

John Salza vs. Evan May

On the Exegesis of Matthew 16:18-19

E. May: Matthew 16 is among the list of famous isolated prooftexts that Roman Catholic scholarship has continually presented to the field of apologetics. It has been refuted for centuries, and yet Romanists cite it as quickly today as they ever have.

J. Salza: Mr. May wants to give his readers the impression that the Catholic position "has been refuted for centuries" to predispose his readers to the "truth" of his position. This type of introductory commentary is a common debate tactic, and it doesn't impress me. As we will see, even though Mr. May says the Catholic position "has been refuted for centuries," he offers no support from either Scripture or tradition to make his case. In fact, both Scripture and the Fathers highlight the errors in Mr. May's positions, which you will see shortly.

If you have read any of Mr. May's posts about me or other Catholic apologists, you also see that he accuses us of using illogical arguments and anachronisms. This is nothing more than a smoke screen for the inadequacy of his own positions. Please have patience with this dialogue, and you will see how Mr. May is really the one guilty of these charges. You will see how Mr. May twists the Scriptures to his own destruction (2 Pet 3:16).

E. May: The amount of assumptions, however, that the Romanist must force into this passage is innumerable. Equally innumerable are the assumptions and anachronistic readings that are forcibly read into the early Fathers that comment on this text. Romanism simply cannot be defended exegetically. For this reason, the defender of the gospel of Rome starts with the assumption that the modern Roman church, with its doctrine and practices of today, is indeed the one true church. This is not something that is ever demonstrated. The mistake of this assumption is shown when the modern papacy is read back into the New Testament text, where such a concept never existed in the first place. The error is undeniable.

J. Salza: Mr. May kicks things off by blowing a lot of smoke at his readers, but we will soon discover how shallow his approach to Scripture and the Fathers really is. We will see whose position is more defensible exegetically. We will also see how the Fathers not only fail to help Mr. May, but actually refute his contentions.

It is also a typical ploy to accuse Catholics of "reading back" into the text. Mr. May confuses reading the plain meaning of the text with "reading back" into the text. As we proceed with this dialogue, the readers should pay close attention to who is actually reading the plain meaning of the text, and who is reading into the text that which he wishes to see. It will soon be obvious.

Matthew 16 13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people 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."

E. May: From the beginning the focus is on the person of Christ. Jesus asks the question, "Who do men say that I am? The Son of man?" He asks his disciples if men own him as the Messiah.

They give differing, false opinions from the people. These opinions were good and honorable, but they were not true. They are high opinions, but not high enough. These opinions might honor Christ as prophet, but they do not rightly honor him as Messiah and Savior.

J. Salza: Agreed. And because the first part of Matthew 16 is about the person of Jesus, the second part of Matthew 16 (vv.18-19) is about the person of Peter. Mr. May properly sets the stage for the pending discussion. This set-up will ultimately support the Catholic position: Jesus builds the Church upon the person of Peter, not specifically upon Peter's faith, which is what Mr. May will contend later on in the discussion.

15He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

E. May: Jesus then questions the opinions of the disciples. Surely the disciples, who were taught better than all others and shared more intimacy with Christ should render a correct answer. Before the disciples can be sent out for the work of ministry, they must display that they grasp the most important thing. If to them Christ was merely John the Baptist or Elijah, their mission for the church would surely fail. The success of the mission is based upon what truth it is built, and Jesus makes sure that the disciples are grasping the very essence of his ministry. Therefore, Jesus begins the examination. He questions to explore whether or not his closest followers have their mission built upon the firm foundation of who he is.

J. Salza: I have little problem with any of this, but it is a bit long winded and off line. Yes, Christ is establishing the Church which is part of His Messianic mission. The question Matthew 16 answers is upon whom Christ builds the Church and with whom Christ invests His authority to carry on His mission. As the text demonstrates (but which Mr. May denies), the answer is Peter.

E. May: Peter speaks for the other disciples and answers the question. Peter did indeed have the boldness to be forward on such matters, as we see in other New Testament texts. But this does not communicate any primacy or superiority of Peter above the rest of the Apostles, for we see others speaking as the mouth for the rest elsewhere (Mark 9:38; John 14:5, 8, 22).

J. Salza: Here is where Mr. May runs into trouble. He says that Peter's declaration did not give Peter "any primacy or superiority" above the rest of the apostles. A plain reading of the subsequent text, however, demonstrates this is not at all the case. After Peter communicated the Father's revelation, Jesus renamed Simon to Peter, declared that He would build the Church upon the rock of Peter, gave Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and invested Peter with the singular authority to infallibly bind and loose (since what Peter binds or looses on earth will be bound or loosed in heaven). Jesus gave none of these privileges to the other apostles. So it is not only exegetically untenable but also dishonest for Mr. May to tell us Peter was not given "any primacy or superiority" over the other apostles. Mr. May accuses Catholics of "reading back" into the text what we want to see, and yet his own exegesis reveals himself guilty of the error, not me. The text is clear that Jesus was giving Simon Peter a unique role in the early Church, and the Fathers were unanimous about this fact.

E. May: Peter answers the question correctly; the disciples knew Christ to be the Son of the living God. While others thought him to be the ghost of Elijah or Jeremiah, they knew Christ to be the Son of the living God

J. Salza: No, Mr. May, only Peter "answers the question correctly." Only Peter knew Christ to be the Son of God. The other "disciples" got it wrong (this is another example of Mr. May reading into the text what he wishes to see). That is why Jesus conferred upon Peter alone the special privileges of the keys and the singular authority to bind and loose. The readers will notice that Mr. May repeats this error in various ways throughout this dialogue. He does this in an attempt to minimize Peter's importance. He wants you to believe that Jesus did not give any special privileges to Peter, but the text does not allow for such a conclusion.

E. May: But it is not as if anything within the disciple set them apart to know this correct answer. The fact that Peter answered correctly does not set Peter apart from the rest of the disciples, or even from those who answered incorrectly. This is because Peter's knowledge depended upon divine revelation. It was God who was to receive the glory, not flesh and bone.

J. Salza: Amen, Mr. May. A Catholic could not have said it better. It was precisely because God gave Peter a divine revelation and Peter was able to infallibly communicate that revelation that Jesus chooses to build His Church upon Peter. God intruded into the mind of Peter and gave Him this infallible truth, and Peter was able to orally communicate that truth infallibly to Jesus and the other apostles. As Jesus indicates, it was not because of Peter's own abilities or worthiness. It was also not because of Peter's faith. Peter's articulation of this Christological truth has nothing to do with Peter's faith or worthiness. Jesus' conferral of the divine privileges upon Peter has to do only with Peter's ability to receive and communicate God's divine revelation.

The implication of your statement in this section (that Peter's knowledge was based on divine revelation) contradicts your subsequent arguments that Jesus builds the Church only on Peter's "faith," but not his "person." There is nothing about "faith" in Matt. 16:18-19. The passage is about God giving Peter a divine revelation, and Peter communicating that revelation.

E. May: Peter received an undeserving blessing from above so that he was enabled to know the very truth on which all others were to be built—the very foundation on which the mission of the Apostles was to be fulfilled. Christ's declaration of blessing upon Peter removed the opportunity for Peter to claim any glory for himself—something very habitual of the disciples. The grace of God mortifies pride, and Christ's declaration of the grace of God upon the life of Peter in revealing truth to him removed any possibility for God's glory to be robbed by a creature.

J. Salza: No problem. Peter would be nothing without Jesus. Catholics agree. But this isn't relevant to the discussion. Mr. May is creating a straw man to knock down. Further, Mr. May must understand that even though Jesus is the rock of the Church and the keeper of the keys, He can and does share these distinctions with Peter. God is not intimidated by the glory He confers upon His children, so Mr. May shouldn't be either.

E. May: Christ also reminds Peter of his roots: he was Bar-Jonah. Peter was not born to this dignity, but it was granted to him by divine grace—grace that does not allow the glory of God to be stolen by the creature of God.

J. Salza: No problem here either. Catholics agree. It is precisely the fact that Peter is so human that underscores the divine gifts Jesus is now conferring upon him. This is why there is a major distinction between Peter's authoritative teaching and his (or any pope's) personal conduct.

18And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

E. May: Jesus, using the emphatic pronoun (alluding back to Peter's confession), states, "But I, the Messiah, for my part, tell you." Peter had just received a revelation of truth from the father. Now he is about to receive truth from the Son. It is Christ who makes this statement. He is the church's head. He is the ultimate authority.

J. Salza: Catholics agree. None of this is at issue. But again, even though Jesus is the ultimate authority, He has delegated to Peter the authority to rule the Church in His place as His Vicar, through the power of the keys. Jesus delegates His authority to Peter, but does not relinquish it. Jesus is still in charge, and Peter is directly accountable to Jesus for his actions. Jesus gave us many parables about how the Master would leave his land to his subjects, and then come back and render an account (see Mt 21:33-44; 25:14-30; Mk 12:1-11; Lk 16:1-10; 19:11-27; 20:9-18). This is precisely what Jesus will do with the leaders He has placed over the Church, beginning with Peter and his successors. Peter himself knew this all too well when he wrote "For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?" (1 Pet 4:17).

E. May: Jesus singles out Peter, once again alluding back to the statement, "You, you who just made that statement." Just as Peter singled out Jesus and revealed his identity, Jesus is about to single out Peter and reveal his identity. He states, "You are ?????? (Petros)," and follows that up with, "and on this ????? (petra) I will build my church."

J. Salza: This is good exegesis. Mr. May identifies the parallel between Jesus' person and Peter's person. Just as Peter's confession was about the person of Jesus, Jesus' declarations will now be about the person (or "identity" as Mr. May says) of Peter. The problem with Mr. May's position is that he later argues that Jesus doesn't build His Church upon the person of Peter, but upon Peter's faith. This is a glaring inconsistency in Mr. May's argumentation.

E. May: To what petra refers has been debated among exegetes. It can basically be broken down into three categories:

- 1. Christological (Christ is the Rock) -Augustine*
- 2. Petrine (Peter is the Rock) -Tertullian, Cyprian, and Basil the Great*
- 3. Faith (the confession is the Rock) -Chrysostom and Cyril of Jerusalem*

From a theological perspective, any of the three could be accepted.

J. Salza: Catholics have no problem in calling all three categories true. Jesus is the rock, and He shares His rock status with Peter. Peter's faith may also be called "rock," but this is a less acceptable conclusion for a couple of reasons. First, Matthew 16:18-19 never uses the word "faith." The passage is not about Peter's faith, but his communication of God's divine revelation. Second, Scripture never equates "rock" with "faith." Scripture associates "rock" with "persons," such as Christ (1 Cor 10:4), Peter (John 1:42) and Abraham (Isaiah 51:1-2). Third, we can't divorce Peter's faith from Peter's person. Faith is an attribute of who Peter is as a person. Fourth, because Peter was speaking about Jesus as a person, Jesus was in turn speaking about Peter as a person, not his faith, as Mr. May pointed out a few paragraphs ago.

E. May: Christ is the Rock on which the church is built (Isaiah 28:16). The stone is laid by Christ ("I will build it"), and the stone is Christ. Christ is the only solid foundation. He is the firm rock that will not sink under the weight of the building.

J. Salza: While it is true that Jesus is the real rock of the Church, that is not what Jesus says in Matthew 16:18. Jesus says Peter is the rock on which He will build the Church. Mr. May feels the need to switch to Isaiah 28:16, but we are exegeting Matthew 16:18-19, not Isaiah 28:16.

Mr. May's exegesis reveals further problems because He says "Christ is the rock on which the Church is built," and then says "I will build it" in reference to Christ. Notice how Mr. May puts words into the mouth of Scripture. Matthew 16:18-19 does not say "Christ is the rock on which the Church is built." It says **Peter** (Petros) is the rock on which the Church is built. Moreover, since Jesus says He is the one who will build the Church (v.18), Jesus cannot be both the rock and the builder. As the text plainly says, Peter is the rock, and Jesus is the builder. So, brothers, you judge who is "reading into the text" what he wants to see.

E. May: But we also see an emphasis from the text on the confession of who Christ is. From the beginning, Jesus examined his disciples, asking "But who do you say that I am." He made certain that they passed the examination of affirming that which is most important. This confession was given to the disciples by divine revelation.

J. Salza: I warned the readers about this recurring error in Mr. May's exegesis, and here it is again. Mr. May keeps saying that the "confession was giving to the disciples by divine revelation." First, the confession is not what is given; the revelation is what is given. Second, the Father gave the revelation to Peter alone, not the disciples. The disciples got the question wrong. Mr. May wants to "read into the text" that the other disciples also received the revelation in order to minimize Peter's uniqueness, but the text is clear that Peter alone received and communicated the revelation.

E. May: But there is also a possibility of the Rock, while primarily and most importantly representing Christ himself, being allegorical of the apostles (represented by Peter) who were to be the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20). For Romanists, this verse not only affirms the preeminence of Peter as the Prince of the apostles, but it also lays the groundwork for the establishment of a permanent Roman see with full Petrine authority.

J. Salza: As he did with Isaiah 28:16, Mr. May now shifts to another verse (this time, Ephesians 2:20) to help him interpret Matthew 16:18-19. But no problem. Ephesians 2:20 says that the apostles are the foundation of the Church. Matthew 16:18-19 says that Peter is the rock of the Church, and the keeper of the keys. This demonstrates the Catholic position that the Church is built upon persons, not the "Bible," or "faith" as Mr. May contends. This also demonstrates that, even though Jesus is the rock, foundation, cornerstone and source of all power and truth, He confers these distinctions upon certain members of the Church, most especially Peter. Peter is the rock upon which the foundation is laid. This also means the Church is hierarchical and authoritative, not merely mystical and invisible which is how Protestants understand "church."

E. May: But this is simply not something that is presented in this passage. Is the man who lays the first stone to be the sole foundation? Does Peter's being called "Rock" necessitate an infallible pontiff of the entire church, from whom there is an apostolic succession? I think we can fairly answer "Absolutely not."

J. Salza: Notice how Mr. May wants to shift your attention away from Matt 16:18-19 and to Ephesians 2:20 to disprove the "preeminence of Peter as the Prince of the Apostles." But we are not using Ephesians 2:20; we are using Matthew 16:18-19. In Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus changes Simon's name to Peter, says He will build the Church upon Peter, gives Peter the keys to the kingdom, and gives Peter the authority to bind and loose. THAT, Mr. May, is what demonstrates the "preeminence of Peter as the Prince of the Apostles." It is interesting that you used the title "Prince of the Apostles." This title, which distinguishes Peter from the rest of the apostles, was used by many of the early Church Fathers in describing Peter and his authority over the apostles. I am assuming you agree that Peter is indeed the Prince of the Apostles. But you say that Peter had no authority over them? Help us with that, Mr. May (using Scripture and the Fathers).

You imply that calling Peter "rock" does not "necessitate an infallible Pontiff," and then make a statement about "apostolic succession." Let's deal with these one at a time. First, you admitted that Peter made an infallible declaration in calling Jesus the Christ, which He received from the Father. So you are not going to deny that God gives Peter the ability to communicate infallibly, are you? And as a result of Peter's infallible declaration, Jesus says He will build His Church upon Peter, and gives Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven and the authority to bind and loose. Jesus' affirms Peter as the infallible leader of the Church, as evidenced by his revelatory declaration, new name, keys, and infallible binding and loosing authority. As you may know, "binding" and "loosing" are rabbinical terms that deal with making doctrinal pronouncements and disciplinary decrees for the faithful.

In this regard, Jesus promises that whatever Peter binds or looses on earth will be bound or loosed in heaven. Because God cannot lie (Titus 1:2), Jesus could only make such a sweeping promise to Peter if He guaranteed that Peter's teaching would be infallible. Otherwise, the gates of hell would indeed prevail. Thus, just as God intruded into the mind of Peter and gave him the revelation that Jesus is the Christ, God continues to penetrate Peter's mind so that what he binds or looses on earth can be ratified by heaven. God prevents Peter from teaching error (which is the definition of infallibility). You can't get much more explicit in demonstrating infallible teaching authority than Matthew 16:18-19.

Which brings us to your comment about "apostolic succession." The Fathers also understood the keys to be a symbol of dynastic succession to Peter's seat of authority. This seat of authority would replace Moses' seat of authority then occupied by the Sanhedrin. The keys were symbols of authority and succession. We see reference to the keys in Isaiah 22 where David's vicar had the keys to the kingdom and the authority to open and shut. Jesus, the Son of David, also appoints a Vicar over His kingdom, and gives him the keys of the kingdom and the authority to bind (shut) and loose (open). The Fathers were unanimous in their understanding of the keys. Your exegesis fails to address the critical significance that the "keys" have on this discussion.

E. May: Christ promises to preserve his church. The gates of hell will not prevail against it. This is because it is built upon the firm foundation of Christ himself, upon the very confession that Christ is the Messiah, the Son of the living God, upon Christ's laying of the foundation of the Apostles (represented by Peter the Rock). It is all about Christ!

J. Salza: We have been over this before. Yes, it is all about Christ. But this does not mean that Christ cannot delegate His authority to Peter, which is what the Scriptures say He does. Notice also Mr. May's equivocation. First he says the Church "is built upon the firm foundation of Christ himself." But then he says it is built "upon the very confession that Christ is the Messiah." Which one is it, Mr. May? Is the Church built upon the foundation of Christ or the confession of Peter? Mr. May certainly has a way of twisting Scripture. Matthew 16:18-19 says that the Church is built upon the rock of Peter, and that is a tough pill for Mr. May to swallow.

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."

E. May: Christ the king will (future tense) give the keys of the kingdom to his Apostles.

J. Salza: Dear readers, here is yet another example of the bias in Mr. May's exegesis. Remember, I warned you that Mr. May would continue to attribute Peter's divine privileges to the other apostles. He does it again here. He "reads into" the text what he wants to see. Jesus does not give the keys of the kingdom "to his Apostles." Jesus gives the keys to Peter alone. Mr. May, if you disagree, then please give us book, chapter and verse where Jesus gives the keys to the other apostles. Mr. May must argue this in order to downplay Peter's significance. If Jesus really gives Peter alone the keys, then it looks like Peter has special authority that the other apostles do not have. And then it begins to look like the Catholic position has merit. How does Mr. May deal with this? He says Jesus gave the keys to all the apostles, not just Peter.

E. May: They will unlock the door to the Gentiles, an act that specifically Peter performs (Acts 10:28). As Christ ascended on high, he gave gifts to the Church (Eph 4:11). From Christ, the ministers (not just Peter but the rest as well [John 20:21]) receive the authority and power.

J. Salza: Peter unlocks the door to the Gentiles because he is the one with the keys. This supports the Catholic position. Unlocking the door to the Gentiles is a divine act that only Jesus can do, and yet Peter performs the act. Why? Because Jesus delegated divine authority to Peter, and Peter acts in Jesus' name. Also, note that the authority to "bind and loose" is not limited to "unlocking the door to the Gentiles." It also refers to declaring dogmatic and disciplinary decrees

as well as forgiving and retaining sin (which is set forth in the passage Mr. May cites, John 20:21-23).

E. May: With the keys of doctrine and discipline, the Apostles will bind and loose, unlock and lock, doing so with the authority of heaven.

J. Salza: Yes, Mr. May, the keys do the locking and unlocking, and they are Jesus' keys. But what does Jesus do with the keys? He gives them to Peter, to act on His behalf while He is in heaven. That means, in your own words, Peter "will bind and loose, unlock and lock, doing so with the authority of heaven." In other words, Peter will teach infallibly.

It is true that Jesus confers binding and loosing authority on the rest of the apostles in Matthew 18:17-18, but Jesus gives Peter alone the keys. Since the binding (shutting) and loosing (opening) authority are derived from the keys which Peter alone holds, the other apostles can only bind and loose when in union with Peter. Thus, Jesus gives Peter the singular authority to bind and loose, and the apostles the collective authority to bind and loose (Jesus doesn't single any apostle out when he confers upon them binding and loosing authority in Mt 18:18 because he has already identified Peter as the one with the keys in Mt 16:19). In order for there to be unity in the Church, the apostles will have to be united to Peter when they bind and loose. Otherwise, there would be inconsistency in doctrine. Heaven cannot lie, and heaven is the one confirming the binding and loosing authority of Peter.

E. May: Matthew Henry states, "It shall be bound in heaven, and loosed in heaven: not that Christ hath hereby obliged himself to confirm all church-censures, right or wrong; but such as are duly passed according to the word, clave non errante - the key turning the right way, such are sealed in heaven; that is, the word of the gospel, in the mouth of faithful ministers, is to be locked upon, not as the word of man, but as the word of God, and to be received accordingly (1 Thess. 2:13, John 12:20)."

J. Salza: The Greek uses the passive voice which indicates that heaven is receiving the binding and loosing from Peter. This is an incredible statement that Jesus makes. Heaven will ratify Peter's binding and loosing decisions. But in order for this to be true, Peter must be prevented from teaching error, for God cannot lie. Thus, God must penetrate the mind of Peter (just as He did when Peter confessed Jesus as the Messiah) and prevent him from teaching error. Otherwise, Jesus could not make such a sweeping promise. All this supports the Catholic understanding of the papacy.

Also, Mr. May cites 1 Thess. 2:13 in which Paul says that the oral teaching of the apostles is the word of God. If Mr. May believes in sola Scriptura, then how does he reconcile the doctrine with Paul's teaching in 1 Thess. 2:13? Sola Scriptura holds that the word of God comes only through the Scriptures, and that this is what was taught to the first century Church. If that is true, Mr. May, then how come Paul teaches the Thessalonians that the word of God comes to us orally as well?

E. May: This is what the text states. It is neither less nor more than what the text states. It is as far as the text allows, and exactly that far. This is consistent Biblical exegesis that does not attempt to impose theological agendas upon unsuspecting passages.

J. Salza: Yes, the text states that Simon spoke infallibly, that Jesus changed Simon's name to Peter, that Jesus promised to build His Church upon Peter, that the gates of hell would not prevail against this Church built upon the rock of Peter, that Jesus would give Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and that Peter would have the authority to bind and loose in heaven what he bound and loosed on earth.

So, yes, Mr. May, "this is what the text states. It is neither less nor more than what the text states." And it provides the basis for papal infallibility – Jesus puts one man in charge; his authority and successive office is symbolized by the keys of the kingdom; and his infallibility is guaranteed by the promise of Jesus Christ Himself:

"Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matt 16:19).

E. May: Yet there are other questions we must ask. Do Romanists really believe that Peter understood these words in the sense that they interpret them? Did Peter view this as Jesus giving him ultimate and infallible authority over the church? Did the rest of the disciples view it in this manner (the disciples who later argued over who was the greatest)?

J. Salza: Mr. May wants us to read Peter's mind to determine what Jesus meant. Mr. May, why don't you simply read what the text says? If you read what the text says, you see that Jesus conferred a special charism of authority and infallibility upon Peter. Jesus renamed Simon to Peter, said He would build the Church upon him, gave him the keys to the kingdom, and promised him that what he bound or loosed would be bound or loosed in heaven. If what Peter binds or looses is ratified by heaven, then Peter acts with infallible authority. As you have said yourself, "this is what the text says."

The early Fathers all viewed Peter as the head of the Church. I have scores of patristic quotations that are too voluminous to post on the site, but I will email them to you separately if you wish. Peter's declarations and actions in the book of Acts and elsewhere further support the Catholic understanding of papal authority. And Linus (who followed Peter), Anacletus, Clement, etc. all understood Jesus' words the same way. That is why we see men succeeding to the chair of Peter in the early Church, even though it meant certain martyrdom. Mr. May, we can all be thankful for the witness these men gave to Christ by the very shedding of their own blood.

E. May: Peter himself gives us an answer:

1 Peter 2 4As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." 7So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who

do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," 8and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

E. May: The precious stone and cornerstone, the rock upon which the Church will be built, according to Peter, is not himself, but the Lord Jesus Christ.

J. Salza: I am surprised by such shoddy exegesis. Just because Peter says Jesus is the cornerstone in 1 Peter 2:4, Mr. May concludes that Peter is not the rock of the Church in Matthew 16:18. Mr. May's faulty exegesis assumes that attributions used in Scripture can be applied to only one person. This is not so. For example:

- in Ephesians 2:20, the apostles are called the foundation of the Church;
- in 1 Corinthians 3:11, Jesus is called the foundation of the Church.
- In 1 Corinthians 3:12, the faithful build upon the foundation;
- in Matthew 16:18, Jesus builds upon the foundation.
- In 1 Peter 2:5, the faithful are called the stones of God's spiritual house;
- in Acts 4:11, Jesus is called the stone of God's house.
- In 1 Corinthians 3:16, the faithful are the temple of God;
- in Apocalypse 21:22, Jesus is the temple of God.
- In Acts 20:28, the apostles are called the bishops of the flock;
- in 1 Peter 2:25, Jesus is called the Bishop of the flock.

If Scripture applies the words "foundation," "builders," "stones," "temple," and "bishop" to both Jesus and His faithful, nothing prevents Scripture from applying the word "rock" to both Jesus and Peter. Moreover, we don't need Matthew 16:18 to prove Peter is the rock because Jesus called Peter the rock in John 1:42! That is the fatal blow to Mr. May's thesis about who is the rock.

E. May: Furthermore, he does not view himself as being vested with authority over the other apostles:

1 Peter 5 1So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 4And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

E. May: Peter refers to himself merely as a fellow elder with the other elders of the Church. All of these elders are under the ultimate authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter does not think of himself as the vicar of Christ or the visible head of the Church. Rather, he views himself as an apostle among other apostles, as a fellow elder with other elders. The only head and ruler of the Church is Jesus Christ.

J. Salza: This is another silly argument. Peter, under divine inspiration, is giving an order to the clergy to tend the flock of God. Peter issues the order by saying "I exhort the presbyters" (v.1). This would certainly be presumptuous if Peter had no authority over them. We might also ask Mr. May why Peter's humility undermines his authority? Jesus describes Himself as "meek and humble of heart" (Mt 11:29). Does that lessen Jesus' authority, Mr. May? Of course not.

By calling himself a fellow presbyter, Peter is imitating the humility of His Lord, which he also commands his readers to practice elsewhere in Scripture. Peter imitated the Lord's humility all the way to his own crucifixion. Presumably, Mr. May would not argue that the President of the United States undermines his authority when he says "My fellow Americans." Nor should he argue the same regarding Peter.

Matthew 16: Examining Vatican I

E. May: Before examining Matthew 16 from a historical perspective, we must be reminded of the qualifications which Vatican I has set for us. What is the interpretation that Vatican I demands? The First Vatican Council (1869-70) convened by Pope Pius IX, affirmed that it could validate its claims and its interpretation of Matthew 16:18-19 by the practice of the Church throughout the ages, as well as through the "unanimous consent" of the Fathers. We must remember this as we look from the historical perspective. Vatican I necessitates that its interpretation of Matthew 16 be the unanimous consent of the early Fathers. Vatican I necessitates that we see Peter as the undisputed head and ruler of the Church, acknowledged as such by the apostles and the Church in general. It necessitates that the early church recognize the bishop of Rome as the infallible successor of Peter, with all authority concerning doctrine and practice.

From the council of Trent:

Furthermore, to check unbridled spirits, it (sic) decrees that no one relying on his own judgment shall, in matters of faith and morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, distorting the Holy Scriptures in accordance with his own conceptions, presume to interpret them contrary to that sense which holy mother Church, to whom it belongs to judge of their true sense and interpretation, has held and holds, or even contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers, even though such interpretations should never at any time be published.—The Council of Trent, 4th Session, the Canonical Scriptures, Rockford: Tan (1978), pp. 18-19

Later affirmed by Vatican I:

And as the things which the holy Synod of Trent decreed for the good of souls concerning the interpretation of Divine Scripture, in order to curb rebellious spirits, have been wrongly explained by some, we, renewing the said decree, declare this to be their sense, that, in matters of faith and morals, appertaining to the building up of Christian doctrine, that is to be held as the true sense of Holy Scripture which our holy Mother Church hath held and holds, to whom it belongs to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Holy Scripture; and therefore that it is permitted to no one to interpret the Sacred Scripture contrary to this sense, nor, likewise, contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers.—Philip Schaff, Dogmatic Decrees of the

Vatican Council, as found in The Creeds of Christendom, Vol II, New York:Harper (1877), p. 242

From these quotes we learn two things:

- 1. Only the Roman Catholic church has the authority to accurately interpret Scripture.*
- 2. No one, not even the RCC herself, is to hold an interpretation contrary to the unanimous consent of the Fathers.*

Matthew 16: Historical Perspectives

How did the early Fathers view Matthew 16? Did they view it as an establishment of Peter as infallible pope, with authority over all of the church, with a line of successors coming from him?

J. Salza: This warrants additional commentary. First, notice that the Church says we are bound to the Fathers' interpretation of Scripture when they are unanimous in their interpretation. While there were about a hundred Fathers worthy of note who wrote about the papacy, Mr. May mentions only about a dozen of them, and quotes from less than ten (and I will deal with each quotation). Needless to say, this does not represent a majority of them. Mr. May wishes to give the impression that we are dealing with the unanimity the Church requires, but this is not so. I point this out only to highlight the errors in Mr. May's approach. He habitually overstates his case and then fails to deliver. I am pleased to dig into the Fathers and demonstrate how they are harmful to Mr. May's position, and fully support Catholic teaching.

Second, as we will see, Mr. May quotes from the early Fathers primarily to prove that Peter is not really the rock of the Church. He ignores the other relevant issues concerning Peter and the keys, his binding and loosing authority, and his position as chief shepherd over the whole Church. Anyway, Mr. May's attempt to prove from the Fathers that Peter is not the rock of the Church causes him two insurmountable problems: (1) John 1:42 already demonstrates that Peter is the "rock"; and, (2) For every quote Mr. May provides, I provide at least another quote from the same father indicating that Peter is the rock foundation of the Church.

So what will Mr. May do? Well, he might be honest with us and change his position about Peter not being the rock of the Church. Or, he might accuse me of misreading the Fathers or say the quotes are irrelevant or not binding. We shall see. I will let you be the judge of the quotes from the Fathers.

Augustine:

But whom say ye that I am? Peter answered, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.' One for many gave the answer, Unity in many. Then said the Lord to him, 'Blessed art thou, Simon Barjonas: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven.' Then He added, 'and I say unto thee.' As if He had said, 'Because thou hast said unto Me, 'Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God,' I also say unto thee, 'Thou art Peter.'" For before he was called Simon. Now this name of Peter was given him by the Lord, and in a figure,

that he should signify the Church. For seeing that Christ is the rock (petra), Peter is the Christian people. For the rock (petra) is the original name. Therefore Peter is so called from the rock; not the rock from Peter; as Christ is not called Christ from the Christian, but the Christian from Christ. 'Therefore,' he saith, 'Thou art Peter; and upon this Rock' which thou hast confessed, upon this rock which thou hast acknowledged, saying, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God, will I build My Church;' that is upon Myself, the Son of the Living God, 'will I build My Church.' I will build thee upon Myself, not Myself upon Thee.

E. May: Augustine considered Christ to be the petra in this passage, and Peter, being the Petros, represented all Christians who are built upon the firm foundation of Christ himself.

J. Salza: Augustine is not saying that Peter is not the rock of the Church, as Mr. May contends. Augustine is saying that Jesus is the rock and Peter is grafted into Jesus because he is Jesus' Vicar. Jesus is the source, not Peter. That is why Augustine says "Peter is so called from the rock; not the rock from Peter." This is what I have said all along. Jesus is the rock, but He shares this status with Peter. Augustine's comments underscore that Peter has truly received a divine appointment from Christ. He rules and governs the Church as the Vicar of Jesus Christ Himself.

Augustine's comments also highlight the unifying principle that Peter's seat of authority brings about in Christ's true Church. Augustine says "Peter is the Christian people" because Peter is the source of unity for the entire, universal, Catholic Church. This is why the thousands of Protestant denominations (all who reject papal authority and even disagree with each other on basic Christian doctrines) cannot be Christ's true Church.

Augustine also says:

"Number the priests even from that seat of Peter. And in that order of fathers see to whom succeeded: that is the rock which the proud gates of hades do not conquer." Augustine, *Psalmus contro Partem Donati* (A.D. 393).

J. Salza: Augustine recognizes not only Peter's seat of authority, but also that Peter's chair has successors. Mr. May, who are Peter's successors? Can you provide us a list? I can. **Here it is.** We also see that Augustine equates "rock" with the papacy as a whole (not just Christ or Peter) when he speaks of the succession to the chair. Augustine does not help Mr. May's case.

Cyprian:

Certainly the other Apostles also were what Peter was, endued with an equal fellowship both of honour and power; but a commencement is made from unity, that the Church may be set before us as one; which one Church, in the Song of Songs, doth the Holy Spirit design and name in the Person of our Lord.

E. May: Cyprian, though recognizing the rock as Peter, recognized the true Rock to be Christ, and Peter representing all of the church in unity.

J. Salza: That is exactly what I have said all along. Jesus is the rock, and yet He calls Peter the rock as well. He shares with Peter His "rock" status. And I am glad that Mr. May correctly points out that Peter represents "all of the church in unity." A Catholic could not have said it better. One must ask where such unity exists in Mr. May's church.

E. May: Roman Catholic historian Michael Winter acknowledges that Cyprian refers to Peter in a non-Roman sense:

*Cyprian used the Petrine text of Matthew to defend episcopal authority, but many later theologians, influenced by the papal connections of the text, have interpreted Cyprian in a pro-papal sense which was alien to his thought. . . Cyprian would have used Matthew 16 to defend the authority of any bishop, but since he happened to employ it for the sake of the Bishop of Rome, it created the impression that he understood it as referring to papal authority. . . Catholics as well as Protestants are now generally agreed that Cyprian did not attribute a superior authority to Peter. Michael Winter, *St. Peter and the Popes* (Westport: Greenwood, 1960), pp. 47-48.*

J. Salza: Perhaps uncomfortable with the Scriptures, Mr. May feels the need to quote from some obscure historian to advance his case. I too can quote from historians and apologists to advance my case. I suggest, however, that we stick to the Scriptures and the Fathers. And, by the way, speaking of Cyprian, the following quotes show just how little the historian Michael Winter knows about him. Look what Cyprian says about Peter:

"For first to Peter, upon whom He built the Church, and from whom He appointed and showed that unity should spring, the Lord gave this power that that should be in heaven which he should have loosed on earth." Cyprian, c.A.D. 246, Ep. lxxiii ad Fubaian. p. 131, in *Colin Lindsay, The Evidence for the Papacy*, (London: Longmans, 1870), 23.

"Peter, also to whom the Lord commends His sheep to be fed and guarded, on whom He laid the foundation of the Church." Cyprian, c.A.D. 246, *De Habitu Virg.*, p. 176, in *Colin Lindsay, The Evidence for the Papacy*, (London: Longmans, 1870), 23.

"On him He builds the Church, and to him He gives the command to feed the sheep; and although He assigns a like power to all the Apostles, yet He founded a single chair, and He established by His own authority a source and an intrinsic reason for that unity. Indeed, the others were that also which Peter was; but a primacy is given to Peter, whereby it is made clear that there is but one Church and one chair." Cyprian, c.A.D. 246, *De ecclesiae catholicae unitate 4*, in *Jurgen's The Faith of the Early Fathers, vol. 1* (Collegetown, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1970), p. 220.

J. Salza: Mr. May, did you catch that? Cyprian says "but a primacy is given to Peter, whereby it is made clear that there is but one Church and one chair." Will you now recant your irresponsible reliance upon Michael Winter and your own position that Peter does not have primacy?

Anyone with a basic knowledge of the early Church Fathers would never make the claims that Mr. May advances. It just shows that Mr. May doesn't really know the Fathers or Scripture like he thinks he does. Here is yet another quote from Cyprian:

"If someone does not hold fast to this unity of Peter, can he imagine that he still holds the faith? If he desert the chair of Peter upon whom the Church was built, can he still be confident that he is in the Church?" *Cyprian, c.A.D. 246.*

J. Salza: Mr. May, I will ask you the same question that Cyprian asks (the same Cyprian you attempted to quote from to prove your case): If you don't hold fast to the unity of Peter, do you imagine that you still hold the faith? If you desert the chair of Peter (Mr. May doesn't even believe there is a chair of Peter), do you still think you are in the Church?

John Chrysostom:

E. May: Chrysostom viewed the rock to be Peter's confession of faith:

The Lord favours Peter, giving him a great reward, because he built the church upon him. For since Peter had confessed Jesus son of God, Jesus said that this confession which Peter uttered would be the foundation of future believers, just as every man should be about to raise up the house of faith and should be about to lay this foundation. For even if we put together innumerable virtues, we, however, may not have the foundation — a proper confession, and we build in vain. Moreover since Jesus said my church, he showed himself to be the lord of creation: for all realities serve God. . . .Therefore if we shall have been confirmed in the confession of Christ, the gates of hell, that is, sins, will not prevail against us. —Cited by John Bigane, Faith, Christ or Peter: Matthew 16:18 in Sixteenth-Century Roman Catholic Exegesis (Washington D.C.: University Press, 1981), pp. 31-32.

J. Salza: Chrysostom's first statement is that Jesus "built the church upon him [Peter]." This flatly contradicts Mr. May's position. Chrysostom says nothing about faith in this statement. He then says Jesus also builds upon Peter's faith as well, but as I have said before, this is no problem for the Catholic position. Jesus can build upon both. The problem is divorcing Peter's faith from his person. Faith is just one attribute of Peter's person. Nothing in Scripture ever limits Jesus' building to the faith of Peter. Further, Scripture never equates "rock" with "faith" and never says that the Church is built upon "faith," but upon persons. That is why Jesus calls the person of Peter the "rock" in John 1:42. Surely Mr. May is not going to argue that John 1:42 is about Peter's faith but not his person, is he?

E. May: Furthermore, while Chrysostom refers to Peter as the first of the apostles, the leader of the apostles, etc, he also refers to other apostles having primacy in other passages:

"James was invested with the chief rule [in Acts 15], and think it no hardship. So clean was their soul from love of glory. 'And after that they had held their peace, James answered,' etc. (v. 13.) Peter indeed spoke more strongly, but James here more mildly: for thus it behooves one in high authority, to leave what is unpleasant for others to say, while he himself appears in the milder part." (Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles, 33)

J. Salza: This quote proves that Peter had authority over James, which doesn't help Mr. May's case at all. Peter is the one who spoke what was "unpleasant." James spoke "more mildly" because he was under Peter's authority. That is why Peter issued the doctrinal decision in Acts 15, and James followed the decision, only adding his pastoral opinion regarding the application of the Noachide laws. This is also why Paul spent 15 days with Peter, not James, when he went to Jerusalem (even though James was the bishop of Jerusalem; see Gal. 1:18-19). Mr. May's quote of Chrysostom proves too much for him. Look at what else Chrysostom says which denies Mr. May's thesis:

"Peter, that Leader of the choir, that Mouth of the rest of the Apostles, that Head of the brotherhood, that One set over the entire universe, that Foundation of the Church." *John Chrysostom, c.A.D. 387, T. iii. Hom. de Dec. Mill. Talent. n. 3, p. 4, 5, in Colin Lindsay, The Evidence for the Papacy, (London: Longmans, 1870), 41.*

"This very Peter – and when I name Peter I name that unbroken Rock, that firm Foundation, the Great Apostle, the First of the disciples, the First called, and the First who obeyed." *John Chrysostom, c.A.D. 387, T. ii. Hom. iii. de Paenit. n. 4, p. 300, in Colin Lindsay, The Evidence for the Papacy, (London: Longmans, 1870), 41.*

"In those days Peter rose up in the midst of the disciples" (Acts i.15): "Both as being ardent, and as intrusted by Christ with the flock,...he first acts with authority in this matter, as having all put into his hands; for to him Christ had said, 'And thou, being converted, confirm thy brethren.'" *John Chrysostom, A.D. 387, Hom. iii. in Act. Apost. Tom. ix. p. 26, in Charles F. B. Allnatt, ed., Cathedra Petri – The Titles and Prerogatives of St. Peter, (London: Burns & Oates, 1879), 37.*

"And should any one say, 'Why then did James receive the throne of Jerusalem?': this is my answer: that He appointed this man (Peter) not teacher of that throne, but of the habitable globe." *John Chrysostom, A.D. 387, Ib. Hom. lxxxviii. n. 6, p. 600, in Joseph Berrington, John Kirk, eds., and James Waterworth, rev. The Faith of Catholics, vol. 2 (New York: Pustet & Co., 1884), 34.*

E. May: In regards to apostolic succession, Chrysostom refers to Ignatius, a bishop of Antioch, as the successor of Peter:

"At all events the master of the whole world, Peter, to whose hands He committed the keys of heaven, whom He commanded to do and to bear all, He bade tarry here [Antioch] for a long period. Thus in His sight our city was equivalent to the whole world. But since I have mentioned Peter, I have perceived a fifth crown woven from him, and this is that this man [Ignatius of Antioch] succeeded to the office after him. For just as any one taking a great stone from a foundation hastens by all means to introduce an equivalent to it, lest he should shake the whole building, and make it more unsound, so, accordingly, when Peter was about to depart from here, the grace of the Spirit introduced another teacher equivalent to Peter, so that the building already completed should not be made more unsound by the insignificance of the successor." (Homily on St. Ignatius, 4)

E. May: Does this mean that Chrysostom considered James to be Pope? Does this mean that Chrysostom considered Ignatius to be Pope? No, and neither was Chrysostom referring to Peter

as Pope when he referred to him as Rock. Rather, it is the message of the gospel that leads to true apostolic succession.

J. Salza: Mr. May is confusing Peter's ordination of bishops with successors to the chair of Peter. Here, Chrysostom is telling us that Ignatius succeeded Peter as the bishop of Antioch. The historical record indicates that Peter ordained Ignatius as bishop of Antioch. Before Peter's ordination of Ignatius, Peter was in charge of Antioch. This homily has nothing to do with the succession to Peter's office. So Mr. May's usage of this quotation is entirely misplaced.

This is also the same Ignatius who held to the primacy of the Church in Rome. I guess that makes Ignatius a "Romanist," according to Mr. May's terminology. He says:

"Ignatius, also called Theophorus, to the Church that has found mercy in the transcendent Majesty of the Most High Father and of Jesus Christ, His only Son; the church by the will of Him who willed all things that exist, beloved and illuminated through the faith and love of Jesus Christ our God; which also presides in the chief place of the Roman territory; a church worthy of God, worthy of honor, worthy of felicitation, worthy of praise, worthy of success, worthy of sanctification, and presiding in love, maintaining the law of Christ... You have never grudged any man. You have taught others." *Ignatius, A.D. 106, Epistle to the Romans, Preface, The Epistles of St. Clement of Rome and St. Ignatius of Antioch, Ancient Christian Writers, (New York: Newman Press, 1946), trans. James A. Kleist.*

J. Salza: By the way, this is also the same Ignatius of Antioch who claimed membership in the Catholic Church, believed in baptismal regeneration, and said that we eat the flesh of Christ in the Eucharist. I doubt that Mr. May wants to deal with Ignatius' views on baptism or the Eucharist, which fully support Catholic doctrine. We can save these topics for another time.

Basil the Great:

And the house of God, located on the peaks of the mountains, is the Church (sic) according to the opinion of the Apostle. For he says that one must know "how to behave in the household of God." Now the foundation of this Church are the holy mountains, since it is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. One of these mountains was indeed Peter, upon which rock the Lord promised to build his Church. Truly indeed and by highest right are sublime and elevated souls, souls which raise themselves above earthly things, called "mountains." The soul of the blessed Peter was called a lofty rock because he had a strong mooring in the faith and bore constantly and bravely the blows inflicted by temptations. All, therefore, who have acquired an understanding of the Godhead—on account of the breadth of mind and of those actions which proceed from it—are the peaks of the mountains, and upon the house of God is built. (Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah, Cap. II.66, PG 30:233)

E. May: In this passage, Basil states that Peter is one part of the foundation, that the mountains are the apostles and prophets, and Peter is but one of them. He is a rock, not because he is the foundation of the church, but "because he had a strong mooring in the faith and bore constantly and bravely the blows inflicted by temptations."

J. Salza: If it were only that simple for Mr. May. We see that Basil calls Peter the rock on which Jesus builds the Church. In fact, Peter is the only apostle singled out in Basil's analysis. Further, no one is saying that the Church is not built upon the other apostles. Basil, like Scripture, makes a distinction between the "rock" of Peter and the "foundation" of the other apostles. None of this proves anything for Mr. May. In fact, as with the rest of the Fathers Mr. May quotes, Basil denies Mr. May's thesis:

"And when he, the instrument of such and so great a judgment; he the minister of the so great wrath of God upon a sinner; that blessed Peter, who was preferred before all the disciples; who alone received a greater testimony and blessing than the rest; he to whom were entrusted the keys of the kingdom of heaven, &c." *Basil the Great, A.D. 371, T. ii. p. 1. Procem. de Judic. Dei, n. 7, p. 221, in Colin Lindsay, The Evidence for the Papacy, (London: Longmans, 1870), 35.*

J. Salza: Unlike what Mr. May wants his readers to believe, Basil says that Peter "was preferred before all the disciples" and "received a greater testimony and blessing than the rest." Why? Because Peter was "entrusted the keys of the kingdom of heaven." This demonstrates that Peter's unique authority is derived from the keys. The keys give Peter the authority to make infallible binding and loosing pronouncements, and effect succession to Peter's chair, just like they were used in the Davidic kingdom. Mr. May overlooks all of this when advancing his Protestant arguments.

Cyril of Alexandria:

E. May: Cyril viewed the rock to be the confession of faith:

But what why do we say that they are foundations of the earth? For Christ is the foundation and unshakeable base of all things—But the next foundations, these nearer to us, can be understood to be the apostles and the evangelists, those eyewitnesses and ministers of the word who have arisen for the strengthening of the faith. For when we recognize that their own traditions must be followed, we serve a faith which is true and does not deviate from Christ. For when he wisely and blamelessly confessed his faith to Jesus saying, 'You are the Christ, Son of the living God,' Jesus said to divine Peter: 'You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church.' Now, by the work 'rock' Jesus indicated, I think, the immoveable faith of the disciple...And I tell you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church (sic), and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.' The surname, I believe, calls nothing other than the unshakeable and very firm faith of the disciple 'a rock' upon which the Church was founded and made firm and remains continually impregnable even with respect to the very gates of Hell. (Commentary on Isaiah IV.2 PG 760:940; Dialogue on the Trinity IV, PG 75:866)

J. Salza: We have already addressed this above. We can include Peter's faith into the equation, but not at the exclusion of his person. Jesus calls Peter "rock" independently of his faith in John 1:42, as well as in Matthew 16:18 (since Peter's divine communication, not his faith, is at issue). The following quote from Cyril proves my point:

"He suffers him no longer to be called Simon, exercising authority and rule over him already as having become His own. But by a title suitable to the thing, He changed his name into Peter,

from the word *petra* (rock); for on him He was afterwards to found His Church." *Cyril of Alexandria, A.D. 424, T. iv. Comm. in Joan., p. 131, in Colin Lindsay, The Evidence for the Papacy, (London: Longmans, 1870), 50.*

J. Salza: Here, Cyril says that Jesus founded His Church "on him," in reference to Peter, the person. So Cyril says that Jesus builds the Church both on Peter as well as his faith, even though Mr. May wants us to believe that Cyril says Jesus builds His Church only upon Peter's faith. Cyril also says that Peter is the shepherd over the whole Church:

"He [Christ] promises to found the church, assigning immoveableness to it, as he is the Lord of strength, and over this he sets Peter as shepherd." *Cyril of Alexandria, A.D. 429, Comm. on. Matt., ad. loc., Migne, Patr. Graec., vol. 72, col. 424, in Michael M. Winter, Saint Peter and the Popes, (Baltimore: Helicon, 1960), 74.*

Gregory of Nyssa:

E. May: Gregory as well viewed the rock to be the confession of faith: The warmth of our praises does not extend to Simon insofar as he was a catcher of fish: rather it extends to his firm faith, which is at the same time the foundation of the whole Church (Panegyric on St. Stephen, PG 46:733)

J. Salza: Already addressed above. Gregory, like the rest of the Fathers, also says that Jesus builds His Church upon the person of Peter:

"The memory of Peter, the Head of the Apostles, is celebrated; and magnified indeed with him are the other members of the Church; but upon him is the Church of God firmly established. For he is, agreeably to the gift conferred upon him by the Lord, that unbroken and most firm Rock upon which the Lord built His Church." *Gregory of Nyssa, A.D. 371, Alt. Or. De S. Steph. Galland t.vi. p. 600, in Colin Lindsay, The Evidence for the Papacy, (London: Longmans, 1870), 32.*

J. Salza: Gregory also says that Peter is the leader of the apostles:

"The leader and coryphaeus of the Apostolic choir...The head of the Apostles." *Gregory of Nyssa, A.D. 371, Alt. Orat. De S. Steph. tom. iii. p. 730, 4, in Charles F. B. Allnatt, ed., Cathedra Petri – The Titles and Prerogatives of St. Peter, (London: Burns & Oates, 1879), 51.*

Jerome:

E. May: For Jerome, the Rock was Christ:

The one foundation which the apostolic architect laid is our Lord Jesus Christ. Upon this stable and firm foundation, which has itself been laid on solid ground, the Church of Christ is built...For the Church was founded upon the rock, Christ, the Catholic Church, is the one dove; she stands the perfect one, and near to His right hand, and has nothing sinister in her...The rock is Christ, Who gave to His apostles, that they also should be called rocks, "Thou are Peter, and upon this

rock I will build my Church (Commentary on Mt 7.25 M.P.L., Vol. 26, Col. 51; Epistle 65:15, Ad Principiam, Cited by J. Waterworth S J., A Commentary)

J. Salza: Once again, Catholics believe that the Rock is Christ. But as we have said, Jesus confers this distinction upon Peter as well. Listen to what else Jerome says about Peter:

"What has Paul to do with Aristotle? Or Peter with Plato? For as the latter [Plato] was the prince of philosophers, so was the former [Peter] chief of the Apostles; on him the Lord's Church was firmly founded, and neither rushing flood nor storm can shake it." *Jerome, A.D. 417, Against the Pelagians 1:14a, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers – Jerome: Letters and Select Works, 2nd series, vol. 6, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 455.*

"Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church.' As He bestowed light on His Apostles, so that they were to be called 'light of the world,' and as they obtained other titles from the Lord, so also to Simon, who believed on the Rock Christ, was given the name Peter (Rock). And in accordance with the metaphor of a rock, it is justly said to him, 'I will build my Church on thee.'" *Jerome, c.A.D. 385-398, Ib. 1. iii. Comm. In Matt., Patr. Lat. i. col. 74, in Colin Lindsay, The Evidence for the Papacy, (London: Longmans, 1870), 40.*

J. Salza: These and many other quotations are devastating to Mr. May's position.

Paul of Emesa:

E. May: Paul of Emesa affirms that the rock was the confession of faith:

Upon this faith the Church of God has been founded. With this expectation, upon this rock the Lord God placed the foundations of the Church. When then the Lord Christ was going to Jerusalem, He asked the disciples, saying, "Whom do men say that the Son of Man is?" The apostles say, "Some Elias, other Jeremias, or one of the prophets," And he says, but you that is, My elect, you who have followed Me for three years, and have seen My power, and miracles, and beheld Me walking on the sea, who have shared My table. "Whom do you say that I am" Instantly, the Coryphaeus of the apostles, the mouth of the disciples, Peter, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." (Homily of the Nativity)

J. Salza: I found no other quotes from Paul of Emesa. But this Father demonstrates that Peter is the spokesman for the apostles. That is because Peter has authority over them. Jesus designates Peter alone as the chief shepherd over the other apostles and the Church at large (John 21:15-17), and prays for Peter **alone** that he might be the source of strength for the other apostles (Luke 22:31-32).

Tertullian:

E. May: Tertullian was the first to recognize the rock as Peter, but he does not identify him as being the rock in the sense that the Church was built upon him, but in the sense that the church is built through him as he preaches the gospel.

J. Salza: Mr. May doesn't provide any quotes from Tertullian, so I will:

"Was anything hidden from Peter, who was called the Rock whereon the Church was to be built; who obtained the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and the power of loosing and of binding in heaven and on earth?" *Tertullian, c.A.D. 200-220, De Praescript Haeret, n.22, p. 209, in Colin Lindsay, The Evidence for the Papacy, (London: Longmans, 1870), 19.*

J. Salza: There is nothing about the Church being built "through" Peter, if Mr. May thinks that is an important distinction. Tertullian says that "whereon [in reference to Peter] the Church was to be built." Tertullian is yet another Father who says the Church is built upon the person of Peter.

E. May: The list could go on and on.

J. Salza: It sure could, Mr. May. And each time the list would grow more and more devastating to your position.

E. May: Eusebius viewed the rock as Christ.

J. Salza: Already addressed. Further, Eusebius viewed Peter as the leader of the apostles:

"That powerful and great one of the Apostles, who, on account of his excellence, was the leader of all the rest." *Eusebius, A.D. 325, Com. in Ps. lxxviii 9, tom. v. p. 737, in Charles F. B. Allnatt, ed., Cathedra Petri – The Titles and Prerogatives of St. Peter, (London: Burns & Oates, 1879), 49.*

E. May: Ambrose viewed the rock as the confession of faith.

J. Salza: Again, Mr. May makes another misleading and irrelevant statement. Here are some more quotes from Ambrose which are fatal to Mr. May's position:

"Peter is called 'rock' because, like an immovable rock, he sustains the joints and mass of the entire Christian edifice." *Ambrose, c.A.D. 385-389, Sermon 4, in The Great Commentary of Cornelius Lapidus, II, Catholic Standard Library, trans. Mossman (John Hodges & Co, 1887), 220, in Michael Mallone, ed., The Apostolic Digest, (Irving, TX: Sacred Heart, 1987), 248.*

"Therefore where Peter is, there is the Church; where the Church is, there death is not, but life eternal; and therefore it was added, and 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against it,' and, 'I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.' Blessed Peter, against whom the gates of hell prevailed not, nor were the gates of heaven closed against him; but who, on the contrary, destroyed the porches of hell and opened the heavenly places." *Ambrose, c.A.D. 385-389, T. i. In Ps. xl. n. 30, p. 879, 880, in Colin Lindsay, The Evidence for the Papacy, (London: Longmans, 1870), 37.*

"Peter, after having been tempted by the devil, is set over the Church. The Lord, therefore, signified beforehand what that is, that He afterwards chose him the pastor of the Lord's flock. For to him He said, 'But thou, when thou art converted, confirm thy brethren.'" *Ambrose, c.A.D.*

385-389, *De Fide, lib. Iv. c. 5, n. 56*, in Charles F. B. Allnatt, ed., *Cathedra Petri – The Titles and Prerogatives of St. Peter*, (London: Burns & Oates, 1879), 36-37.

J. Salza: Ambrose even refers to the "Roman See" in union with the "Catholic Church." Would Mr. May also call Ambrose a "Romanist"?

"St. Ambrose...declares union with the Roman See to be union with the Catholic Church. Speaking of his brother Satyrus, who had arrived, after shipwreck, in a place of doubtful orthodoxy, he says: "He called the Bishop to him, and not accounting any grace true which was not of the true faith, he inquired of him whether he agreed with the Catholic Bishops, that is, with the Roman Church." *Ambrose, A.D. 385, De Excessa Frat. n. 46, tom. ii. p. 1126*, in Charles F. B. Allnatt, ed., *Cathedra Petri – The Titles and Prerogatives of St. Peter*, (London: Burns & Oates, 1879), 94.

E. May: Bede viewed the rock as Christ.

J. Salza: No quotes provided, but already addressed.

E. May: Palladius of Helenopolis viewed the rock as the confession of faith.

J. Salza: Same thing here, and same response.

E. May: Here is the point: we hardly have the "unanimous consent" that is demanded by Trent and Vatican I.

J. Salza: Again, Mr. May assumes that citing a dozen or so Fathers is a unanimity of the Fathers. He is wrong. Second, we have just demonstrated that the Fathers from whom Mr. May quotes actually contradict his views. What a quandary for Mr. May.

E. May: Why does Rome demand an outrageous interpretation of the passage, with no exegetical warrant, that scores of church fathers simply missed? The answer is Sola Ecclesia.

J. Salza: Mr. May, thank you for helping me explain and vindicate the Catholic Church's teaching on the papacy using Scripture and the early Church Fathers. This dialogue has demonstrated that you "read into" the Scriptures what you want to see (e.g., Peter is not the rock; all the apostles knew Jesus was the Son of God in Mt 16:18-19; all the apostles were given the keys to the kingdom of heaven, etc.). You initially come off like you are in the know and your opponent is an idiot, so I was expecting a lot more from you. But when you gave us your exegesis of Matthew 16:18-19 and analysis of the Fathers, you revealed your true colors. You demonstrated your bias against the Catholic faith and not your proficiency in apologetics.

Catholics do not believe in Sola Ecclesia. We believe in Sola Verbum Dei (the Word of God alone). This word comes to us from Christ and the apostles through both the written and oral tradition (2 Thess 2:15), which has been entrusted to the Church that Jesus builds upon the rock of Peter (Matt. 16:18:19; 1 Tim 3:15). The ineffable wisdom of God is made know through this Church (Eph. 3:9-10).

I hope this short dialogue is helpful to those who read it, Catholic and Protestant alike. I will take my leave and let the readers be the judge of who is more faithful to the plain meaning of Scripture, me or Mr. May. If Mr. May comes back and continues to accuse me of "reading into" the text, we will know why this debate is over.

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