

St. Peter and the Three Stages of the Spiritual Life

The Three Stages of the Spiritual Life

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St. Peter and the Three Stages of the Spiritual Life

1. Reginald Garrigou Lagrange. *The Three Conversions of the Spiritual Life*. TAN Books, 2002.
2. St. Catherine of Siena. *The Dialogue*. TAN Books, 2010.

1. The Purgative Way (Spiritual Childhood)

Simon First Encounters Jesus

One of the two who heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon, and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). *He brought him to Jesus*. Jesus looked at him, and said, "So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter). (John 1:40-42)

The Repentance and Call of Simon

While the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennes'aret. And he saw two boats by the lake; but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had ceased speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." And Simon answered, "*Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.*" And when they had done this, they enclosed a great shoal of fish; and as their nets were breaking, they beckoned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*" For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the catch of fish which they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zeb'edee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; henceforth you will be catching men." *And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.* (Luke 5:1-11)

The Spiritual Misunderstanding of Peter

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. *And Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you."* But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men." Then Jesus told his disciples, "*If any man would*

come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 16:21-25)

The Spiritual Consolations of Peter

[Jesus] took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his countenance was altered, and his raiment became dazzling white. And behold, two men talked with him, Moses and Eli'jah... *Now Peter and those who were with him were heavy with sleep, and when they wakened they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Eli'jah" -- not knowing what he said... (Luke 9:28-36)*

The Spiritual Pride of Peter

And Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." *Peter said to him, "Even though they all fall away, I will not."* And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I say to you, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." But he said vehemently, *"If I must die with you, I will not deny you."* And they all said the same. (Mark 14:26-31)

The Spiritual Weakness of Peter

And they went to a place which was called Gethsem'ane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here, while I pray." And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch." And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him... *And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak..."* "And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer him. And he came the third time, and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come; the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand." (Mark 14:32-42)

The Spiritual Failure of Peter

While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them... And when those who were about him saw what would follow, they said, *"Lord, shall we strike with the sword?"* And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said, "No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him... Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. *Peter followed at a distance; and when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them.* Then a maid, seeing him as he sat in the light and gazing at him, said, "This man also was with him." But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." And a little later some one else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, "Certainly this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are

saying." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. *And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.* (Luke 22:47-62)

2. The Illuminative Way (Spiritual Adolescence)

The Second Conversion of Peter

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you (Gk "you all") that he might sift you like wheat, *but I have prayed for you* (Gk "you" singular) *that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren.*" (Luke 22:31-32)

The Threefold Restoration of Peter

After this Jesus revealed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tibe'ri-as; and he revealed himself in this way. Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathan'a-el of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zeb'edee, and two others of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat; but that night they caught nothing. Just as day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus.

Jesus said to them, "Children, have you any fish?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in, for the quantity of fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on his clothes, for he was stripped for work, and sprang into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, but about a hundred yards off. When they got out on land, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish lying on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and although there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord.

Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me (Gk *agapao*) more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you (Gk *phileo*)." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me (*agapao*)?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you (*phileo*)." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me (*phileo*)?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me (*phileo*)?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you (*phileo*)." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." (John 21:1-17)

Peter between the Resurrection and Ascension

To them [the apostles Jesus] presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, *appearing to them during forty days, and speaking of the kingdom of God... And when he had said this, as*

they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight... Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet... they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew... All these with one accord devoted themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. (Acts 1:3, 6-14)

3. The Unitive Way (Spiritual Adulthood)

Pentecost and the Spiritual Fatherhood of Peter

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. *And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance... But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh... And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'... Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him..." So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:14-42)*

The Spiritual Wonders of Peter

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at that gate of the temple which is called Beautiful to ask alms of those who entered the temple. Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked for alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, with John, and said, "Look at us." And he fixed his attention upon them, expecting to receive something from them. But *Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up he stood and walked and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. (Acts 3:1-8)*

The Spiritual Courage of Peter

Many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to about five thousand. On the morrow their rulers and elders and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem... and all who were of the high-priestly family. And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a cripple, by what means this man has been healed, be it known

to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well... And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they wondered; and they recognized that they had been with Jesus. (Acts 4:1-13)

The Spiritual Zeal of Peter

And when they had brought them [the apostles], they set them before the Sanhedrin. And the high priest questioned them, saying, "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." But Peter and the apostles answered, "*We must obey God rather than men.* The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him..." [W]hen they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. *Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.* And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. (Acts 12:1-40-42)

The Suffering of Peter

About that time Herod the king laid violent hands upon some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword; and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. *This was during the days of Unleavened Bread.* And when he had seized him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to guard him, *intending after the Passover to bring him out to the people.* So Peter was kept in prison; but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. (Acts 12:1-5)

Peter's Final Act of Love

Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and so with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus was revealed to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me (Gk *agapao*) more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you (Gk *phileo*)..." "

[Jesus said to Peter] "*Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go.*" This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God.

Peter turned and saw following them the disciple whom Jesus loved, who had lain close to his breast at the supper... When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about this man?" Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me! (Gk *su moi akolouthei*)." (John 21:15-16, 18-22)

The Martyrdom of Peter

Simon Peter the son of John, from the village of Bethsaida in the province of Galilee, brother of Andrew the apostle, and himself chief of the apostles, after having been bishop of the church of

Antioch and having preached to the Dispersion — the believers in circumcision, in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia— pushed on to Rome in the second year of Claudius to overthrow Simon Magus, and held the sacerdotal chair there for twenty-five years until the last, that is the fourteenth, year of Nero. *At his hands he received the crown of martyrdom being nailed to the cross with his head towards the ground and his feet raised on high, asserting that he was unworthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Lord.* (Jerome, *Lives of Illustrious Men*, 1)

“First Rock from the Son”
The Biblical Basis for Petrine Primacy and the Papacy

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1. The Testimony of Matthew:

Matt. 16:13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do men say that the Son of man is?” 14 And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” 15 He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” 16 Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” 17 And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter (Gk *Petros*), and on this rock (Gk *petra*) I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

- a. “Peter” means _____ and he is the one on whom the Church is built.
- b. There is no S _____ in the distinction of the Greek *petros* and *petra*
You are Petros, and on this petra I will build my Church ...
- c. Jesus spoken language was Aramaic, in which Peter’s name is _____ (cf. Eng. “Cephas”)
You are Kepha, and on this kepha I will build my Church ...
- d. The “keys of the kingdom” are an image from _____ 22:22 (see below)
- e. The implication is that Peter is being made Royal Steward, F _____ O _____ of the kingdom, second only to the king (cf. 1 Kgs 18:3)
- f. The “binding” and “loosing” is P _____ to the “opening” and “shutting” of Isa 22.
- g. However, “binding” and “loosing” were also technical terms to referring to the authority to establish *halakhah*, i.e. the authoritative interpretation of religious L _____.

The Jewish Encyclopedia of 1906 on “binding and loosing”: The power of binding and loosing was always claimed by the Pharisees. Under Queen Alexandra, the Pharisees, says Josephus (*Jewish War* Book 1, Chapter 5, par. 2), "became the administrators of all public affairs so as to be empowered to banish and readmit whom they pleased, as well as to loose and to bind." [!] This does not mean that, as the learned men, they merely decided what, according to the Law, was forbidden or allowed, but that they possessed and exercised the power of tying or untying a thing by the spell of their divine authority (!), just as they could, by the power vested in them, pronounce and revoke an anathema (!) upon a person. The various schools had the power "to bind and to loose"; that is, to forbid and to permit (¶ag. 3b); and they could bind any day by declaring it a fast-day (Meg. Ta'an. xxii.; Ta'an. 12a; Yer. Ned. i. 36c, d). This power and authority, vested in the rabbinical body of each age or in the Sanhedrin, received its ratification and final sanction from the celestial court of justice (!) (Sifra, Emor, ix.; Mak. 23b). In this sense Jesus, when appointing his disciples to be his successors, used the familiar formula (Matt. xvi. 19, xviii. 18). By these words he virtually invested them with the same authority as that which he found belonging to the scribes and Pharisees who "bind heavy burdens and lay them on men's shoulders, but will not move them with one

of their fingers"; that is, "loose them," as they have the power to do (Matt. xxiii. 2-4). In the same sense, in the Second Epistle of Clement to James (2nd-4th cent. AD), Peter is represented as having appointed Clement as his successor, saying: "I communicate to him the power of binding and loosing so that, with respect to everything which he shall ordain in the earth, it shall be decreed in the heavens; for he shall bind what ought to be bound and loose what ought to be loosed as knowing the rule of the church."

h. Peter is our “chief R_____” on earth, to interpret the *Torah* of Jesus!

"The Lord says to Peter: 'I say to you,' he says, 'that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it. And to you I will give the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever things you bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth, they shall be loosed also in heaven' [Matt. 16:18—19]. ... On him [Peter] he builds the Church ... (Cyprian of Carthage, *The Unity of the Catholic Church* 4; 1st edition [A.D. 251]).

"In the city of Rome the episcopal chair was given first to Peter; the chair in which Peter sat, the same who was head—that is why he is also called Cephas ['Rock']—of all the apostles, the one chair in which unity is maintained by all. Neither do the apostles proceed individually on their own, and anyone who would [presume to] set up another chair in opposition to that single chair would, by that very fact, be a schismatic and a sinner. . . . Recall, then, the origins of your chair, those of you who wish to claim for yourselves the title of holy Church" (Optatus of Miletus, *The Schism of the Donatists* 2:2 [A.D. 367]).

"I follow no leader but Christ and join in communion with none but your blessedness [Pope Damasus I], that is, with the chair of Peter. I know that this is the rock on which the Church has been built. Whoever eats the Lamb outside this house is profane. Anyone who is not in the ark of Noah will perish when the flood prevails" (St. Jerome, *Letters* 15:2 [A.D. 396]).

1a. The Background from Isaiah and the Old Testament

Is. 22:15 Thus says the Lord GOD of hosts, “Come, go to this steward, to Shebna, who is over the household (Heb. *asher al-habbayit*), and say to him: 16 What have you to do here and whom have you here, that you have hewn here a tomb for yourself, you who hew a tomb on the height, and carve a habitation for yourself in the rock? 17 Behold, the LORD will hurl you away violently, O you strong man. . . . 19 I will thrust you from your office, and you will be cast down from your station. 20 In that day I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, 21 and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your girdle on him, and will commit your authority to his hand; and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. 22 And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.

- The steward held an “_____” (v. 19) that continued beyond his personal lifetime.
- Eliakim’s father “Hilkiah” has a Levite name, held by at least two high _____.
- The “robe” (Heb. *kuttōnet*) and “girdle” (‘*abnet*) were P_____ garments (cf. Ex 28:4)
- He is called a “father” (“papa”!) to the Jewish people, also a priestly _____ (Gen 45:8).
- The badge of office was the _____ to the palace; he controlled access to the king.

1Kings 4:1 King Solomon was king over all Israel, 2 and these were his high officials: Azariah the son of Zadok was the priest; 3 Elihoreph and Ahijah the sons of Shisha were secretaries;... 6 Ahishar was *in charge of the palace* (lit. *over the house*)

2. The Testimony of Luke

Luke 12:36 “Be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the marriage feast, so that they may open to him at once when he comes and knocks. 37 Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes ... 38 If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them so, blessed are those servants!” ... 41 Peter said, “Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?” 42 And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and wise steward (*oikonomos*), whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? 43 Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing. 44 Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. 45 But if that servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming,’ and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, 46 the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him ... and will punish him, and put him with the unfaithful.”

- a. Note that a specific parable about the _____ set over the house is addressed to Peter!
- b. Greek *oikonomos* used 15x in OT for royal steward, first in 1 Kings 4:6; six times specifically of Eliakim son of Hilkiah: 2 Kgs 18:18,37; 19:2; Isa. 36:3,22; 37:2.

Luke 22:32 [Peter,] I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren.”

3. The Testimony of John

John 21:15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” 16 A second time he said to him, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” 17 He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

- a. This triple commission clearly picks up from _____ (Good Shepherd Discourse).
- b. Jesus is affirming Peter as pastor (shepherd) of the Church in a _____ way, unlike the other apostles.

"We recognize in the letter of your holiness [Pope Siricius] the vigilance of the good shepherd. You faithfully watch over the gate entrusted to you, and with pious care you guard Christ's sheepfold, you that are worthy to have the Lord's sheep hear and follow you" (Synod of Ambrose of Milan: *Synodal Letter to Pope Siricius* [A.D. 389]).

“To him [Peter] he gives the command to feed the sheep [John 21:17], and although he assigns a like power to all the apostles, yet he founded a single chair [*cathedra*], and he established by his own authority a source and an intrinsic reason for that unity. Indeed, the others were also what Peter was [i.e., apostles], but a primacy is given to Peter, whereby it is made clear that there is but one Church and one chair. So too, all [the apostles] are shepherds, and the flock is shown to be one, fed by all the apostles in single-minded accord. If someone does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he imagine that he still holds the faith? If he [should] desert the chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, can he still be confident that he is in the Church? (Cyprian of Carthage, *The Unity of the Catholic Church* 4; 1st edition [A.D. 251]).

"There are many other things which rightly keep me in the bosom of the Catholic Church. The consent of the people and nations keeps me, her authority keeps me, inaugurated by miracles, nourished in hope, enlarged by love, and established by age. The succession of priests keep me, from the very seat of the apostle Peter (to whom the Lord

after his resurrection gave charge to feed his sheep) down to the present episcopate [of Pope Siricius]" (St. Augustine, *Against the Letter of Mani Called "The Foundation"* 5 [A.D. 397]).

4. The Testimony of the Early Church: The Role of Peter vis-à-vis a Church Council

Acts 15:5 But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up, and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them [Gentiles], and to charge them to keep the law of Moses." 6 The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. 7 And after there had been much debate, Peter rose and said to them, "Brethren, you know that in the early days God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. 8 And God who knows the heart bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us; 9 and he made no distinction between us and them, but cleansed their hearts by faith. 10 Now therefore why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? 11 But we believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will."

Acts 15:12 And all the assembly kept silence; and they listened to Barnabas and Paul as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. 13 After they finished speaking, James replied, "Brethren, listen to me. 14 Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. 15 And with this the words of the prophets agree, as it is written, 16 'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up, 17 that the rest of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, 18 says the Lord, who has made these things known from of old.' 19 Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, 20 but should write to them to abstain from the pollutions of idols and from unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood. 21 For from early generations Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read every sabbath in the synagogues."

- a. There is no D _____ after Peter speaks.
- b. The F _____ thing James does is make reference to Peter's (Simeon's) speech.
- c. James' comments represent a *concession* and *practical proposal*, since he was the _____ of the circumcision party (Gal 2:12).

The Fathers on Petrine primacy and church councils:

"We exhort you in every respect, honorable brother, to heed obediently what has been written by the most blessed pope of the city of Rome, for blessed Peter, who lives and presides in his own see, provides the truth of faith to those who seek it. For we, by reason of our pursuit of peace and faith, cannot try cases on the faith without the consent of the bishop of Rome" (Peter Chrysologus, Bishop of Ravenna, *Letters* 25:2 [A.D. 449]).

"After the reading of the foregoing epistle [*The Tome of Leo*], the most reverend bishops cried out: 'This is the faith of the fathers! This is the faith of the apostles! So we all believe! Thus the orthodox believe! Anathema to him who does not thus believe! Peter has spoken thus through Leo!'" (*Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, session 2, AD 451).

**INFALLIBLE, BUT NOT ABSOLUTE:
UNDERSTANDING PAPAL INFALLIBILITY IN AN AGE OF UNBELIEF
BY
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Synopsis: Catholics are blessed with a special gift in the guidance of St. Peter and his successors in matters of faith and morals, a gift that includes the ability of the pope to define doctrine infallibly; i.e., that the Pope is not able to make a mistake when defining doctrine to be held by all the faithful. Yet this deeply cherished gift is also the subject of much ridicule in the Church's opponents and misunderstanding on the part of many of the faithful. In this presentation, Dr. Baglow examines the teaching of Vatican I regarding papal infallibility to clarify its nature, scope and object. In better understanding papal infallibility, Catholics will be able to cherish this gift and offer their obedience to papal teaching with understanding and reverence for the ineffable mystery of God, as well as accurately represent it in our skeptical culture.

Outline:

I. Introduction: Papal Infallibility, the Absolute Mystery of God, and a Culture of Skepticism

A. The Absolute Mystery of God

The *Pagan* spoke: I see that you have most devoutly prostrated yourself and are shedding tears of love-not hypocritical tears but heart-felt ones. Who are you, I ask?

Christian: I am a Christian.

Pagan: What are you worshipping?

Christian: God.

Pagan: Who is [this] God whom you worship?

Christian: I don't know.

Pagan: How is it that you worship so seriously that of which you have no knowledge?

Christian: Because I am without knowledge of Him, I worship Him.

(Nicholas of Cusa, *De Deo Abscondito*)

"It is better to find God by not finding him [i.e. by learning that he is beyond your grasp] than by finding to lose him."

(St. Augustine, *Sermo* 52, 16: PL 38, 360.)

"If you can comprehend it, it isn't God. Let us rather make a devout confession of ignorance, instead of a brash profession of knowledge."

(St. Augustine, *Sermo* 52, 16: PL 38, 360.)

"When we pray, often we can hardly know the meaning of the words we are using."

(St. Augustine, *Soliloquia*, i.9)

“...to faith belong those things the sight of which we shall enjoy in eternal life, and by which we are brought to eternal life. Now two things are proposed to us to be seen in eternal life: viz. *the hiddenness of God; and the mystery of Christ's Incarnation.*”

(St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II.1.8)

B. The Rejection and Misunderstanding of Papal Infallibility by Catholics

Rejection

“This claim extends not to one doctrinal statement but to all of them; it covers every single one. It shields the entire doctrinal structure of the Catholic Church from criticism. Papal infallibility – the formal principle, as it were, of Catholicism - becomes the crowning conclusion of the system. The insurance policy is flawless: There can be no appeal from the pope to any other authority. Infallibility in this context functions as an... ideology.”

(August Hasler, *How the Pope Became Infallible*, p. 277)

Misunderstanding

“all direct doctrinal instructions of all encyclicals, of all letters to individual bishops and allocutions, published by Popes, are *ex cathedra* pronouncements and are therefore infallible.”

(Dom Cuthbert Butler, *The Vatican Council: 1869-1870*, p. 57)

“When the Pope thinks, it is God who is thinking in him.” (*Quando egli medita, è Dio che pensa in lui.*)”

(Butler, p. 61)

II. The Gift of Infallibility

A. The Infallibility of the Church

Matthew 16:18: “And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.”

B. The Infallibility of the Bishops

Romans 10:14-17, “And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent?...For faith comes through hearing.”

“Infallibility is a property of the Magisterium in its activity of teaching, not a property of magisterial statements. The statements protected by infallibility are said to be definitive, which means that these statements are not subject to rejection or correction by any other authorities in the Church.”

(Avery Dulles, *Magisterium*, p. 66)

“The magisterium is not above the word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on, listening to it devoutly, guarding it scrupulously, and explaining it faithfully by divine commission and with the help of the Holy Spirit. It draws from the deposit of faith everything that it presents as divinely revealed. The real source of Christian revelation, which we call the Gospel, is Jesus Christ himself, not the magisterium.”

(*Dei Verbum*, 10)

“No further public revelation is to be awaited before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ.”
(*Dei Verbum*, 4)

III. Papal Infallibility

A. Understanding the Doctrine

The Burden of Proof

“No doctrine is understood as defined infallibly unless this is manifestly evident.”
(CIC, c. 749, #3)

The Definition of Papal Infallibility

“Therefore, faithfully adhering to the tradition received from the beginning of the Christian faith, to the glory of God our savior, for the exaltation of the Catholic religion and for the salvation of the Christian people, with the approval of the Sacred Council, we teach and define as a divinely revealed dogma that when the Roman Pontiff speaks EX CATHEDRA, that is, when, in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, *he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole Church*, he possesses, by the divine assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed his Church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals. Therefore, such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are of themselves, and not by the consent of the Church, irreformable. “So then, should anyone, which God forbid, have the temerity to reject this definition of ours: let him be anathema.”
(Vatican I, *Pastor Aeternus* 4:9)

“[The Church] only speaks when it is necessary to speak; but hardly has she spoken out magisterially some great general principle, when she sets her theologians to work to explain her meaning in the concrete, by strict interpretation of its wording, by the illustration of its circumstances, and by the recognition of exceptions, in order to make it as tolerable as possible, and the least of a temptation, to self-willed, independent, or wrongly educated minds... a moderation of doctrine, dictated by charity, is not inconsistent with soundness in the faith... A principle of minimizing is necessary for a wise and cautious theology.”
(Newman, “Letter to the Duke of Norfolk”)

Gasser’s *Relatio*: Infallibility is Peter’s, Not Simon’s

“infallibility... does not belong to the Roman Pontiff inasmuch as he is a private person, nor even inasmuch as he is a private teacher, since, as such, he is equal with all other private teachers... Hence we do not speak of personal infallibility, although we do defend the infallibility of the Roman Pontiff, not as an individual person...but as head of the Church...”
(Gasser, *The Gift of Infallibility: The Official Relatio of Bishop Vincent Gasser at Vatican Council I*, p. 41-42)

...with great care our Lord Jesus Christ willed that the charism of truth [including infallibility] depend not on the conscience of the Pontiff, which is private – even most private – to each person... but rather on the public relation of the Pontiff to the universal Church.
(Gasser, p. 46)

Gasser's *Relatio*: Infallibility is Relational, Not Separate

"...we do not separate the Pope, defining, from the cooperation and consent of the Church. The purpose of this prerogative [of infallibility] is the preservation of truth in the Church. The special exercise of this prerogative occurs when there arise somewhere in the Church scandals against the faith, i.e. dissensions and heresies... we do not exclude the cooperation of the Church because the infallibility of the Roman Pontiff does not come to him in the manner of inspiration or revelation but through divine assistance. Therefore the Pope, by reason of his office and the gravity of the matter, is held to use the means suitable for properly discerning and aptly enunciating the truth. These means are councils, or the advice of bishops, cardinals, theologians, etc." (Gasser, p. 43)

IV. Infallible, But Not Absolute: Papal Infallibility and the Absolute Mystery of God

A. Gasser's *Relatio*: The Limits and Conditions of Infallibility

"Note well. It is asked in what sense the infallibility of the Roman Pontiff is *absolute*. I reply and openly admit: **in no sense** is pontifical infallibility absolute, because absolute infallibility belongs to **God alone**, who is the first and essential truth and who is never able to deceive or be deceived. All other infallibility, as communicated for a specific purpose, has its limits and conditions under which it is considered to be present. **The same is valid in reference to the infallibility of the Roman Pontiff.**" (Gasser, p. 45)

**B. A Century Later: *Mysterium Ecclesiae*
Recognizing the Absolute Mystery of God**

"The transmission of divine Revelation by the Church encounters difficulties of various kinds. These arise from the fact that the hidden mysteries of God 'by their nature so far transcend the human intellect that even if they are revealed to us and accepted by faith, they remain concealed by the veil of faith itself and are as it were wrapped in darkness.'" (Mysterium Ecclesiae #5)

Recognizing the Limits of Infallibility

"...the meaning of the pronouncements of faith depends partly upon the expressive power of the language used at a certain point in time and in particular circumstances. Moreover, it sometimes happens that some dogmatic truth is first expressed *incompletely* (but not falsely), and at a later date, when considered in a broader context of faith or human knowledge, it receives *a fuller and more perfect expression*..."

"All these things have to be taken into account in order that these pronouncements may be properly interpreted. Finally, even though the truths which the Church intends to teach through her dogmatic formulas are distinct from the changeable conceptions of a given epoch and can be expressed without them, nevertheless it can sometimes happen that these truths may be enunciated by the Sacred Magisterium in terms that bear traces of such conceptions." (Mysterium Ecclesiae #5)

So if Infallibility is Limited, Why Pay Any Attention?

“The faithful...must shun the opinion, first, that dogmatic formulas (or some category of them) cannot signify truth in a determinate way, but can only offer changeable approximations to it, which to a certain extent distort or alter it; secondly, that these formulas signify the truth only in an indeterminate way, this truth being like a goal that is constantly being sought by means of such approximations. Those who hold such an opinion do not avoid dogmatic relativism and they corrupt the concept of the Church's infallibility relative to the truth to be taught or held in a determinate way.” (*Mysterium Ecclesiae* #5)

The Example of Boniface VIII

“We are obliged by our Faith to believe and to hold that there is one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. Indeed we firmly believe and sincerely confess this and that outside of this Church there is neither salvation nor the remission of sins. Moreover, we declare, state, and define that for every human creature it is a matter of strict necessity for salvation to be subject to the Roman Pontiff, that is, the Pope.” (Boniface VIII, *Unam Sanctam*, 1302 A.D.)

“Therefore, no one will be saved who, *knowing the Church to have been divinely established by Christ*, nevertheless refuses to submit to the Church or withholds obedience from the Roman Pontiff, the Vicar of Christ on earth.”

(Holy Office, “Letter to Cardinal Cushing,” 1949 A.D.)

Summary:

- 1) The Church has a confident humility about papal infallibility. On the one hand, we believe that the Church does understand and declare what is true. On the other hand, we also believe that verbal formulations of divine truths are not the Truth *per se*, but mere expressions *of* the Truth.
- 2) It is the real truths of the Faith which are infallible, not the verbal formulations which contain them. An infallible statement is not at all wrong, but the way we say it might not be quite adequate.

V. Conclusion: From False Certitude to Humble Confidence

“Step 80: Do not become a Catholic because you think it will give you certainty.”

“Some Evangelicals find Catholicism attractive because they think it offers them certainty about Christian beliefs. Previously, they thought an inerrant Bible alone provided certainty...Looking to Rome, some decide that the... Magisterium provides the [cognitive] certainty that conservative Protestantism taught them to desire... it seems to provide that absolute certainty.

“Don’t do that. Don’t think that way. Establishing certainty is a distinctively *modern secular* project, not a Christian one. It was [modern philosophy] who taught us to... search after an indubitable and universal foundation of certainty in human knowledge... Christ, by contrast, calls us to drop what we want and expect, to believe, and to learn the truth from and follow him.

“...managing feelings of insecurity is not what Christian faith is about. So don’t replace an old foundationalist Protestantism with a new (falsely) foundationalist Catholicism... forget about that. Learn, have faith, seek understanding, and be prepared to give an account. Be forgiven and forgive. Be formed by the sacraments and practices of the Church, particularly the Eucharist, and learn Christian love for God and neighbor. That’s it.”

(Smith, *How to Go From Being a Good Evangelical to a Committed Catholic in Ninety-Five Difficult Steps*, p. 151-152)

Closing Prayer: The Apologist and the Absolute Mystery of God

The Apologist’s Evening Prayer

By C.S. Lewis

*From all my lame defeats and oh! much more
From all the victories that I seemed to score;
From cleverness shot forth on Thy behalf
At which, while angels weep, the audience laugh;
From all my proofs of Thy divinity,
Thou, who wouldst give no sign, deliver me.*

*Thoughts are but coins. Let me not trust instead
Of Thee, their thin-worn image of Thy head.
From all my thoughts, even from my thoughts of Thee,
O thou fair Silence, fall, and set me free.
Lord of the narrow gate and the needle’s eye,
Take from me all my trumpery¹ lest I die.*

¹ **Trumpery** [truhm-puh-ree]: 1. something without use or value; rubbish; trash; worthless stuff. 2. nonsense; twaddle: His usual conversation is pure trumpery. 3. worthless finery.
(<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/trumpery>)

SIMON VERSUS PETER

What Good is the Chair of Peter if its Occupants are Sinful Human Beings?

Many popes have been saints, martyrs, and noble shepherds.

- Nevertheless, the papacy is not an establishment of a line of impeccable people

Historical Stumbling Blocks: Some of the Worst of the Papacy

Julius II (1503-1513): the warrior pope

- Bribed and cajoled his way to the papacy
- Spent most of his time fighting wars
- After his death the anonymous satire *Julius exclusus de caelis* (Julius Excluded from Heaven) became very popular
- Like other popes in this era, Julius had children

Leo X (1513-1521): “Let us enjoy the papacy since God has given it to us.”

- Made a cardinal at age thirteen
- Ate, drank, and partied until Rome was out of money
- Ineptitude helped to create schism

Nepotism

- OED: “The showing of special favour or unfair preference to a relative in conferring a position, job, privilege, etc.”
- From Latin *nepot* (nephew).
- The popes of this era were infamous for making their nephews and illegitimate sons cardinals.

Do the sins of the papacy show that this is a purely human institution?

THREE-PART RESPONSE

Part I: in the New Testament, Peter's authority is a gift from God given in spite of Peter's failures.

Matthew 16:13-28

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that the Son of man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." 15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in the heavens. 18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hades shall not prevail against it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of the heavens, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in the heavens, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in the heavens." 20 Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. 21 From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. 22 And Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you." 23 But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not thinking the things of God but of men." 24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life? 27 For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay every man for what he has done. 28 Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." (RSV altered)

Things to note:

- Simon's confession does not come from himself but from God. It is not based on his own intelligence or piety. It is a gift.
- Nevertheless, Simon's confession leads Jesus to declare that Simon is the Rock, Peter, on whom the Church will be built.
- Peter knows that Jesus is the Christ, but he has no clue what this actually entails.
- Left to his own devices, Peter is not the rock on whom the Church is built. He is rather a stone that people trip over.

Is the bishop of Rome a stumbling stone or the rock, is he Simon or Peter? He is both. He is a stumbling stone on his own and to the extent that he hasn't been conformed to the love of Christ which gives itself for others. But by God's grace he is Peter, the rock.

Luke 22:28-34

28 "You [plural] are those who have continued with me in my trials; 29 and I covenant to you [plural], as my Father covenanted to me, a kingdom, 30 that you [plural] may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 31 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you [plural], that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you [singular] that your [singular] faith may not fail; and when you [singular] have turned again, strengthen your [singular] brothers." 33 And he said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death." 34 He said, "I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you [singular] three times deny that you [singular] know me." (RSV altered)

Things to note:

- When Jesus warns the apostles of their coming temptation he addresses only Peter (see Gethsemane also).
- Simon is the man that Satan attacks, but Peter is the man that Jesus has prayed for.
- Peter is strengthened by Christ so that he can strengthen the apostles.
- In the very same breath that Jesus tells Simon that he will deny him he also conspicuously calls him the Rock and gives him the charge to strengthen his brothers.

John 21:15-19

John 21:15 When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." 16 A second time he said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. 18 Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go." 19 (This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God.) And after this he said to him, "Follow me." (RSV)

Things to note:

- Peter is restored here, confessing his love for Christ in a way that echoes his three-fold denial of Christ.
- Here again we have the essence of the papacy: Jesus gives Peter authority to shepherd his flock in the same breath that he gently rebukes him.

After Peter is reinstated and receives the Spirit at Pentecost he does amazing things.

- In Acts, Luke is careful to show that the apostles, especially Peter and Paul, are like Jesus.
- His speeches convert thousands (2:22-36).
- Heals people like Jesus (3:1-10).
- Raises the dead (9:36-41).
- Teaches with authority at the Jerusalem Council (15)

Nevertheless, Peter continued to make mistakes as time went on.

- Note what Paul says he did in Antioch.

Galatians 2:1-16

2:1 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. 2 I went up by revelation; and I laid before them (but privately before those who were of repute) the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain. 3 But even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. 4 But because of false brethren secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage -- to them we did not yield submission even for a moment, that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. 6 And from those who were reputed to be something (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) -- those, I say, who were of repute added nothing to me; 7 but on the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised 8 (for he who worked through Peter for the mission to the circumcised worked through me also for the Gentiles), 9 and when they perceived the grace that was given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised; 10 only they would have us remember the poor, which very thing I was eager to do. **But when Cephas came to Antioch I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.** 12 For before certain men came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. 13 And with him the rest of the Jews acted insincerely, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their insincerity. 14 But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?" 15 We ourselves, who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, 16 yet who know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified.

Part II: it is necessary to distinguish between the office of the papacy and the private personality of the popes.

- No pope is perfect.
- Infallibility has nothing to do with a popes day to day activities or opinions.

The distinction between person and office is prefigured in the authority structures that preceded the Church that Christ established.

Matthew 23:1-4, 13

23:1 Then said Jesus to the crowds and to his disciples, 2 "*The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; 3 so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do; for they preach, but do not practice.* 4 They bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with their finger.... 13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you shut (*kleiete*) the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in.

Part III: treasure in earthen vessels

The glaring inadequacy of the people God chooses to do his work manifests his power which is made perfect in weakness.

Read what Paul says about his apostolic ministry with the bishop of Rome in mind:

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

4:5 For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. 7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 11 For while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So death is at work in us, but life in you.