

“And no one has demonstrated that he ever did otherwise” would be denied by William Webster.

Perhaps so, but the patristic evidence Webster cites in the article at that link is compatible with the truth of the statement by Pope Pius IX quoted in comment #32 [as understood according to the explanation I provided in comment #33] that he would not receive and interpret the Sacred Scriptures except according to the unanimous consent of the fathers. As I explained in comment #41 of the "And...And" post (Jan. 23, 2013),

Often (in the Catholic paradigm) passages are understood to be rich in having multiple facets, so that they can be simultaneously understood in many different (but compatible) ways. And that's true of the Matthew 16 passage as well (see [this post](#) I wrote in 2008). So it is important not to 'create' division by imposing an either/or paradigm on interpretations that can be understood as mutually compatible in a both/and paradigm.

The Catholic Church affirms that Christ is the Rock, and that the faith Peter confessed is the rock, and that Peter "represents" the universal Church, and that the other Apostles also are foundation stones of the Church and that they also bear the keys. These truths are all compatible with Peter himself, on account of his being the first to confess the faith, having been given the unique office and charism that the Catholic Church teaches he was given, and in that sense also being the rock on which the Church is built. This is one of the paradigmatic differences between Protestantism and Catholicism, namely, that in the Catholic paradigm there are types and levels of causes that can act simultaneously, levels of meanings that can be true of a passage simultaneously, and forms of participation and union by which persons can participate in the life, work, suffering, and even nature of another. This is why, for example, in 1302 Pope Boniface VIII can say in *Unam Sanctum*:

Therefore, of the one and only Church there is one body and one head, not two heads like a monster; that is, Christ and the Vicar of Christ, Peter and the successor of Peter, since the Lord speaking to Peter Himself said: 'Feed my sheep' [Jn 21:17], meaning, my sheep in general, not these, nor those in particular, whence we understand that He entrusted all to him [Peter].

And in 1943 Pope Pius XII can similarly say in *Mystici Coporis Christi*:

[Nor] may anyone argue that the primacy of jurisdiction established in the Church gives such a Mystical Body two heads. For Peter in virtue of his Primacy is only Christ's Vicar; so that there is only one chief Head of this Body, namely Christ, who never ceases Himself to guide the Church invisible, though at the same time He rules it visibly, through Church rested not on Him alone, but on Peter too, its visible foundation stone.

Therefore in order to create a problem for the statement by Pope Pius IX, it is not enough to show many examples of Church Fathers saying that Christ is the rock and that Peter's faith is the rock, and that the other Apostles exercised the keys, etc. Someone would have to show that the unanimous consent of the Fathers is that Peter is **not** the rock on which the Church is built, not

merely that for the Fathers Jesus is the Rock and Peter's faith is the rock, since Peter's being the rock is fully compatible with these other things also being the rock. Otherwise, by interpreting Patristic writings stating that Jesus is the Rock and that Peter's confession is the rock, as meaning that **only** Jesus is the Rock, or that **only** Peter's confession is the rock, Webster is using the Protestant theological paradigm (with its either/or assumptions regarding such things) to derive his conclusion that these Church Fathers are thereby saying that Peter is \*not\* the rock. And that begs the question, by using a Protestant theological presupposition as the interpretive framework by which to create an incompatibility between the statement by Pope Pius IX and the teaching of the Church Fathers.

Among the patristic quotations Webster cites, there are only two that could be taken as possibly implying that Peter is \*not\* the rock. One is by St. Ambrose:

Faith, then, is the foundation of the Church, for it was not said of Peter's flesh, but of his faith, that 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'

And the other is by St. Augustine:

Why have I wanted to make this little introduction? In order to suggest to you that in Peter the Church is to be recognized. Christ, you see, built his Church not on a man but on Peter's confession. (Sermon 229)

First note that two statements, out of the entirety of the patristic corpus, is no "unanimous consensus" of the Fathers. But second, these two statements have to be understood in light of everything else these Doctors of the Church say about this subject.

Regarding **St. Ambrose's** statement, when he says that Christ's statement was not "said of Peter's flesh, but of his faith," his reference to Peter's flesh is not addressing the particular office St. Peter was given. That flesh died and was buried in Rome. But the faith is preserved in the Petrine office, which Peter occupied in the flesh. Webster's thesis that for St. Ambrose, Peter's faith being the rock means that Peter himself could not be the rock, is problematic because St. Ambrose in other places acknowledges that Christ made Peter himself the pastor of His flock and rock of the Church. Webster is attempting to qualify St. Ambrose's well-known statement:

It is to Peter himself that He says, "you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church." Where Peter is, there is the Church. And where the Church, no death is there, but life eternal." (Commentary on Twelve Psalms of David)

But if St. Ambrose believed that Peter's faith being the rock made it such that Peter himself was not the rock, or did not hold the pastoral primacy over Christ's flock, he would have been unlikely to say the following things:

We recognized in the letter of your holiness the vigilance of the good shepherd. You faithfully watch over the gate entrusted to you, and with pious solicitude you guard Christ's sheepfold, you that are worthy to have the Lord's sheep hear and follow you. Since you know the sheep of Christ you will easily catch the wolves and confront

them like a wary shepherd, lest they disperse the Lord's flock by their constant lack of faith and their bestial howling." (Synodal Letter of Ambrose, Sabinus, Bassian, and others to Pope Siricius, AD 389)

In fine, Peter, after having been tempted by the devil [Luke 22:31-32] is set over the Church. The Lord, therefore, foreshowed what that was, that He afterwards chose him as the pastor of the Lord's flock. For to him He said, "But thou when converted confirm thy brethren." (Commentary on the Psalms, 43:40).

Go your way, therefore, to my brethren— that is, to those everlasting doors, which, as soon as they see Jesus, are lifted up. Peter is an everlasting door, against whom the gates of hell shall not prevail. (Exposition of the Christian Faith, Bk IV.26)

To the same Apostle, again, when on a former occasion he said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," He made answer: "You are Peter, and upon this Rock will I build My Church, and I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 16:18 Could He not, then, strengthen the faith of the man to whom, acting on His own authority, He gave the kingdom, whom He called the Rock, thereby declaring him to be the foundation of the Church? (Exposition of the Christian Faith, Bk IV.57)

Peter is called the Rock because, like an immovable rock, he sustains and joins the mass of the entire Christian edifice. (Sermon 4).

Christ is the Rock, 'For they drank from that spiritual Rock that followed them and that Rock was Christ, ' and He did not refuse to bestow the favor of this title even upon His disciple, so that he too might be 'Peter,' in that he has from the Rock a solid consistency of firm faith. (*Expos. in Luc.*)

And this confession is indeed rightly made by them, for they have not the succession of Peter, who hold not the chair of Peter, which they rend by wicked schism; and this, too, they do, wickedly denying that sins can be forgiven even in the Church, whereas it was said to Peter: "I will give unto you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound also in heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed also in heaven." (Matthew 16:19) (Concerning Repentance, Bk 1, 33)

And of St. Ambrose, St. Augustine writes

In a passage in this book [written by Augustine], I said about the Apostle Peter: 'On him as on a rock the Church was built.' This idea is also expressed in song by the voice of many in the verses of the most blessed Ambrose where he says about the crowing of the cock: 'At its crowing he, this rock of the Church, washed away his guilt.' (Retractions, 20)

These statements suggest that for St. Ambrose it is not so simple as identifying the rock with Peter's faith, but that it also involved Peter himself, and through him even his episcopal successors on the chair of Peter.

Now, regarding the **St. Augustine** passage, from Sermon 229, the same could be said. In saying that Christ "built his Church not on a man but on Peter's confession," St. Augustine is denying not that St. Peter received a special office, but that it was merely Peter as man on whom Christ built His Church, rather than Peter as enlightened by the Father's supernatural gift of faith, in whom, by this gift, the connection between faith and office would be preserved. For he writes elsewhere:

"Not to speak of this wisdom, which you do not believe to be in the Catholic Church, there are many other things which most justly keep me in her bosom. The consent of peoples and nations keeps me in the Church; so does her authority, inaugurated by miracles, nourished by hope, enlarged by love, established by age. The succession of priests keeps me, beginning from the very seat of the Apostle Peter, to whom the Lord, after His resurrection, gave it in charge to feed His sheep, down to the present episcopate. And so, lastly, does the name itself of Catholic, which, not without reason, amid so many heresies, the Church has thus retained; so that, though all heretics wish to be called Catholics, yet when a stranger asks where the Catholic Church meets, no heretic will venture to point to his own chapel or house. Such then in number and importance are the precious ties belonging to the Christian name which keep a believer in the Catholic Church ...no one shall move me from the faith which binds my mind with ties so many and so strong to the Christian religion.... For my part I should not believe the gospel except the authority of the Catholic Church moved me. (Against the Fundamental Epistle of Manichaeus, 4-5)

We know, indeed, the great merit of the bishop and martyr Cyprian; but is it in any way greater than that of the apostle and martyr Peter, of whom the said Cyprian speaks as follows in his epistle to Quintus? "For neither did Peter, whom the Lord chose first, and on whom He built His Church, (Matthew 16:18) when Paul afterwards disputed with him about circumcision, claim or assume anything insolently and arrogantly to himself, so as to say that he held the primacy, and should rather be obeyed of those who were late and newly come. Nor did he despise Paul because he had before been a persecutor of the Church, but he admitted the counsel of truth, and readily assented to the legitimate grounds which Paul maintained; giving us thereby a pattern of concord and patience, that we should not pertinaciously love our own opinions, but should rather account as our own any true and rightful suggestions of our brethren and colleagues for the common health and good." Here is a passage in which Cyprian records what we also learn in holy Scripture, that the Apostle Peter, in whom the primacy of the apostles shines with such exceeding grace, was corrected by the later Apostle Paul, when he adopted a custom in the matter of circumcision at variance with the demands of truth. (On Baptism, Against the Donatists, II.1.2)

For the whole body of the saints, therefore, inseparably belonging to the body of Christ, and for their safe pilotage through the present tempestuous life, did Peter, the first of the apostles, receive the keys of the kingdom of heaven for the binding and loosing of sins." (Tractates on the Gospel of John, 124)

"These miserable wretches, refusing to acknowledge the Rock as Peter and to believe that the Church has received the Keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, have lost these very keys from their own hands." (Augustine, Christian Combat, 31,33).

Peter, who had confessed Him the Son of God, and in that confession had been called the Rock upon which the Church should be built, .... (*In Ps. lxxix. n. 4.*)

Why! A faggot that is cut from the vine retains its shape. But what use is that shape if it is not living from the root? Come, brother, if you wish to be engrafted in the vine. It is grievous when we see you thus lying cut off. Number the bishops from the See of Peter. And, in that order of fathers, see whom succeeded whom. This is the Rock which the proud gates of hades do not conquer. All who rejoice in peace, only judge truly." (*Psalmus Contra Pertem Donati*).

For, if the order of the succession of bishops is to be considered, how much more surely, truly, and safely do we number them from Peter, to whom the Lord said: 'Upon this Rock I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.' For to Peter succeeded Linus, to Linus Clement .... To Julius Liberius, to Liberius Damasus, to Damasus Siricius, to Siricius Anastasius." (Epistle 53)

In these quotations, especially the last two, St. Augustine is speaking about the authority of the universal Church, whereas in Sermon 229 he is speaking about each individual Christian's expression of faith, by which we each become, as it were, a rock on which the Church continues to be built for those who come after us. So here too it would be a mistake to take that one statement of St. Augustine in Sermon 229 as denying that Christ made Peter the rock on which He built His Church, and gave unique authority over His Church to Peter and his successors, because that's just what St. Augustine affirms in other places, and we should not make him contradict himself if we need not do so.

*Feast of the Chair of St. Peter, 2013*