter, there is not the slightest shred of evidence that he had been in the so-called Eternal City. Though as expected, bones were found in Roman digs of many Christian martyrs who died during the late period of the New Testament. But Peter escaped the shovel. No one can claim to having come close to finding his remains!

If Peter had been in Rome as a bishop as long as Catholic dogma argues, why did Paul write to the church at Rome? "I long to see you [in Rome] in order that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established" (Rom. 1:11). Why could Peter not have done this ministerial work of building up the believers in that city? This remarkable verse alone seems to bring on the death knell of what the Catholics are trying to prove.

But What If?

The Catholic Church attempts to establish the supremacy of Peter as bishop of the church in Rome, in order to create a doctrine of Papal headship. But even if Peter had such a starring role in that pagan city, this still would not substantiate his authoritative and sovereign position over all of Christendom. One way or another this argument becomes a dead issue!

The Pope's Connection to Paganism

As already shown above, the power of the Pope imitates the raw authority of the pagan emperors. But there's even more.

From the Pope downwards, all can be shown to be *now* radically Babylonian. The College of Cardinals, with the Pope at its head, is just the counterpart of the Pagan College of Pontiffs, with its "Pontifex Maximus," or "Sovereign Pontiff," which had existed in Rome from the earliest times, and which is known to have been framed on the model of the grand original Council of Pontiffs at Babylon ... the Pope *now* pretends to supremacy in the Church as the successor of Peter.

The Pope holds the titles and the keys of Janus and Cybele. Cybele is the goddess who had the "power of the key," and was worshipped in Rome, along with Janus, ages before Christianity. The earliest Popes simply assumed some of the trappings of the Roman religions and carried this forward into Christendom.

Even today, like the ancient Pharaohs, the Pope is carried about on special occasions in a chair borne about on the shoulders by loyal bearers. As with the Pharaohs, music fills the air, and the procession moves slowly between rows of soldiers. The gilded chair catches the eyes of all. The vestments are resplendent as the sun; the bearers are clad in crimson, with other "servants" carrying insignia of the Pope's office. The papal pomp and ceremony is reminiscent of the processions of the Pharaohs, shaded on their chair with a canopy and kept cool by the exercise of a servant waving the mystic fan of the god Bacchus.

In ancient mythology, mother Cybele was also the god Dagon. Janus was the two-headed god "who lived in two worlds," but was also known as the Babylonian divinity, as an incarnation of Noah. The Pope wears the headdress not of the Aaronic priests of Israel, but of the mitre of the fish god Dagon.

The two-horned mitre, which the Pope wears, when he sits on the high altar at Rome and receives the adoration of the Cardinals, is the very mitre worn by Dagon, the fish-god of the Philistines and Babylonians.

But besides these satanic outer trappings, and the obvious connections with ancient pagan religions, what is the real spiritual power behind the Pope over the lives of millions of Catholics? And what authority does he claim to have, in regard to their eternal destiny, and concerning life and death issues?

The Ungodly History of the Popes

The sordid story of many of the Popes would take too much space in this article to describe. Though there were some sincere and well-intentioned Popes, a great number became some of the most ruthless leaders history has ever known. Vatican intrigue, murder, gross sexual immorality, thievery, torture, the exercising of religious power to send people to hell, all of these horrors are part of the fabric of the story of the Papacy. To tell this story again is not a part of this article.

But there are certain historical markers of which it is important to take note.

For example, a great conflict took place during the reign of Pope Boniface VIII (1294-1303). For centuries the Catholic Church owned the Papal states in Italy. This was the Pope's temporal kingdom. However, the Pope also claimed supreme religious authority in the West. This was basically accepted by the "Christian" rulers of Europe.

Over a dispute of taxing the bishops of France, Boniface proclaimed he had the right to intervene in the affairs of any nation he wished. The French nobility retaliated and accused the Pope of teaching false doctrine, and of simony, the selling of Church offices. Boniface died before the matter came to a head.

When Pope Gregory XI died in 1378, again politics came to fore between the Italian cardinals and some of the French Catholic spiritual leaders. The new Italian Pope Urban VI and Clement VII nearly went to war as to who should be Pope. Clement set up his throne at Avignon in France, bringing on what history calls The Great Schism. A split Papacy, with two competing Popes, lasted from 1378 to 1417.

If the Popes are miraculously and directly chosen by the Holy Spirit, as Catholicism claims, how could two Popes be so divinely appointed in two locations? And, by what arguments does any given Pope think he has the right to rule the world?

It must be remembered that in Catholic doctrine, the Church has replaced Israel. The Pope is the vicar (substitute) of Christ here on earth, and thus has Christ-like powers to extend his religious kingdom over all peoples. In the last several hundred years, the Popes have been *kept* in their place, in terms of their exercising direct temporal power. But this will not last forever. There are changes in the wind already taking place.

For some decades the Church led many inquisitions throughout Catholic countries against what it perceived as spiritual heresy. The most well known is called the Spanish Inquisition that took place in the fifteen century. This era was one of the darkest chapters of history. Great cruelties and injustices were carried out, and thousands died because the Church feared the religious power of the Pope and bishops would somehow be destroyed.

The Church continues to foster superstition, mysticism, and the teaching of false doctrine, yet this was even more blatant during the Middle Ages. Then, there was almost no preaching at Mass except on special occasions. The priest was the only active person at services, and in the name of the Pope, he could absolve a congregant from his sins, or withhold that forgiveness. Without the blessing from the priest, a Catholic could be in danger of never reaching heaven.

Many worshipers, too, mistakenly thought that the most important moment at Mass was the elevation of the host after the Consecration ... people ran from church to church to be present for that moment and see the consecrated host. That was what "attending Mass" meant to many people.

The Pope never stopped such superstitious behavior among the people!

Papal Infallibility

The Roman Pontiff is the divinely appointed successor of Peter "in primacy over the universal Church." (*Modern Man*, 332) However, when the Pope speaks with infallibility, the Church admits that he does not expound doctrine from his own view, but he adjudicates as the supreme teacher of the universal Church. (Ibid., 346) Addressing religious matters, the bishops and the Pope can make pronouncements, "and the faithful are to accept their teaching and adhere to it with a religious assent ... This religious submission of mind and will must be shown in a special way to the authentic magisterium of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*; that is, it must be shown in such a way that his supreme magisterium is acknowledge with reverence." (Ibid., 350)

In the statements above, it is clear that the Pope has absolute authority in whatever he says. Though the expression *ex cathedra* is tantamount to claiming infallibility for the Pope, when he speaks on specific matters of faith and practice, so at other times his word is considered coming from his *supreme magisterium*, which is very close to again claiming infallibility for any issue he addresses.

Apostolic Succession

The Pope and bishops wield such awesome authority because they are in the direct line of Peter and the apostles. Their authority has been handed down by an unbroken chain of spiritual leadership. "The Catholic understanding of apostolic succession includes the oversight and governance of the church by the successor of St. Peter, the pope, and by the bishops (the successors of the apostles) in communion with him." (*Essential*, 141) According to Catholics, this right of authority comes about because of the words of Christ in Matthew 16:13-20. Jesus said, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

It is enough to say here that the rock is not Peter, and the keys to the kingdom have to do with the Jewish nation, and not the building of the church! The Greek grammar actually separates the issues of "My church" and the "kingdom of heaven." (For a complete and detailed discussion, refer to my book *An Introduction to Classical Evangelical Hermeneutics*, chapter 16, [Kregel, 2000])

But the Catholic Church insists, and claims:

"Catholics believe that the pope alone, in specific circumstances, can speak with the gift of infallibility that Jesus has given to His church. The Roman Pontiff, head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when, as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful – who confirms his brethren in faith – he proclaims to be a definite act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals." (*Essential*, 160)

The Church goes on to claim that, whether the Pope speaks infallibly or not depends on him alone, i.e., "what was his own intention?" All he has to do is make his word authoritative!

Father Dietzen writes:

"The infallible nature of a teaching depends not on the type of document in which it is included, but on the intention of the Holy Father made clear in the statement itself. Theoretically, [when speaking infallibly] it could [even be written down] on the back of an envelope."

Papal Primacy

Catholic theologian Ott tells us, "The Fathers did not expressly speak of the infallibility of the Pope, but they attest the decisive teaching authority of the Roman Church and of its Pontiff." (*Funda*, 288) Ott goes on and shows what the Roman Catholic system has always propagated, but is now being softened by Catholic *revisionist* writings. But his work can be trusted to make clear what orthodox Catholicism of the Italian kind, has always taught. (*Ibid.*, 279-88)

He writes, "The Pope possesses full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the whole Church, not merely in matters of faith and morals, but also in Church discipline and in the government of the Church."

"The power of the Pope transcends both the power of each individual bishop and also of all the other bishops together. The bishops collectively (apart from the Pope), therefore, are not equal to or superior to the Pope ... Thus the Pope can rule independently on any matter which comes under the sphere of the Church's jurisdiction without the concurrence of the other bishops or of the rest of the Church."

"As the supreme lawgiver of the Church, the Pope is not legally bound by ecclesiastical decisions and usages.... Thus, the Papal power, like any other Episcopal power, embraces the legislative, the juridical and the punitive power."

In other words, the Pope is a law unto himself. He answers to no one, and he can claim divine infallibility, with no opposition forthcoming from any earthly human authority.

Ott further notes, "The source of [the Popes] infallibility is the supernatural assistance of the Holy Ghost, Who protects the supreme teacher of the Church [the Pope] from error." (287)

Though Peter was the prime spokesman at the beginning of the church, later he was not seen as the "representative spokesman" of the disciples or apostles, as Catholicism tries to claim. In fact they say, "The New Testament recognizes a 'Petrine function.'" (*Handbook*, 536) It is far more true to the facts that Paul became the central figure among the apostles. John also held a key position and was given the privilege of writing the last great volume of the New Testament, the book of Revelation. To admit to this does in no way take away from Peter his important apostolic role, but he was not placed above the rest of the disciples, as the Catholics try to claim.

The Catholic writer McBrien points out: "And when the Roman Pontiffs carefully pronounce on some subject which has hitherto been controverted, it must be clear to everybody that, in the mind and intention of the Pontiffs concerned, this subject can no longer be regarded as a matter of free debate among theologians." (*Cat*, 748-49)

The matter is settled, according to Catholic dogma.

McBrien goes on and writes, "Pope Pius XII's *Humani Generis* (1950), for example, insisted that even papal encyclicals, although they do not engage the fullness of the pope's teaching authority, demand both external [the larger body of Catholics] and internal [among the bishops and cardinals] assent." (Ibid., 748)

Conclusion

It is clear that the New Testament does not give supremacy to Peter as the first Pope. And it is also certain from the New Testament that there is no doctrine of apostolic succession that would grant such authority and control to the bishop of Rome, as the head of the Church. But as well, history does not cooperate with the teachings of the Catholic Church. One must go late into the centuries in order to try to find any statement creating the doctrine of Papal supremacy.

In April 1895 Pope Leo XIII wrote an Encyclical *Praeclara* addressing "all [Protestant] princes and peoples," asking them to consider a return to the Catholic fold. He set forth what was called the *Satis Cognitum* that tried to argue all Church Councils during the Middle Ages had proclaimed and confirmed the Pope as the Head of all Christians, and that believers should return to the "communion with the Apostolic See." The Latin *Satis Cognitum* means enough or sufficient knowledge. Pope Leo was trying to argue that there is sufficient information about the ancient Church Councils to prove the bishops meeting in those conclaves held to the primacy of the bishop of Rome as Head of the Catholic Church.

But this was not true by any means!

In 1912, some sixteen years after Pope Leo's Encyclical, Church of England vicar Edward Denny wrote a masterpiece volume in response, entitled *Papalism*. Denny carefully examined the major Councils of history and documented that no such Papal authority was given to the bishop of Rome. In fact, he shows just the opposite in that, over and over, bishops who gathered for these Councils denounced the idea that there was to be a supreme pontiff. In many cases the attending bishops rebuffed any attempt at an Italian takeover or kidnapping of Church authority.

The authority of the Pope over all Christians was the central theme of Pope Leo's arguments: "The wayward brothers, the Protestants and the Eastern Orthodox, must come home and give spiritual homage to the Pope of Rome."

Denny's book responded to this seductive appeal. His research played an important role in blunting the ambitions of many Episcopalians in England who wanted to return to the Roman Catholic fold.

Quoted below are several conclusive examples from Denny's research that shows what he found as he read through the debates of the many Church Councils:

"The Fathers of the Fourth [Chalcedon] Council [of AD 541] knew nothing of the necessity of 'Papal' confirmation," i.e., of making the Pope the Head of all of Christendom (p. 529).

"At the Second Council of Constantinople (AD 553), the Roman Italian bishop Vigilius was not present. The Councils ... decisions were arrived at without any idea on the part of the Fathers of the Synod that they would require his 'ratification' [in making him] the Supreme Pastor [of all of the Church] (Ibid.).

"In fact, they took the opposite view and held that they did not intend to give him such authority." "They held [their position] to be final and conclusive, and those who did not accept it became subject to anathema [condemnation]" (p. 530). "It is plain that the Council acted as the Supreme authority in the Church," and not the "Roman Pope Vigilius" (Ibid.).

The book Papalism repeatedly documents this view: The majority of Church Councils never gave the bishop of Rome ultimate and final authority over Christendom!

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References:

Almost all the books below carry the Catholic *Imprimatur*, which means the work is considered to be free from doctrinal or moral error. Even the volumes that do not carry this seal are still written by Catholic theologians and agencies that are a part of the Catholic body of teaching.

Note abbreviations:

The Catechism of Modern Man, All the Words of Vatican II, Edited by Team of Daughters of St. Paul (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1968). Imprimatur: Richard Cardinal Cushing, Archbishop of Boston. (*Modern Man*)

The Catholic Catechism, John A. Hardon (New York: Doubleday, 1981). Imprimatur: Joseph T. O'Keefe, Vicar General, Archdiocese of New York. (*CathCat*)

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Deharbes Catechism (One of the most popular Catholic catechisms in America at the turn of the century.), Joseph Deharbe (New York: Schwartz, Kirwin, & Fauss, 1912). Imprimatur: John Farley, Archbishop of New York. (*Deharbe*)

Dictionary of Mary, [no author named] (New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing, 1997). Imprimatur: Patrick J. Sheridan, Vicar General, Archdiocese of New York. (*DictMary*)

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Inside Catholicism, Richard P. McBrien (San Francisco: Collins Publishers, 1995). The author is a professor of theology, University of Notre Dame. (*Inside*)

Your One-Stop Guide to Mary, Mitch Finley (Ann Arbor, MI.: Servant Publications, 2000). The author is a Catholic writer, and his book is endorsed by priest William H. Shannon, professor Emeritus of Religious Studies, Nazareth College. (*Mary*)

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