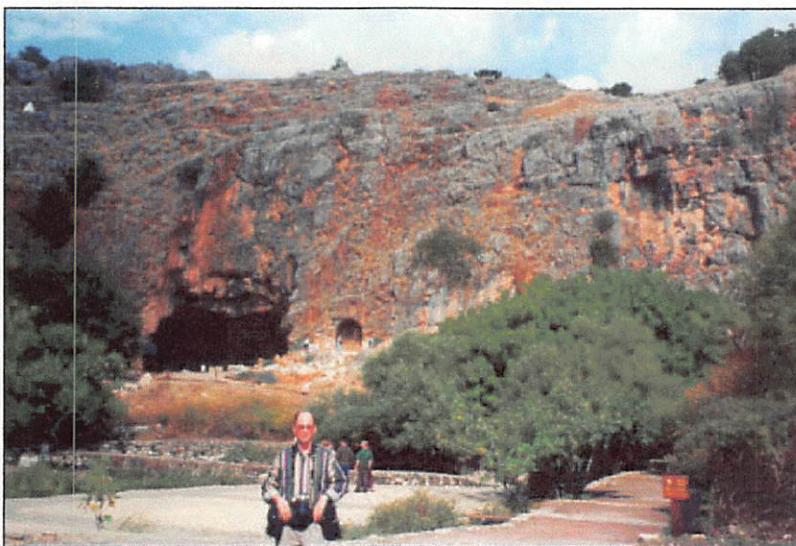


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# Stumbling "Upon this Rock"

**Steve Ray Responds to Bill Webster's "Rebuttal" of his Book UPON THIS ROCK and Critiques Bill's Use and Abuse of the Patristic Witness regarding the Primacy of Peter and the Petrine Primacy of Rome**

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Stephen Ray does Research at the Rock in Caesarea Philippi

"You see, then, that the fact that Christ is called the rock, and that on Him the Church is built, is no hindrance to Peter's also being, in a different sense, called rock, and being said to be the foundation of the Church; so that I consider there is no ground for the fear entertained by some, in ancient and in modern times, that, by applying the words

(George Salmon, *The Infallibility of the Church* )

## **Is William Webster Correct?**

**1) In his Critique of *Upon this Rock* by Stephen Ray?**

**2) In his Understanding of the Papacy and the Early Fathers?**

Outline (How I Have Approached William Webster's "Rebuttal"):

Initial Comments and Disclaimers

Introduction

Preliminary Comments

How do we Read and Write Church History?

Unanimous Consent of the Fathers

Answering the "Misrepresentations":

1. Misrepresentation One:

- a. Bill's e-mail
- b. St. Augustine
- c. St. John Chrysostom

2. Misrepresentation Two: Tertullian

3. Misrepresentation Three: St. Cyprian

4. Misrepresentation Four: Origen, St. Ambrose, St. Jacob of Nisibis

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Concluding Statements



Bill Webster and the Sovereignty of God

Appendix A: "Papal Supremacy" by John Henry Cardinal Newman

Appendix B: Further Quotations from Eastern Patriarchs

Appendix C: Tertullian and Montanism

Appendix D: Yves Congar and the Unanimous Consent of the Fathers

Appendix E: Vatican I's Decree

### Initial Comments:

1) A criticism that may be leveled against this rebuttal is that it is "fragmentary" or "scattered." Mr. Webster might claim that my comments are not focused. I would like to preempt this charge in advance, by informing the reader that Bill Webster simply "cut 'n' pasted" lengthy sections of his book into this "rebuttal", but that the fragmentary nature of his "rebuttal" (coming, as it obviously does, without the requisite honest interaction with my whole work) formed the nature of my counter-rebuttal. Put simply, his "rebuttal" was fragmentary and if my counter-rebuttal is to be point-by-point, it may naturally seem fragmentary to the reader as well. However, following the arguments will be immensely instructive to the reader, and I hope entertaining in places, especially the Interview with St. Augustine and the Trial concerning St. John Chrysostom. This response to Bill Webster's "rebuttal" will almost become a "large Appendix" to my book *Upon this Rock*, but I have divided it into 11 easy chapters, based on the structure of Bill Webster's "rebuttal".

2) I have provided about 20 pages of introductory material to lay the groundwork for this response and defense of the Papacy and my book. If the reader wants to get right to the "meat and potatoes" of my response to Bill Webster's "rebuttal" -- paragraph-by-paragraph -- they can simply skip the introductory material and jump ahead to the actual "rebuttal" and my response.

3) Throughout this work Mr. Webster's writing against my book will be called the "Rebuttal". My response and counter-challenge will be called the "response". I provide the complete text of Bill's rebuttal with my response and his words are in a blue Arial font and mine are in the black Times Roman font.

4) In my book *Upon this Rock*, when I quoted Bill Webster, I never intended my comments to be taken personally. It was *not* personal, though it appears Bill Webster, unhappily, might have taken it as a personal affront. I do not know Bill Webster, nor have I ever spoken with him. I simply used his books as samples of the new genre of books by Protestant apologists which attempts to wade into unfamiliar waters -- the teaching of the Fathers. I simply used Bill Webster's books as an example of such a genre of new apologists. I am sorry if Bill Webster took it personally.

## Introduction

I received an e-mail a few weeks ago telling me that I had been accused of intentionally and purposefully misrepresenting William Webster and the Church Fathers. I went to William Webster's web site and was surprised by what I read. I spent a troubled day or two deciding if I should respond? I asked the Lord and searched my soul. I consulted a few close friends and family on the matter. The answer was overwhelmingly in the affirmative.

Why tackle such a project, responding to such a "rebuttal" from Bill Webster, a man I have never met or spoken to? First, I am sensitive to my brothers and sisters who are in disagreement. I am concerned, and hope in some small way to dispel some misconceptions about the Catholic Church, which I find so prevalent today. At the same time, I am a tenacious kind of man. As a kid I admired the Apache Indians and aspired to be as enduring and intrepid as they proved to be. As a kid, I even carried a pebble under my tongue according to the practice of the desert Indians, in order to run long distances without my mouth becoming dry. I haven't changed as I've grown older. I like the image of Caleb, the faithful "old dog" of the Exodus story (Num 13:30-14:10). The faithful, rugged, tenacious, loyal, feisty, believing Caleb is a hero of mine.

However, *the main reason I write* (and I conclude with this reason in a final section of this response entitled "Bill Webster and the Sovereignty of God"), is that I hope and pray that Bill Webster will eventually see the errors and bankruptcy of Fundamentalist Protestantism and come home to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. With this in mind, I write with charity, though I argue strongly and persistently. If my goal is to win our brother back to the fullness of the faith, it would be foolish to write in an angry or hostile manner. I love Bill and respect his gifts and hope they will be used some day for the good of the universal Catholic Church with a goal to the unity of the faith, and what St. Paul asserts when he says "this is the way it is done in all the churches of God".

This is great fun for me and my family. It is similar to defending the fort, or in a biblical sense of epic proportions, standing with a sword and shield defending the truth against subtle, and sometimes not so subtle error. I envision myself standing shoulder to shoulder with saints, martyrs, confessors, and the whole of the faithful for two thousand years. In the olden days men challenged each other to a dual with ivory handled pistols. Today, we are much more civilized, and as Christians, hopefully more charitable. Today we click away at keyboards and the "dual" is with words, and even though the tussle seems to be a brutal battle at times, it can actually, when done with words, be a friendly and respectful endeavor, even though in the course of discussion we may employ rhetorical questions, satire, challenges, and even a bit of good natured ribbing, it is still intended to be a charitable discussion on things most important, with a view to the reconciliation of ideas and hearts.

Don't get me wrong, I have nothing against Mr. Webster and I don't write to perpetuate a "fight". I beg his indulgence to refer to him as Bill throughout this response. Throughout his "rebuttal" he refers to me as *Mr. Ray*, but I don't think of myself as *Mr. Ray*, that's my dad's name. When someone calls me Mr. Ray I always spin around to see if my dad is standing behind me. I hope if Mr. Webster and I ever meet personally he will call me Steve and allow me to call him Bill. I hope he doesn't think I'm too forward by using his



first name through the rest of this response (plus, "Bill" is easier for my clumsy fingers to type).

Bill is probably a good guy. His neighbors and members of his local congregation are, I would suppose, very pleased with him. I expect he is sincere in his belief, and I would have the same expectation regarding his intent with his "rebuttal". I have no reason to suspect ill will, probably only self-preservation since he mainly addresses the footnotes where his name appears. There's nothing wrong with that. Sometimes people just see things differently and unfortunately, when this happens, the two in question often talk *past* each other instead of *to* each other. I hope to agree with Bill wherever I can, correct some things as needed, and to overall, maybe, help bridge the gap between our very different positions.

Bill, and a lot of other Protestant apologists (though I tend to think they are more properly termed "anti-Catholics"), are not, it seems to me, prepared for the new Catholic apologists being raised up by God to defend and promote the fullness of the Faith in the Catholic Church which is ancient yet forever young. Anglican divines learned a century ago, that if you begin to twist the Fathers out of their rightful context, the Holy Roman Catholic Church, you end up a victim of your own devise. Nothing Bill promotes in his books or in this "rebuttal" is new. It was all argued much more persuasively and learnedly a century ago in England, and a century ago in England the same thing happened as is happening today: the Catholics rose to the occasion and utterly demolished the Anglican arguments. "He who is ignorant of history is bound to repeat it", as the old saying goes. The difference is that the Anglicans across the sea of a century ago were much more learned than the Protestant controversialists of today.

I hope to avoid the "he said - she said" kind of argument, though I'm afraid it won't be altogether possible. Maybe we can help bridge the gap or narrow the divide between us - Lord knows that divided Christendom can certainly use some of that. If worse comes to worse we can agree to disagree on some matters. Let's face it, greater minds than ours have debated these issues for many centuries. There is no hostility or anger in my fingertips, but passion for the truth burns the keys and will sometimes manifest itself. Hopefully I'll get down to some good straight talk with a fellow believer in our Lord Jesus Christ. So Bill, please bear with me!

Again, why do I want to tackle such a project? There are a few more reasons. First, I have a short hiatus this month with no pressure. Second, since this is the first critique of my new book, I felt it was appropriate to respond. Third, I really enjoy a good challenge and diving deeper into history, the Church, and theology. Fourth, I hope to help people discern the errors in much current "anti-Catholic" efforts based mainly on Protestant bias. Fifth, for my edification and the edification of my fellow-Catholics who have come into port with the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. And lastly, and maybe most importantly, as I said earlier, because such things have become family projects and everyone gets involved.

How *does* one approach a forty-page "rebuttal" with only a little spare time? Should I write a general overview and correct the major flaws or take the whole "rebuttal" tit-for-tat and respond sentence-by-sentence? Probably a bit of both, right? Here's my problem: when you write a book it gets published, a lot of people may read it, and you may make a little bit of money (very little I've discovered), but the kind of writing I embark upon this

evening takes a lot of time, is read by very few, and makes absolutely *no* money. It just sits on a web page for a few years while the book marches on. But, like any other kind of chore, it's a tough job, and someone's got to do it. So, let's get going.

### Preliminary Comments

Before I jump into Bill's actual text, there are a few preliminary issues I would like to touch on.

Many of the statements and assumptions Bill makes about the early Church and the Fathers have been dealt with in detail in my book (and I don't want to reproduce that here; I'd rather have the reader buy a copy!). For example, he habitually incorporates the practice of mixing metaphors (*Upon this Rock*, pps. 15 - 17 and elsewhere), he insists on the false dilemma of *either-or* instead of *both-and*, he provides quotes that allegedly support his position while ignoring others, and ignoring the historical *practice* of the early Christians. I'm pretty sure Bill never read my book, since as we will see, in many places he ignores my book completely and simply "cuts and pastes" whole sections of his book into the "rebuttal" as a substitute for actual interaction with my material. I also question whether he read the book because things I clearly explain in my book he seems to overlooks or ignores in his "rebuttal", and he spends a fair amount of time criticizing me for not admitting or revealing certain "evidence" which I have clearly stipulated or freely included in my book. I did not limit myself exclusively to passages that seemed "Catholic-friendly", as some others have done. We'll get to all that in due time.

I would also like to ask Bill: "What is your interpretation of Matthew 16? If you read his books and this "rebuttal", you will see that he hold his own cards very close to his chest. I don't recall him ever explaining what *he* actually believes - how he interprets this profound passage. Does he interpret the "rock" to be: 1) Peter (Mt 16:18); 2) Peter's faith; 3) Peter's confession; 4) the apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20); 5) the Church (1 Tim 3:15), or something else? Which is it Bill? We don't want a convoluted answer, but a simply response like you try to force upon Catholics and the text. What do you believe? When you force and impose an artificial *either-or* decision on the Catholics and the Fathers, it may come back to haunt you. I will present you with your dilemma again in more detail later.

Many of us have heard of the *Six Blind Men of Industan* and their description of the elephant. It is hard not to apply this to the significantly few Protestant Fundamentalists who happen "to fall against" the Fathers and figure they understand the Fathers better than the Catholic Church which is the organic tree that grew from the apostolic and patristic seed. Hunting and pecking through the Fathers, without the guidance of 2,000 years of the Church to whom the Fathers belong, is much like the investigation experienced by these men from Industan:

"It was six men of Industan to learning much inclined, Who went to see the elephant, though all of them were blind, That each by observation might satisfy his mind. The first approached the elephant and happening to fall against his broad and sturdy side at once began to bawl, God bless me, the elephant is very like a wall. The second, feeling of the tusk cried, Ho! What have we here, so very round and smooth and sharp? To me it's mighty clear This wonder of an elephant is very like a



spear. The third approached the animal and happening to take The squirming trunk within his hands, thus boldly up and spake, I see, quoth he, the elephant is very like a snake. The fourth reached out an eager hand, felt about the knee. What most this wondrous beast is like is mighty plain, quoth he. 'Tis clear enough the elephant is very like a tree. The fifth who chanced to touch the ear said even the blindest man Can tell what this resembles most. Deny the fact, who can, This marvel of an elephant is very like a fan. The sixth no sooner had begun about the beast to grope Than seizing on the swinging tail that fell within his scope I see, quoth he, the elephant is very like a rope. And so these men of Industan disputed loud and long, Each in his own opinion exceeding stiff and strong. Though each was partly in the right and all were in the wrong."

Ah, bless the Lord Jesus for His infallible Church, which has stood the test of time and continues to be the only one who holds firmly the full teaching and morals of the Apostles and the Fathers. She is thriving today, one billion strong, and goes into the next millennium with a renaissance probably unrivaled in Her history. The Lord has been faithful. It is a great time to be Catholic and bless the Lord He has brought us into port!

## Historiography: Am I Guilty of Mangling History? How Should we Read and Write Church History?

In our discussion about the Fathers and how they understood Peter and the primacy of Rome, it is very important to understand how to read and write history. This is the study of "historiography". Bill and I have very different perspectives on this matter and it is my conclusion that it is one of the major reasons we may never be able to see eye-to-eye on these matters. I will begin with Bill's comments and then move to discuss the proper methods of historical research - specifically about the Church. I will also explain why I think Bill is in bed with Enlightenment thinking and secularists.

Bill's comment about my violation of the rules of "historiography" is very poorly worded, which is, surely, the result of trying to write so much in so little time, something I can appreciate. But when I read these sentences casually, as did others I asked, it appears initially that Bill completely misunderstands the word "historiography". Read his comments for yourself: *"Stephen Ray, and Roman apologists in general, are guilty of a major error of historiography. This is the error of importing the theological understanding of terms developed in a later age and to then impose these concepts on the same terms of the writings of an earlier age, assuming that because they use the same word you do, that they mean the same thing by it."*

When I first read this, it appeared that Bill was *defining* historiography as the reading back into history of current ideas. This would be a serious embarrassment, for historiography, properly defined, means actually the opposite! But I knew Bill was too intelligent to make such a blunder so I decided he must mean that I am guilty, not of historiography, but of violating basic rules of historiography.

I asked a best friend of mine with his Ph.D. in English, Dennis Walters, what he thought Bill meant, and if his "rebuttal" was just worded poorly at this point (I am not criticizing Bill here, I get typing fast too, and know there are probably plenty of grammatical errors on my part as well). He responded: "His charge against you is fairly murky. As nearly as I can make it out, it is that you are violating the rules of historical interpretation of ideas (a kind of fallacy in logic) by 'importing the theological understanding of terms developed in a later age' and assuming that the era before the term was invented, and about which you are writing, understood the *concept* the same way that you understand it today. But that isn't exactly what he *said*. I think he got mixed up in his own grammar (which contains a couple of errors, by the way)."

For those who don't know, historiography is defined as **1 a:** the writing of history; *especially* : the writing of history based on the critical examination of sources, the selection of particulars from the authentic materials, and the synthesis of particulars into a narrative that will stand the test of critical methods; **b:** the principles, theory, and history of historical writing (a course in *historiography* ) **2:** the product of historical writing: a body of historical literature" (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* ).

Alleged violations of historiography are commonly referred to as "anachronisms" or "prolepses". "**Anachronism**" is defined by *Merriam-*



Webster's

*Collegiate Dictionary* as "1 : an error in chronology; *especially* : a chronological misplacing of persons, events, objects, or customs in regard to each other 2: a person or a thing that is chronologically out of place; *especially* : one from a former age that is incongruous in the present." "Prolepsis" is defined as "a: The anachronistic representation of something as existing before its proper or historical time or b: The assignment of something, such as an event or a name, to a time that precedes it."

I'm not sure why William accuses me of an "error of historiography." I suspect that he has been seduced by a positivist and secularist historiography which would certainly undermine his own understanding of salvation history. *He seems to think it improper that I detect a child in an embryo.* He seems to deny that the past points toward the future. No Christian who takes the Bible seriously can deny that history is directed towards increasing our understanding of God's will. In short, doctrine develops. History is not just a series of discrete, undirected, random events unrelated to one another. Our fragmentary and incomplete past understandings grow into fullness through the superintendence of the Holy Spirit. Animal skins, the doctrine of atonement for Adam and Eve, were adequate but primitive when compared with the Mosaic sacrificial system.

Furthermore, the Mosaic understanding of atonement cannot do full justice to Jesus' sacrifice. Furthermore, the Mosaic understanding of atonement cannot do full justice to Jesus' sacrifice. I can hear Bill saying, however, that it is a mistake to see the Mosaic system implied or latent in Adam and Eve's animal skins or to see Jesus in the sacrifice of animals. He would consider, if he remains consistent, that such thinking would be anachronistic. To the contrary, it is the practice of the Hebrew historians, the mind of the Apostles, and the methodology of the Fathers. History is meaningful, under the providence of God and directed to a purpose. The Hebrew historians are often called the world's first great historiographers. They read their current history in light of the received narrative of what God had accomplished in their past. The Apostles and the Fathers weren't shy about interpreting their moment in light of the tradition they had received. Each expected that he was approaching a fuller understanding than his ancestors had had. That is why we can read the fragmentary evidence of the past as pregnant with greater meaning than secularists and non-Christians can. We can see the oak in the acorn. I'm surprised that Bill has a hard time understanding this since he is so committed to the Puritans who themselves were not shy to read their present as the fulfillment of the past. He would do well not simply to accept the historical conclusions of the Puritans but to try and enter into their historical methodology.

Accusers are often blind to the fact that they may practice themselves what they point out in others. Can any of us be 100% objective when studying history? Can we completely avoid reading our experiences, historical and theological developments, and understandings back onto earlier generations? Did the Apostle Paul ever do such a thing? Did he view Jewish history differently after Acts 9 than he did as a Pharisee? Did the Apostles in Jerusalem and the Gentiles in Asia view anything differently after the first church council in Acts 15? Will Bill argue that his presuppositions and accepted Baptist traditions have no effect on his research?

The new book *Reading Scriptures with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), written by Protestant author Christopher A. Hall, makes this point, "Many conservative Protestant interpreters, though uncomfortable to find themselves

slumbering with Enlightenment and postmodernist bedfellows, will fail to discern or acknowledge the necessity of studying the fathers" (pg. 31). I would suggest that even those who *do* begin to investigate and read the Fathers, as Bill has done to his credit, still fail to understand or think *like* the Fathers, therefore misunderstanding Patristic thought and teaching.

I tried to be objective as I studied history and the papacy but I'm quite willing to admit that I view history as a Catholic. I understand the Catholic Church as a living organism, the Body of Christ. It is also an organization, although this word has its unhelpful connotations. As any organization grows, the need for a unifying factor is essential. As a business owner, I know this all too well. Countries know it, sports teams know it, families know it, and Protestant churches know it too. When the "guarantor" of unity is removed or non-existent, the unity is soon non-existent. How many Protestant denominations have blown apart through envy, contradictory opinions, differing theologies? This type of disunity proves the point. Catholics expect God to provide unity for his Church, and therefore a "principle" or head to represent and secure this unity since that is his desire and the prayer of our Lord (Jn 17:22 - 23). I would expect God to make provision to ensure and guarantee that visible unity of his Body on earth. The Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura* does exactly the opposite. Within less than four hundred years it has spawned over 30,000 competing and conflicting sects and groups.

Catholics believe, with good biblical and historical warrant, as well as just good old common sense, that Peter and the Popes are God's answer to providing the needed and expected visible unity of His people. Just as a CEO in a company, a captain in the army, a father in a family and a pastor in a Baptist church, there is a need for visible leadership to ensure unity. I deal with this in great detail along with the biblical reasons for the papacy, which Bill doesn't really address in his "rebuttal", or in his books. One of the embarrassing things of dealing with the biblical evidence for Bill, especially if one looks at modern scholarship, is that linguistic and textual biblical scholars almost unanimously have agreed that the "Rock" of Matthew 16 is Peter. This is the literal meaning of the text though many other applications can be drawn from the text. (Boy, I feel like I'm writing my book all over again!)

My friend Dr. Dennis Walters again commented on the definitions of the Church and her Ecumenical Councils and the defining of words and the meanings of earlier ages: "I grant that the language at large changes the meanings of words. In popular speech, the changes happen fairly quickly (600 years is a fairly slow rate of change; most meanings change far more quickly). But in philosophy and theology, which are sciences, the chances of meanings changing with no one noticing are remote at best. I agree with William that theological terms change in meaning. But one reason why the Church continually revisits the same topic century after century in its councils, encyclicals, and theological investigations is to ensure that the problem William is pointing to does not happen vis-a-vis Church teaching. So, when the Church says that, by 'transubstantiation' we actually mean something pretty close to what Justin meant by 'transmutation,' it is doing so after a great deal of scientific investigation and reflection. The historiographical problem--actually, both a logical and a historical problem --is actually what the Church is explicitly trying to avoid in making statements that attempt to clarify meaning."

This issue of historiography really lies at the heart of much of the disagreement between Bill and me. I think it is probably an honest difference in methodology and in how we see



God working in history. As long as we differ on the basic premise of how to read Christian history, we will continue to come up with differing conclusions. I think this is a fair assessment.

I am concluding this section on historiography with an extended quote from Fr. Stanley Jaki (Ph.D. in Physics and Theology) from his book *And on This Rock*. In it he discusses how one "reads" history and the development of ideas which can then be seen as we look back at the earlier era. He is criticizing many of the liberal Catholic theologians who have given away the store in the pursuit of ecumenism and "modern critical methods" but his words apply to Bill and other Fundamentalists trying to dismantle the apostolic and patristic hermeneutics.

"Should we readily forget that around 1870 cultivators (mostly Protestant) of biblical criticism assured the world that Christ never spoke the words 'And on this Rock,' or if He did, he meant only faith, perhaps Peter's faith, but certainly not Peter himself was meant by those words. Surely we can be most gratified by the fact that in more recent times, Kittel, Cullmann, and many lesser names have come around to admitting that Peter himself was meant by those words. Surely we can be gratified that it is no longer fashionable in biblical scholarship to doubt Peter's leadership among the Twelve. But should we also believe that it was not rational, scholarly, and objective to believe in the primacy of Peter until the biblical criticism caught up with the idea in these last days? Would not such subservience to the shifting moods of biblical criticism be a catastrophic prospect for reason as well as faith? After all, biblical criticism, or at least the 'accepted' or 'in' wing of it still denies us the continuity of Peter's primacy and with it continued infallibility and indefectibility for the Church as well. No different is the case when one turns to the scholarly evaluation the record of the first two or three Christian centuries concerning the role of Peter's successors in the Church. The venture may simply be misplaced if too much weight is given to a not-too-old and highly acclaimed book on ecclesiology according to which even a thousand years later, that is, during the High Middle Ages, 'papal infallibility can be found only in its germ in the record.' According to another recent and major monograph, papal infallibility owes its origin to the excessive zeal of some early Franciscan theologians.' Clearly, what is then the point of looking for any evidence for infallibility in the first three centuries?

"Let us therefore be more modest and go back only as far as the beginning of this century. Then the record in question appeared rather different to Catholic theologians not yet swayed by some Utopian vision of ecumenism or by the subtle strategy of Protestantizing the Church from within, a strategy which Pope Paul VI decried in an agonizing utterance. As to Protestant theologians, hardly any of them could at that time be suspect of an overweening sympathy for Roman Catholicism in their reading of the record. One of the most prominent of them, Harnack, was indeed too much of a liberal to have sympathy for even traditional Protestantism. Thus we may reasonably assume that only respect for the historical record prompted him to write in his famed *History of Dogma* that the first letter of Clement, bishop of Rome, written to the Corinthians, 'proves that, by the end of the first century, the Roman Church had already drawn up fixed rules for her own guidance, that she watched with motherly care over outlying communities, and that she then knew how to use language that was at once an expression of duty, love, and authority'. Almost

exactly a hundred years later there came the famous edict of Victor I, an edict declaring that any local church that failed to conform with Rome was excluded from the union of the one Church on the ground of heresy. Harnack wondered aloud:

"How would Victor have ventured on such an edict - though indeed he had not the power of enforcing it in every case - unless the special prerogative of Rome to determine the conditions of the 'common unity' in the vital questions of faith had been an acknowledged and well established fact? How could Victor have addressed such a demand to the independent churches, if he had not been recognized, in his capacity of bishop of Rome, as the special guardian of the 'common unity'?"

"The forcefulness of Harnack's words is undeniable, but are, therefore, the texts he reflected upon a support of papal infallibility? *They are, indeed, as long as one looks for things and not mere words.* A historian of the dogma of the Eucharist, who is satisfied with nothing short of the expression 'Real Presence', must wait until the Middle Ages, but then what is he going to do with the words of Saint Augustine, according to whom during the last supper "Christ carried that Body (of His) in His own hands"? *Much the same is true about the early record concerning infallibility. It clearly contains the thing, that is, the reality of the infallibility of the Bishop of Rome, though not the expression of itself. But to perceive things beneath the words as far as history is concerned, one must have a notion of history such as the one formulated by Newman and in that very book of his which is the record of his agonizing search as to where "faithfulness to type" is preserved:*

"History is not a creed or catechism, it gives lessons rather than rules; . . . bold outlines and broad masses of color rise out of the records of the past. They may be dim, they may be incomplete; but they are definite . . . to be deep in history is to cease to be a Protestant."

"To such an approach to history it will be objected that it prejudices history, that it forces one in advance to decide what to look for in history, to the detriment of a critical scholarship by Newman, who had repeatedly endorsed papal infallibility as a theological tenet prior to its definition at Vatican I and, though he viewed that definition inopportune, accepted it unreservedly. Its latter-day Roman Catholic critics [and Protestant as well] would do well to ponder Newman's penetrating observation about objectors to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception: 'I have never heard of one Catholic having difficulty in receiving it, whose faith on other grounds was not already suspicious'" (Stanley Jaki, *And On this Rock* [Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press, 1997], 113 - 116).

So, yes, I look at history from a Catholic perspective inherited from the Jews, the Apostles, and the Fathers. In studying history, the proper "historiography" is surely the province of the Catholics. Those who refuse to see God at work in history, and who fail to look back to the past with eyes to see the development of God's truth and Church, have it seems to me, jumped into bed with the secularists who deny God's continuing involvement in history and have abandoned the perspective of the Apostles, the Fathers and the Early Church in their methodology of reading and understanding history. These are the violators of a God-centered historiography.



## **Unanimous Consent of the Fathers:**

It would certainly be helpful if we understand how Bill interprets the Fathers in light of history. How does Bill look at the teaching of the Fathers and the Catholic principle of Unanimous Consent of the Fathers? I bring this up here because I think that Bill pursues the Fathers with two principles in mind. *First* , if the Fathers don't necessarily use the same exact terminology and expressions as used at the Vatican Councils, then the Vatican Councils must misunderstand or misrepresent the early Church Fathers. I don't know if Bill read this in my book or not since he never mentions it, but he accuses me of frequently of thinking the Fathers taught the same thing as Vatican I and in the same terms. However, I make it abundantly clear in my book that the Fathers probably would not have stood up at Vatican I and said "We've always taught the Pope's infallibility, and in those exact terms!" (p. 207). I won't comment on Bill's first principle here since it will come up later in our discussion.

*Second* , he uses the Unanimous Consent of the Fathers, a principle taught by the Catholic Church, to discredit the Catholic conclusions drawn from the Patristic period. Granted, Bill does not bring this principle up in his "rebuttal" but he makes it clear from his usage of the Fathers and the conclusions he arrives at. Also, and more importantly, he makes this one of the most important of his interpretive principles when reading the Fathers and critiquing the Catholic Church in his book *The Church of Rome at the Bar of History* .

He misunderstands and misrepresents (oh boy, here I go using Bill's favorite word myself!) the Church's teaching on the Unanimous Consent of the Fathers. With his wrong interpretation in hand, he wades through the Fathers like an elephant through a lily pond. Since this is such an important principle, I thought I should give a rather lengthy explanation of his view and the Church's meaning of the phrase. You will see why this is so important as we progress in this study. For a more detailed discussion of current understanding of "Unanimous Consent" read Appendix D, which is a lengthy explanation by Yves Congar.

In his book *The Church of Rome at the Bar of History* (which is a very attractive and nicely laid out book, I must say), Bill begins well by quoting the excellent words of St. Vincent of Lerins and the Councils of Trent and Vatican I, but then misses the mark by misunderstanding and misapplying the Church's stance.

The Unanimous Consent of the Fathers (*unanimis consensus Patrum* ) refers to the morally unanimous teaching of the Church Fathers on certain doctrines, the interpretations of Scripture as received by the universal Church. The individual Fathers are not personally infallible, and a discrepancy by a few patristic witnesses does not harm the collective patristic testimony.

The word "unanimous" comes from two Latin words: *únus*, one + *animus* , soul or mind. "Consent" in Latin means agreement, accord, and harmony; being of the same mind or opinion. Where the Fathers speak in harmony, with one soul or mind overall - not necessarily each and every one agreeing on every detail but by consensus and general agreement - we have "unanimous consent". The teachings of the Fathers provide us with an authentic witness to the apostolic tradition.

St. Irenaeus (ad c. 130 - c. 200) writes of the "tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome' (*Against Heresies* , III, 3, 2), and the "tradition which originates from the apostles [and] which is preserved by means of the successions of presbyters in the Churches" (Ibid., III, 2, 2) which "does thus exist in the Church, and is permanent among us" (Ibid., III, 5, 1). Unanimous consent develops from the understanding of apostolic teaching preserved in the Church with the Fathers as its authentic witness.

St. Vincent of Lerins, explains the Church's teaching: "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 and 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, consent. We shall follow universality if we confess that one faith to be true, which the whole Church throughout the world confesses; antiquity, if we in no wise depart from those interpretations which it is manifest were notoriously held by our holy ancestors and fathers; consent, in like manner, if in antiquity itself we adhere to the consentient definitions and determinations of all, or at the least of almost all priests and doctors" (*Commonitory* 2). Notice that St. Vincent mentions "almost all priests and doctors".

The phrase Unanimous Consent of the Fathers had a specific application as used at the Council of Trent (Fourth Session), and reiterated at the First Vatican Council (*Dogmatic Decrees of the Vatican Council* , chap. 2). The Council Fathers specifically applied the phrase to the interpretation of Scripture. Biblical and theological confusion was rampant in the wake of the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther stated "There are almost as many sects and beliefs as there are heads; this one will not admit Baptism; that one rejects the Sacrament of the altar; another places another world between the present one and the day of judgment; some teach that Jesus Christ is not God. There is not an individual, however clownish he may be, who does not claim to be inspired by the Holy Ghost, and who does not put forth as prophecies his ravings and dreams" (cited in Leslie Rumble, *Bible Quizzes to a Street Preacher* [Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1976], 22).

A fine definition of Unanimous Consent, based on the Church Councils, is provided in the *Maryknoll Catholic Dictionary* , "When the Fathers of the Church are morally unanimous in their teaching that a certain doctrine is a part of revelation, or is received by the universal Church, or that the opposite of a doctrine is heretical, then their united testimony is a certain criterion of divine tradition. As the Fathers are not personally infallible, the counter-testimony of one or two would not be destructive of the value of the collective testimony; so a moral unanimity only is required" (Wilkes-Barre, Penn.: Dimension Books, 1965), pg. 153).

The Council Fathers at Trent (1554 - 63) affirmed the ancient custom that the proper understanding of Scripture was that which was held by the Fathers of the Church to bring order out of the enveloping chaos. With the schism of the Reformation, came mass confusion in biblical interpretation and ecclesiology as we demonstrated with the comment of Martin Luther above. In response to what even Luther considered a disaster, the Fathers of Trent called the Christian world back to sanity and unity according to the true and tested teachings of the Fathers of the Church, both from the patristic era and the councils.



Even Luther understood that such unbridled and wild interpretations of the Scriptures would bring disaster and a return to the sanity of the Fathers. In a letter to Ulrich Zwingli, Martin Luther conceded that reformers would again have to take refuge in the Church councils in order to preserve the unity of the faith on account of the many interpretations which were given to the Scriptures (see *Epis. ad Zwingli* and mentioned in *Crossing the Tiber*, 45).

One must also make another important distinction which Bill fails to make and that is the definition of the word "fathers" in the context of Vatican I. Does it mean only the Apostolic or Patristic Fathers of the first centuries? No. It refers to the fathers of the councils as well. For example in chapter 4, number 1833 it refers to "the fathers of the fourth council of Constantinople". Are these fathers? Not "Church" fathers, but certainly "council" fathers. The Fourth Council of Constantinople was convened in 869, which according to

*Bill's*

*own words* in this "rebuttal" places them way outside the "patristic era". Bill states later in his comments on St. Methodius that, "the ninth century is hardly what we would call the patristic age. Historically, the patristic age is considered to have ended with John of Damascus in the mid eighth century". So, we find that the term "fathers" includes the fathers of councils and has a broader range of meaning than simply the early fathers. It encompasses the teachings and decrees of the Ecumenical Councils. Even the bishops attending the Vatican I and Vatican II councils are referred to as "fathers" in this broader sense.

Papal primacy was taught in the councils by the council fathers from early times. For example, in the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431 we read, "No one doubts, but rather it has been known to all generations, that the holy and most blessed Peter, chief and head of the Apostles, the pillar of the faith, the foundation stone of the Catholic Church, received the keys of the kingdom from our Lord Jesus Christ the Savior and Redeemer of the human race, and that the power of binding and loosing sins was given to him, who up to this moment and always lives in his successors, and judges" (Denzinger, 49-50). Does this sound like the words of Vatican I? Absolutely, because Vatican I was based on the teachings of the Fathers, both patristic and council fathers. Imagine the audacity of these words in 431 if Petrine primacy and jurisdiction were not known to be true and irrefutable, a truth which "no one doubts". Had Bill been there in 431 he might have stood up and scoffed, challenging these words, but the council fathers would have told Bill to "Hush, don't speak about what you don't know!" The councils, such as the Council of Ephesus, is where the fathers of the Church unanimously agreed on the official teaching of the universal Church, tying all the teachings of the Fathers together into a systematic and dogmatic structure - the unanimous consent of the Fathers.

Based on earlier teaching, tradition, and councils, the fathers of the Council of Florence in 1274 state, "Also this same holy Roman Church holds the highest and complete 466 primacy and spiritual power over the universal Catholic Church which she truly and humbly recognizes herself to have received with fullness of power from the Lord Himself in Blessed Peter' the chief or head of the Apostles whose successor is the Roman Pontiff. And just as to defend the truth of Faith she is held before all other things, so if any questions shall arise regarding faith they ought to be defined by her judgment. And to her anyone burdened with affairs pertaining to the ecclesiastical world can appeal; and in all

cases looking forward to an ecclesiastical examination, recourse can be had to her judgment, and all churches are subject to her; their prelates give obedience and reverence to her. In her, moreover, such a plentitude of power rests that she receives the other churches to a share of her solicitude, of which many patriarchal churches the same Roman Church has honored in a special way by different privileges-its own prerogative always being observed and preserved both in general Councils and in other places" (Denzinger, 185)

Opposition to the Church's teaching is exemplified by Bill Webster who misrepresents the Council Fathers by redefining and misapplying "unanimous consent". First in redefining, he implies that unanimous consent means that all the Father must have held the same fully developed traditions and taught them clearly in the same terms as used later in Vatican I. This is a false understanding of the phrase and even in American law unanimous consent "does not always mean that every one present voted for the proposition, but it may, and generally does, mean, when a [verbal] vote is taken, that no one voted in the negative"

(*Black's Law Dictionary* ).

Second, he misapplies the term, not simply to the interpretation of Scripture, as the Council Fathers intended, but to tradition. The passage quoted by Bill in his book *The Church of Rome* does not come from the Vatican document's chapters on Papal Infallibility but from the section on the inspiration and interpretation of Scripture. But ignoring this fact, in *The Church of Rome* , Bill states, "In summarizing our study thus far of Scripture and tradition, we have seen that there are two tests by which we can legitimately judge the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church. The test of history - of unanimous consent - and the test given by Jesus - the test of Scripture. Does the teaching conform to or invalidate Scripture? In applying these tests to the Roman Catholic tradition what do we conclude?" (pg. 31). Notice the test given by the Councils regarded only the interpretation of Scripture, whereas Bill expands the test out of the documents context to all of Catholic tradition. Bill's assertions are not true, but using a skewed definition and application of "unanimous consent", Bill uses selective patristic passages as proof-texts for his analysis of the Fathers and then sees it all through the fogged lens of Fundamentalist tradition.

The Council Fathers were no fools. They were patristic scholars and debated the issues endlessly. They knew that the interpretation of the Scriptures currently held by the Church during the years of the Councils did not contradict the teachings held by the Church Fathers and the Council Fathers.

As an example, individual Fathers may explain "the Rock" in Matthew 16 as Jesus, Peter, Peter's confession, or Peter's faith. Even the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* refers to the "Rock" of Matthew 16 as Peter in one place (CCC 552) and his faith (CCC 424) in another. Matthew 16 can be applied in many different and noncontradictory ways to refute false teachings and to instruct the faithful without invalidating the literal, historical interpretation of Peter as the Rock upon which the Church has been built. Please notice the quotation from *The See of Peter* in my book *Upon this Rock* , page 151.

It also needs to be recognized that when Vatican I used the term "unanimous consent of the Fathers" they were referring not just to the Church Fathers of the first few centuries



but also to those Fathers that gathered in councils throughout the ages.

Bill Webster and others emphasize various patristic *applications* as "proof" of non-unanimous consent contrary to Papal Primacy. Discussing certain variations in the interpretations of the Fathers, Pope Leo XIII (*The Study of Holy Scripture* , from the encyclical *Providentissimus Deus* , Nov., 1893) writes, "Because the defense of Holy Scripture must be carried on vigorously, all the opinions which the individual Fathers or the recent interpreters have set forth in explaining it need not be maintained equally. For they, in interpreting passages where physical matters are concerned have made judgments according to the opinions of the age, and thus not always according to truth, so that they have made statements which today are not approved. Therefore, we must carefully discern what they hand down which really pertains to faith or is intimately connected with it, and what they hand down with unanimous consent; for 'in those matters which are not under the obligation of faith, the saints were free to have different opinions, just as we are,' according to the opinion of St. Thomas."

(Works referred to while discussing Unanimous Consent: St. Irenaeus' quote, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Roberts and Donaldson, Eerdmans, 1985, vol. 1, p. 415, 417. St. Vincent's quote, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* , 2<sup>nd</sup> series, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Eerdmans, 1980, vol. 11, p. 132. Luther quote, Leslie Rumble, *Bible Quizzes to a Street Preacher* [Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 1976], 22. William Webster's quote, 31. Black's Law Dictionary, *Black's Law Dictionary* , Henry Campbell Black, St. Paul, MN: West Publ. Co., 1979, p. 1366. Pope Leo XIII quote, Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma* [London: B. Herder Book Co., 1954], 491 - 492).

Bill has discovered the principle of the "unanimous consent of the fathers" but because he doesn't understand it and has defined and applied it much differently than it was intended, he has misrepresented the Church (maybe even born false witness). Bill has built for himself and his followers a house of cards, the foundation for the rest of his conclusions about the Papacy and all the other issues addressed in his book *The Church of Rome at the Bar of History* . When examined carefully any observant researcher, Bill's house of cards will be seen to be just that, a weak and unhistorical structure though joyfully espoused by his followers who want it to see it as sound and infallible.