

Webster Stumbles “Upon this Rock” 3: Wrong on Augustine Too! St. Augustine, St. Peter, and the Papacy

A Partial Response to Webster’s Second Attempt
(Find my first paper on St. Augustine by [clicking here](#))

[Initial Notes: I wrote a book on Peter and the Papacy entitled [Upon this Rock: St. Peter and the Primacy of Rome in Scripture and the Early Church](#). It appears that Bill took umbrage with the footnotes in my book which referred to him and his books. It appears that Bill did not read my book before critiquing it since he zoomed on the eight footnotes that referenced him in the index but failed to comment on the other two footnotes referring to him. It seems that he missed those final two footnotes because the “indexer” (which is out of my control as the author) failed to add these two references to Bill Webster in the index. Bill would have avoided several, if not many pitfalls had he read my whole book—I still hope he does some day.

Bill wrote a forty page “refutation” to my book (dealing only with the footnotes where his name appeared) which can be found at his website (<http://www.christiantruth.com/stephenray.html>). The full text of his “refutation” is included in my [215-page response](#).

This current paper is a partial response to Bill Webster’s “The Papacy: A Third Response to Stephen Ray” which appears on his website at <http://www.christiantruth.com/ray3index.html>. He has begun his latest “rebuttal” (link provided above) and I am answering each “rebuttal” as he posts them, though I now have very limited time.]

This current paper is a blockbuster response to Bill Webster’s comments on St. Augustine and the Papacy. This is the latest installment. This is very good reading if you are interested in Peter and the Papacy and it is very happy information if you are a Catholic. We’ve known this truth all along as Catholics but a challenge to our position gives us the opportunity to dig deeper and shine brighter! A Catholic has nothing to fear and the deeper one digs, the more confident the Catholic becomes - as you will see here!

I had pretty much decided not to continue the dialog further after my long response, since the time involved with writing multiple page “rebuttals” is very prohibitive, especially when trying to write and speak to a much wider audience than just the few who log onto these websites. This paper, like that on John Chrysostom which precedes it, is one of several shorter responses and I thank **Joe Gallegos** again for his invaluable help in preparing this latest answer. I appreciate his knowledgeable and kind assistance in the face of my time restraints. He has an encyclopedic knowledge of patristics and has proved a scholar and a friend. You can visit Joe’s website at <http://www.cin.org/users/jgallegos>.

In my first response, I answered Bill line-by-line, but since Webster's discussion on St. Augustine, like that on John Chrysostom, was starting to repeat itself we will deal with Augustine in three sections. I could go into great detail on the great many little things Bill has to say about me and Augustine, but this paper is simply organized into three key topics rather than a line-by-line rebuttal. The three topics are: (1) Peter, "this rock", and Matthew 16:18; (2) the primacy of St. Peter; and (3) the primacy of the bishop of Rome. I am not going to respond to many of the personal and smaller issues, but to stick to these three areas.

There will also be *very* few quotations used from other authors in this paper. Webster tends to base much of his thinking and conclusions on the writings of others and depends on secondary sources for most of his material. We will show that the best way to understand Augustine is listen to Augustine himself and not what a very carefully selection of others say about him. We will look at what *St. Augustine* says, try to keep it simple, and make careful observations on the actual historical situation surrounding Augustine's words and actions. We will synthesize our conclusions based on Augustine's writings and not on the opinions others.

I will also try to avoid personal comments regarding Mr. Webster at this point, attempting to stick to the theological and historical data at hand. We have gotten personal enough in previous writings. I am going visit Mr. Webster in Washington some day and take him to lunch since I find him to be an affable sort of fellow. So, here we attempt to stick to the thoughts of Augustine and the history surrounding his bishopric and life in Hippo.

Peter, this rock, and Matthew 16:18

Webster writes:

"At the end of his life, Augustine wrote his *Retractions* where he corrects statements in his earlier writings which he says were erroneous. One of these had to do with the interpretation of the rock in Matthew 16. At the beginning of his ministry Augustine had written that the rock was Peter. However, very early on he later changed his position and throughout the remainder of his ministry he adopted the view that the rock was not Peter but Christ or Peter's confession which pointed to the person of Christ."

(Webster, *Church Fathers*; Webster, The Matthew 51)

"Clearly Augustine is repudiating a previously held position, adopting the view that the rock was Christ and not Peter." (Webster, Church Fathers; Webster, The Matthew 51)

"Augustine does not endorse the Roman Catholic interpretation. Again and again he states that the rock is Christ, not Peter. Augustine claims no exclusive Petrine succession in the Roman bishops and no papal office." (Webster, *Church Fathers*; Webster, The Matthew 59)

"Yet Augustine interprets Matthew 16 in a Protestant and Orthodox way, explicitly

repudiating the Roman Catholic interpretation of Vatican I.” (Webster, Church Fathers; Webster, The Matthew 61)

After quoting Augustine’s *Sermon* 26, Webster writes:

“He writes after nearly five centuries of church history and gives an interpretation of Matthew 16 ... that is a direct contradiction of the Roman Catholic interpretation.”(Webster, Did I really 278)

“[H]e gives an interpretation ... which is diametrically opposed to the Roman interpretation.” (Webster, The Bar 48)

Webster writes as if Augustine interpreted Matt 16:18 with Protestant filters in order to downplay the primacy of St. Peter and his successors, the bishops of Rome. I will show that Augustine’s extensions of Matt 16:18 apart from Peter himself were *never* used to downplay or ignore the primacy of St. Peter or his successors, the bishops of Rome. After reading Webster’s narrow view on Augustine’s understanding of Matt 16:18, one would believe Augustine had no concept or understanding of Peter’s primacy or of the papacy. Webster asserts that Augustine repudiated and contradicted the Catholic understanding of Matt 16:18. Far from repudiating the Catholic understanding of Matt 16:18, I will provide testimony from Augustine to show he interpreted Matt 16:18 in various ways during his life and not exclusively equating “this rock” with Christ Himself. In addition, I will provide several citations from Augustine to show that he had a well developed understanding of the primacy of St. Peter and of his successors, the bishops of Rome. Let’s take a look at St. Augustine’s treatment of Matt 16:18 a little closer.

“Number the bishops from the see of Peter itself. And in that order of Fathers see who succeeded whom, That is the **rock** against which the gates of hell do not prevail.”

Psalmus contra partem Donati, 18 (A.D. 393),GCC 51

“Let us not listen to those who deny that the Church of God is able to forgive all sins. They are wretched indeed, because they do not recognize in Peter the **rock** and they refuse to believe that the keys of heaven, lost from their own hands, have been given to the Church.”

Christian Combat, 31:33(A.D. 397), in JUR,3:51

“For if the lineal succession of bishops is to be taken into account, with how much more certainty and benefit to the Church do we reckon back till we reach Peter himself, to whom, as bearing in a figure the whole Church, the Lord said: ‘Upon this **rock** will I build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it !’ The successor of Peter was Linus, and his successors in unbroken continuity were these: -- Clement, Anacletus, Evaristus, Alexander, Sixtus, Telesphorus, Iginus, Anicetus, Pius, Soter, Eleutherius, Victor, Zephirinus, Calixtus, Urbanus, Pontianus, Antherus, Fabianus, Cornelius, Lucius, Stephanus, Xystus, Dionysius, Felix, Eutychianus, Gaius, Marcellinus,

Marcellus, Eusebius, Miltiades, Sylvester, Marcus, Julius, Liberius, Damasus, and Siricius, whose successor is the present Bishop Anastasius. In this order of succession no Donatist bishop is found. But, reversing the natural course of things, the Donatists sent to Rome from Africa an ordained bishop, who, putting himself at the head of a few Africans in the great metropolis, gave some notoriety to the name of ‘mountain men,’ or Cutzupits, by which they were known.”

To Generosus, Epistle 53:2(A.D. 400), in NPNF1,I:298

“When, therefore, He had said to His disciples, ‘Will ye also go away?’ Peter, that **Rock**, answered with the voice of all, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.’ “

Homilies on John, Tract 11:5(A.D. 417), in NPNF1,VII:76

“And the Lord, to him to whom a little before He had said, ‘Blessed thou art, and upon this **Rock** I will build my Church,’ saith, ‘Go back behind, Satan, an offence thou art to Me.’ Why therefore ‘Satan’ is he, that a little before was ‘blessed,’ and a ‘**Rock**’ ?”

In Psalms, 56[55]:14[PL 36, 656] (A.D. 418),in NPNF1,VIII:223

“Peter, who had confessed Him as the Son of God, and in that confession had been called the **rock** upon which the Church should be built.”

In Psalms, 69:4[PL 36, 869] (A.D. 418), in Butler, 251

“And if a Jew asks us why we do that, we sound from the rock, we say, This Peter did, this Paul did: from the midst of the **rocks** we give our voice. But that **rock**, Peter himself, that great mountain, when he prayed and saw that vision, was watered from above.”

In Psalms, 104[103]:16(A.D. 418),in NPNF1,VIII:513

“[In my first book against Donatus] I mentioned somewhere with reference to the apostle Peter that ‘the Church is founded upon him as upon a **rock**.’ This meaning is also sung by many lips in the lines of blessed Ambrose, where, speaking of the domestic cock, he says: ‘When it crows, he, the **rock** of the Church, absolves from sin.’ But I realize that I have since frequently explained the words of our Lord: ‘Thou art Peter and upon this **rock** I will build my church’, to the effect that they should be understood as referring to him Peter confessed when he said: ‘Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God’, and as meaning that Peter having been named after this **rock**, figured the person of the Church, which is built upon this **rock** and has received the keys of the kingdom of heaven. For what was said to him was not ‘Thou art **rock**’, but ‘Thou art Peter’. But the rock was Christ, having confessed whom(even as the whole Church confesses) Simon was named Peter. Which of these interpretations is more likely to be correct, let the reader choose.”

Retractations,1:21(A.D. 427),in GILES, 177

Augustine was not steadfast in his interpretation of Matthew 16:18. Above, Augustine equated the rock with Peter's faith, Peter's successors, and Peter himself. It was during his controversies with the Manicheans, Donatists, and Pelagians that he emphasized the role of Christ and identified "this rock" with Christ. In his dealings with the Manicheans, the nature of God was in the forefront; with the Donatist, it was the nature of the Church and clergy; with the Pelagians, it was the nature of grace and its originator, Jesus Christ. Augustine equated "this rock" with Christ not to downplay Peter's primacy, rather to emphasize Jesus Christ. Against all these heresies, Augustine stressed that the Church's foundation and grace rested upon a divine and not a human person. Nevertheless, Augustine remained steadfast in his understanding of Peter's primacy and the primacy of the Roman See. Augustine did not reject the Petrine interpretation, in favor of which he cites Ambrose's hymn, but leaves it to the reader to choose. Simon remains a rock, a secondary rock dependent on the Rock-Christ, for Augustine writes, 'Peter having been named after this **rock**' (*Retractations* 1:21).

As a side note, it is interesting and unfortunate that Webster misunderstands and misinterprets Ambrose at this point, claiming:

"This can be seen from the example of Ambrose himself. In other passages he refers to Christ as the rock: . . . 'When the cock crew, *the very rock of the Church did away with his guilt.*'

"For Ambrose, then, the rock is not Peter but his confession of faith. It points to the person of Christ as the ultimate rock. So it is possible to make it appear that Ambrose holds a particular view when in fact he does not, by not presenting his complete teaching on this subject" (Webster, *Church Fathers*; Webster, The Matthew 66).

Augustine, much more informed on the writings and teachings of Ambrose than Webster, tells us quite clearly in his *Retractations* that this passage from Ambrose refers to PETER AS THE ROCK and *not* to Christ. It seems Webster's anachronistic perspective led him to read his own impressions of this passage back into the Fathers - through the lens of his own recent Protestant tradition. I have suggested Webster remove his book from the market until mistakes such as these (and there are quite a few others) are corrected in a future edition.

Augustine often interprets the same Scripture passages in a literal and allegorical sense. For example, in *On the Literal interpretation of Genesis* Augustine interprets the fall of Adam and Eve in a literal sense; whereas, in *On Genesis Against the Manichaens*, he favors an allegorical interpretation. In the end, Augustine favors the literal interpretation without completely abandoning the allegorical view. Similarly with his interpretation of Matthew 16:18. Hence, the one foundation does not eliminate the other. According to Augustine, Jesus renamed Simon to Rock to be the **foundation** of the Church (*In Psalms* 69:4). Elsewhere, Augustine writes that Christ is even a foundation for Peter (*Sermon* 76:1).

Therefore, according to Augustine, Peter is the foundation of Church (including the Apostles) and Jesus is Peter's foundation since He is the foundation of foundations! This is the only interpretation which takes into account **all** of Augustine writings.

The Primacy of St. Peter

Webster writes:

“According to Augustine the Apostles **are equal in all respects**. Each receives the authority of the keys, not Peter alone.” (Webster, A Refutation; Webster, The Church Fathers; Webster, The Matthew 16, 56)

“In Augustine's view, Peter holds a primacy or preeminence, but none of this applies to him in a jurisdictional sense, because he says that ‘Christ did not build his Church upon a man’ “ (Webster, A Refutation; Webster, The Church Fathers; Webster, The Matthew 16, 56)

“Augustine states that Peter is the first and head of the apostles and that he holds a primacy. However he does not interpret that primacy in a Roman Catholic sense. He believes that Peter's primacy is figurative in that he represents the universal Church.”

(Webster, A Refutation; Webster, The Church Fathers; Webster, The Matthew 16, 59)

“In Augustine's view Peter is a symbolic representative of the Church. While he holds a primacy it is not a primacy of jurisdiction but of **honor**.”(Webster, The Papacy)

“Note here [Sermon 299] that Augustine states that Peter is the first and Paul is the last. This has to do with the priority of time, not with official position. He also states that Paul and Peter **are equals**.” (Webster, The Papacy)

“In this passage Augustine states that the pre-eminence or primacy of Peter is due to the fact that he represents the Church universal. When Christ bequeathed the power of binding and loosing to Peter he was bequeathing this power to the entire Church. Augustine then ties together Matthew 16 and Matthew 18 exegetically to demonstrate that what had been entrusted to Peter had in fact been entrusted to all. There are **no distinctions** between the Apostles in the mind of Augustine. They are all on an **equal footing**.” (Webster, The Papacy)

“In addition, when Christ entrusted his sheep to Peter he was **not entrusting the other Apostles** to him, but the converts who would be the fruit of his preaching. The Apostles are **equally shepherds** with Peter.” (Webster, The Papacy)

Webster's position regarding Peter's primacy among the Apostles is clear. According to Webster, Peter had no more authority than the rest of the Apostles - all are on equal footing. Webster is obviously aware of the passages in Augustine's writing asserting Peter's primacy, but is forced to downplay the force and natural sense of the texts. I

present a few passages from Augustine regarding Peter's primacy among the Apostles. These texts alone clearly shows Peter's primacy was not simply one of honor but included authority over the Apostles.

“Among these [apostles] it was **only** Peter who almost everywhere was given privilege of representing the whole Church. It was in the **person** of the whole Church, which he alone represented, that he was privileged to hear, ‘To you will I give the keys of the kingdom of heaven’ (Mt 16:19)... Quite rightly too did the Lord after his resurrection entrust his sheep to Peter to be fed. It's not, you see, that he alone among the disciples was fit to feed the Lord's sheep; but when Christ speaks to one man, unity is being commended to us. And he first speaks to Peter, because Peter is **first** among the apostles.” (*Sermon 295:2-4* (A.D. 410), in WOA3,8:197-199)

“So does the Church act in blessed hope through this troublous life; and this Church symbolized in its generality, was personified in the Apostle Peter, on account of the **primacy** of his apostleship.” (*On the Gospel of John*, Tract 124:5 (A.D. 416), in NPNF1, VII:450)

“For as some things are said which seem peculiarly to apply to the Apostle Peter, and yet are not clear in their meaning, unless when referred to the Church, whom he is acknowledged to have figuratively represented, on account of the **primacy** which he bore among the Disciples.” (*On the Psalms*, 108[109]:1 (A.D. 418), in NPNF1, VIII:536)

“The authority of Cyprian does not alarm me, because I am reassured by his humility. We know, indeed, the great merit of the bishop and martyr Cyprian; but is it in any way greater than that of the apostle and martyr Peter, of whom the said Cyprian speaks as follows in his epistle to Quintus?

‘For neither did **Peter, whom the Lord chose first, and on whom He built His Church**, when Paul afterwards disputed with him about circumcision, claim or assume anything insolently and arrogantly to himself, so as to say that he held the primacy, and should rather be obeyed of those who were late and newly come. Nor did he despise Paul because he had before been a persecutor of the Church, but he admitted the counsel of truth, and readily assented to the legitimate grounds which Paul maintained; giving us thereby a pattern of concord and patience, that we should not pertinaciously love our own opinions, but should rather account as our own any true and rightful suggestions of our brethren and colleagues for the common health and weal.’ (Cyprian, Epistle 76[70]:3)

Here is a passage in which Cyprian records what we also learn in holy Scripture, that the Apostle Peter, in whom the **primacy** of the apostles **shines** with such **exceeding grace**, was corrected by the later Apostle ... I suppose that there is no slight to Cyprian in comparing him with Peter in respect to his crown of martyrdom; rather I ought to be afraid lest I am showing disrespect towards Peter. For who can be ignorant that the **primacy** of his apostleship is to be preferred to any episcopate whatever?” (*On Baptism against the Donatist*, 2:1,1 (A.D. 400), in NPNF1, IV:425-426)

After citing Cyprian words, “For neither did Peter, whom the Lord chose first, and on whom He built His Church,” Augustine did not say ‘Peter is not the foundation of the Church’ or ‘The Church is not built on Peter’; rather, Augustine writes, ‘Cyprian records what we also learn in holy Scripture, that the Apostle Peter, in whom the primacy of the apostles shines with such exceeding grace.’ Augustine clearly maintained throughout his life that Peter was a secondary foundation of the Church dependent on Christ. Even though Augustine was not uniform in his interpretation of Matt 16:18 he never wavered from the fact that Peter was a foundation of the Church (secondary to Christ) and enjoyed a primacy amongst the apostles.

Webster makes the same mistake with Augustine as he did with John Chrysostom. Webster scours the writings of Augustine for two types of passages. First, Webster brings forth passage after passage that show Christ as the foundation of the Church and wrongly concludes that Peter is not a foundation in any sense. This is refuted above. Augustine, as do Catholics, maintains that Christ is the foundation of foundations of the Church. However, Augustine asserts that Peter is a secondary foundation dependent on Christ.

Second, Webster brings forth passages that assert the general care of the Church to the Apostles and Webster wrongly concludes from these passages that all the Apostles are equal in authority. However, Webster fails to engage with the passages from Augustine that clearly contrast Peter with the rest of the Apostles! As in Matt 16:18 Augustine asserts Christ as the foundation of foundations of the Church and subordinates Peter’s foundational role over the Apostles to Christ, we find Augustine’s understanding of John 21:17 similar. According to the bishop of Hippo, Christ is the pastor of pastors and subordinates Peter’s supreme pastorship over the Apostles to Christ,

“Christ was entrusting Peter with his lambs to feed, while he himself was feeding Peter.”

(*Sermon* 146:1(A.D. 455-411) in WOA3,4:445)

In Peter’s pastoral mission, Augustine sees a personification of pastoral unity.

“And every time in reply he affirmed his love, he **entrusted** him with the care of his **flock**. Every time, you see, that Peter said ‘I love you,’ the Lord Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my lambs, feed my sheep’ (Jn 21:15-17). The one man Peter represents the **unity** of **all shepherds** or **pastors** of the Church - but of the good ones, who know how to feed Christ’s flock for Christ, not for themselves.” (*Sermon* 147:1(A.D. 412) in WOA3, 4:448)

This pastoral mission of Peter is given to all the Apostles, and consequently their lawful successors - the bishops of the Catholic Church, for Augustine writes,

“Remember, then, how the Lord Jesus Christ is both the door and the Shepherd: the door, in presenting Himself to view; the Shepherd, in entering in by Himself. And indeed, brethren, because He is the Shepherd, He hath given to His members to be so likewise. For both Peter, and Paul, and the other apostles were, as all good bishops are, shepherds.” (*On John*, Tract 47(A.D. 417), in NPNF1,VII:261)

Nevertheless, Peter enjoys a primacy in his pastoral and foundational roles since he was first in rank and dignity among the Apostles. After Christ's Resurrection and before all the Apostles, Peter is made pastor over the Apostles since Peter is first!

“Quite rightly too did the Lord after his resurrection entrust his sheep to Peter to be fed. It's not, you see, that he alone among the disciples was fit to feed the Lord's sheep; but when Christ speaks to one man, unity is being commended to us. And he first speaks to Peter, because Peter is first among the apostles.” (*Sermon 295:4* (A.D. 410), in WOA3, 8:199)

Webster's attempts to downplay Peter's primacy to a mere order of time among the Apostles simply does not square with the texts of the Bishop of Hippo.

Hence, Augustine is able to compare the leader of the Israelites with the leader of the Apostles!

“The Lord, indeed, had told His disciples to carry a sword; but He did not tell them to use it. But that after this sin Peter should become a **pastor** of the Church was no more improper than that **Moses**, after smiting the Egyptian, should become the **leader** of the congregation.” (*Reply to Faustus the Manichean, 22:70* (A.D. 400), in NPNF1, IV:299)

This single passage from Augustine in his rebuttal to the Faustus the Manichean clearly equates the preeminent authority of Moses over the Israelites with Peter over the Church. Moses had no equals in authority. Likewise, Peter was the pastor over the Church including the rest of the Apostles and had no equals in authority.

“This gospel that has just been read about Christ the Lord, and how he walked over the surface of the sea, and about the apostle Peter, and how, by growing afraid as he walked, he staggered, and by losing confidence began to submerge, until by confessing he again emerged; this gospel is advising us to take the sea as meaning the present age and this world, and the apostle Peter as representing the one and only Church. Peter, you see, is the **first** in the class of the apostles, and the readiest in expressing love of Christ, and is often the **one who answers for all** ... So then, this self-same Peter, blessed by being surnamed **Rocky** from the rock, representing the person of the Church, holding the **chief place** in the **apostolic ranks**...” (*Sermon 76:1-3* (A.D. 412), in WOA3, 3:311-312)

Lastly we will examine Augustine's thought on the authority of Peter's successors—the bishops of Rome. Here is where Augustine's thought on Peter's primacy shines forth, for Augustine bases his papal ideas on the primacy of St. Peter!

“For **who can fail to know** that the most blessed Peter was the **first** of the apostles?”

(On the Gospel of John, Tract 56:1(A.D. 416), in NPNF1, VII:301)

Who has failed to know? Webster has, that's who!

The Primacy of the Bishop of Rome

Webster writes:

“Augustine claims no exclusive Petrine succession in the Roman bishops and no papal office.” (Webster, A Refutation)

“All the bishops are successors of Peter because they are the successors of the Apostles, all of whom were equal.” (Webster, The Papacy)

“All the bishops sit on the chair of Peter.” (Webster, The Papacy)

“Therefore, the exalted titles applied to Peter do not apply to the bishops of Rome because the fathers never make that application in their writings.” (Webster, The Papacy)

“In his actual practice Augustine manifested an anti-papal ecclesiology as did the North African Church generally. This is seen in his dealings with pope Zosimus over two specific issues, one doctrinal [Pelagianism] and the other disciplinary [Apiarius] and in the Donatist controversy.” (Webster, The Papacy)

Webster summarizes his position on Augustine’s view of Rome:

“Augustine cites Rome and the succession of Roman bishops from Peter because Rome was the only Western Apostolic see. He refers to Rome and its succession as proof of the continuity of the true Church and what could legitimately be called Catholic, the criterion being succession from the apostles. He is seeking to prove that the bishop of Rome was descended in direct line from the Apostles and that the Donatists boast of catholicity was illegitimate. He is not expressing a view of papal primacy in these statements. His view of catholicity is that the Church is founded upon the apostolic sees, plural, and that communion with the Church universal is the test of catholicity, not communion with Rome alone. Rome is just one example of an apostolic see, the only one in the West.” (Webster, The Papacy)

According to Webster, Augustine’s view of the primacy of Rome is no different than his view on the primacy of St. Peter. That is, the See of Rome is equal in authority and jurisdiction to all the Sees of Christendom, including the Sees of Hippo or Carthage. Webster’s only concession is that Augustine believes the See of Rome is Apostolic in origin. In the final analysis, the fact that the See of Rome is founded by Peter and Paul is of no importance to Webster. Webster goes so far as to conclude that communion with Rome was not a necessary criterion for unity within the Catholic Church:

“[I]t needs to be emphasized that he does not believe that communion with the Church of Rome was the exclusive criterion for unity.” (Webster, The Papacy)

Webster writes as if Augustine had no concept or developed idea of the papacy.

Webster's last reply contains the same criticisms found in Salmon, Gore, and Guettee. In short, Webster offers nothing new in his rebuttal, and scholarly replies are readily found in Newman, Chapman, Knox, Allies, Kenrick, Winter, or Rivington. Again, rather than offer a line by line rebuttal to Webster's critique, I will show Augustine's view of the papacy in each of his three great controversies. Augustine is the only Church Father to have routed three (3) great heresies in his lifetime: Manicheanism, Donatism, and Pelagianism.

The Manichean Controversy

In Augustine's reply against the Letter called "Fundamental" by Manichaeus, Augustine gives his motive for staying in the Catholic Church. The reply dates from A.D. 397. Augustine writes:

"For in the Catholic Church, not to speak of the purest wisdom, to the knowledge of which a few spiritual, men attain in this life, so as to know it, in the scantiest measure, deed, because they are but men, still without any uncertainty (since the rest of the multitude derive their entire security not from acuteness of intellect, but from simplicity of faith,)--not to speak of this wisdom, which you do not believe to be in the Catholic Church, there are many other things which most justly keep me in her bosom. The consent of peoples and nations keeps me in the Church; so does her authority, inaugurated by miracles, nourished by hope, enlarged by love, established by age. **The succession of priests keeps me, beginning from the very seat of the Apostle Peter, to whom the Lord, after His resurrection, gave it in charge to feed His sheep, down to the present episcopate.** And so, lastly, does the name itself of Catholic, which, not without reason, amid so many heresies, the Church has thus retained; so that, though all heretics wish to be called Catholics, yet when a stranger asks where the Catholic Church meets, no heretic will venture to point to his own chapel or house. Such then in number and importance are the precious ties belonging to the Christian name which keep a believer in the Catholic Church, as it is right they should, though from the slowness of our understanding, or the small attainment of our life, the truth may not yet fully disclose itself. But with you, where there is none of these things to attract or keep me, the promise of truth is the only thing that comes into play. Now if the truth is so clearly proved as to leave no possibility of doubt, it must be set before all the things that keep me in the Catholic Church; but if there is only a promise without any fulfillment, no one shall move me from the faith which binds my mind with ties so many and so strong to the Christian religion." (*Against the Letter of Mani called the "Fundamental", 4:5* (A.D. 397), in NPNF1, IV:130)

Webster obfuscates and downplays the clear meaning of the text by saying such things as, "Augustine cites Rome because Rome was the only Western See." (Webster, The Papacy) or "He refers to Rome and its succession as proof of the continuity of the true Church" (Webster, The Papacy) or "seeking to prove that the bishop of Rome was descended in direct line from the Apostles." (Webster, The Papacy)

Augustine's motive for staying in the Catholic Church is tied to the See of Peter and the

uninterrupted succession of its episcopate. Note well, Augustine without equivocation readily asserts that the charge of caring for the flock of Christ was entrusted to Peter first and subsequently to his successors. According to Augustine, the Roman See is first because he assigns Peter first amongst the Apostles. Hence, Augustine's motive for citing Rome and not Alexandria or Hippo or Carthage or Milan is because it is the Roman seat that enjoys the primacy.

The Donatist Controversy

In dealing with the Donatist schism I will be dealing with three (3) texts.

(1) In A.D. 393, Augustine prepared an alphabetical psalm against the Donatist party for his more simple minded faithful. The psalm consisted of twenty strophes. Each strophe contained twelve lines and chronicled the origin and development of the Donatist schism. In the eighteenth strophe, Augustine describes the Church as a vine. Woe to them who cuts themselves away from the root:

“Why! A faggot that is cut off from the vine retains its shape. But what use is that shape, if it is not living from the root?” (*Psalm against the Donatist Party*, 2 (A.D. 393), in GILES, 182)

Augustine then writes, as if he was anticipating Webster's argument against the papacy, that the essential characteristic of the Catholic Church is communion with the See of Rome, Peter's chair:

“Come, brothers [Donatists and Webster], if you wish to be engrafted in the vine. It is grievous when we see you thus cut off. **Number the priests** even from that **seat of Peter**. And in that **order of fathers** see who to whom succeeded: that is **the rock** which the proud gates of hades do not conquer. All who rejoice in peace, only judge truly.” (*Psalm against the Donatist Party*, 2 (A.D. 393), in GILES, 182)

In contrast to Augustine's psalm Webster writes:

“While Augustine does cite the succession of Roman bishops back to Peter, it needs to be emphasized that he does **not** believe that communion with the Church of Rome was the exclusive criterion for unity but, rather, communion with the catholic church at large as represented by all the apostolic sees, Rome being but one.” (Webster, The Papacy)

However, the reading of the strophe is too clear to mean anything else other than the criterion for the true Church. According to Augustine, the true Church begins with St. Peter and consequently his successors, the bishops of Rome. There is only one See of Peter, the See of Rome. It is this successive successions from Peter himself which is the rock on which Christ's Church is built. Those who do not have communion with the See of Peter, like the Donatists and Webster, must accept the fact they are not Catholic.

(2) Between 397 and 398, Augustine wrote to the Donatist Glorius and his colleagues. In

the letter, Augustine chronicles the history of the Donatist schism and inserts a poignant comment regarding the See of Rome:

“All the more should he have feared to break the peace of unity, because Carthage was a great and famous city, whence the evil might spread from the head through the whole body of Africa. Besides, it was in touch with the overseas countries, and enjoyed widespread fame. Certainly, it had a bishop of no ordinary authority, who was able to pay no attention to a crowd of hostile conspirators, when he saw that he was united by pastoral letters to **the Church of Rome, where the primacy of the apostolic chair has always flourished**, and to those other countries from which the Gospel came to Africa, itself, and when arrangements were made for him to plead his case if his opponents should try to win over those churches from him.” (*To Glorius et. al*, Epistle 43:7 (A.D. 397-398), in FC, XII:187)

Augustine clearly ascribes the See of Rome the primacy of the apostolic chair. This passage is in perfect harmony with Augustine ascribing a primacy to St. Peter, “Peter ... holding the **chief place** in the **apostolic ranks**...”(*Sermon 76:3*)

Webster obfuscates the clear sense of Augustine words by downplaying the meaning of the word *primacy*. According to Webster, *primacy* was merely an honorific title containing no jurisdictional authority. However, if Webster had only looked further into Epistle 43, we find Augustine used the word *primacy* in a parallel passage:

“But, we have other records of the church, in Secundus of Tigisis, who then held the **primacy** in Numidia, left proved and avowed traitors to the judgement of God.”

To Glorius et. al, Epistle 43:3(A.D. 397-398), in FC, XII:184

Secundus of Tigisis, at this time held the primacy in the province of Numidia. Since Secundus held the primacy, he presided over the other bishops of Numidia. For example in the Council of Cirta, Secundus presided over the Council,

“This consideration ought to have weighed much with Secundus, who was at that time **Primate**, if his desire, as **president** of the **Council**, was to promote peace”

To Glorius et. al, Epistle 43:8(A.D. 397-398),in NPNF1,I:278

Hence, Augustine words , “[T]he Church of Rome, where the primacy of the apostolic chair has always flourished”, clearly means the Roman Church is the number one See in authority in Christendom.

(3) The last testimony during this controversy is a letter to the Catholic Generosus ,who lived in Cirta, against the Donatist party. Previously, Generosus sent a letter to Augustine he received from a Donatist priest. Epistle 53 contains Augustine reply containing the following argument:

“For, if the **order of succession of bishops** is to be considered, how much more surely, truly and safely do we number them **from Peter**, to whom, as representing the whole Church, the Lord said: ‘Upon this **rock** I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’ For, to **Peter succeeded** Linus, to Linus Clement, to Clement Anacletus ... to Siricius Anastasius.” (*To Generosus*, Epistle 53:2 (A.D. 400), in FC, XII:247)

Whatever may be missing in the previous passages is supplied in this passage. According to Augustine, Peter is the representative of the whole Church and is the rock foundation of the Church. Additionally, Peter’s successors, the bishops of Rome, continue the rock foundation of Christ’s Church. Augustine counters the Donatist’s letter with the order of bishops from Peter to Anastasius!

Let’s examine Webster’s writings to see how he futilely attempts to undermine this passage.

“Augustine cites Rome and the succession of Roman bishops from Peter because Rome was the only Western Apostolic see.” (Webster, The Papacy)

Yes, the See of Rome is the only Apostolic See in the Western Church, but according to Augustine the See of Rome is the foremost See of Christendom, for Augustine writes, “**the Church of Rome, where the primacy of the apostolic chair has always flourished**” (*Epistle* 43:7). This is the reason why Augustine chose the See of Peter and not because it is the only Western See. Webster continues:

“He refers to Rome and its succession as proof of the continuity of the true Church and what could legitimately be called Catholic, the criterion being succession from the apostles. He is seeking to prove that the bishop of Rome was descended in direct line from the Apostles and that the Donatists boast of catholicity was illegitimate. He is not expressing a view of papal primacy in these statements. His view of catholicity is that the Church is founded upon the apostolic sees, plural, and that communion with the Church universal is the test of catholicity, not communion with Rome alone. Rome is just one example of an apostolic see, the only one in the West.” (Webster, The Papacy)

Webster offers nothing new here. Again, Webster downplays the clear force of Epistle 53 by pointing out secondary matters. Yes, the bishop of Rome by succession descended from the apostle Peter; therefore, the Roman Church is an apostolic see, but Webster fails to point out the obvious. That is, Augustine chose the See of Rome because it is the foremost Apostolic See of Christendom. It is the See of Peter (*Epistle* 53:2), the first of the Apostles (*Sermon* 76:3), who is mentioned in the passage as the rock foundation and who’s See is the foundation of Christendom. Note well, the argument of appealing to the successors of Roman See, presupposing Rome’s primacy in Christendom, was previously used in the Donatist controversy by Optatus of Mileve (a city in the African province of Numidia about 90 miles from Augustine’s Cathedral).

Optatus writes:

“You cannot deny that you know that upon Peter first in the city of Rome was conferred the episcopal chair, on which sat Peter, the head of all the apostles, whence he was called Cephas, that in this one chair unity should be preserved by all, lest the other apostles might uphold each for himself separate chairs, so that he who should set up a second chair, against the unique chair, would already be a schismatic and a sinner. Well then, on the one chair, which is the first of the endowments, Peter first sat, to whom succeeded Linus to Damasus Siricius” (*The Schism of the Donatist*, 2 (A.D. 367), in GILES, 118)

The reason why Augustine and Optatus appealed to the Roman successors is that this See is the first See of Christendom and not because it is the only Western See or is an example of an apostolic See. Lastly, according to Augustine and Optatus, those who separate themselves from the See of Sees, the Roman Church, become severed from the vine (Augustine’s *Psalm against the Donatist Party*, 2; Optatus’ *The Schism of the Donatist*, 2).

Augustine ends his reply to Generosus against the Donatists with this triumphant remark:

“In this order of succession not a Donatist bishop is found.” (*To Generosus*, Epistle 53:2 (A.D. 400), in FC, XII:247)

In the case of Webster, Augustine would have remarked,

“In this order of succession NO BISHOP *whatsoever* is found.”

In other words, the Donatist party and Webster are not in communion with the See of Rome. Worse yet, Webster cannot point to *any* Catholic bishop with whom he is in communion. So did he leave the Catholic Church according to St. Augustine’s standards despite Webster’s negative assertion? (See Webster’s essay in Moody Press’s *Roman Catholicism*.) Absolutely! He sure did. He quotes the Fathers as though they are his guys, when in reality they soundly condemn such actions along with the early heresies and schisms.

The Pelagian Controversy

In the Pelagian controversy I will be examining fifteen (15) texts. Pelagianism was the only true heresy that originated in the West. After Manicheanism and Donatism, Augustine spent his energies refuting this deadly heresy against the Catholic doctrines of grace and free will. The first letter we will examine is an appeal by the provincial council of Carthage to Pope Innocent I.

(1) “After we had gathered in solemn conclave in the church at Carthage, according to our custom, and we were holding a synod on various subjects, our fellow priest Orosius brought us a letter from our holy brothers and fellow priests, Heros and Lazarus, the substance of which we have decided to append to this. After reading it, we make known that Pelagius and Caelestius are originators of an accursed error, which is subject to

anathema to all of us. As a consequence, we asked for a review of the disturbance raised under the name of Caelestius here in the church at Carthage about five years ago...”

Caelestius, a disciple of Pelagius, was condemned by an African council presided over by Aurelius, the bishop of Carthage five (5) years prior. After which, Caelestius appealed to Rome and fled Africa. No one in Africa questioned Caelestius’ right to appeal to Rome. The letter continues:

“Consequently, the Lord and Brother, we have thought it best to transmit this report to your holy Charity, that the **authority of the Apostolic See** may be **added to the decisions of our insignificance**, in order to safeguard the welfare of many and to correct the perversity of some ... But they refuse either to acknowledge fully or to oppose openly that grace by which, as it is written ... and other passages so innumerable that a volume could not contain them if we try to cull them from all the Scriptures. We fear we may seem to have been forward in citing these passages to you, which you have **greater reason** to preach from the Apostolic See ... If your Reverence has believed that Pelagius was justly acquitted of heresy by the action of the bishops which was accomplished in the East, [a year prior, at the council of Diospolis, the charges against Pelagius were dropped and he was re-instated as orthodox] it still remains urgent that his false doctrine, which now has many supporters scattered in various places, **ought to be anathematized by the authority of the Apostolic See**. Let your Holiness have compassion on us in your pastoral heart, and consider what a baneful and deadly thing it is for the sheep of Christ ... Reverence will, no doubt, pass this judgement, after you have examined the report of the action taken by the bishops in the same case in the East. We shall then all rejoice in the mercy of God. Pray for us, blessed lord and pope.” (*Council of Carthage to Pope Innocent*, Epistle 175 (Jan A.D. 416), in FC, XII:85, 86, 88, 90)

Five (5) months later, another African council, which convened in the province of Numidia in the city of Mileve, appealed to Rome on the same Pelagian matter. The council writes:

(2) “Whereas, by a particular gift of His grace the Lord has placed you **in the Apostolic See** and has given to our times a man like you to **reign over us**, it would be more possible for us to be charged with guilt of negligence if we failed to report to your Reverence matters which need to be made known for the benefit of the Church than for you to receive such suggestions coldly or negligently, we therefore beg you to deign to apply your pastoral care to the great perils of the weak members of Christ.” (*Council of Mileve to Pope Innocent*, Epistle 176 (Jun A.D. 416), in FC, XII:91)

The Council then delineates the entire Pelagian affair and continues:

“In making these errors known to your apostolic heart, we have no need to say much or to enlarge upon this great impiety by our words, since without doubt they move you so deeply that you could not possibly neglect to correct them ...Trusting in the merciful help of the Lord our God, which deigns to guide you in your plans and hear you in your prayers, we think that those who hold these distorted and dangerous views will readily

submit to the authority of your Holiness, which is derived from the authority of the holy Scriptures, so that we may congratulate you on their conversion rather than grieve over their loss, most holy lord. But, no matter what choice they make, your Reverence surely sees that immediate and speedy provision must be made for the others whom that are able to trap in their snares in great numbers if this is not made known to them. We are addressing this written report to your Holiness from the Council of Numidia, imitating the Church of Carthage and our brother bishops of the Carthaginian province, having heard that they have written on this matter to the Apostolic See which you so blessedly adorn” (*Council of Mileve to Pope Innocent*, Epistle 176 (Jun A.D. 416), in FC, XII:93-94)

Both African Councils appealed to the Apostolic See, the bishop of Rome, in order to condemn the heresy once and for all. The African Councils understood that in order to gain universal condemnation of the Pelagians and gain universal approval for their actions the authority of the Roman See was required. Lastly, the Africans (including Augustine) believed that the heretics would more readily heed the authority of the Roman See over any African bishop or provincial council because the primacy of the Apostolic See was ‘derived from ... the holy Scriptures’ and the Apostolic See has ‘more reason’ to preach than any single African bishop or any provincial African council.

Since papal condemnation of the Pelagian heresy was vital to the African Councils and bishops, a follow-up letter written by African foremost bishops was delivered to Pope Innocent. Aurelius (bishop of Carthage, the bishop of the first Seat of Africa), Alypius (bishop of Thagaste, friend of Augustine), Augustine (bishop of Hippo Regius), Evodius (bishop of Uzalis), and Possidius (bishop of Calama, friend and biographer of Augustine) write:

(3) “We have sent your Holiness letters from the two councils of the province of Carthage and of Numidia, signed by a large number of bishops. These letters condemn the enemies of the grace of Christ, who trust in their own virtue ... ‘Many are they who rise up against us and say to our soul: There is no salvation for him in his God’ But the family of Christ, which says: ‘When I am weak, then I am strong,’ and which the Lord says: ‘I am thy salvation,’ its heart quivering with fear and trembling, awaits the help of the Lord even through the charity of your Reverence... [M]any who argue noisily, dragging down weak and untutored souls as their conquest ... Therefore, he ought to be summoned to Rome and carefully questioned ... or this matter should be taken up with him by letter...And if you find that he says grace is what ecclesiastical and apostolic truth teach that it is, then he should be absolved by the Church without any scruple...For, if they [supporters of Pelagius] knew that the same book which they think or know is his had been anathematized and condemned by him, in submission to the authority of the Catholic bishops and especially of your Holiness, which we are very certain has a great weight with him, we think they would not dare to go on speaking against the grace of God” (Aurelius, Alypius, Augustine, Evodius, & Possidius to Pope Innocent, Epistle 177 (Jun A.D. 416), in FC, XII:94-96, 105)

These five prominent Bishops of Northern Africa repeat with greater force the appeal

made by the councils of Carthage and Mileve; that is, the authority of the bishop of Rome will be heeded by Pelagius and his followers; whereas, their authority had been ignored. According to these African bishops, if Rome finds the faith of Pelagius orthodox than the issue is closed without hesitation! Like the two previous councils, the African bishops readily affirm the authority and grace of the Roman See is greater than any single African bishop or provincial council. The bishops continue:

“Your Blessedness will see, from the defense made in the report, the rest of the objections that have been made against him, and will no doubt judge them accordingly. Surely, the most gentle sweetness of your heart will pardon us for sending your Holiness a more lengthy letter than perhaps you wished. We are not **pouring our little trickle back into your ample fountain** to increase it, but the trial of our time is no slight one ... We wish to be **reassured by you** that this **little trickle of ours**, however scant, **flows from the same fountainhead as your abundant stream**, and **we desire** the consolation of **your writings**, drawn from our common share of the one grace.” (*Aurelius, Alypius, Augustine, Evodius, & Possidius to Pope Innocent*, Epistle 177 (Jun A.D. 416), in FC, XII:18)

The contrast of authority between the bishops of Africa and the Roman See is clear. In humility, the bishops desire the confirmation of their faith by the Apostolic See! Pope Innocent responds to all three letters. To the council of Carthage, Pope Innocent writes:

(4) “In your inquiries into the things of God, which require to be treated by priests with great care, especially when there is question of a true, just, and Catholic council, you have kept the precedents of ancient tradition, being mindful of ecclesiastical discipline, and you have added strength to our religion, not only now in your council, but before it when you made your pronouncement according to right reason, and when you voted to submit the matter to our judgement, knowing well what is owing to the Apostolic See, **since all of us who are placed in this position desire to follow the Apostle himself, from whom the very episcopate and the whole authority of its name are derived.** Following in his footsteps, we know equally how to condemn what is evil and to approve what is praiseworthy, as for example, the fact that you keep the customs of the fathers with priestly zeal, that you do not think they should be trampled underfoot. Because it has been decreed by a divine, not a human, authority that whenever action is taken in any of the provinces, however distant or remote, it should not be brought to a conclusion before it comes to the knowledge of this See, so that every just decision may be affirmed by our authority. Thus, just as all waters come forth from their natural source and flow through all parts of the world, keeping the purity of their source, so all the other Churches may draw from this source knowledge of what they are to teach, whom they are to absolve, and from whom waters, intended only for pure bodies, should be withheld as being soiled with indelible filth. Therefore, I thank you, dearest brothers, for sending us letters ... in which you show that while administering the Churches of which you have care, you have an interest in the welfare of **all, and on behalf of the Churches of the whole world, in union with all, you ask a decree that may be for the good of all.** ... Therefore, whoever appears to be in agreement with this statement which declares that we have no need of divine help shows himself an enemy of the Catholic faith, and an ingrate to the goodness

of God. They are unworthy of our communion, which they have polluted by such preaching ... But this answer, furnished with abundant examples of our law, is sufficient to meet your warning, and we think that nothing remains for us to say.” (*Pope Innocent to Council of Carthage*, Epistle 181 (Jan A.D. 417), in FC, XII:121-122, 125, 127)

To the Council of Mileve, Pope Innocent writes:

(5) “In the midst of our other cares for the Church at Rome and the duties of the Apostolic See, in the course of which we examine decrees on various subjects with faithful and curative argument, our brother and fellow priest, Julius, brought the letter of your Charity which you sent ... from the Council of Mileve, and ... included the report of the Synod of Carthage, adding this document of similar protests. You show diligence and consideration in taking thought of the apostolic honor, of that concealed honor, I mean, of him whom ‘besides those things which are without, the solicitude for all churches’ (2 Cor 11.28) weighed down; and in asking what opinion is to be held on anxious matters, following in that the form of the **ancient rule**, which you know has always been upheld by me throughout the whole world. But I pass over that for I believe your Prudence is well aware of it. Why did you affirm it by your action if you did not know that replies always flow from the apostolic font to petitioners in all provinces? **In particular, I think that as often as an argument of faith is being blown about, all our brothers and fellow bishops ought to refer it solely to Peter, that is, to the one having the authority and rank, as your Charity has now done, so that it may be for the common benefit of all the Churches. They must be the more on guard when they see originators of evil cut off from the communion with the Church by enactments of our decree**, in consequence of the report from a twofold synod. Therefore, your Charity will perform a doubly good action, for you will gain gratitude for **preserving the canons of belief, and the whole world will share in the common good conferred by you**. ... Therefore, **concerning Pelagius and Caelestius**, that is, the originators of new dogmas ... **we decree, relying on the strength of apostolic authority, that they are to be deprived of communion with the Church** until ‘they recover themselves from snares of the Devil, by whom they are held captives at his will’ (2 Tim 2:14,23,26); that they are not to be received within the Lord’s flock which they have chosen to forsake.” (*Pope Innocent to Council of Mileve*, Epistle 182 (Jan A.D. 417), in FC, XII:127, 128, 130, 131)

To Aurelius, Alypius, Augustine, Evodius, and Possidius, Pope Innocent writes:

(6) “We have received with grateful heart the letters of your Fraternity, so full of faith ... which you sent from the two councils by our brother and fellow bishop, Julius. Their content and the whole development of thought on the daily grace of God and the amendment of those who hold contrary **views are based on right reason**, so as to be well fitted to remove all error from these latter and to furnish them a worthy teacher ... However, in our previous letters in answer to your reports I think we have said enough on these points concerning what we think either of their perfidy or of your opinions.” (*Pope Innocent to the African Bishops*, Epistle 183 (Jan A.D. 417), in FC, XII:132)

The African bishops and councils appealed to Rome not for a condemnation of Pelagius

and an affirmation of their faith from just another apostolic See, but a condemnation and an affirmation with universal impact and authority. Rome, as the guardian of the Church, provided the universal antidote! Letters by both the African bishops and Pope Innocent I clearly affirm the universal jurisdiction, primacy, and authority of Rome. The African bishops' letters obtained their intended affect; that is, the universal condemnation of Pelagius and affirmation of their own faith. According to Augustine and his African colleagues, the Roman decree on Pelagius was **final**.

A few months later, Augustine and Alypius write to their African colleague Paulinus, bishop of Nola, on the Pelagian controversy:

(7) "But later, when letters came to us from the East, giving the most open publicity to the case, we were in duty bound not to fail to use our episcopal authority, such as it is, in behalf of the Church. Therefore reports [letters 175 & 176 above] of this controversy were sent to the Apostolic See from the two Councils of Carthage and Milevis, and this was done before the ecclesiastical minutes of the meeting, in which Pelagius is described as having been cleared before the bishops of the province of Palestine ... In addition, to the reports of the councils we also wrote a personal letter [letter 177 above] to Pope Innocent of blessed memory, in which we dealt with the same case somewhat more at length. **He answered all these communications in a manner which was right and fitting for the pontiff of the Apostolic See.**" (*Augustine & Alpyius to Paulinus*, Epistle 186 (mid A.D. 417), in FC,XII:192-193)

Good old Augustine. Here we have the African reply to the Pelagian controversy in a nutshell. The Africans provide the entire account of the Pelagian controversy to the Bishop of Rome in order to universally ratify their own faith and condemn the faith of Pelagius. A few months later on September 23 A.D. 417, Augustine preached a sermon on John 6 in Carthage and wrote this classic summary of the Pelagian affair:

(8) "My brothers and sisters, please share my anxiety and concern. Wherever you find such people, don't keep quiet about them, don't be perversely soft-hearted. No question about it, wherever you find such people, don't keep quiet about them. Argue with them when they speak against grace, and if they persist, bring them to us. You see, there have already been two councils about this matter, and their decisions sent to the Apostolic See; from there rescripts have been sent back here. **The case is finished**; if only the error were finished too, sometime! So, let us all warn them to take notice of this, teach them to learn the lesson of it, pray for them to change their ideas." (*Sermon 131:10* (Sept A.D. 417), in WOA3, 4:322)

The paraphrase "Rome has spoken; the case is finished" is derived from this sermon. There is no substantive difference between Sermon 131 and the paraphrase. Notice the escalation in the appeal in Sermon 131. First, Augustine asks the faithful to persuade the Pelagian by argument. Next, if discussions do not convince the Pelagians, then bring the matter to African bishops since the controversy was already addressed in their local councils of Carthage and Mileve. Lastly, the African councils reports were submitted to Rome for their ratification and universal condemnation of the Pelagian heresy. Rome in

response issued a decree (Epistle 181,182) and the matter is finished!

Interesting how Webster failed to engage in the entire Pelagian affair and simply refers everyone to the Apiarius affair. Webster simply offers the following:

“Nowhere in the writings of Augustine or in his practice does one find belief in the bishop of Rome as the ultimate criterion of orthodoxy or that his judgment was the final authority in any controversy.” (Webster, The Papacy)

This conclusion is simply laughable. Not only did the African Church affirm Rome’s primacy, but contemporaries of Augustine understood this as well. And, the bishop of Rome was certainly clear on the matter as well, and spoke it quite eloquently, without any rebuttal from the African bishops.

Prosper of Aquitaine, a friend and disciple of Augustine wrote:

(9) “We do not have to fight against your party afresh, nor have we to begin battles against an unknown foe; the war engines of your party were smashed and fell clattering among those who were sharers, yes, and leaders of their insolence, at the time when Innocent of blessed **memory struck the heads of deadly error with the apostolic sword.**” (Prosper of Aquitaine, *Against the book called Collations*, 21 (A.D. 432), in GILES, 262)

Prosper clearly understood Augustine and the Pelagian controversy. After all, Augustine wrote a couple of works on grace for Prosper himself. Unlike Webster, Prosper affirmed that the Pelagian error was answered once and for all by the See of Rome.

Similarly, Marius Mercator, a pupil and friend of Augustine wrote (and who would know the situation better, the contemporary Marius Mercator or Webster living roughly 1600 years later):

(10) “Celestius and Pelagius were not for the first time condemned by Zosimus, of blessed memory, but by his predecessor Innocent, of holy record, ... Now they were condemned by Innocent of holy record ... After that reports were sent to Rome, and the [Pelagian] books were sent there, **and an apostolic ruling was returned to the said councils**, excommunicating Celestius and Pelagius. I have in my hands a copy of these writings.” (Marius Mercator, *Memorandum against Celestius*, 10-11 (A.D. 429), in GILES, 214-215)

Marius echoes the understanding of Augustine; that is, Rome provided the universal ruling for the Catholic Church. Rome ratified the faith of the African councils and condemned the Pelagian error. Augustine reiterated his thoughts on the finality of Pope Innocent’s decree a few years later.

(11) “[H]e [Celestius] should **yield his assent** to the rescript of the Apostolic See which had been issued by his predecessor [Pope Innocent] of sacred memory. The accused man,

however, refused to condemn the objections raised by the deacon, yet **he did not dare** to hold out against the letter of the blessed Pope Innocent.” (Augustine, *On Original Sin*, 7:8 (A.D. 418), in NPNF1, V:239)

(12) “This was thought to have been the case in him when he replied that he consented to the letters of Pope Innocent of blessed memory, **in which all doubt about this matter was removed.**” (Augustine, *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians*, 3:5 (A.D. 420), in NPNF1, V:393)

(13) “[T]he words of the venerable Bishop Innocent concerning this matter to the Carthaginian Council ... **What could be more clear or more manifest than that judgment of the Apostolical See?**” (Augustine, *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians*, 4:6 (A.D. 420), in NPNF1, V:394)

No commentary is necessary. Augustine is clear and unequivocal regarding the decree of Rome. Hence, “[F]rom there [Pope Innocent of Rome] rescripts have been sent back here. The case is finished” (*Sermon* 131:10) is summarized by the phrase “Rome is spoken the case is closed”. Even the Protestant editors of the Nicene Post Nicene Fathers admit as much. Regarding the paraphrase they write:

(14) “But it is not found in this form, though we may admit that it is an epigrammatic condensation of the sentences of Augustin.” (NPNF1, 1:21) I have maintained this with James White in my correspondence though he seems to have a mental and emotional block on this matter. (see <http://www.catholic-convert.com/Portals/57ad7180-c5e7-49f5-b282-c6475cdb7ee7/Documents/White-Legends1.doc> and <http://www.catholic-convert.com/Portals/57ad7180-c5e7-49f5-b282-c6475cdb7ee7/Documents/White-Legends2.doc> . It would behoove White to read more before he speaks unadvisedly on these matters.

Near the end of Augustine’s life, in his incomplete reply against Julian, bishop of Eclanum and ardent defender of Pelagianism, Augustine continued to affirm the finality and authority of Pope Innocent’s decree. Augustine writes:

(15) “Since you persist in asserting that freedom, acting rightly or wrongly, cannot perish through sheer misuse, let the blessed Pope Innocent, pontiff of the Roman church, answer. Replying on your affairs to the episcopal councils of Africa [Carthage and Mileve] he said, ‘Having experienced free will...’ **Do you see what the catholic faith does through its minister?**” (Augustine, *Unfinished Work against Julian’s 2nd reply*, 6:11 (A.D. 430), in GILES, 223)

Perhaps Webster can answer Augustine’s parting shot! Perhaps not!

Pope Zosimus Hesitations

Webster attempts to downplay Rome’s *coupe de grace* against Pelagianism by countering with the minor hesitations of Pope Zosimus and the disciplinary case of Apiarius. It is no

surprise that Webster found little time and words to engage in the Pelagian episode. Webster summarizes Augustine's view of the papacy in light of Pope Zosimus' hesitations:

“Pope Zosimus reigned from 417 to 418 A.D. During the Pelagian controversy, Zosimus, in an encyclical letter—therefore speaking authoritatively on a matter related to faith and morals—rebuked Augustine and the North African Church for their official condemnation of Pelagius. He declared Pelagius and his main disciple Caelestius orthodox in their teaching and demanded that the North African Church change its views towards them and submit to his judgment and authority. This was done in opposition to the opinion and authoritative judgment of Pope Innocent I, Zosimus' predecessor as bishop of Rome. The North African Church refused to submit to this 'infallible' pope, demonstrating that the early Church did not believe that the popes were infallible. This is the view, in particular, of Augustine, the premier Church father of the first four centuries and leader of the North African Church.” (Webster, The Papacy)

According to Webster, Augustine in view of Zosimus' handling of Pelagius and Caelestius had no concept or high view of the authority and primacy of the Bishop of Rome. It is not clear if Webster believes that Pope Zosimus embraced Pelagianism and subsequently recanted after reading the acts and canons of the African synod or if Pope Zosimus believed that Pelagius and Caelestius themselves had become orthodox while he denounced their actual heretical beliefs.

Pope Zosimus was opposed by the Africans for his initial decision concerning the orthodoxy of Pelagius and Celestius, NOT for any decision concerning Pelagianism. There is a huge difference here that needs to be made very clear. Webster seems to misunderstand this and presents it in such a way that the distinction is non-existent or fuzzy. There is no doubt that the Pelagians were claiming that Zosimus supported their *heresy* along with their *man*, but neither Augustine nor the other Africans (as clearly shown here) go along with them on the first point.

In short, for a time Pope Zosimus believed Caelestius personally to be orthodox by virtue of his explicit submission to papal authority, but at no time did the Pope approve his doctrinal errors. This certainly does not impinge upon the teaching of papal infallibility, nor does it place Augustine outside the Church's understanding and practice of papal primacy.

Nevertheless, it is interesting how Webster cites secondary sources and opinions, but fails to cite Augustine himself on the matter. The only account we have regarding the proceedings at the Roman synod is from Pope Zosimus himself. There are four epistles (Epistle 2 *Magnum Pondus*, Epistle 3 *Postquam a nobis*, Epistle 12 *Quamvis partum & Epistola Tractoria*) from Pope Zosimus. In addition, we have the African reply preserved in fragment by Prosper of Aquitaine. Lastly, we have the writings of Augustine, who unlike Webster, continues to uphold a high view of Pope Zosimus and the See of Rome.

Zosimus, following the pontificate of Innocent, enters into the Pelagian controversy

following an appeal from Pelagius' disciple Caelestius. Pope Zosimus writes:

“(1) Great matters demand a great weight of examination, that the level of judgement be not less than the matters dealt with. In addition there is the authority of the apostolic see, to which the decrees of the fathers ordained a particular reverence in honour of S. Peter. We must therefore pray, and pray without ceasing, that by the continued grace and unceasing help of God, from this fountain the peace of faith and of catholic brotherhood may be sent unclouded into the whole world ...”

“(2) The priest Celestius came to us for examination, asking to be acquitted to those charges on which he had been wrongly accused to the apostolic see. And although we were distracted by a great weight of ecclesiastical business, we put it all on one side, so that you would not have to wait for information, and we sat for the examination in the basilica of S. Clement, who was imbued with the learning of the blessed apostle Peter”

“(3) We discussed all that had been done before, as you will learn from the acts attached to this letter. Celestius being admitted, we caused to be recited the pamphlet which he handed in, and not content with this, we repeatedly inquired of him whether he spoke from his heart or with his lips the things which he had written”

“(6) In the present case we have decided nothing hurriedly or immaturely, but we make known to your holinesses our examination upon the unfettered faith of Celestius. The earlier libellus, written by him in Africa, ought to be evidence in his favor against those who boast on unexamined rumours. Wherefore within two months either let those come forward who can show **that he now believes otherwise than the contents of his pamphlets and confession**, or let your holinesses recognize nothing of doubt to be remaining in that which he henceforward openly and manifestly professes.”

“(7) I have therefore admonished Celestius himself, and other priests present at the time from various places, that these little snares of questions and silly contests, which do not build, but destroy, spring from contagious curiosity which there is when each man abuses his natural capacity.” (Pope Zosimus [reign A.D. 417-418], Epistle 2, To Aurelius and the African Bishops [*Magnum pondus*] (A.D. Sept 417), in GILES, 206-207)

First, notice the affirmation of the primacy and rights of the Apostolic See. According to Webster, you would expect the African Fathers to reply that the See of Rome had no such rights and the papal claims of Pope Zosimus was but a figment of his imagination. After all, the first and best way to disarm a false authority is to deny he *has* any authority. However, the African fathers and Augustine made no such claim! Quiet to the contrary. As we will see later, Augustine continued to affirm a high view of the papacy. Pope Zosimus believed to be orthodox in his faith and allowed a two-month grace period to Caelestius' African accusers to present the facts against Caelestius. A few days later after receiving a letter from Praylius, bishop of Jerusalem, Pope Zosimus writes:

“(1) After the presbyter Celestius had been heard by us and had professed plainly the sentiments of the faith, and had confirmed the statements of his libellus with his repeated

protestations, we wrote fully of him to your charity.”

“(2) And now, behold, we have received a letter from Praylius, bishop of Jerusalem, ... who intervenes most earnestly in the cause of Pelagius. The same Pelagius has also sent a letter of his own, containing his complete purgation, and he has appended a profession of faith, what he holds and what he condemns, without any deceit, so that all difficulties on interpretation may cease. These were publicly read; all their contents corresponded with what Celestius had produced previously, and were in the same sense and tenor. Would that any of you, dear brothers, could have been present at the reading of these letters! What joy was there on the part of the holy men present! How they wondered! Scarcely could any refrain even from tears: that such men had been able to dishonour unfettered faith. Is there any place where the grace or help of God is left out?...”

“(3) See! Pelagius and Celestius appear before the apostolic see by their letters and confessions. **Where is Heros? Where is Lazarus? Damnable names, making one blush.** Where are the young men Timasius and Jacob, who produced writings said to be of Pelagius? When these accused make such professions before the apostolic see, you yourselves judge whether the things reported of them by men of civil character and of no weight, and by vague rumour, should be believed.”

“(8) ... May you judge those whom false judges were condemning are recognized as having never been torn away from our body and from catholic truth Therefore we send for your delight copies of the writings sent by Pelagius. We do not doubt that the reading of them will bring to you joy in the Lord concerning his unfettered faith.” (Pope Zosimus [reign A.D. 417-418], Epistle 3, To Aurelius and the African Bishops [*Postquam a nobis*] (A.D. Sept 417), in GILES, 206-207)

Notice that Zosimus had *not* decided the matter officially since he had given the African bishops a couple of months to present their side of the case. Nevertheless, Pelagius and Caelestius had convinced Pope Zosimus of their orthodoxy. Why in the world, in his own mind, was Zosimus so lenient on Pelagius and Caelestius? There are three primary contributors to Pope Zosimus’ hesitation. *First*, Pope Zosimus did not possess the theological acumen in order to decipher the finer points of grace contained in their confessions of faith. *Second*, Pope Zosimus admired the sincerity and willingness of the accused to be corrected on matters of faith. Augustine recounts the confession of Caelestius, ‘If it should so happen that any error of ignorance has stolen over us human beings, let it be corrected by your decisive sentence.’ (*On Original Sin*, 9 (A.D. 418), in NPNF1, V:239). *Lastly*, the Pope had a distaste for their accusers. The two Gallic bishops, Heros of Arles and Lazarus of Aix, who accused both Pelagius and Caelestius, opposed Pope Zosimus’ episcopal appointment of Arles, Patroclus. Even though Pope Zosimus was not willing to tolerate heresy, he was more than ready to overthrow the accusations of Heros and Lazarus!

Meanwhile, Pope Zosimus began to entertain doubts about the orthodoxy and sincerity of Caelestius. Pope Zosimus writes:

“(1) Although the tradition of the fathers has assigned such great authority to the apostolic see that no one dare to dispute its judgement, and has kept this always by canons and rules and church order, and in the current of its laws pays the reverence which it owes to the name of Peter, from whom descends; for canonical antiquity, by the consent of all, has willed such power to this apostle, so that the promise of Christ our God, that he should loose the bound and bind the loosed, is equally given to those who have obtained, with his assent, the inheritance of his see; for he has a care for all churches, especially for this where he sat, nor does he permit any of its privileges or decisions to be shaken by any blast, since he established it on the firm and immovable foundation of his own name, which no one shall rashly attack, but at his peril. Peter then is the head of so great authority, and has confirmed the devotion of all the fathers who followed him, so that the Roman church is established by all laws and discipline, whether human or divine. His place we rule, and we inherit the power of his name; you know this, dearest brothers, and as priests you ought to know it. Such then being our authority, that no one can revise our sentence, we have done nothing which we have not of our own accord brought to your notice in our letter, giving this much to our brotherhood, that by consulting together, not because we did not know what ought to be done, or might do something which might displease you as contrary to the good of the Church, but we desired to treat together with you of a man who, as you wrote, was accused before you, and who came to our see asserting his innocence, not refusing judgement from the former appeal; of his own accord calling for his accusers, and condemning the crimes of which he was falsely accused by rumour. We thought, in fact we know, that his entire petition was explained in the earlier letter which we sent you, and we believed that we had sufficiently replied to those who answer.”

“(2) But we have unfolded the whole roll of your letter which was sent by Subdeacon Marcellinus. You have understood the entire text of our letter as if we had believed Celestius in everything, and had given our assent, so to speak, to every syllable without discussing his words. Matters which need a long treatment are never rashly postponed, nor without great deliberation must anything be decided on which a final judgement has to be given. So let your brotherhood know that we have changed nothing since we wrote to you, or you write to us; but we have left all as it was before, when we informed your holiness of the matter in our letter, in order that the supplication you sent to us might be granted. Farewell.” (Pope Zosimus [reign A.D. 417-418], Epistle 12, To Aurelius and the Council of Carthage [*Quamvis patrum*] (A.D. Mar 418), in GILES, 212-213)

Pope Zosimus reaffirmed the authority of the See of Rome in the terms of Vatican I and added no final decision regarding Caelestius. According to Epistle 12:2, the African fathers responded with a letter following Zosimus' first two letters. The letter requested the Pope extend the delay of the decision as the two (2) month delay had nearly elapsed.

After these letters were received in Africa, the African episcopate condemned the Pelagian heresy in nine (9) canons and sent a copy of the acts to Pope Zosimus with a cover letter. Note well, that the African Church condemned Pelagianism before at the councils of Mileve (416) and Carthage (416), but required the help of Rome to achieve universal results. Here is a fragment of the cover letter:

“We decree that the sentence against Pelagius and Celestius issued by the venerable bishop Innocent, from the see of the most blessed apostle Peter, shall stand, until they shall openly and explicitly confess that the grace of God by Jesus Christ our Lord helps us not only to know, but to do what is right, in every single act; so that, without it, we could not have, think, say, or do anything that pertains to true and holy religion.”
(*Council of Carthage to Pope Zosimus* (A.D. 417-418), fragment in Prosper of Aquitaine, in GILES, 211-212)

Here is the single canon against Pelagianism:

“If any one says that new-born children need not be baptized, or that they are baptized for the remission of sins, but that no original sin is derived from Adam to be washed away in the laver of regeneration, so that in their case the baptismal formula ‘for the remission of sins’ is to be taken in a fictitious and not in a true sense, let him [be anathema]” Canon 2

Interesting how this canon not only is directed at Pelagius and his disciple Caelestius, but all those who do not believe in baptismal regeneration; this of course would include Webster. The date of the cover letter and canons from Carthage are in question. They were developed either during the last half of 417 or early during 418. Later, Emperor Honorius issued a rescript condemning those who denied original sin/grace and demanded the banishment of both Pelagius and Caelestius. During this period Pope Zosimus had received the African response and become familiar with the heresy contained in Pelagius’ commentary on the Romans. Augustine writes:

“In order to procure the condemnation of these opinions, Pope Zosimus, as you may read, annexed them to his letter, which he wrote for publication throughout the catholic world. Among these statements, Pelagius, pretending to expound the Apostle Paul’s Epistle to the Romans” (Augustine, *On Original Sin*, 2:24 (418), in NPNF1, V:245)

As the evidence was mounting against the Pelagian cause, Pope Zosimus summoned Caelestius to appear before him. Caelestius ignored the summons and fled from the Eternal city. Shortly thereafter, Pope Zosimus issued the universal decree against Pelagianism in his famous *tractoria*. It would be unfair to say Pope Zosimus was pressured by the African and civil rulings into condemning Caelestius and Pelagius; rather it would be more correct to say that Pope Zosimus was equally affected by 1) the behavior of the Pelagians in Rome, 2) the growing sentiment against the Pelagian faction, 3) his understanding of the Pelagian heresy he discovered in reading Pelagius’ Roman commentary, 4) the actions taken by the African synod and 5) the flight of Caelestius from Rome. All these items led to Pope Zosimus’ issuing his condemnation against Caelestius and Pelagius. Unfortunately Pope Zosimus’ *tractoria* is not extant, but we have accounts of its existence and a small fragment from Augustine, Prosper of Aquitaine and Marius Mercator.

Augustine writes:

“[T]he Catholic Church, by the mercy of God, has repudiated the poison of the Pelagian heresy. There is an account of the provincial Council of Carthage, written to Pope Innocent, and one of the Council of Numidia; and another, somewhat more detailed, written by five bishops, as well as the answer he [Pope Innocent] wrote to these three; likewise, the report to Pope Zosimus of the Council of Africa, **and his answer which was sent to all the bishops of the world...**” (Augustine, *To Valentine*, Epistle 215 (A.D. 427), in FC, 32:63-4)

“They [Pelagius & Caelestius] were condemned ... by two venerable prelates of the Apostolic See, Pope Innocent and Pope Zozimus ... We have copies of recent letters from the above mentioned Apostolic See, both those sent in particular to Africa, and those issued in general to all bishops ... To quote the words which we read in the letter of the blessed Zozimus:

“ ‘The Lord is faithful in his words,’ (Ps 144.13) and His baptism has the same fulfillment in fact and in words, that is, indeed, by a true confession and remission of sins in every sex, age, and condition of the human race. No one is set free but he who is the slave of sin, and no one can be called ransomed but he who was formerly made captive by sin, as it is written: ‘If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed’ (Jn 8:36) Through Him we are spiritually born again, through Him we are crucified to the world, by His death the decree of death that was brought upon all of us by Adam, and transmitted to every soul by its descent, is torn down; but there is no single one of his children who is not held subject to this decree before he is set free by baptism.”

In these words of the Apostolic See the Catholic faith stands out as so ancient and so firmly established, so certain and so clear, that it would be wrong for a Christian to doubt it.” (Augustine, *To Optatus*, Epistle 190 (A.D. 418), in FC, 30:285-6)

This is a constant theme for Augustine throughout the Zosimus and Pelagian episode. Augustine, unlike Webster, unflinchingly upheld the primacy and authority of the See of Rome.

Augustine recounts the entire episode:

“For while so many and such important ecclesiastical documents were passing and repassing between the Apostolical See and the African bishops, - and, moreover, when the proceedings in this matter in that see were completed, with Coelestius present and making answer, - what sort of a letter, what decree, is found of Pope Zosimus, of venerable memory, wherein he prescribed that it must be believed that man is born without any taint of original sin? Absolutely he never said this--never wrote it at all.... But now, when the first letters of the most blessed Pope Innocent, in reply to the letters of the African bishops, would have equally condemned this error which these men are endeavouring to commend to us; and his successor, the holy Pope Zosimus, would never have said, never have written, that this dogma which these men think concerning infants is to be held; nay, would even have bound Coelestius by a repeated sentence, when he endeavoured to clear himself, to a consent to the above-mentioned letters of the Apostolic

See; - assuredly, whatever in the meanwhile was done more leniently concerning Coelestius, provided the stability of the most ancient and robust faith were maintained, was the most merciful persuasion of correction, not the most pernicious approval of wickedness; and that afterwards, by the same priesthood, Coelestius and Pelagius were condemned by repeated authority, was the proof of a severity, for a little while intermitted, at length of necessity to be carried out, not a denial of a previously-known truth or a new acknowledgment of truth.” (Augustine, *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians*, 5:3 (A.D. 420), in NPNF1, V:392-393)

“The venerable Pope Zosimus, keeping in view this deprecatory preamble, dealt with the man, puffed up as he was with the blasts of false doctrine, so as that he should condemn all the objectionable points which had been alleged against him by the deacon Paulinus, and that he should yield his assent to the rescript of the Apostolic See which had been issued by his predecessor of sacred memory. The accused man, however, refused to condemn the objections raised by the deacon, yet he did not dare to hold out against the letter of the blessed Pope Innocent; indeed, he went so far as to “promise that he would condemn all the points which the Apostolic See condemned.” Thus the man was treated with gentle remedies, as a delirious patient who required rest; but, at the same time, he was not regarded as being yet ready to be released from the restraints of excommunication. The interval of two months being granted him, until communications could be received from Africa, a place for recovery was conceded to him, under the mild restorative of the sentence which had been pronounced. For in truth, if he would have laid aside his vain obstinacy, and be now willing to carry out what he had undertaken, and would carefully read the very letter to which he had replied by promising submission, he would yet come to a better mind. But after the rescripts were duly issued from the council of the African bishops, there were very good reasons why the sentence should be carried out against him, in strictest accordance with equity. What these reasons were you may read for yourselves, for we have sent you all the particulars.” (Augustine, *On Original Sin*, 8 [7] (A.D. 418), in NPNF1, V:239)

Unlike Webster, Augustine defends the authority and primacy of the See of Rome. Note well, the Pelagians were attempting to show that Pope Zosimus was on their side of the argument. In reply, Augustine answers all the Pelagian charges and in doing so he refutes Mr. Webster as well. Both Pelagius and Caelestius had written to Pope Zosimus and promised submission to any correction of faith. Pope Zosimus accepted their confession of faith based on this submissive assertion. Their submission to any correction in faith by the Holy See made their letters *catholic* in belief.

Pelagius wrote:

“If we have by chance set down aught in it unskillfully or without due caution, **we desire to be corrected by you, who hold both the faith and see of Peter**” (Pelagius, *Libellus Fidei* (A.D. 417), in GILES, 208)

Similarly Caelestius wrote:

“[B]ut whatever I have derived from the fountain of the prophets and the apostles, I have presented for approbation to the judgment of your apostolic office; so that if any error has crept in among us, human as we are, through our ignorance, **it may be corrected by your sentence.**” (Caelestius, *Libellus* (A.D. 417), fragment in Augustine’s *On Original Sin*, 26 [23] (A.D. 418), in NPNF1, V:246)

Augustine summarizes his position:

“But since Coelestius had written this in his pamphlet, among those matters, merely, on which he confessed that he was still in doubt and desired to be instructed, the desire of amendment in a man of so acute an intellect, who, if he could be put right, would assuredly be of advantage to many, and not the falsehood of the doctrine, was approved. And therefore his pamphlet was called catholic, because this also is the part of a catholic disposition...” (Augustine, *Against Two Letters of the Pelagians*, 5:3 (A.D. 420), in NPNF1, V:393)

In other words, Caelestius’ letter was catholic since it ‘*is the part of a catholic disposition*’ to consent to the Holy See. Hence, according to Augustine, since Pelagius and Caelestius promised obedience and correction of the Holy See the documents were considered *catholic*. Is it in Webster’s mind and faith to submit his faith to the correction of the Holy See? After all, according to the great bishop of Hippo, it is part of the Catholic mindset to do so! In the final analysis Augustine believed Pope Zosimus upheld the primacy and faith of the Apostolic See.

“For although he [Pelagius] deceived the council in Palestine, seemingly clearing himself before it, he entirely failed in imposing on the church at Rome (where, as you well know, he is by no means a stranger), although he went so far as to make the attempt, if he might somehow succeed.” (Augustine, *On Original Sin*, 9 [8] (A.D. 418), in NPNF1, V:239)

The Case of Aparius

The case of Aparius is one of the favorite episodes of anti-Catholic controversialists. Webster brings forth this episode following the Pelagian heresy in order to downplay Augustine’s steadfast belief in the papacy. Webster writes:

“When it was finally determined that they were not from Nicaea, the North Africans rejected these canons as giving the bishop of Rome any authority to interfere in the sphere of their own jurisdiction. Significantly, in 424 A.D., at a Synod in Carthage, the Church passed decrees of its own forbidding all appeals in Church controversies to other sees apart from their own. In their thinking, there was no higher authority or court of appeal than the local bishop, except for the authority of a general Council. If papal supremacy were the common belief, teaching and practice of the Church, the North African bishops and Augustine would certainly have responded in submission and obedience and would not have prohibited appeals to any other see but their own. They were willing to obey a general Council but not the bishop of Rome.” (Webster, The Papacy)

In other words, according to Webster, the African Church was autonomous and had no understanding of the primacy of the Roman See. It is interesting to find that Webster, like George Salmon of years past, did not engage with the entire Pelagian/African episode leading up to the Roman decision that “the case is finished”. Instead Webster, deals with the hesitations of Pope Zosimus (who succeeded Pope Innocent I) and the disciplinary case of Apiarius. Regarding Zosimus, we saw why it was important to his case to leave part of the story untold.

Now, let us visit the disciplinary case of the priest from Sicca Veneria (about 100 miles southeast of Hippo) named Apiarius. There are very few records relating to the case of Apiarius - three to be exact. The first comes from the acts of the council of Carthage held between 418-419. The African fathers write:

“Item, it seemed good that presbyters, deacons, or other of the lower clergy who are to be tried, if they question the decision of their bishops, the neighbouring bishops having been invited by them with the consent of their bishops, shall hear them and determine whatever separates them. But should they think an appeal should be carried from them, let them not carry the appeal except to African councils or to the primates of their provinces. But whoso shall think of carrying an appeal across seas he shall be admitted to communion by no one in Africa.” (Council of Carthage, Canon 17 (African Code 125), 1 May 418, in NPNF2, XIV:502)

The following year the African fathers write:

“It also seemed good that presbyters, deacons, and others of the inferior clergy in the causes which they had, if they were dissatisfied with the judgments of their bishops, let the neighbouring bishops with the consent of their own bishop hear them, and let the bishops who have been called in judge between them: but if they think they have cause of appeal from these, they shall not betake themselves to judgments from beyond seas, but to the primates of their own provinces, or else to an universal council, as has also been decreed concerning bishops. But whoso shall think good to carry an appeal across the water shall be received to communion by no one within the boundaries of Africa.” (Council of Carthage, Canon 1 (African Code 28), 25 May 419, in NPNF2, XIV:456)

Inferior clergy could first appeal to their own bishop then to their primate of their province, or to a universal synod and nothing else. There is some debate on whether canon 17 was created with Apiarius in mind or that these canons were generated to delineate the appeal process for lower clergy; nevertheless, Apiarius committed a number of crimes during the year of 418. A few days later the African fathers provide us with the first glimpses of the Apiarius episode:

“(1) To the most blessed lord, and our honourable brother Boniface, Aurelius, Valentine of the primatial See of Numidia, and others present with us to the number of 217 from the whole council in Africa. Since it has pleased the Lord that our humility should write concerning those things which with us our holy brethren, Faustinus a fellow-bishop and

Philip and Asellus, fellow presbyters, have done, not to the bishop Zosimus of blessed memory, from whom they brought commands and letters to us, but to your holiness, who art constituted in his room by divine authority, we ought briefly to set forth what has been determined upon by mutual consent; not indeed those things which are contained in the prolix volumes of the acts, in which, while charity was preserved, yet we loitered not without some little labour of altercation, deliberating those things in the acts which now pertain to the cause. However the more gratefully would he have received this news as he would have seen a more peaceful ending of the matter, my lord and brother, had he been still in the body!

(2) Apiarius the presbyter, concerning whose ordination, excommunication, and appeal no small scandal arose not only at Sicca but also in the whole African Church, has been restored to communion upon his seeking pardon for all his sins. First our fellow bishop Urban of Sicca doubtless corrected whatever in him seemed to need correction. For there should have been kept in mind the peace and quiet of the Church not only in the present but also in the future, since so many evils of such a kind had gone before, that it was incumbent to take care that like or even graver evils should be prevented thereafter. It seemed good to us that the presbyter Apiarius should be removed from the church of Sicca, retaining only the honour of his grade, and that he should exercise the office of the presbyterate wherever else he wished and could, having received a letter to this effect. This we granted without difficulty at his own petition made in a letter.

(3) But truly before this case should be thus closed, among other things which we were treating of in daily discussions, the nature of the case demanded that we should ask our brothers, Faustinus our fellow bishop, and Philip and Asellus our fellow presbyters, to set forth what they had been enjoined to treat of with us that they might be inserted in the ecclesiastical acts. And they proceeded to make a verbal statement, but when we earnestly asked that they would present it rather in writing, then they produced the Commonitory. This was read to us and also set down in the acts, which they are bringing with them to you. In this they were bidden to treat of four things with us, first concerning the appeal of bishops to the Pontiff of the Roman Church, second that bishops should not unbecomingly be sailing to court, thirdly concerning the treating the causes of presbyters and deacons by contiguous bishops, if they had been wrongly excommunicated by their own, and fourthly concerning the bishop Urban who should be excommunicated or even sent to Rome, unless he should have corrected what seemed to need correction.

(4) Of all which things concerning the first and third, that is that it is allowed to bishops to appeal to Rome and that the causes of clerics should be settled by the bishops of their own provinces, already last year we have taken pains to insinuate, in our letter to the same bishop Zosimus of venerable memory, that we were willing to observe these provisions for a little while without any injury to him, until the search for the statutes of the Council of Nice had been finished. And now we ask of your holiness that you would cause to be observed by us the acts and constitutions of our fathers at the Council of Nice, and flint you cause to be exercised by you there, those things which they brought in the Commonitory: that is to say, If a bishop shall have been accused, etc. [Here follows Canon vii. of Sardica.]

Item concerning presbyters and deacons. If any bishop has been quickly angered,

etc. [Here follows Canon xvii. of Sardica.]

(5) These are the things which have been inserted in the acts until the arrival of the most accurate copies of the Nicene Council, which things, if they are contained there (as in the Commonitory, which our brethren directed to us from the Apostolic See alleged) and be even kept according to that order by you in Italy, in no way could we be compelled either to endure such treatment as we are unwilling to mention or could suffer what is unbearable: but we believe, through the mercy of our Lord God, while your holiness presides over the Roman Church, we shall not have to suffer that pride. And there will be kept toward us, what should be kept with brotherly love to us who are making no dispute. You will also perceive according to the wisdom and the justice which the most Highest has given thee, what should be observed, if perchance the canons of the Council of Nice are other [than you suppose]. For although we have read very many copies, yet never have we read in the Latin copies that there were any such decrees as are contained in the Commonitory before mentioned. So too, because we can find them in no Greek text here, we have desired that there should be brought to us from the Eastern Churches copies of the decrees, for it is said that there correct copies of the decrees are to be found. For which end we beg your reverence, that you would design yourself also to write to the pontiffs of these parts, that is of the churches of Antioch, Alexandria, and Constantinople, and to any others also if it shall please your holiness, that thence there may come to us the same canons decreed by the Fathers in the city of Nice, and thus you would confer by the help of the Lord this most great benefit upon all the churches of the West. For who can doubt that the copies of the Nicene Council gathered in the Greek empire are most accurate, which although brought together from so diverse and from such noble Greek churches are found to agree when compared together? And until this be done, the provisions laid down to us in the Commonitory aforesaid, concerning the appeals of bishops to the pontiff of the Roman Church and concerning the causes of clerics which should be terminated by the bishops of their own provinces, we are willing to allow to be observed until the proof arrives and we trust your blessedness will help us in this according to the will of God. The rest of the matters treated and defined in our synod, since the aforesaid brethren, our fellow bishop Faustinus, and the presbyters Philip and Asellus are carrying the acts with them, if you deign to receive them, will make known to your holiness. And they signed. Our Lord keep thee to us for many years, most blessed brother. Alypius, Augustine, Possidius, Marinus and the rest of the bishops [217] also signed.” (*Council of Carthage to Pope Boniface* [reign. A.D. 418-422], *Quonian Domino placuit*, African Code 134, 31 May 419, in NPNF2, XIV:506-507)

Apiarius was excommunicated and removed from his church at Sicca for unknown crimes by his bishop Urban. There were no appeals to any neighboring bishops or to the primate of Carthage or to an African synod, rather Apiarius appealed directly to Zosimus, the bishop of Rome. Why does Apiarius appeal to Rome, if according to Webster, the African bishops believed they were autonomous in authority and understood that Rome’s jurisdiction excluded Africa? Pope Zosimus restored Apiarius to communion and

commissioned his legate Faustinus to carry out the decision in Africa. The African Church provisionally accepted appeals to Rome on alleged Nicene (they were actually canons from Sardica) canons until the discrepancy between the Rome and African texts were worked out. Note well, the African Church did not summarily reject the intrusion of the Roman See, which would have been the case if the African Church believed the Roman See had no jurisdiction or authority within the African provinces. Hence, no complaint of Pope Zosimus intrusion into the Apiarius affair, but grief caused by the Roman legate Faustinus. After the year 419, the African Church drew up canons that forbid lower clergy appeals over seas (i.e., Rome); nevertheless, higher clergy were still allowed to appeal to Rome. In fact, appeals to Rome continued even after the African Church confirmed that the Zosimus' canons were not Nicene. There followed a number of appeals to Rome following this provisional ruling of the African Church up until the African synod of 424. Apiarius was banned from his old church at Sicca Veneria, but was allowed to remain a priest in the town of Thabraca. In sum, the Apiarius affair was over.

Appeal of Antoninus of Fussula

For several centuries our knowledge of the case of Antoninus has come from a single three (3) page letter from Augustine. This letter numbered 209 in the collection is addressed to Pope Celestine. However, newly discovered letters, 27 in all, by Augustine were found by Johannes Divjak in the mid 1970s. Letter 20* contains a detailed account on the Antoninus affair, which sheds favorable light on Augustine's attitude toward the papacy.

The town of Fussula is just a few miles south from the See of Hippo and under the care of Augustine. Augustine decided it was time to appoint a bishop for this once Donatist laden town.

“Then there came a time when I could no longer cope the way that was required with a diocese suddenly made so much larger by the influx of converted Donatists not only in the town itself but also in the surrounding rural districts.” (Augustine, *To Fabiola*, Divjak Epistle 20*:3 (A.D. 423), in FC,81:135

Initially, Augustine chose one of his monks, but he withdrew his name at the last minute. At the same time, the primate of Numidia was coming to town and Augustine (Ep 209) was in the embarrassing position of having no candidate bishop to present. In his haste, Augustine chose an underage reader name Antoninus.

“At the last minute, the priest I thought I had ready ran out on us ... Thus did I thrust such a burden on this young man, hardly more than twenty years of age, one not tested previously in other ranks of the clergy.” (Augustine, *To Fabiola*, Divjak Epistle 20*:3-4 (A.D. 423), in FC, 81:135

Antoninus terrorized his flock by seizing property and applying brute force pastoral tactics.

“Then, seeing both clergy and laity subject to him, he quickly learned the lesson and became puffed up with the arrogance of power. Rather than teaching by example, he gave orders, forcing people to do his will... Anyone who fell into their clutches lost money, furnishings, clothing, farm animals, fruits, wood, finally even stones. The homes of some people were taken over, the houses of others were demolished...” (Augustine, *To Fabiola*, Divjak Epistle 20*:4, 6 (A.D. 423), in FC, 81:136-137)

After the people of Fussala complained for ten years, Augustine’s tribunal decided to remove Antoninus from his See and allow him to keep his episcopal grade. In addition, he would remain excommunicated until he restored everything that was seized.

“We ordered that all the spoils be restored but we allowed the bishop to keep his episcopal rank safe and intact.” (Augustine, *To Fabiola*, Divjak Epistle 20*:8 (A.D. 423), in FC, 81:138)

Next, the tribunal decided to appoint a new bishop of Fussala. On the day of the new ordination, Antoninus threatened to appeal to the See of Sees, Rome. According to Webster, you might think the African fathers would have laughed at the suggestion of an appeal to Rome, instead Augustine and the tribunal looked for a compromise. Antoninus would be given eight local congregations and the estate of Thogonoetum for his See.

“But as the day for the ordination dawned, he took it into his head to appeal.” (Augustine, *To Fabiola*, Divjak Epistle 20*:9 (A.D. 423), in FC, 81:139)

Like the congregation of Fussala, the flock at Thogonoetum rejected him. Frustrated with rejection, Antoninus then filed a formal appeal to the bishop of Rome, Pope Boniface. However, Rome referred the case back to Africa by appointing Numidia bishops to settle the matter. The case grew to a critical mass and the African fathers, including Augustine, realized the matter would not be settled by a decision by any one single African bishop, be it the primate of Numidia or the bishop of Carthage, or by any African synod (such as the councils of Carthage or Gilva). At the council of Gilva Antoninus in a rage threatened the council by appealing to Rome:

“He immediately came back in and, disturbed mentally and physically, threatened to go to the apostolic see” (Augustine, *To Fabiola*, Divjak Epistle 20*:25 (A.D. 423), in FC, 81:146)

Augustine in just a few words gives us his clear understanding of the primacy of Rome:

“as if we had been going to send whatever had been done with him in the acts to some other place.” (Augustine, *To Fabiola*, Divjak Epistle 20*:9 (A.D. 423), in FC, 81:139)

According to Augustine, Rome was the place where the final decision was going to place. Since the case had come to an impasse Augustine turned to Rome for the trump card! On his knees Augustine writes to Pope Celestine:

“I beg you to second our efforts, most saintly lord and holy Pope ... and give orders that all the documents addressed to you be read to you ... For myself, **I must avow to your Blessedness** that such fear and grief torture me in that twofold peril that I am thinking of retiring from the administration of my episcopal office ... if I see the Church of God ravaged by one whose appointment as bishop I imprudently supported.” (Augustine, *To Pope Celestine* [reign A.D. 422-432], Epistle 209 (A.D. 423), in FC, 32:32, 35)

Augustine pulled out all the stops imploring Pope Celestine to rule on the Antoninus affair. In the end, all efforts by the African Church were stymied by Antoninus. It is very telling that according to Augustine their only recourse was to appeal to the See of Sees, Rome.

Appeal of Honorius of Caesarea

This episode came to light the past few years in the recent epistles (22*, 23*, & 23A*) uncovered by Johannes Divjak. Honorius was the bishop of Cartenna (a town a few miles southwest of Caesarea). After the death of Deuterius of Caesarea, Honorius and the laity of Caesarea wanted him to become the new bishop despite the Nicene prohibitions (Canon 15) and the protests of the higher clergy in the province of Mauretania.

“In addition, Honorius, a bishop of the province of Caesarea whom you well know, brother Alypius, with considerable scandal for the Church, is now being sought by the people of Caesarea after the death of our brother Deuterius of holy memory so that he may become their bishop there. Certain religious people there have written us to say how bad this would be if it becomes a reality.” (Augustine, *To Alypius*, Epistle 22*:5 (A.D. 420), in FC, 81:157)

Augustine, aware of the Nicene prohibitions and the desires of the bishops of Mauretania, wanted to end this dispute by convincing Honorius to stay at Cartenna. Augustine had the opportunity since Honorius was his guest for a time, but in the end he failed to persuade Honorius.

“Bishop Honorius is with us, assuring us that for the sake of peace of the Church and ecclesiastical discipline, he will do nothing whatsoever except what we want. May the Lord grant that he is telling the truth.” (Augustine, *To Renatus*, Epistle 23*:2 (A.D. 419), in FC, 81:164)

“But we tried, if could be done, to have the case end with us” (Augustine, *To Alypius*, Epistle 22*:9 (A.D. 420), in FC, 81:160)

In the end, like the case of Antoninus, Augustine and the African Fathers were at their wits end. They realized that no one African bishop or synod would provide the authority to decide this disciplinary matter. Again, Rome was needed.

“And because of this it is unlikely that this case can be closed here while ill feelings and unavoidable necessity require that it be concluded by the judgment of the apostolic see.”

Augustine, *To Alpyius*, Epistle 22*:11 (A.D. 420), in FC, 81:161

Augustine acknowledges that the decision from the See of Rome is final.

“Concerning which we are doing nothing at all because we are certain what kind of verdict can be expected from that see.” (Augustine, *To Alpyius*, Epistle 22*:11(A.D. 420), in FC, 81:160-161)

In the end, Augustine’s final and the most important instruction is for Alypius to see the Pope himself in order to expedite matters regarding the Honorius case. These are Augustine’s final words on the subject:

“May the Lord in his mercy avert this either by your charity or, best of all, by your assiduous work at the apostolic see and by your most merciful and just vigilance.” (Augustine, *To Alpyius*, Epistle 22*:11 (A.D. 420), in FC, 81:161)

Augustine wanted nothing else but to have Rome issue a ruling on the Honorius affair!

Apiarius falls big time

Webster treats the Apiarius affair as a single event in time, but Apiarius’ misdeeds must be understood as two separate events. His infractions in 418 were minor and Apiarius essentially escaped unscathed, as he was allowed to exercise his priestly duties in another city other than Sicca Veneria. The Apiarius case was over. However during the year 424 or 425, Apiarius committed several severe and heinous crimes. Most likely these crimes were sexual in nature and the magnitude of these crimes were greater than any of his previous infractions that occurred 7 years ago. Unfortunately, the only glimpse we have into Apiarius’ second fall is contained in a synodal letter from the African Church to Pope Celestine. Interestingly enough, there is no evidence that Augustine was part of this synod or epistle. Augustine was up in age and he rarely traveled outside of Hippo; hence, he was not involved in the synod. Nevertheless, I provide this epistle as Webster uses it as his trump card to undermine Augustine’s understanding of the papacy. The African fathers write:

“To the lord and most beloved and our honourable brother Celestine, Aurelius, Palatinus, Antony, Totus, Servusdei, Terentius, Fortunatus, Martin, Januarius, Optatus, Ceticus, Donatus, Theasius, Vincent, Fortunatian, and the rest of us, assembled at Carthage in the General Council of Africa.

(1) We could wish that, like as your Holiness intimated to us, in your letter sent by our fellow presbyter Leo, your pleasure at the arrival of Apiarius, so we also could send to you these writings with pleasure respecting his clearing. Then in truth both our own satisfaction, and yours of late would be more reasonable; nor would that lately expressed by you concerning the hearing of him then to come, as well as that already past, seem hasty and inconsiderate. Upon the arrival, then, of our holy Brother and fellow-Bishop

Faustinus, we assembled a council, and believed that he was sent with that man, in order that, as he [Apiarius] had before been restored to the presbyterate by his assistance, so now he might with his exertions be cleared of the very great crimes charged against him by the inhabitants of Tabraca. But the due course of examination in our council discovered in him such great and monstrous crimes as to overhear even Faustinus, who acted rather as an advocate of the aforementioned person than as a judge, and to prevail against what was more the zeal of a defender, than the justice of an inquirer. For first he vehemently opposed the whole assembly, inflicting on us many injuries, under pretence of asserting the privileges of the Roman Church, and wishing that he should be received into communion by us, on the ground that your Holiness, believing him to have appealed, though unable to prove it, had restored him to communion. But this we by no means allowed, as you will also better see by reading the acts. After however, a most laborious inquiry carried on for three days, during which in the greatest affliction we took cognizance of various charges against him, God the just Judge, strong and long suffering, cut short by a sudden stroke both the delays of our fellow-bishop Faustinus and the evasions of Apiarius himself, by which he was endeavouring to veil his foul enormities. For his strong and shameless obstinacy was overcome, by which he endeavoured to cover, through an impudent denial, the mire of his lusts, and God so wrought upon his conscience and published, even to the eyes of men, the secret crimes which he was already condemning in that man's heart, a very sty of wickedness, that, after his false denial he suddenly burst forth into a confession of all the crimes he was charged with, and at length convicted himself of his own accord of all infamies beyond belief, and changed to groans even the hope we had entertained, believing and desiring that he might be cleared from such shameful blots, except indeed that it was so far a relief to our sorrow, that he had delivered us from the labour of a longer inquiry, and by confession had applied some sort of remedy to his own wounds, though, lord and brother, it was unwilling, and done with a struggling conscience.

(2) Premising, therefore, our due regards to you, we earnestly conjure you, that for the future you do not readily admit to a hearing persons coming hence, nor choose to receive to your communion those who have been excommunicated by us, because you, venerable Sir, will readily perceive that this has been prescribed even by the Nicene council. For though this seems to be there forbidden in respect of the inferior clergy, or the laity, how much more did it will this to be observed in the case of bishops, lest those who had been suspended from communion in their own Province might seem to be restored to communion hastily or unfitly by your Holiness.

(3) Let your Holiness reject, as is worthy of you, that unprincipled taking shelter with you of presbyters likewise, and the inferior clergy, both because by no ordinance of the Fathers hath the Church of Africa been deprived of this authority, and the Nicene decrees have most plainly committed not only the clergy of inferior rank, but the bishops themselves to their own Metropolitans. For they have ordained with great wisdom and justice, that all matters should be terminated in the places where they arise; and did not think that the grace of the Holy Spirit would be wanting to any Province, for the bishops of Christ (Sacerdotibus) wisely to discern, and firmly to maintain the right: especially since whosoever thinks himself wronged by any judgment may appeal to the council of

his Province, or even to a General Council [i.e. of Africa] unless it be imagined that God can inspire a single individual with justice, and refuse it to an innumerable multitude of bishops (sacerdotum) assembled in council. And how shall we be able to rely on a sentence passed beyond the sea, since it will not be possible to send thither the necessary witnesses, whether from the weakness of sex, or advanced age, or any other impediment?

(4) For that your Holiness should send ally on your part we can find ordained by no council of Fathers. Because with regard to what you have sent us by file same our brother bishop Faustinus, as being contained in the Nicene Council, we can find nothing of the kind in the more authentic copies of that council, which we have received from the holy Cyril our brother, Bishop of the Alexandrine Church, and from the venerable Atticus the Prelate of Constantinople, and which we formerly sent by Innocent the presbyter, and Marcellus the subdeacon through whom we received them, to Boniface the Bishop, your predecessor of venerable memory.

(5) Moreover whoever desires you to delegate any of your clergy to execute your orders, do not comply, lest it seem that we are introducing the pride of secular dominion into the Church of Christ which exhibiteth to all that desire to see God the light of simplicity and the day of humility.

(6) For now that the miserable Apiarius has been removed out of the Church of Christ for his horrible crimes, we feel confident respecting our brother Faustinus, that through the uprightness and moderation of your Holiness, Africa, without violating brotherly charity, will by no means have to endure him any longer. Lord and brother, may our Lord long preserve your Holiness to pray for us.” (*Council of Carthage to Pope Celestine* [reign A.D. 422-432], *Optaremus* (African Code 138), in NPNF2, XIV:509-510)

Anti-Catholic controversialists have seized on *Optaremus* in order to show the prevailing attitude of the African Church and Augustine toward the papacy. Webster is no exception. In fact, rather than treat the Apiarius episodes of 418 and 425 separately, he interprets both episodes as one. They should be treated separately to be historically accurate. Webster sums up Augustine’s attitude in the following passage:

“Significantly, in 424 A.D., at a Synod in Carthage, the Church passed decrees of its own forbidding all appeals in Church controversies to other sees apart from their own. In their thinking, there was no higher authority or court of appeal than the local bishop, except for the authority of a general Council. If papal supremacy were the common belief, teaching and practice of the Church, the North African bishops and Augustine would certainly have responded in submission and obedience and would not have prohibited appeals to any other see but their own. They were willing to obey a general Council but not the bishop of Rome.” (Webster, The Papacy)

It is true that this letter from the African high clergy, excepting Augustine, denies any appeals from lower or even higher clergy to the bishop of Rome. Nevertheless, in practice the African Church, including Augustine, appealed to Rome even after the Zosimus’ canons were found to be Sardican in origin. The cases of Antony of Fussala and Honorius

of Caesarea are striking examples of Rome's appellate authority in action. Augustine even provided some additional examples when he requested the help of Pope Celestine in the Honorius matter. Augustine writes:

“There are existing precedents in the judgments of the apostolic see itself or its confirmation of the verdicts of others, where men guilty of certain offenses were neither deprived of their episcopal rank nor left unpunished. Not to cite examples too far removed from our times, I will recall some recent ones. Let Priscus, a bishop of the province of Caesarea, utter his protest ... Listen to the protest of Victor, another bishop of the same province ... Hear the protest of Laurentius, a third bishop of the same province, a protest made...” (Augustine, *To Pope Celestine* [reign A.D. 422-432], Epistle 209 (A.D. 423), in FC, 32:33, 34)

African appeals after *Optaremus* (A.D. 424) continued as well. Pope Leo the Great sent Potentius to North Africa to examine the case of Lupicinus:

“The case also of bishop Lupicinus we order to be heard there, but at his urgent and frequent entreaties we have restored him to communion for this reason, that, as he had appealed to our judgment, we saw that while the matter was pending he had been undeservedly suspended from communion. Moreover there is this also in addition, that it was clearly rash to ordain one over his head who ought not to have been ordained until Lupicinus, having been placed before you or convicted, or having at least confessed, had opportunity to submit to a just sentence, so that, according to the requirements of ecclesiastical discipline, he who was consecrated might receive his vacant place.” (Pope Leo the Great [reign A.D. 440-461], *To the Bishops of Mauretania*, Epistle 12:12, in NPNF2, XII:16)

Likewise with Pope Gregory the Great who directed the bishops of Numidia to examine the case of Donadeus:

“How serious, and intolerable even to be heard of, is the complaint of Donadeus, the bearer of these presents, who describes himself as having been a deacon, will be made manifest to your Fraternity by the petition presented by him, which is contained in what is subjoined below. But, since it has come to our ears that he had been deposed for bodily sin, let your Love make full enquiry into this, and, if it is so, let him be consigned to penance, that he may free himself by tears from the bond of the profligacy of which he has been guilty. If, however, he should be proved innocent of any such transgression, all that his petition contains must be enquired into with diligent examination by you, together with the primate of the council, and others our brethren and fellow-bishops. And, if his complaint is supported by the truth, let both such strictness of canonical discipline be brought to bear on his bishop Victor, who has not lighted to commit so great a wickedness against God and his own priestly profession, that he may understand the wickedness of what he has done; and let the man himself be restored to his order: for it is indeed preposterous, and confessedly against ecclesiastical order, that any one whom his own fault or crime does not depose from the rank of the office which he fills should be deprived invalidly at the will of this or that person.” (Pope Gregory the Great [reign A.D.

590-604], *To the Bishops of Numidia*, Book 12, Epistle 8, in NPNF2, XIII:87-88)

Hence, appeals to Rome continued **before** and **after** *Optaremus*. *Optaremus* is an isolated trumpet blast from the African fathers directed at Rome, particularly against Faustinus, for undue meddling in disciplinary matters which were normally settled in the African provinces. *The African Church simply wanted to control all disciplinary appeals made to Rome*. Just as local judges in our own American judicial system claim the right to handle cases before they are appealed to the Supreme Court. Appeals still could be made if a synod of African bishops desired. As we see, appeals continued before and after *Optaremus*. In a letter near the end of his life Augustine matter-of-factly writes:

“I greatly desire, with the Lord’s help, to take up in our council and, if need be, to write to the Apostolic See, questions concerning those who excommunicate a whole household...” (Augustine, *To Clesicianus*, Epistle 1*:5 (A.D. 426/7), in FC, 81:13)

In other words, appeals to Rome could still be made as long as an African synod decided it was prudent to do so. This is just proper procedural etiquette which requires the proper chain of authority.

Augustine and Church Councils

Finally, Webster so skews the writings of Augustine that he has the prelate of Hippo asserting that Councils have a higher authority than the Apostolic See. Webster writes:

“Augustine believed that Councils held a higher authority than the Bishop of Rome.... Augustine did view Councils to be the ultimate authority in the Church and not the bishop of Rome.” (Webster, The Papacy)

Webster cites passages from Augustine during the Donatist controversy and triumphantly concludes:

“If the theory of papal primacy were true for the early Church why would Augustine speak of the need for the decision of a general council once the bishop of Rome had spoken.” (Webster, The Papacy)

This general council referred to by Webster was the Council of Arles held in A.D. 314. The Donatist faction, a rigorist party, contested the appointment of Caecilian to the See of Carthage since they believed his consecration was performed by one who handed over the Scriptures to the enemies (a traitor of the Church); therefore, his appointment was considered invalid. The Donatist party appointed a new bishop, Majorinus at a Carthaginian Council composed of seventy bishops. The dispute over the rightful claimant to the See of Carthage became the cause of the Donatist schism. The Donatist appealed to the Emperor to settle the incident and Emperor Constantine wasted no time in referring the matter to Pope Melchiades.

Augustine writes:

“But, because Constantine did not dare to judge the case of a bishop, he assigned it to the bishops to be discussed and settled. This was done at Rome with Melchiades presiding as bishop of that Church, together with many of his colleagues.” (Augustine, *To Donatists*, Epistle 105:8 (A.D. 409), in FC, 18:202)

Note that the question to be settled here was not a matter of faith, but simply who was the rightful claimant to the See of Carthage. Therefore the infallibility of the papacy is not addressed here. Pope Melchiades and the bishops at Rome decided against the Donatist party and acquitted Caecilianus. Augustine reflects:

“And yet what a decision was finally pronounced by the blessed Melchiades himself; how equitable, how complete, how prudent, and how fitted to make peace!” (Augustine, *To Glorius et. al*, Epistle 43:16 (A.D. 397), in NPNF1, I:281)

According to Augustine, the decision of Rome was considered final! This is not surprising since in the same epistle Augustine considered the Roman Church as the place where *‘the supremacy of an apostolic chair has always flourished’* (Ep 43:7) and believed Pope Melchiades not only in the seat of an apostolic chair, but the *‘Father of the Christian people!’* (Ep 43:16)

Despite this decision, the Donatist faction remained obstinate and appealed the Roman decision to the Emperor once more. The Donatist party contrasted the decision at Rome consisting of about 20 bishops with the seventy bishops of the Carthaginian council. The Donatists were furious about the Roman decision and demanded another council. The Roman decision caused much unrest in Africa and the emperor decided to give the Donatist another council at Arles. The council was not a higher authority, but a council consisting of a fresh set judges. These judges included four (4) legates of Pope Sylvester, as Pope Melchiades had died! Augustine comments:

“[T]he case tried by Melchiades, who was then Bishop of Rome, along with the assessors whom at the request of the Donatists the Emperor had sent, nothing could be proved against Caecilianus; and thus, while he was confirmed in his episcopal see, Donatus, who was present as his opponent, was condemned. After all this, when they all **still persevered in the obstinacy of their most sinful schism**, the Emperor being appealed to, took pains to have the matter again more carefully examined and settled at **Arles**. They, however, declining an ecclesiastical decision, appealed to Constantine himself to hear their cause. When this trial came on, both parties being present, Caecilianus was pronounced innocent, and they retired vanquished; but they still persisted in the same perversity.” (Augustine, *To Glorius et. al*, Epistle 43:4 (A.D. 397), in NPNF1, I:277)

Hence, it was granted by the Emperor to hold a council consisting of a large number of bishops despite the authority vested in the See of Rome, whose authority was not commensurate with their small number. According to Augustine, the reason why the council of Arles was granted was due to the perverse behavior of the Donatists not the lack of authority in the See of Rome, as Webster would have us believe. Augustine

concludes:

“What they actually did afterwards, however, is sufficiently shown in the letter of the Emperor. For it was not before other bishops, but at the bar of the Emperor, that they dared to bring the charge of wrong judgment against **ecclesiastical judges of so high authority** as the bishops by whose sentence the innocence of Caecilianus and their own guilt had been declared. He granted them the second trial at Arles, before other bishops; **not because this was due to them**, but only as a **concession to their stubbornness**, and from a desire by all means to restrain so great effrontery.” (Augustine, *To Glorius et. al*, Epistle 43:20 (A.D. 397), in NPNF1, I:282)

The synod at Arles decided against the Donatists and sent a letter of their decision to Pope Sylvester. In short, there was nothing brought forth at Arles that would induce the new Pope to reverse the decision of Pope Melchiades. Since this matter dealt with only a matter of fact; that is, to the rightful claimant to the See of Carthage; the matter was not under the definition of papal infallibility.

Despite the decisions arrived at Rome and Arles, the Donatist party remained obstinate and appealed to the emperor again! In contrast, the catholic mind would have obeyed the decisions arrived at at Rome. According to Augustine, these decisions were *equitable*, *prudent*, and *complete* (Ep 43:16)!

Webster makes the same mistake regarding the controversy between Cyprian and Pope Stephen. Webster concludes:

“Why doesn’t Augustine just assert that the bishop of Rome had spoken and the case was therefore closed in this issue with Cyprian and Stephen. If the theory of papal primacy were true for the early Church, why would Augustine speak of the need for the decision of a general council once the bishop of Rome had spoken.” (Webster, [The Papacy](#))

This is an argument from total silence. I am often falsely accused of speaking from silence, but here we see a classic example of Webster arguing from silence. You could apply the same argument against Scripture. If Augustine assigned a coordinate authority to Scripture then why didn’t he simply refer the matter by citing passages from Scripture? There are several reasons why Augustine deferred to a general/plenary council instead of the authority in the See of Rome or in Scripture on this matter. First, the bitterness displayed in the exchange between Cyprian and Pope Stephen precluded Augustine from commenting on the authority of the Roman See in this episode. Augustine remarks:

“I am unwilling to go on to handle again what Cyprian poured forth with signs of irritation against Stephen, as it is, moreover, quite unnecessary. For they are but the selfsame arguments which have already been sufficiently discussed; and it is better to pass over those points which involved the danger of baneful dissension. But Stephen thought that we should even hold aloof from those who endeavored to destroy the primitive custom in the matter of receiving heretics; whereas Cyprian, moved by the difficulty of the question itself, and being most largely endowed with the holy bowels of

Christian charity, thought that we ought to remain at unity with those who differed in opinion from ourselves.” (Augustine, *On Baptism*, V:25.36 (A.D. 400), in NPNF1, IV:476)

Next, Augustine citing Cyprian’s words asserted that there was no explicit testimony in Scripture and relied on Tradition on this matter:

“But **Stephen** certainly did not ‘communicate with heretics,’ merely because he did not dare to impugn the baptism of Christ, which he knew remained perfect in the midst of their perversity. For if none have baptism who entertain false views about God, it has been proved sufficiently, in my opinion, that this may happen even within the Church. ‘**The apostles,**’ indeed, ‘**gave no injunctions on the point;**’ but the custom, which is opposed to Cyprian, may be supposed to have **had its origin in apostolic tradition, just as there are many things which are observed by the whole Church, and therefore are fairly held to have been enjoined by the apostles, which yet are not mentioned in their writings.**” (Augustine, *On Baptism*, V:23.31 (A.D. 400), in NPNF1, IV:475)

In addition, the matter of heretical baptism was not a universally held belief during Cyprian’s time:

“For this question of baptism had **not been as yet completely worked out**, but yet the Church observed the most wholesome custom of correcting what was wrong, not repeating what was already given, even in the case of schismatics and heretics: she healed the wounded part, but did not meddle with what was whole.” (Augustine, *On Baptism*, II:7.12 (A.D. 400), in NPNF1, IV:430)

Lastly, the Donatist faction foisted their provincial Councils (Carthage A.D. 312 [70 Donatist bishops], Carthage A.D. 336 [270 Donatist bishops], and Bagai A.D. 394 [310 Donatist bishops]) in Augustine’s face to prove the universality of their wayward belief. However, Augustine pointed out that this simply represented the faith of a province and not of the world. Hence, Augustine put forth the plenary Council of Arles against the provincial synods of the Donatists in order to show the universality and apostolicity of their faith. The Council of Arles consisted of forty-six (46) bishops and proxies (including 4 from Pope Sylvester) representing various Sees throughout Christendom, and not just bishops from Africa. Augustine, as do Catholics today, believed that the supreme witness to the universal faith of the Church is expressed through the general council of the Church. Here, Augustine contrasted the provincial councils with the plenary council:

“They condemned ... some few in Africa, by whom they were in turn vanquished by the judgement of the whole world ... the Catholics trusted ecclesiastical judges like these in preference to the defeated parties in the suit ... having made a schism in the unity of the Church, were refuted, not by the authority of 310 African bishops [at Bagia], but by that of the whole world.” (Augustine, *Against the Letter to Parmenian*, 3.4:21, 3.6:30, (A.D. 400), in NPNF1, IV:431-432)

“Cyprian, indeed, says that on this subject not one, but two or more Councils were held; always, however, in Africa. For indeed in one he mentions that seventy-one bishops had been assembled, - to all whose authority we do not hesitate, with all due deference to Cyprian, to prefer the authority, supported by many more bishops, of the whole Church spread throughout the whole world, of which Cyprian himself rejoiced that he was an inseparable member.” (Augustine, *On Baptism*, III:10.14 (A.D. 400), in NPNF1, IV:439)

For the plenary council of Arles writes:

“Moreover, with regard to the Africans, forasmuch as they use their own law of re-baptizing, we have decreed that, if any heretic comes to the Church, he should be questioned concerning the Creed; and, if it be found that he has been baptized into the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, hands shall be laid upon him, and no more. But if, on being questioned as to the Creed, he does not give the Trinity in answer, then let him rightly be baptized” (Council of Arles, *Canon 8* (A.D. 314), in NE, 294)

Augustine did not pit the General Council of the Church against Rome or against Scripture; rather, he simply emphasized this magisterial instrument of the church in contrast to the Donatist’s provincial councils. At Arles, Scripture, Rome, the universal Church, and Tradition were brought together in sharp contrast to the provincial synods of the Donatists.

Summary

Webster is fond of citing secondary sources throughout his replies instead of synthesizing Augustine’s thought from the texts alone. *I have kept secondary citations to a minimum and allowed the great prelate from Hippo to speak for himself within the historical context.* When we examine the magnificent landscape of Augustine’s writings we find the great bishop of Hippo extol and ring the praises of the authority of the Roman See at almost every turn. What is most striking is the contrast between Webster’s and Augustine’s thought on the papacy during those select episodes where critics often downplay the papacy. During these episodes, Webster denigrates the papacy and Augustine goes out of his way to uphold and defend the authority of the Roman See. For example, Webster uses the Pope Zosimus and Pelagian affairs as an example where Augustine denies the primacy of the Roman See; whereas, Augustine provides us with this ready reply for his Pelagian counterparts:

“[H]e [Pelagius] entirely failed in imposing on the church at Rome (where, as you well know, he is by no means a stranger), although he went so far as to make the attempt, if he might somehow succeed. But, as I have just said, he entirely failed. For the most blessed Pope Zosimus recollected what his predecessor, who had set him so worthy an example, had thought of these very proceedings. Nor did he omit to observe what opinion was entertained about this man by the trusty Romans, whose faith deserved to be spoken of in the Lord, and whose consistent zeal in defense of catholic truth against this heresy he saw prevailing amongst them with warmth, and at the same time most perfect harmony.” (Augustine, *On Original Sin*, II:9.8 (A.D. 418), in NPNF1, V:239)

Similarly:

“In these words of the Apostolic See [Pope Zosimus] the Catholic faith stands out as so ancient and so firmly established, so certain and so clear, that it would be wrong for a Christian to doubt it.” (Augustine, *To Optatus*, Epistle 190 (A.D. 418), in FC, 30:286)

Augustine provides a similar response in the disciplinary case involving Apiarius and Pope Zosimus. This affair is a favorite among Catholic critics and Webster is no exception. When the North African Church was faced with not finding the canons [as they were Sardican in origin] cited by Pope Zosimus in their copy of the Nicene canons did Augustine refuse or deny the authority of the Papacy, as Webster would have us believe? No, instead we have Augustine readily accept these canons till their copies could be verified:

“We promise that this shall be observed by us, provided that upon more careful examination it be found to be of the Council of Nice.” (Augustine, *Council of Carthage* (May 1, A.D. 418), in NPNF2, XIV:443)

Additionally during this time, Augustine is chosen as a legate for who else, but Pope Zosimus himself. He was chosen by Pope Zosimus to investigate an ecclesiastical matter in the province of Mauritania:

“An urgent matter connected with the Church took me to that city [Caesarea in Mauretania] at the bidding of the venerable Pope Zosimus, Bishop of the Apostolic See.” (Augustine, *To Optatus*, Epistle 190 (A.D. 418), in FC, 30:271)

Why has Webster so skewed the writings of Augustine as if the prelate of Hippo had no concept or understanding of Peter’s primacy or the unique authority vested in his successor, the See of Rome? I believe that Webster’s anti-Catholic zeal has blinded his efforts. The vast majority of his web site is devoted to critiquing the Catholic faith; hence, it is no surprise to find Webster substitute zeal for scholarship. In chapter 12 of *Roman Catholicism* (published by Moody), Webster spends an entire essay in answering the following question: “Did I really leave the Holy Catholic Church?” In support of answering in the negative, Webster proffers the same arguments and citations from Augustine against the papacy he used in his latest criticisms of “*Upon This Rock*.” I would like to end my reply with Augustine’s answer to Webster’s question: “Did I really leave the Holy Catholic Church?”

“[T]itle of **Catholic**, which, not without cause...**hath this Church alone**, amid so many heresies, obtained in such sort, that, whereas all heretics wish to be called Catholics, nevertheless to ANY STRANGER, who is asked where to find the Catholic Church, none of them, would dare to point to his own basilica or home.” (Augustine, *Against the Epistle of Manichaeus*, 4.5 (A.D. 397)

Augustine answers Webster’s question in spades! I would challenge Webster to apply this

test on a policemen down the street or on a minister standing on the corner or on a librarian in his town - ask him or her *where the Catholic Church is?* They will **NOT** point him to Our Redeemer Lutheran Church or Calvary Chapel or a Reformed Baptist Church or St. Michael's Coptic Church or St. John Chrysostom Orthodox Church, **but** a Church who is in communion with the See of Rome!

Good Old St. Augustine—his test, 1570 years later, still applies!

August 28, 2000

Feast Day of St. Augustine

Bishop of Hippo and Doctor of the Church

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