

Misrepresentation Six: Cyprian and the “bishop of bishops”:

We now address the sixth and final “misrepresentation” alleged by Bill Webster. Am I getting tired yet? Nope. I love this kind of stuff. Defending Jesus and his Church makes me flush with enthusiasm and joy. My kids are climbing all over me, my oldest daughter is home from Steubenville for the summer, the chickens are all put away for the night, the ten acres are all mowed, my wife is snuggled on the couch next to me here in our den, my five hundred employees are out taking care of my business, I am surrounded by over 10,000 books, and I have the joy of the Lord filling my soul and my family. Who could ask for more! I love being Catholic! So, let’s carry on with this last “misrepresentation”.

One final misrepresentation I would like to address are some additional comments Mr. Ray makes in his Introduction. He states:

The bishop of Rome was unique in assuming the authority and obligation to oversee the Churches. Clement and Ignatius make this clear from the first century and the beginning of the second. If the authority exercised had been illegitimate, or wrongly arrogated, it would have been an act of overzealousness at one end of the spectrum, of tyranny at the other. Yet no one ever stood up and said, “No, you have no authority. Who are you to order us, to teach us, to require obedience from us, to excommunicate us?” If the jurisdictional primacy of Rome had been a matter of self-aggrandizement, someone would have opposed it as they opposed other innovations and heresies in the Church. The silence is profound (Upon This Rock (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1999), p. 13).

Bill is about to make a big commotion about an enthusiastic statement I made in my book, as stated above. This statement was not meant to be a challenge as in: “Find one patristic witness to resist or deny papal authority and I will take a back seat.” It was rather a rhetorical statement, an exclamation of satisfaction, as in “My goodness, look at the overwhelming acknowledgment of papal primacy in the early Church, expressed not only in the positive evidence I am about to provide but in the silence of the Fathers as well!”

My exclamation was in the style of St. Vincent of Lerins, “ ‘Catholic’, which, as the name itself and the reason of the thing declare, comprehends all universally. This rule we shall observe if we follow universality, antiquity, consent. We shall follow universality if we confess that one faith to be true, which the whole Church throughout the world confesses; antiquity, if we in no wise depart from those interpretations which it is manifest were notoriously held by our holy ancestors and fathers; consent, in like manner, if in antiquity itself we adhere to the consentient definitions and determinations of all, or at the least of almost all priests and doctors” (*Commonitory* 2). It was especially taken in the context of Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and especially St. Irenaeus who opposed the determination of the Pope Victor, asked him to prudently reconsider, but never denied Pope Victor’s authority to excommunicate.

Since Bill brought this topic up, let's go back to my book and read the whole context of my statement and not just the few sentences provided by Bill. Again we come back to Bill's e-mail response sent to me.

From *Upon this Rock*, pages 12-14: "While reading Webster's book, I noticed, along with his selective use of the Fathers in attempting to discredit the Catholic Church's teaching on the Papacy, that there are no citations "revealed" in his book in which a Christian, especially a Church Father, explicitly denies the Petrine primacy or the Petrine succession. Webster collects a large number of passages that are supposed to prove that the Fathers oppose Catholic teaching, yet never is there a flat-out denial of the Petrine primacy or the primacy of Rome. This is a silence that speaks volumes! We may find differing interpretations of Peter's primacy, which is what we should expect, according to John Henry Newman, yet we find no denial of that primacy.

"I wrote to William Webster and asked him if he knew of any Church Father who denied the primacy of Peter or of his successors. Mr. Webster's response was very telling, and I wish he had been forthright about this matter in his book.

"His return E-mail stated, 'No father denies that Peter had a primacy or that there is a Petrine succession. The issue is how the fathers interpreted those concepts. They simply did not hold to the Roman Catholic view of later centuries that primacy and succession were 'exclusively' related to the bishops of Rome. What an extraordinary admission; what an extraordinary truth. Many of the Fathers were in theological or disciplinary disagreement with Rome (for example, Cyprian and Irenaeus), yet they never denied Rome's primacy. They may have debated what that primacy meant, or how it was to work out in the universal Church, but they never denied the primacy. The quickest way to achieve jurisdictional or doctrinal victory is to subvert or disarm the opponent. In this case it would have been as simple as proving from the Bible or from tradition that Peter, and subsequently his successors in Rome, had no primacy, no authority to rule in the Church. Yet, as even Webster freely admits, this refutation never occurred. Irenaeus may challenge the appropriateness of a decision made by Victor, but he never challenges Victor's authority to make the binding decision. Cyprian may at times disagree with a decree of Stephen's on baptism, but he never rejects the special place of the Roman See, which would have been the easiest means of winning the debate. The bishop of Rome was unique in assuming the authority and obligation to oversee the Churches. Clement and Ignatius make this clear from the first century and the beginning of the second. If the authority exercised had been illegitimate, or wrongly arrogated, it would have been an act of overzealousness at one end of the spectrum, of tyranny at the other. Yet no one

ever stood up and said, “No, you have no authority. Who are you to order us, to teach us, to require obedience from us, to excommunicate us?” If the jurisdictional primacy of Rome had been a matter of self-aggrandizement, someone would have opposed it as they opposed other innovations and heresies in the Church. The silence is profound.

“As doctrines develop, as authority develops, as even a family or society develops, there is discussion relating to authority and its exercise. Amazingly enough, this is also true for the canon of the New Testament, which was not finally collected and codified for almost four hundred years after the death of Christ. Does the fact that there were various interpretations of what the New Testament was, or which books it contained—a discussion, by the way, that raised its head again in the teaching of Martin Luther—in anyway prove that somehow the New Testament held by the Protestant is uncertain or in doubt because there were various applications or perceptions of that canon in the early years? The faithful Christian may have believed various things about the canon, but he never denied that the Scriptures held a special place. He may have clung to a different collection of books, yet he always understood that there were “apostolic” books. In the same way, early Fathers, especially Eastern Fathers, may have defined the primacy of Peter and the supremacy of his successors in nuanced ways, yet they never denied that the primacy or authority was attached to Peter and his See in Rome.

“Authority has always been an object of distrust and, very often, defiance. The nation of Israel refused to hear authority: they rejected the authority of the prophets and rejected their Messiah sent by the Father. The apostles themselves were abused and rejected. Should it surprise us that many in our present day reject and demean the unifying authority God has ordained in his Church? In the primitive Church, as we learn from St. Irenaeus, the greatest theologian of the second century, many groups splintered off from the apostolic Church and “assembled in unauthorized meetings”. Rejecting the Church and spurning her shepherd is nothing new to our day” (*Upon this Rock*, 12 - 14).

This should establish the context. However, since Bill took the “*No one ever said....*” as a challenge, I will respond.

First, I am not the only one who makes such a claim. Let’s read J. Michael Miller’ excellent treatment of the Papacy, *The Shepherd and the Rock*, “From the beginning of the second century, written documents testify that local churches outside Rome recognized its special role in the *koinonia* [universal church community]. Although they sometimes argued that the Roman bishop had acted imprudently or ill-advisedly, none, neither in the East to the West, disputed his right to provide pastoral care for churches other than his own (*The Shepherd and the Rock* [Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1995], 75. See also Aidan Nichols

in *Rome and the Eastern Churches*, pg. 277). He also comments, “Rome never needed to demand recognition for its prerogatives; rather, it was peacefully accepted” (pg. 88).

These statements are a complete misrepresentation of the truth and demonstrate a profound ignorance of church history.

This is a very strong charge. A “profound ignorance of church history”? Really Bill! Are you an expert on Church history able to judge all others? I think that I have proven in my book, for those who read the whole thing and not just a few footnotes with their names in it, and for those who have read *this* response all the way up to this point, that I am not as “ignorant” as you’d like to believe. I think the reader may tend to disagree with your condescending statement. Am I the finest historian of all time? Of course not, but “profoundly ignorant”? I don’t think so. We may have a difference of opinion on many points, but I never stooped to calling you profoundly ignorant. But, leaving your condescending *argumentum ad hominem* behind us, let’s continue with the content of the argument.

The church Fathers and ecumenical councils are not silent on their opposition to the claims of the bishops of Rome which they considered to be in fact illegitimate and innovations.

As we have seen, and I deign to repeat it all here, this last statement by Bill is a gross exaggeration and misrepresentation of history. It fits his Fundamentalist tradition, but it is certainly not a characterization of the early Church. “Peter has spoken through Leo” (Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon), and as Sergius, Metropolitan of Cyprus (649 A.D.) writes to Pope Theodore, “O Holy Head, Christ our God hath destined thy Apostolic See to be an immovable foundation and a pillar of the Faith. For thou art, as the Divine Word truly saith, Peter, and on thee as a foundation-stone have the pillars of the Church been fixed.” (Sergius Ep. ad Theod. lecta in Session ii. Concil. Lat. anno 649). Bill may find his selective and misunderstood quotations and take them out of their fuller context to make it sound like the Fathers “denied” a Petrine and/or Roman primacy, but the full history belies such a claim. Did some oppose the Pope and argue with his dictates? Absolutely, but that is not the same as denying an overall primacy as we’ve discussed over and over again.

The fact that Cyprian changed the wording of his treatise, *On the Unity of the Church*, because Stephen the bishop of Rome misapplied his words to mean papal primacy is clear evidence that they were opposed to any thought that the bishop of Rome held universal jurisdiction within the Church.

Yet, does St. Cyprian in his revision *categorically deny* that the bishop of Rome held a unique position? Does “toning down” equal “flat out spoken denial”,

which is what I was speaking of in my book? I don't think so. By the way, I added this specific information about St. Cyprian's revision in much greater detail than Bill provided here or in his book. I am quite aware of the history of St. Cyprian's *On the Unity of the Church*. Did Bill know that I already included a good bit of detail on this point? Why would I add the "rhetorical statement" in my introduction if I felt it was contradicted by Cyprian and his treatise *On the Unity of the Church*? I'm not sure why Bill brings this up because it certainly proves nothing. Here is what my book already said about this topic, footnote #68 on pages 182 - 183:

"*The Unity of the Catholic Church* 4 in Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, 1:220 written between 251 - 256 A.D. Few selections from the Fathers have been as heatedly debated as these words of Cyprian. Certain ambiguities in Cyprian's writings cause partisans to claim him for their individual "causes". After verbal altercations with Pope Stephen over baptism, Cyprian toned down his treatise in a later revised version, possibly because "Rome was making more of his words than he had intended" (Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100 - 600)*, 1:159), especially now that he was in theological disagreement with Rome. Bévenot summarizes the situation, "At Rome, where there were no doubts about its Bishop's authority over the whole Church, Cyprian's original text could not fail to be read as a recognition of that fact. If, in the course of the baptismal controversy this was, as it were, thrown in his teeth, he will have exclaimed, quite truthfully: 'But I never meant *that!*' - and so he 'toned it down' in his revised version. He did not then repudiate what he had formerly held. He had never held that the Pope possessed universal jurisdiction. But he had never denied it either; in truth he had never asked himself the question where the final authority in the Church might be. . . . We have in Cyprian's *De ecclesiae catholicae unitate* a good example of what a dogma can look like while still in an early stage of development. The reality (in this case, the Primacy of Rome) is there all the time: it may be recognized by some; by others it may even be denied, and that though much of what they say or do unconsciously implies it. . . . Cyprian is a standing example of what we mean when we speak of the Papal Primacy being 'implicit' in the early Church" (*Ancient Christian Writers* 25:7 - 8 quoted in Jurgens', *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, 1:220). Cyprian seems to have adopted a modified view of primacy after Cornelius, possibly as a result of his disagreements with Stephen, the bishop of Rome. The modified conception leveled the office of bishop and, in theory anyway, perceived the government of the Church to be an "aristocracy of equal bishops" each accountable to God alone. Instead of seeing Peter as invested with a dynastic office, Cyprian seems to have modified his view to perceive Peter alone as the recipient of the keys so as to *symbolize* the unity of the episcopate and the Church. However, even in his own lifetime he saw the impossibility of unity on this unrealistic basis which is

demonstrated by his frequent appeal to Rome for theological and practical determinations . Dom John Chapman, whose book should be read by any wanting to understand Cyprian's attitude toward Rome, wrote, "I fear it was the shortness of his experience which made it possible to put forward a theory which no one has ever held before or since. This is why I think 'St. Cyprian's theory of the episcopate' is of no importance except for his own biography" (*Studies in the Early Papacy* [Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1971], 44)."

So, even though Bill implies I must be ignorant of the above information, it was in my book all along for those who have read it.

This is also seen in the example of Cyprian and the Eastern Fathers who opposed Stephen and his demands for their submission to his teaching on the rebaptism of heretics. I give the following summation of that controversy in *The Matthew 16 Controversy: Peter and the Rock*:

Before we read this section from Bill's book, we should state up front that it proves nothing against what I said earlier. Opposing the bishop of Rome is certainly no proof of a denial of papal authority. There have been saints (as St. Cyprian is venerated) and doctors of the Church (as we have mentioned St. Catherine of Sienna) who have scolded, reprimanded, and even opposed the Pope. St. Cyprian even refused to obey the Pope and yet the Church has still seen fit to honor him with the title of Saint. This opposition does not suggest, and certainly does not prove, that those who confronted the Pope rejected the primacy of the Roman bishop. They just aren't the same thing. Let Bill find anywhere in my book where I state that no one ever opposed the bishop of Rome. Many opposed St. Paul and his directives without necessarily questioning his apostolic authority.

The conflict regarding heretical baptism was over whether or not it was necessary to rebaptize those who had been baptized by Novationist groups—which baptized in the name of the Trinity—who were then later converted and sought membership in the orthodox Church. Cyprian and many Eastern bishops said yes, while Stephen said no. The controversy escalated to the point where Stephen demanded submission by Cyprian and the others to his point of view on pain of exclusion from communion with Rome upon refusal.

Does St. Cyprian deny that Pope Stephen had the authority or power to excommunicate? Of course not, and that is *exactly* my point! This is not the first time that a whole section of the Church opposed the bishop of Rome. For those who read my book (pages 161 - 163), they will remember the writings and visit of St. Irenaeus who traveled to Rome. He appealed to the Pope not to excommunicate the Asian churches, but didn't challenge his authority to do so. St. Irenaeus, the greatest theologian of the second century never questioned Pope Victor's authority or prerogative to excommunicate the Asian churches. Rather, he argued as to its

prudence. Opposition to, or arguments with the bishop of Rome does *not* prove what Bill would like it to prove. I already dealt with such things in my book.

We have also discussed earlier whether “Eastern bishops” were involved in this debate at Carthage. I won’t go into it again here, but accuracy with historical facts is significant if one is to earn our trust and confidence in his historical acumen, especially if they are inclined to call others “profoundly ignorant of Church history”.

Stephen went so far as to denounce Cyprian as a false prophet and deceitful worker. It is evident from Cyprian’s correspondence that such a demand by Stephen was made on the basis of his application of Matthew 16 to himself as Peter’s successor.

We see the imposition of the Petrine primacy, similar to the formulation of Vatican I, was understood and practiced at this early date by the Roman bishops. This imposition of episcopal authority from Rome was resisted at times, questioned, and struggled against, but in the end, the Roman theology and decisions won out as the orthodox teaching.

So, we have the bishop of Rome as early as the mid-third century claiming what the bishops of Rome understood from the onset - they held the seat of Peter in the see of Rome. This was certainly not the first time the bishop of Rome assumed such authority over distant churches. It was recognized by St. Clement of Rome in the first century. St. Clement said that the Apostles themselves taught their disciples the principle of succession to the “sacred office”. And, does the fact that a bishop criticizes a fellow bishop, even though he is the bishop of Rome, at one point in his life invalidate everything else the bishop believed and practiced throughout the rest of his ministry?

In light of this, the response of Cyprian and the Eastern bishops is significant. Did they submit to Stephen? They did not.

First, Cyprian was not an Eastern bishop; he was an African bishop. Second, at first they did resist the Papal determination, but in the end all the African bishops acquiesced to Rome’s stance on the issue of re-baptism, a teaching that is still the unquestioned doctrine of the Church today! This was neither the first nor the last instance of resistance to the Church’s authority. Nothing is new under the sun. It certainly does not invalidate my point.

Second, the Eastern *patriarchs* did submit to Pope Stephen! Bill is confusing the African bishops with the Eastern patriarchs. If we consider, for a moment, that Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch were the three “home offices” of the Church; and that Rome’s communication with the East operated through either Alexandria or Antioch, then it is clear that the majority of the East sided with

Stephen, whereas the Africans alone opposed him (with perhaps a few Eastern sympathizers).

For example, when the anti-pope Novatian challenged the authority of Pope Cornelius, Patriarch St. Dionysius of Alexandria defended Cornelius' rightful succession, and subsequently writes to Cornelius at Rome to report how: "Antioch, Caesarea, and Jerusalem, Tyre and Laodicea, all Cilicia and Cappadocia, Syria and Arabia, Mesopotamia, Pontus, and Bithynia, have returned to union and their bishops are all in concord" (Eusebius, Hist. Eccl., VII, v).

So, all of these Eastern churches dealt with Rome *through* Alexandria. Yet, unlike Cyprian, Dionysius of Alexandria accepted the teaching of Pope Stephen I that baptism by heretics was valid. We know of seven letters from him on the subject, two being addressed to Stephen's successor, Pope Sixtus II (257-8). In one of these, he asks advice in the case of a man who had received baptism a long time before from heretics, and now declared that it had been improperly performed. Dionysius had refused to renew the Sacrament after the man had so many years received the Holy Eucharist. So, he asks the Pope's opinion. (See Dionysius of Alexandria in Eusebius).

In fact, Stephen's demand, his interpretation of scripture, and the ecclesiology which it represented, was unanimously repudiated by these bishops. Their response was a North African Council in 256 A.D., attended by eighty - six Eastern and Western bishops.

Eastern and Western bishops? That Cyprian and his synod were African and Western is certain, but where do you find Eastern bishops in the council? *Look through the list*. Even St. Cyprian himself, in his introductory remarks of the council writes: "When, in the kalends of September, a great many bishops from the provinces of Africa, Numidia, and Mauritania, had met together at Carthage . . ." (*The Seventh Council of Carthage under Cyprian* as recorded in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 5:565). In the *Atlas of the Bible and Christian History* (ed. Tim Dowley [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997], 75), we see that Numidia and Mauretania are on the northern coast of Africa in the current countries of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. Alexandria, Egypt, well over one thousand miles to the east, which could have been considered "Eastern", had no representative listed. Nor do we find any from Antioch, Jerusalem, or other Eastern sees. This was strictly a local synod of African bishops. What is my point? Well . . .

. . . wasn't I accused just a few minutes ago of being "profoundly ignorant of church history"? One should not call another man "profoundly ignorant of church history" and then a few paragraphs later say something as historically incorrect as this! Bill, there were no Eastern bishops at the Council of Carthage in 256! Were St. Cyprian and the council members "Eastern"? These were the first

champions of Latin. “As paradoxical as it may seem, the first Christian documents in Latin come not from Rome but from Roman Africa” (*The Fathers of the Church*, [Vicenza: Instituto San Gaetano, 1987], pg. 137). It was an *African* Council, not an *Eastern* Greek council. We will see another such blunder when we are told that St. Cyprian was out of communion with the Pope.

[To Bill’s credit, and I just read this comment in a subsequent response posted on his web site, he says, “Steve did point out an error in one of my statements in reference to the participants at the Council of Carthage. He says: ‘Jurgens says of this council ‘The Seventh Council of Carthage, of which Cyprian was president, met with eighty-seven bishops present (from the African church, and not from the East and West as stated by Bill), in the year 256 A.D.’ I erroneously assumed that due to the aggressive support Cyprian had received from the East that there were Eastern bishops present at the Council. I was mistaken. All 87 Bishops were western bishops from the region of North Africa. Thanks for pointing this out. It has been duly noted and corrected.”]. I appreciate Bill’s kind words of response, but he is still inaccurate as to the supposed “aggressive support from the East”.

However, be that as it may, let’s look at what Bill actually says. He says there was an “aggressive support from the East” against Pope Stephen. Really? Where? Where is Cyprian’s support from the Eastern *patriarchs*? Where Bill? Why doesn’t Alexandria, the second See, speak up in Cyprian’s defense? Why is Antioch, the third See, silent? Where is Jerusalem (a.k.a., Aelia) or its metropolitanate, Caesarea Palestina? Why aren’t they Cyprian’s allies here? It’s because the best support which Cyprian could find was from the remote, backwoods church of Caesarea in Cappadocia! This see, which would later come to prominence due to its monastic connections, its bishop Basil the Great, and its proximity to Constantinople was, at this time, the equivalent of Little Rock, Arkansas. Indeed, it would be like Cyprian, as mayor of Boston, Massachusetts finding himself in conflict with the President of the United States, appealing to Little Rock, Arkansas, and ignoring the political clout of New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Dallas, and Washington D.C. That’s what Caesarea in Cappadocia was like compared to all the other Eastern sees. Yet, Cyprian’s *main* ally is the bishop of this little place. So, why is the rest of the East silent, Bill? It’s because they all recognized the authority of Rome.

[All agreed with Cyprian in rejecting not only Stephen’s theology and practice on heretical baptism but also his claims to authority.](#)

First, let’s clarify. When Bill says “all agreed”, I am assuming he refers to the African bishops of the local synod. If so, OK. Second, claiming that they rejected Pope Stephen’s “*claims to authority*” is certainly a personal opinion and

contrary to everything we know of the event. It is one thing to resist authority, it is quite another to deny that the authority exists. Did every bishop reject the authority of Rome, or did they only argue with his stance on baptism? The burden of proof is certainly on Bill to prove his claim. In addition, isn't it interesting that the African bishops eventually, and quietly acquiesced to Pope Stephen's dictates on baptism. Charles Poulet warns us, "It would be a mistake to conclude from this misunderstanding [between Cyprian and Pope Stephen] that St. Cyprian, the apostle of unity, was opposed to the primacy of the pope; he calls Rome the '*locus Petri*' (the see of Peter), and again '*ecclesia principalis, unde unitas sacerdotalis exorta est*' (the principal Church, the birthplace of sacerdotal unity)" (*A History of the Catholic Church* [St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1941], 101).

Was St. Cyprian's objection an aggressive, all-out rejection of authority and the papal office? If so, why didn't Cyprian, especially in the midst of his Synod, if he believed all bishops were equal, why didn't he excommunicate Pope Stephen if he thought he was such a heretical and wicked man? He had pleaded with the Pope to excommunicate others, so why, if all bishops were equal, did he and Firmilian not excommunicate Pope Stephen? F. P. Havey in his article "African Synods" in the *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton, 1907) writes, "These records also show how the close relations between Africa and Rome were several times troubled during the course of five centuries. The baptismal controversy put the Church into a state in passive resistance to Rome. In the Synod of September, 256, St. Cyprian was placed in a painful dilemma. While maintaining the right of bishops to think for themselves, he still clung to the necessity of unity in the Church, and would not break the revered bond with Rome" (pg. 1:200). Ah, Rome, the seat of Peter! It would be disastrous to break unity with that Church!

In their opening remarks to the Council the bishops give the following remarks which clearly reflect their understanding of ecclesiology:

It remains that we severally declare our opinion on this same subject, judging no one, nor depriving any one of his right of communion, if he differ from us. For no one setteth himself up as a Bishop of Bishops, or by tyrannical terror forceth his Colleagues to a necessity of obeying; inasmuch as every Bishop, in the free use of his liberty and power, has the right of forming his own judgment, and can no more be judged by another than he can himself judge another. But we must all await the judgment of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who alone has the power of both setting us in the government of His Church, and of judging of our acts therein (A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church (Oxford: Parker, 1844), The Epistles of St. Cyprian, The Judgments of Eighty-Seven Bishops in the Council of Carthage on the Question of Baptizing Heretics, pp. 286-287).

Bill really jumped the gun on this matter. A little background. After reading Bill's "rebuttal", a friend asked on my Bulletin Board (at www.catholic-convert.com/wwwboard) alternate about Webster's citing of "bishop of bishops"

in his “rebuttal”. In a matter of minutes I quickly responded in a very impromptu and unofficial manner and even at the end of the text on Bill’s web site (www.christiantruth.com), concluded with the words “*Just a start on one point in his rebuttal*”. All messages on my Board are routinely deleted after 15 days to make room for the new 100+ messages a day that are posted. If I consider something important, I permanently place in the “*Studies & Writings*” page.

So, my quick “toss away” comments were hardly an “official” statement. In fact, the message is already well over 15 days old and long ago deleted. However, Bill jumped right in and treated my posting as some kind of major pronouncement and wrote a twelve page “rebuttal” *and posted it on his web site*. Actually I’m honored that such a quick and spontaneous note from “little ol’ me” merits a twelve page “rebuttal”! Actually, what this seems to demonstrate is that, with the marvelous spate of new apologists rising up to defend the Catholic Church, a lot of Protestant apologists realize the ground is eroding out from under them and they are quite nervous and a bit jumpy right now.

We are going to spend a good bit of time on the above quotation, so bear with me. Bill has made a big deal of this passage so we will look at it carefully. This is an interesting quotation Bill brings to bear but we have a few problems with it. *First*, is this the final, definitive, and *only* thing St. Cyprian had to say about the papacy? Can one fluctuate and vacillate on matters of authority during a lifetime of trial and turbulence? Of course. It happens all the time and in every century. Did Cyprian fluctuate and vacillate? I think so. Just because he opposes a Pope’s demands in the heat of battle at one point in his career, doesn’t necessarily mean that Cyprian rejected the Primacy of Peter’s chair in Rome in general. Let’s look at his uncertainty and inconsistency throughout his short ten years as a Christian, as the travails of persecution and conflict washed against him.

“First of all when the African envoys arrived in Rome they found themselves treated as heretics. They were refused communion, refused even hospitality, and the pope refused them a hearing. Cyprian was regarded as the false prophet of a false Christ. The second fact is St. Cyprian’s letter. For all his recognition of the *ecclesia principalis* he writes as though in this matter he considered all bishops were equals, as though the administration of baptism was a detail of the local church’s domestic life and if the detail differed from church to church that was the business of the local church and of the local church alone. To God alone is the local bishop responsible. This is hardly in keeping with the theory of 254 that bishops are to be judged by the people who elected them and, if bad, deposed. *St. Cyprian is once again weaving a theory to justify his policy*, and weaving it from one day to the next. *Another contradiction of his own theory* is the declaration in the letter to Rome that this question of the validity of baptism is one on which Catholic bishops can differ.

In 255 he had explained to Marcianus that it is an article of faith!” (Philip Hughes, *A History of the Church* [New York: Sheed & Ward, 1935], 1:144). As I stated earlier, St. Cyprian can be seen as a bundle of contradictions in his short ten years as a Christian.

Michael Winter, who Bill quotes frequently (as I do in my book) again demonstrates the confusion of Cyprian’s conclusions, a confusion that caused Cyprian to change like a chameleon when dealing with various issues and crises. Can Bill demonstrate that because St. Cyprian under pressure speaks of “bishop of bishops” as a “left-handed challenge” to Pope Stephen, that that was his final theology, set in cement? No, St. Cyprian was struggling with his theories and while admitting a special Petrine authority and leadership in Rome, he resisted or yielded depending upon his own circumstances. Winter writes,

“How such unanimity was to be preserved [Cyprian] did not say, and as Chapman pointed out, this notion could only have occurred to him as a result of *his lack of experience of ecclesiastical affairs*. The principle of unanimity is closely linked with Cyprian’s insistence on the role of councils in the government of the church. Although it does not seem to have occurred to Cyprian, at least at the beginning of his career, *the authority of a council is incompatible with the equality of bishops which he championed*, and which he expressed so clearly at the council of Carthage in 256. ‘None of us poses as the bishop of bishops; none tyrannizes his colleagues to force their assent, since every bishop is free to exercise his power as he thinks best; he can neither judge, nor be judged by, another bishop. We must all wait upon the judgement of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom alone it belongs to rule over us in the government of the church and to judge our conduct.’ In practice unanimity was ensured in the African councils by the force of Cyprian’s own personality. *If this unity were not forthcoming, Cyprian’s theory had no remedy*. Admittedly he approved of excommunication of bishops, as in the case of Marcian of Arles, but *this procedure was not consistent with his principles of the equality and autonomy of bishops*. Basically *he had no remedy for the disagreement of bishops*, and it was a rude shock to him to realize that such a thing could happen. *The dispute over the validity of heretical baptism exposed the inadequacy of Cyprian’s theory; and in that time of crisis his ecclesiology broke down completely having no remedy to offer*.

“The gravity of the baptismal controversy has tended to focus undue attention on Cyprian’s theory. In reality it was never widely held; Cyprian himself was the only early ecclesiastic who took it seriously. It finds no echo in the authentic tradition of the church, and Batiffol did not hesitate to describe the idea of the autonomous bishop as a complete chimera” (*St. Peter and the Popes*, 152, emphasis mine).

Second, this was not the first time the phrase “bishop of bishops” was used. It was earlier claimed for James the Righteous in the pseudo-Clementine literature. Tertullian also used the phrase several decades before Cyprian used of the phrase. Tertullian the heretic was attacking the bishop of Rome for his claimed ability to forgive serious sins. He chided the Pope with the words, “I hear that there has even been an edict set forth, and a peremptory one too. The *Pontifex Maximus* — that is, the bishop of bishops — issues an edict: “I remit, to such as have discharged (the requirements of) repentance, the sins both of adultery and of fornication” *On Modesty* 1 in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* 4:74 written about 220 A.D. Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, James, *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume IV*, [Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.] 1997). Cyprian may have thought that the Pope actually appropriated the title “bishop of bishops” based on Tertullian’s acerbic retort.

My footnote in *Upon this Rock*, commenting on this passage says, “Tertullian, as a Montanist, is ridiculing the bishop of Rome for readmitting certain penitents into communion. “Pope Callistus (217 - 222 A.D.) had decided that rigorous discipline in many churches needed to be relaxed. Tertullian, now lapsed into heresy, fiercely attacks the ‘peremptory edict.’ The words are intended as sarcasm, but nonetheless they indicate clearly the position of authority claimed by Rome. And the opposition comes, not from an [orthodox] Catholic bishop, but from a Montanist heretic” (“Pope” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 12:264). Tertullian taught there was no forgiveness after baptism for the sins for idolatry, fornication, and murder. That the Church forgave such sins led Tertullian to chastise her. Protestants of course, would disagree with Tertullian on this point and side with the Catholic Church” (*Upon this Rock*, 174).

Third, there seems to be some question as to what the local synod promulgated. Bill says, “Cyprian presided over the Council and is therefore expressing the opinion of the Council as a whole.” This may be the case, but an opinion does not a formal decree make. First, this comment on ‘the Bishop of Bishops’ is not necessarily a decree of the council but an opinion made by St. Cyprian within the council. Of course, this may be construed to be the official statement, though this is not stated so. Actually, we do not have the decrees of this council and they are basically a collection of comments by various African bishops who attended the council, along with St. Cyprian’s opening and closing comments. *Denouncing Roman primacy is certainly not included as a promulgation of the council*. Why not? If Pope Stephen was a heretic, why not condemn and excommunicate him as part of the council’s deliberations and pronouncements? St. Cyprian provides a multitude of opinions expressed by bishops attending the council to show a consensus of opinion on the baptism of heretics (not on the primacy of Rome). Whereas Bill implies that the Council of

Carthage made a solemn decree that no bishop could be a bishop of bishops, this is not the case.

Bill says, “[Cyprian] speaks of this as a universal law in the Church as a whole.” Where does Cyprian say that? This is merely a projection of Bill’s own opinion (dare I say “wish”) into the opinion of Cyprian. Cyprian does not declare that his opinion is “a universal law of the Church”! Bill is the one that says that.

Bill says, “Thus, from the standpoint of his ecclesiology, no bishop can lawfully be called the Bishop of Bishops as Stephen was claiming for himself.” Again, where do we find in the record that Stephen “was claiming” this for himself. Bill assumes this but there is no evidence for it. Too much is being assumed here.

Bill quotes Eno, Winter and Jurgens to support his conclusion. He again misses all the pertinent information from Eno that harms his position. We have seen already how Bill quoted Eno and left the ellipses (. . .) out. Read the whole context of Eno and find he is no serious friend of Mr. Webster. The same goes for his citation from Winter. Such selective proof-texting impresses no one but the Protestants who want to join Bill’s cause. And I have already agreed with the statement he offers from Jurgens.

Bill says, “So in his use of the term ‘bishop of bishops’ Cyprian is making a direct reference to Stephen.” Again, this is an assumption. He cites Jurgens to support this assumption, but Jurgens only says that Cyprian “has Stephen in mind” and not that he is making a “direct reference to Stephen”. Such assumptions are not becoming. At best Cyprian is making an allusion to Stephen, but he is doing so by addressing the statement to himself and the African bishops: “None of us set himself up as a bishop of bishops.” The “us” directs the statement, and at best it is only alluding to Stephen. *But, I have already stated that in my original comments* (which Bill chose to leave out of his second response) so I don’t know what the big deal is. My original statement was: *“This statement of Cyprian does imply a rebuke indirectly directed at Pope Stephen,* but it is certainly not the outright denial of authoritative office that Bill implies and it certainly doesn’t meet the criterion I set in my book.”

Fourth, there seems to be a problem with the translation Bill used. Maybe he should have read it more carefully and checked the translation he used. Cyprian does not say, as the translation used by Bill implies, that “no one setteth himself up as a Bishop of Bishops” as though this is a final decree of the Council - no one like the Bishop of Rome has the authority to set himself up as a supreme bishop. I have four alternative translations in my library which provide the text of St. Cyprian. They all render the sentence differently, which is why I question Bill’s

use of the translation that he did use. I am not saying he had bad intent, I am simply stating that the translation he used is does not render the passage in harmony with the majority of translations; in fact, I haven't been able to find a translation that omits the word "us" as Bill's translation. Eerdman's edition of the Council of Carthage and St. Augustine's later quotation of the same passage (*On Baptism, Against the Donatists*) translated by the Rev. Robert Ernest Wallis, Ph.D., renders the passage "For no one of *us* sets himself up as a bishop of bishops" (ANF 5:565). Notice the little preposition "us". Who does the "us" refer to? The African bishops! Cyprian does not say "*no* one is Bishop of Bishops" but "none of *us* [African bishops] claim to be a bishop of bishops". This statement of Cyprian *does* imply a rebuke indirectly directed at Pope Stephen, but it does not force a reading of an outright denial of special prerogatives of the Petrine office that Bill implies, and it certainly doesn't meet the criterion I set in my book.

Bill subsequently critiqued my comments on Cyprian's "the bishop of bishops" but fails to tell his readers that *I agreed with him* that Stephen was the intended target of the barb. Why did Bill fail to mention that? Even Jurgens comments in *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, "In the context of the present question of opposition between Rome and Carthage, it is impossible to believe that in committing himself to the words of the present address, Cyprian did not have Stephen in mind" (1:241). I stated, in agreement with Bill that "This statement of Cyprian *does* imply a rebuke indirectly implicating Pope Stephen", but it is certainly not the outright denial of the special Petrine see that Bill implies. It certainly does not meet the negative criterion of the "challenge" in my book. There is a big difference between an outright denial - looking the opponent in the eye and saying, "You are not in an authoritative office", and saying sarcastically out of the side of one's mouth, "None of *us* claim to be the chief!" I hope the reader can see the difference. This is *all* I was saying in my book, and all I was saying in my comment on the "bishop of bishops." Bill ought to acknowledge there is a difference and we can agree that St. Cyprian was challenging Pope Stephen's decision and authority at this moment in his career, under the extreme political and doctrinal pressure challenging Stephen's correctness. Cyprian wanted to know "how could a heretic be in the seat of Peter?"

The second and alternative translation of this passage from Cyprian and the *Seventh Ecumenical Council of Carthage* is in William Jurgens' *Faith of the Early Fathers*. We find the same distinction here. Jurgens says this of the council "*The Seventh Council of Carthage*, of which Cyprian was president, met with eighty-seven bishops present (from the African church, and not from the East and West as stated by Bill), in the year 256 A.D. The subject of their meeting was now the hotly controverted question of the baptism of heretics. They refused to acquiesce to the demands of Pope St. Stephen, even in the face of his threats of excommunication. Emissaries were sent to Rome from the council, but Stephen

refused to give the audience” (Jurgens, 1:240). Interestingly enough, Cyprian and the African bishops sent emissaries to Rome and they were rebuffed for they represented a renegade council and the African church was threatened by Pope St. Stephen with excommunication. Do we find any dogmatic statement by the Africans that St. Stephen had not authority to excommunicate them any more than Irenaeus never denied the authority of Pope Victor had authority to excommunicate the Asian churches in the second century?

A third translation contained in E. Giles’ *Documents Illustrating Papal Authority: AD 96 - 454* again renders it against Webster’s wishes as “For no one of us sets himself up as a bishop of bishops.” Giles adds the comment: “Both Puller and Batiffol have read into these remarks of Cyprian the idea that the bishop of Rome had claimed to be ‘bishop of bishops’. But all that Cyprian actually says is that no African bishop claims such a position. If this is all he means, he seems to be underlining what he had previously written to Stephen and to Jubian, to the effect that he did not wish to impose his convictions on his colleagues” (pg. 72).

St. Augustine quotes Cyprian and the Council word for word. It is cited the same way as translated earlier by Wallis though this is translated by J. R. King. He translates it “For no one of us sets himself up as a bishop of bishops” (*On Baptism, Against the Donatists* in NPNF first series, 4:426). Interesting enough, earlier in the same book, St. Augustine sets the stage to show how Peter and Cyprian both worked to preserve the unity, while the Donatists brought about schism. St. Augustine writes of Peter and Cyprian, “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’. [The statement of Cyprian does not deny a primacy; rather, it *affirms* the primacy. It shows the great humility of Peter in that even though he had the great primacy, he was still humble when shown when and how he was wrong in his practice. Cyprian’s challenge was for Pope Stephen to have the same humility in his primacy that Peter had shown in his primacy.] 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 [in his see, as stated in the next sentence] is to be preferred to any episcopate whatever? But, granting the difference in the dignity of their sees, yet they have the same glory in their martyrdom” (NPNF first series, 4:425, 426).

My original comment was, “Notice the little preposition “us”. Who does the “us” refer to? The African bishops! Cyprian does not say “no one is Bishop of Bishops” but “none of us African bishops claim to be a bishop of bishops”. This is quite a different thing from the slanted implications drawn by Bill using a translation that suits his purpose. *This statement of Cyprian does imply a rebuke indirectly directed at Pope Stephen*, but it is certainly not the outright denial of authoritative office that Bill implies and it certainly doesn’t meet the criterion I set in my book.” So, I already agreed that the statement was indirectly aimed at Stephen. So . . .

Bill misinterprets the passage and draws conclusion too strong for the text to bear. I’m sorry, but I simply disagree and the text supports my conclusion.

Finally, just in the form of intelligent speculation, is it not possible that by saying, “no one of *us* sets himself up as a bishop of bishops,” Cyprian’s back-handed reference to Stephen may be directed toward Cyprian’s own, metropolitan authority, as opposed to that of the Pope. Basically, Pope Stephen had pronounced sentence on heretical Baptism, not only for his own see, but (as metropolitan of Italy) for all the other sees around him, as well as those of the entire Catholic Church. Yet, what Cyprian can be saying is that “no one among us here in Africa does this. Rather, we let our individual bishops decide on their own. We don’t force them. And, here am I, as the metropolitan of all African and Numidia, with power and authority over all the African sees, saying this. So, if I do not force the bishops under me to do things within their sees, why should anyone force us to do things from Rome?”

Bill has certainly done no damage to my claim in *Upon this Rock*. It should also be noted that even with all the bluster and resistance of the Cyprian and the African bishops, the position of Pope Stephen is very soon vindicated in Africa as the teaching of the Apostles and the whole Church and within a short time the African church dropped its insistence on re-baptizing heretics and quietly acquiesced and followed Rome and the whole Church. As the *Catholic Encyclopedia* comments on the situation, “St. Cyprian strove to press the African views on Rome, but Pope Stephen menaced excommunication. At the celebrated September Synod of 256 the eighty-seven bishops assembled from the three provinces still maintained their attitude against Baptism by heretics.... These records also show how the close relations between Africa and Rome were several times troubled during the course of five centuries. The baptismal controversy put the Church into a state of passive resistance to Rome. In the Synod of September, 256, St. Cyprian was placed in a painful dilemma. While maintaining the right of bishops to think for themselves, he still clung to the necessity of unity in the Church, and would not break the revered bond with Rome” (“African Synods” in

The Catholic Encyclopedia ed. Charles G. Herbermann [New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907], 1:200).

Did the whole Church eventually teach the Roman position on baptism? There seems to be some discussion as to the details and various aberrations in some areas. The issue in the East was slightly different than that of the West. In the East, heretical Baptism continued to be suspect because of the numerous anti-Trinitarian heresies which occurred there. If one was not Baptized into the Trinity, then one was not Baptized. We still hold this today. And, indeed, this seems to have been Firmilian's assumption.

Bill provides a quote and comment which I reproduce here: "There were three views in the ancient Church: first, that of the early African Church and of Asia Minor, in the time of Firmilian, which rejected all baptism out of the Church, schismatical as well as heretical; second, that of the Greek Church generally, stated fully by S. Basil, which accepted schismatical, but rejected heretical baptism; third, that first mentioned by Stephen, Bishop of Rome, who accepted all baptism, even of heretics, which had been given in the name of the Trinity. The second continues to be the rule of the Greek, the third (with some modifications) of the Latin, Church (*A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church* (Oxford: Parker, 1844), Volume 30, p. 281). Eastern fathers who reject heretical baptism include: Basil the Great, Athanasius, Epiphanius, and Cyril of Jerusalem. One can find an expression of Basil's view in Canons 1 and 47 of the Canons of Basil."

First, the only exception to the rule set down by Pope Stephen was in the case of Trinitarian heresies, baptisms that took place in the Trinitarian context. All these Fathers opposed the Baptismal formula of the Arians who denied that Jesus was God.

Second, so Firmilian represents all of Asia Minor for Bill Webster? Sorry, Bill. Firmilian was in little, back-water Caesarea in Cappadocia as we stated before. What about Ephesus? What about Smyrna? What about Laodicea? What about the other seven churches of Asia, to say nothing of the regions of Galatia, Bithynia, Pontus, Lycia, Cilicia, and other places? Caesarea only represents Cappadocia at best. Yet, as such, it would be the neighbor of Syria, where the great patriarchal see of Antioch presided. Thus, why isn't Cyprian allied with the Patriarch of Antioch? It's because Antioch agreed with Rome.

Third, since the eventual teaching regarding baptism is not the thrust of this whole discussion, but since it is brought up, I will provide a few more quotes without getting into depth with the primary documents. Athanasius by the way, rejected Arian baptism because he knew that they meant something completely

different than an Orthodox Christian when he said the words, “In the Name of the Father, and the [created] Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Philip Schaff writes, “In the course of the fourth century, however, the Roman theory gradually gained on the other, received the sanction of the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 [along with the defense of the deity of Christ], was adopted in North Africa during the Donatistic controversies, by a Synod of Carthage, 348, defended by the powerful dialectics of St. Augustine against the Donatists, and was afterwards confirmed by the Council of Trent with an anathema on the opposite view” (Schaff, Philip, *History of the Christian Church*, 2:264 - 265, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1997.

It is summed up nicely by Dom Chapman in *Studies in the Early Papacy*, “In the East there were others in the fourth century besides St. Basil who thought it might be well sometimes to rebaptize heretics; but such peculiarities were apparently only put in practice in rare cases. It was certainly not the custom anywhere to rebaptize Arians or Semi-Arians. From the fifth century onwards the East is absolutely in line with the West, and St. Basil’s theoretical opinion remains a dead letter. All St. Cyprian’s torrents of argument, eloquence, invective against the teaching of Rome were in vain” (pg. 50).

And finally, from Stanley Jaki, “No turning of Peter’s keys ever was so momentous in the history of the Church. *It made possible in the long run that ecumenical movement which today rightly recognizes the overriding importance of the validity of baptism in all Christian denominations.* The savior of the future Church was Stephen because already the whole past was with the see he held. In analyzing the situation of the Church as it existed two generations before Stephen, Harnack and other leading Protestant historians of Christian dogma and church constitution plainly acknowledged, as was already noted, the Catholic, or Roman, character of Christianity already in its early stage. *As to the present, or Stephen’s days, the most telling judgment on the overriding importance of his see was passed by none other than Emperor Decius. That most resolute enemy of Christians “would have preferred to hear that a rival claim to his empire had been elected in Rome than that a bishop had been elected there.” We owe this report on Decius to none other than Cyprian.* Clearly he had no excuse. Nor do those who ascribe the ascendancy of the bishop of Rome either to imperial favor, or to the power vacuum created by the fall of the empire. Constantine was half a century away, and the fall of imperial Rome one and a half centuries still in the future” (*The Keys of the Kingdom*, 72 - 73, emphasis mine).

For a very comprehensive summary of the re-baptism issue and its rejection in the whole Church, the short-term exceptions, and the final results, read *History of Dogmas* (M. Tixeront [St. Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1930], 1:366ff.).

It is obvious from these comments that these bishops reject the notion that one particular bishop holds a position of authority over other bishops as head of the Church universal. No single bishop can legitimately claim to be 'Bishop of Bishops' as they put it.

“These incidents throw light on the growing recognition, in the middle of the 3rd cent., of the pre-eminent position of Rome, as a court of appeal at any rate for Gaul and Spain, and as the see with which other sees deemed it appropriate to be in communion. Stephen emerges as an imperious and uncompromising prelate, fully aware of his special prerogative; his rival bishops did not hesitate to put the blame for splitting the church on him. It is interesting that he was accused of ‘glorying in his standing as bishop and of claiming to hold the succession from Peter, on whom the foundations of the church were laid’. He was in fact the first pope, so far as is known, to find a formal basis for the Roman primacy in the Lord’s charge to the Apostle Peter cited in Matt. 16:18” (J. N. D. Kelly, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Popes*, Oxford Paperbacks, 21).” *He is not the first to assume the authority, but the first recorded to utilize the Matthean text as a biblical basis. The authority had been exercised since the first century. This primacy of Rome based on Matthew 16 was exercised over a hundred years before the final collection of the New Testament canon!*

I cite below the excellent explanation of St. Cyprian’s view of the Church and her government provided by Mark Bonocore. I think it may clear up a lot of confusion and makes sense of all St. Cyprian’s seeming “contradictions” about the chair and see of Peter.

“As I Catholic, I can clearly say that the Archbishop of my city holds the “Chair of Peter” in this city. Furthermore, the archbishop of another city holds the ‘Chair of Peter’” in *that* city. Yet, only Rome holds the Chair of Peter of the *principal church*: the Chair of *Sacerdotal Unity*. This is the ecclesiology of Cyprian.

“I do not see Cyprian calling all bishops the ‘successors of Peter’ anywhere. Rather, Cyprian refers to the principal of a monarchical bishop. Nowhere does Cyprian refer to the Petrine ministry of universal unity. He is clearly speaking in a regional sense. However, when he does speak of the Roman Bishop, it’s only then that he uses expressions like: “[Pope] Cornelius . . . when the place of [Pope] Fabian, which is the place of Peter, the dignity of the Sacerdotal Chair, was vacant, Since it has been occupied both at the will of God and with the ratified consent of all of us...” (Letters 48 [A.D. 253]).”

“In the same epistle, he also tells Pope Cornelius: “We decided to send and are sending a letter to you from all throughout the province [of Africa] so that all our colleagues might give their decided approval and support to you

and to your communion, that is, to both the unity and the charity of the Catholic Church” (Letters 48:1, 3 [A.D. 253]).

“This is clearly a recognition of a universal ministry of unity. It was Cornelius who specifically held “the place of Peter” - not for the local or regional Church (where Cyprian or another bishop held primacy), but for the entire (universal), Catholic Church. As Cyprian puts it: “Indeed, the others were what Peter also was; but a *primacy* is given to Peter, whereby it is made clear that there is but one Church and *one chair*.”

“By this “one Chair,” Cyprian is referring to the teaching authority of the Church. And, his ecclesiology works like this:

First, on the **local** level, the “one Chair” is held by the local bishop.

Second, on the **regional** level, the “one Chair” is held by the regional bishop (or metropolitan ...which was Cyprian’s office as Bishop of Carthage: Metropolitan of all Africa and Numidia).

Third, on the **universal** level, the “one Chair” was held by Peter’s actual successor at Rome. This was the “*principal church*,” in which “*sacerdotal unity*” has its source. This was the “*womb and root of the catholic church*,” and the Bishop of Rome held the “*place of Peter*.” He held the “one Chair” in the universal sphere, for communion with him was “*communion with the catholic church*.”

“That’s what Cyprian is saying! So, I don’t know what could be more clear. And, indeed, Cyprian bases his ecclesiology on the Jewish Tradition of the “Chair of Moses” (Matt 23:1-3). In the Jewish understanding, the “Chair of Moses” was the teaching authority of the synagogue; and:

First, on the **local** level, the “Chair of Moses” was held by the principal rabbi of a particular city’s synagogue (e.g. Corinth or Rome).

Second, on the **regional** level, the “Chair of Moses” was held by the principal rabbi of a particular region (e.g. Rabbi Akiba at Jamnia).

Third, but, on the **universal** level, the “Chair of Moses” was *actually* held by the High Priest in Jerusalem. This is clear from John 11:49-52 and from Acts 23:2-5, where Paul backs down because the law defined the High Priest as “the *ruler* of thy people.” See also Acts 28:17-21, where those who held the “Chair of Moses” in Rome (i.e., the “leaders of the Jews”): speak about receiving authoritative instruction from Jerusalem (i.e., from the *actual* and *universal* “Chair of Moses,” the High Priest).

“For the Jews of the Diaspora, one could not be said to be part of Israel if he rejected the rightful authority of Jerusalem. Such a position would make oneself a Samaritan.

“Indeed, the Jewish historian Josephus says how the Hellenistic Jews before the fall of the theocracy in Palestine looked reverently toward Jerusalem and favored religious currents coming from it: “Doubts were referred there for solution” (Josephus, *Contra Apion* 1.30-36). We also know that the Jews of the Dispersion turned to Jerusalem for their Scriptures (2 Mc 2.13-15) and for its translation [Est 11.1 (Vulg.); 10.31 (LXX)]. Such were appeals to the ultimate “chair of Moses” (Matt 23:1-3), the High Priest and the Sanhedrin itself.

“Cyprian is writing in a Catholic sense. For the Catholic Church, every bishop holds the “chair of Peter” - *in his own city*, that is. And that’s what Cyprian is saying. Yet, when universal matters are to be decided, it is the Bishop of Rome who holds the actual Chair: The Chair of “Sacredotal Unity.” So, one cannot “pick and choose” when it comes to Cyprian.”

This is further illustrated by Firmilian, the leading bishop of Cappadocia, who completely supported Cyprian in his opposition to Stephen.

Remember, opposition is not equal to denial of authority. My son may oppose me, but saying I am not his father and have no fatherly prerogatives is quite another thing. He may in a “heat of battle” say such a thing when blinded by rage, but to actually sit down and formulate it is another thing. That is what my point was in my book. I hope it is all becoming clear.

In a personal letter to Cyprian he expressed his own personal opposition to Stephen by stating that Stephen had fallen into error and adopted a false ecclesiology by misinterpreting Matthew 16. He gives his point of view in the following words:

But how great his error, how exceeding his blindness, who says, that remission of sins can be given in the synagogues of heretics, and abideth not on the foundation of the one Church which was once fixed by Christ on a rock, may be hence learnt, that Christ said to Peter alone, Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven: and again in the Gospel, when Christ breathed on the Apostles only, saying, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained. The power then of remitting sins was given to the Apostles, and the Churches which they, sent by Christ, established, and to the Bishops who succeeded them by vicarious ordination.

And herein I am justly indignant at such open and manifest folly in Stephen, that he who boasts of the seat of his episcopate, and contends that he holds the succession from Peter, on whom the foundations of the Church were laid, introduces many other rocks, and buildeth anew many Churches, in that by his authority he maintains baptism among them...Nor does he perceive that he who thus betrays and abandons unity, casts into the shade, and in a manner effaces, the truth of the Christian Rock...Stephen, who proclaims that he

occupies by succession the chair of Peter, is roused by no zeal against heretics...He who concedes and assigns to heretics such great and heavenly privileges of the Church, what else does he than hold communion with them, for whom he maintains and claims so much grace?...But as to the refutation of the argument from custom, which they seem to oppose to the truth, who so foolish as to prefer custom to truth, or not to leave darkness, when he sees light?...And this you of Africa may say in answer to Stephen, that on discovering the truth you abandoned the error of custom. But we join custom to truth, and to the custom of the Romans we oppose custom, but that of truth; from the beginning holding that which was delivered by Christ and by His Apostles (A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church (Oxford: Parker, 1844), The Epistles of St. Cyprian, Epistle LXXV. 17, 18, 20, pp. 279-281).

I have dealt with Firmilian at some length in my book and don't want to spend a lot of time on it here. His exclamations have very little to do with a challenge to my book and the rhetorical statement I have made. Let's finish Bill's comments and then make a few of our own.

Firmilian expresses a view of the overall government of the Church which is directly opposed to that of Vatican I. He states that the keys were given to Peter alone as a representative of the Church universal, but were subsequently given to all the Apostles who then passed them on to every legitimate succeeding bishop. In the mind of Firmilian, all bishops are on an equal footing. He mocks Stephen's claim of superiority to other bishops based on his possessing a unique Petrine succession. According to Firmilian all bishops possess the chair of Peter and are built upon the rock. This is not the exclusive and unique possession of the bishops of Rome. And if, as Firmilian claims Stephen did, they depart from the unity of the Church which is expressed in the collegiality of its bishops, they separate themselves from the rock and foundation of the Church. Because Stephen, in Firmilian's view, had departed from Apostolic truth, he was no longer in unity with Apostolic succession and the rock foundation of the Church. The Roman see itself was not inherently authoritative simply because it could claim a Petrine foundation and succession. This did not impress the Eastern bishops. The important thing to them, and to Cyprian as well, was conformity to Apostolic truth. Where Roman custom opposed what they considered to be truth, they felt obliged to oppose the bishop of Rome. These bishops did not submit to the bishop of Rome and Cyprian died out of communion with him.

We will look closely at the above paragraph in sections. First, let's discuss Firmilian and his opposition to the Pope. Schaff explains the motives and reasons behind Firmilian's harsh invectives.

Philip Schaff writes, "Still more sharp and unsparing was the Cappadocian bishop, Firmilian, a disciple of Origen, on the bishop of Rome, *while likewise implying a certain acknowledgment of his primacy*. Firmilian charges him with folly, and with acting unworthily of his position; because, as the successor of Peter, he ought rather to further the unity of the church than to destroy it, and

ought to abide on the rock foundation instead of laying a new one by recognizing heretical baptism. *Perhaps the bitterness of Firmilian was due partly to his friendship and veneration for Origen, who had been condemned by a council at Rome*” (Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 2:162, emphasis is mine). We discussed this excommunication of Origen and its possible effect on his interpretation of the Matthew 16 passage.

Firmilian does nothing to discredit the primacy of the seat of Peter in Rome; in fact, he only confirms the authority of the Pope. This was exactly my point in my book and Michael Winter makes my point quite ably. Bill would like to turn the invectives of Firmilian into proof that the Fathers rejected the authority of Rome to excommunicate, lead, and hold the primacy. Since Bill has earlier stated that Winter is an “*honest* historian” (with which I agree), let’s hear what Winter has to say:

“Firmilian’s protest amounts almost to the classical conditions for the argument from silence. *Despite his anger there is no formal denial of Stephen’s competence to excommunicate other bishops*. Everything would seem to provoke such a denial if it had been possible. Instead he can say no more than that when Stephen has excommunicated everyone he will have severed himself from the whole of the church. By contrast there is no suggestion that Cyprian or Firmilian attempted to excommunicate Stephen. The persecution of Valerian put an end to this stage of the dispute, since both Stephen and Cyprian were martyred. At a later date the whole church, characteristically, followed the Roman tradition (*St. Peter and the Popes*, 151). (Geez, I wish I had added this quote to my book, eh? Oh well, guess I couldn’t put everything in it!)

This is exactly what I said in the *Introduction* to my book which stirred up such a reaction from Bill, but here we have it, in Bill’s words, from an “*honest Roman Catholic historian*” - . “No one denied that the Pope had the authority!”

Webster also says St. Cyprian died out of communion with Pope Stephen. If he were out of communion it would mean he had been excommunicated or had left the Church. Neither is the case. St. Augustine uses the fact that St. Cyprian maintained communion with the whole Church including Rome as his main argument against the Donatists (*On Baptism, Against the Donatists*) who actually *did* break communion. What Bill may fail to realize is that St. Stephen died a year “before” St. Cyprian, and St. Cyprian died in good relations with Pope Stephen’s successor St. Sixtus II (See Hamell, Patrick. J., *Handbook of Patrology* [New York: Alba House, 1968], 74). Warren Carroll writes, “Despite this important disagreement and Cyprian’s actual disobedience, he was never excommunicated, and remained in close contact with Rome” (*The Founding of Christendom* [Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press, 1985], pg. 495. Was St. Cyprian canonized a saint

because he was out of communion with Rome? Come on Bill, you know better than that.

(Note: In a subsequent correspondence Bill stated “Sorry Steve, I did not state this correctly. What I meant to say is the Cyprian was never reconciled to Stephen and he continued his opposition to the Roman practice even after Stephen died.” Bill then provided supporting evidence to prove that Cyprian was never in agreement, to the best of our knowledge, with the practice of Rome regarding re-baptism. I agree with Bill about the failure to reconcile differences between Cyprian and Rome. Bill then went on to say, “When I refer to Cyprian being out of communion with Rome I do not mean that he became a schismatic but that the issue was never resolved and he remained steadfast in his opposition to Rome on that point.”) I understand now what Bill tried to say and appreciate the clarification; but on the other hand, the word *communion* is a very specific term and not appropriate in this context. Bill expects others to be very precise. We expect the same from him.

The word “communion” cannot be used loosely in theological or historical matters involving the Church. Maybe it’s my “profound ignorance of church history”, but I understand communion to be much more specific. In theology and ecclesiology, *communion* means common life together. The word “excommunication” is the opposite, *removal* from the common life of the Church. One can be in communion yet in stark disagreement or even disobedience. To be “out of communion” is to have been excommunicated, which Cyprian was not, or to leave the bounds of communion in the Church, as a schismatic, which Cyprian never did. Therefore to use the phrase “out of communion” is imprecise language and should be avoided.

What does St. Augustine say about Cyprian regarding his error? “The statement that Cyprian entertained opinions at variance with those approved by the constitution and practice of the Church is found, not in canonical Scripture, but in his own writings, and in those of a Council; and although it is not found in the same records that he corrected that opinion, it is nevertheless by no means an unreasonable supposition that he did correct it, and that this fact may perhaps have been suppressed by those who were too much pleased with the error into which he fell, and were unwilling to lose the patronage of so great a name” (Epistle XCIII in Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, James, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series: Volume I*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1997.

They clearly did not view the Roman bishop as the universal ruler of the Church, nor communion with him a necessary condition for membership in the Church universal.

Cyprian could say, 'He who does not have the Church for his mother does not have God for his father,' but in so stating he did not mean submission to and communion with the bishop of Rome. Karl Morrison sums up the controversy between Stephen and Cyprian and the Eastern bishops [*Editor's note: Again, we are not dealing with Eastern bishops here and Bill may want to correct this on page 206 of his book The Matthew 16 Controversy*] in these words:

Stephen had condemned Cyprian as 'false Christ, false apostle, and practicer of deceit,' because he advocated re-baptism; and the Bishop of Carthage reciprocated in kind. Since the headship which Stephen claimed was unwarranted, by the example of St. Peter, he could not force his brethren to accept his views. Even worse, his judgment opposed the authentic tradition of the Church. The bishop of Rome, wrote Cyprian, had confounded human tradition and divine precepts; he insisted on a practice which was mere custom, and 'custom without truth is the antiquity of error.' Whence came the 'tradition' on which Stephen insisted? Cyprian answered that it came from human presumption. Subverting the Church from within, Stephen wished the Church to follow the practices of heretics by accepting their baptisms, and to hold that those who were not born in the Church could be sons of God. And finally, Cyprian urged that bishops (Stephen was meant) lay aside the love of presumption and obstinacy which had led them to prefer custom to tradition and, abandoning their evil and false arguments, return to the divine precepts, to evangelical and apostolic tradition, whence arose their order and their very origin.

In a letter to Cyprian, Firmilian endorsed everything the bishop of Carthage had said and added a few strokes of his own...Recalling the earlier dispute about the date of Easter, he upheld the practice of Asia Minor by commenting that, in the celebration of Easter and in many other matters, the Romans did not observe the practices established in the age of the Apostles, though they vainly claimed apostolic authority for their aberrant forms. The decree of Stephen was the most recent instance of such audacity, an instance so grave that Firmilian ranked Stephen among heretics and blasphemers and compared his doctrines and discipline with the perfidy of Judas. The Apostles did not command as Stephen commanded, Firmilian wrote, nor did Christ establish the primacy which he claimed...To the Roman custom, Firmilian, like Cyprian, opposed the custom of truth, 'holding from the beginning that which was delivered by Christ and the Apostles.' And, Firmilian argued, by his violence and obstinacy, Stephen had apostacized from the communion of ecclesiastical unity; far from cutting heretics off from his communion, he had cut himself off from the orthodox and made himself 'a stranger in all respects from his brethren, rebelling against the sacrament and the faith with the madness of contumacious discord. With such a man can there be one Spirit and one Body, in whom perhaps there is not even one mind, slippery, shifting, and uncertain as it is?' (Karl Morrison, *Tradition and Authority in the Western Church* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969), pp. 31-32).

These facts are certainly no endorsement of the views promulgated by the First Vatican Council. The writings and practice of Cyprian reveal that he held an opinion directly opposing that of Vatican One on papal supremacy.

We have answered this charge repeatedly and I have no intention of repeating it again here. Bill's "rebuttal" is seriously running out of gas as we come down to the final paragraphs. I have to say that if this is the worst that can be thrown at my book *Upon this Rock* and the Catholic Church's teaching on the Papal Primacy, Catholics can certainly live proud and sleep easy.

William Jurgens affirms this in the following summation of Cyprian's practice which reflected his theory of ecclesiology:

Although Cyprian was on excellent terms with Pope St. Cornelius...he fell out sharply with Cornelius' successor, Pope St. Stephen...on the question of the rebaptizing of converted heretics. It was the immemorial custom of the African Church to regard Baptism conferred by heretics as invalid, and in spite of Stephen's severe warnings, Cyprian never yielded. His attitude was simply that every bishop is responsible for his own actions, answerable to God alone (William Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1970), Volume I, p. 216-217) (*The Matthew 16 Controversy: Peter and the Rock* (Battle Ground: Christian Resources, 1966), pp. 196-199).

Stephen Ray says, 'If the authority exercised had been illegitimate, or wrongly arrogated, it would have been an act of overzealousness at one end of the spectrum, of tyranny at the other. Yet no one ever stood up and said, "No, you have no authority. Who are you to order us, to teach us, to require obedience from us, to excommunicate us?" If the jurisdictional primacy of Rome had been a matter of self-aggrandizement, someone would have opposed it as they opposed other innovations and heresies in the Church. The silence is profound' (*Upon This Rock* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1999), p. 13).

Again, since Firmilian was the most vocal and acerbic witness against Pope Stephen, let's read again the words of our "honest" church historian. "Firmilian's protest amounts almost to the classical conditions for the argument from silence. *Despite his anger there is no formal denial of Stephen's competence to excommunicate other bishops.* Everything would seem to provoke such a denial if it had been possible. Instead he can say no more than that when Stephen has excommunicated everyone he will have severed himself from the whole of the church. By contrast there is no suggestion that Cyprian or Firmilian attempted to excommunicate Stephen. The persecution of Valerian put an end to this stage of the dispute, since both Stephen and Cyprian were martyred. At a later date the whole church, characteristically, followed the Roman tradition (*St. Peter and the Popes*, 151).

Again, Cyprian, Firmilian, and all the others who opposed papal authority throughout the centuries still did not deny their special prerogatives. As we've said before (this gets old after 170 pages) my son can resist and even disobey me, but that is quite a different thing from saying I am not his father and have no fatherly prerogatives.

The foregoing facts give the lie to these assertions. It is not the silence but the clear expression of outrage and opposition that is profound. The Council of Carthage explicitly denies the right of any bishop to call himself the Bishop of Bishops and to demand obedience to his demands. William Jurgens is a Roman Catholic patristic scholar quoted over and over again by Stephen Ray. He repudiates the the above assertions of Mr. Ray when he says that 'in spite of Stephen's severe warnings, Cyprian never yielded. His attitude was simply that every bishop is responsible for his own actions, answerable to God alone' (William Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1970), Volume I, p. 217).

This is just one example of many that could be cited. Others would be the opposition of the Eastern Churches to Victor, the bishop of Rome, in the second century; the opposition of Augustine and the North Africans to Zosimus in the fifth century; the excommunication of Vigilius by the North African bishops in the sixth; the repudiation of the primacy claims of Rome by the Second (I Constantinople) and the Fourth (Chalcedon) ecumenical councils; the official condemnation of Honorius as a heretic by the Sixth (III Constantinople) ecumenical council. And all of these culminating of course in the final and continuing repudiation by the Eastern Churches of the primacy claims of Rome with the split between the East and West in the eleventh century. But since Mr. Ray states that there is not one single example in all the history of the early Church this one example will suffice.

We have already discussed this at great length Bill, and we agree on the obstinacy of St. Cyprian, Firmilian, and many others throughout history¹. But you have still not produced one orthodox Father who denied the special prerogatives of Rome. The obstinacy of some does not equal a denial that the authority exists, but we have gone over this *ad nauseum*. Firmilian and his like do nothing to disprove or invalidate my assertions, nor to they invalidate Vatican I. It should be remembered that the men at Vatican I were no dummies. They understood history and the details of the Fathers. They were scholars who spent their lives studying and living the teachings of the Ancient Church and the Fathers. They knew what they were doing as the Church always does. I for one, cast my lots with them, *not* with the tens of thousands of vagabond sects circling the visible Church in visible disunion (a scandal!), howling and taunting the historical Church, challenging her every word and defining themselves over and over again as Protest-ants, not only against the Catholic Church of St. Peter, St. Clement, St. Cyprian, St. Augustine, and St. Jerome, but against *each other* as well.

No source of unity, then no unity! No leader, then no cohesion! No infallible teaching, then a hundred thousand contradictory teachers (remember what Martin Luther said)! No primacy, then everyone is supreme! No kingdom of God, then degeneration into a "democracy of God" where truth is relative - a travesty of the Gospel.

I am a Catholic Christian, blessed be the Name of the Lord! I stand in the line of the apostles, the martyrs the popes, the Fathers, the Councils and the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

This is the Church of which Martin Luther said, “I never approved of a schism, nor will I approve of it for all eternity, . . . That the Roman Church is more honored by God than all others is not to be doubted. Saint Peter, Saint Paul, forty-six popes, many hundreds of thousands of martyrs, have shed their blood in its bosom, and have overcome hell and the world, so that God’s eye regards it with especial favor. Though nowadays everything is in a wretched state, it is no ground for separating from the Church. On the contrary, the worse things are going, the more should we hold close to her, for it is not by separating from the Church that we can make her better. We must not desert God on account of the devil; or abandon the children of God who are still in the Roman communion, because of the multitude of the ungodly. There is no sin, no amount of evil, which should be permitted to dissolve the bond of charity or break the bond of unity of the body” (Martin Luther, writing to Pope Leo X, January 6, 1519, more than a year after the Ninety-Five Theses. Quoted by Protestant J. H. Merle d’Aubigné in *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*”, pg. 160, and in *The Facts about Luther*, pg. 356).

Concerning the confusion already in Luther’s time he wrote, “There are almost as many sects and beliefs as there are heads; this one will not admit Baptism; that one rejects the Sacrament of the altar; another places another world between the present one and the day of judgment; some teach that Jesus Christ is not God. There is not an individual, however clownish he may be, who does not claim to be inspired by the Holy Ghost, and who does not put forth as prophecies his ravings and dreams” (*Crossing the Tiber*, pg. 45).

Concerning this travesty, the dissolution of doctrine and the Protestant sects, Luter concluded, “If the world last long it will be again necessary, on account of the different interpretations of Scripture which now exist, that to preserve the unity of the faith we should receive the Councils and decrees and fly to them for refuge” (*Contra. Zwingli et. Ecol.* See *The Catholic Controversy* by St. Francis de Sales, pg. 155) (*Crossing the Tiber*, pg. 45).

Bill is a Reformed Baptist. How many Baptist factions are there? Well there is the American Baptist Assoc., American Baptist Churches in the USA, Baptist Bible Fellowship, Baptist General Conference, Baptist Missionary Assoc. of America, Bethel Ministerial Assoc., Black Baptist, Central Baptist Assoc., Conservative (oops, already mentioned that one), Two competing Duck River Assoc. of Baptists, Free Will Baptist, General Assoc. of Regular Baptist Churches (the “regular” *really* sets them apart), General Baptist (who claim to be the *true*

followers of John Smyth), General Conference of the Evangelical Baptist Church., Inc. (formerly known as the Church of the Full Gospel, Inc., and now they're just evangelical), Landmark Baptist, National Baptist Evangelical Life and Soul Saving Assembly of the USA (their only doctrine is "Bible doctrine as announced by the Founder of the Church, Jesus Christ"), National Primitive Baptist, North American Baptist (announcing their non-universal quality), Primitive Baptist, Reformed Baptist (Bill Webster and James White settled here), Separate Baptist (they reject all creeds, however they have an annual statement of belief and refuse to be called Protestants), Seventh Day Baptist, Southern Baptist, the Two-Seed group, United Baptist, and United Free Will Baptist, not to mention the tens of thousands that are too small to categorize or don't want to be categorized. Now, should we list all the non-Baptist sects?

Reading through Bill's material and that of his compatriots in the Protestant apologetics movement, I certainly concur with Martin Luther. He would be dismayed and grief stricken at the condition of Christendom today, especially knowing his name is waved as a banner above the chaotic processions marching in their own little factions, each claiming to have the Holy Spirit and the truth theology. Lord, grant unity to your Church and thank you profoundly for leading myself and thousands upon thousands in the last few years into the grandeur of you holy Mother Church. We are certainly and deeply grateful!

[These are only a few of the many misrepresentations that are evident in Mr. Ray's book, *Upon This Rock*. He has consistently misrepresented my statements and those of the Church Fathers. If there is anyone guilty of proof-texting and of promoting an agenda it is Mr. Ray.](#)

I think my response demonstrates quite clearly who is really guilty of misrepresentation, and that over and over again. But, I will leave the final evaluation up to the honest (and obviously tenacious reader). Having spent this amount of time answering the questions, clearing up the confusion, and defending my book, I have no hard feelings toward Bill. I have enjoyed this exercise immensely and intend to respond to any other critics depending on my available time. I find Bill to be a bright man, passionate in his belief, and an able debater. I also love him as a brother in our Lord Jesus and hope to spend eternity with him in the glory of the celestial city which has no light but the glory of our Lord. We will conclude our discussion and controversy there, in the light of the True Word, the Son of the Father.

I was asked, "After reading and responding to Bill's "rebuttal", what do you think about your book now?" I would have to say that I was proud of *Upon this Rock* and its content when I finished writing it, and after seeing it published, but after "defending my dissertation", I am more pleased and proud of it than ever. I wouldn't change anything, but if I had the ability to revise it I would add a few

more supporting documents, but other than that I would change nothing. However, I hope Bill takes the time to read the whole book, if he hasn't so far, and consider the fuller arguments. In addition, I hope that Bill will fix the many problems with his own book (missing ellipses, misinterpretation of St. Ambrose, Eastern bishops at the Council of Carthage, etc.) so as not to mislead his readers or appear unprofessional.

As I conclude my response, I find myself saying about Bill Webster what Dom Chapman said about Prof. Koch with whom he debated (specifically about St. Cyprian). Chapman said, "Professor Koch, is a very good-natured controversialist; he is accurate and never does willful violence to the texts he interprets, though I cannot always think he has got hold of the right interpretation. Still I often agree with him. His fault is his attempt to systematize what is unsystematic. He has studied the ultimate results of a few expressions, and uses them as a norm, explaining away whatever is out of harmony with them. In much the same way some Catholic controversialists have been so impressed by a few texts of Cyprian about Rome that they have understood other passages without sufficient warrant in a similar sense, and have glossed over some difficulties. This is equally mistaken in method, but it is at least kinder to the Saint" (*Studies on the Early Papacy*, 47).

Bill Webster and the Sovereignty of God

Finally, Bill is, as I understand, a Reformed Baptist, which means he has a great appreciation for the sovereignty of God. As such, I would expect that he would trust God to bring about His will for His Church; that God would superintend and cause His Church to move in the right direction, teaching the correct things, not allowing the gates of hell to prevail against her. Such, I would think, would be the act of God in His sovereignty. I am sometimes surprised by those who claim God is so sovereign and yet He is somehow unable to superintend the Church through history to be infallible and under His control. God can superintend fallible men to produce inspired writings but is unable to fallible men to provide an infallible interpretation so His people can be sure of the truth for their age. God seems to falter in His sovereignty and loses control of the Church in the first centuries and as soon as He regains “the truth” in the Reformation, He again loses His grip on things as 30,000 denominations and sects spin out of control. Where is His sovereign control in this scenario?

In this regard I quote at length from Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (*Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991], 73-74), “But the New Testament shows us more than the formal aspect of a structure; it also reveals to us the inward nature of this structure. It does not merely furnish proof texts, it is a permanent criterion and task. It depicts the tension between *skandalon* and rock; *in the very disproportion between man’s capacity and God’s sovereign disposition, it reveals God to be the one who truly acts and is present. If in the course of history the attribution of such authority to men could repeatedly engender the not entirely unfounded suspicion of human arrogation of power, not only the promise of the New Testament but also the trajectory of that history itself prove the opposite. The men in question are so glaringly, so blatantly unequal to this function that the very empowerment of man to be the rock makes evident how little it is they who sustain the Church but God alone who does so, who does so more in spite of men than through them.* The mystery of the Cross is perhaps nowhere so palpably present as in the primacy as a reality of Church history. That its center is forgiveness is both its intrinsic condition and the sign of the distinctive character of God’s power. Every single biblical logion [word] about the primacy thus remains from generation to generation a signpost and a norm, to which we must ceaselessly resubmit ourselves. *When the Church adheres to these words in faith, she is not being triumphalistic but humbly recognizing in wonder and thanksgiving the victory of God over and through human weakness. Whoever deprives these words of their force for fear of triumphalism or of human usurpation of authority does not proclaim that God is greater but diminishes him, since God demonstrates the power of his love, and thus remains faithful to the law of the history of salvation, precisely in the paradox of human impotence.* For with the same realism with which we declare today the sins of the popes and their disproportion to the magnitude of their commission, *we must also acknowledge*

that Peter has repeatedly stood as the rock against ideologies, against the dissolution of the word into the plausibilities of a given time, against subjection to the powers of this world.

“When we see this in the facts of history, we are not celebrating men but praising the Lord, who does not abandon the Church and who desired to manifest that he is the rock through Peter, the little stumbling stone: “flesh and blood” do not save, but the Lord saves through those who are of flesh and blood. *To deny this truth is not a plus of faith, not a plus of humility, but is to shrink from the humility that recognizes God as he is.* Therefore the Petrine promise and its historical embodiment in Rome remain at the deepest level an ever-renewed motive for joy: the powers of hell will not prevail against it ... (emphasis mine).

I hope Bill comes home to the faith of his fathers, not only in the Church but in his immediate family as well. I hope he joins us again in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. I have enjoyed this discussion with Bill and apologize for its length. I hope no ill-will is taken, as none is intended. I used some humor, satire, and respectful jousting all in the name of a good debate. As I said in the beginning, I hope to meet Bill in person someday and share a cup of coffee. He may call me Steve, and I plan to call him Bill. I somehow feel like I already know him a bit. May God bless us all and build the Kingdom in the visible unity of our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.