

Chapter 14

'Feed My Lambs'

15 So 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, "Tend My lambs." 16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Shepherd 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 all things; You know that I love You." Jesus said to him, "Tend My sheep.

18 "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." 19 Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me!"¹

The Roman Catholic View

According to Roman Catholic dogma, Jesus designated Peter as shepherd of the entire Church in John 21:15-19. Vatican II in its first document, "Dogmatic Constitution of the Church," Chapter I, "The Mystery of the Church," states the following:

After His resurrection our Savior handed her [the Church] over to Peter to be shepherded (Jn. 21:17), commissioning him and the other apostles to

1 John 21:15-19.

propagate and govern her (cf. Mt. 28:18 ff.).²

Similarly, in Chapter III,

The order of bishops is the successor to the college of the apostles in teaching authority and pastoral rule; or, rather, in the episcopal order the apostolic body continues without a break. Together with its head, the Roman Pontiff, and never without this head, the episcopal order is the subject of supreme and full power over the universal Church. But this power can be exercised only with the consent of the Roman Pontiff. For our Lord made Simon Peter alone the rock and keybearer of the Church (cf. Mt. 16:18-19), and appointed him shepherd of the whole flock (cf. Jn. 21:15 ff.).³

Again in the sixth document, "Decree on Ecumenism,"

After Peter's profession of love, Christ entrusted all His sheep to him to be confirmed in faith (cf. Lk. 22:32) and shepherded in perfect unity (cf. Jn. 21:15-17). Meanwhile, Christ Jesus Himself forever remains the chief cornerstone (cf. Eph. 2:20) and shepherd of our souls (cf. 1 Pet. 2:25).⁴

In the official *Catechism of the Catholic Church* similar claims about Peter are made:

Jesus entrusted a specific authority to Peter: "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" [Matt. 16:19]. The "power of the keys" designates the authority to govern the house of God, which is the Church. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, confirmed this mandate after his Resurrection: "Feed my sheep" [John 21:15-17].⁵

Finally,

2 *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 23.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 344.

5 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 553, p. 142; the Scripture references in the footnotes of the catechism are placed within the quotation in brackets.

The Lord made Simon alone, whom he named Peter, the "rock" of his Church. He gave him the keys of his Church [Mt 16:18-19] and instituted him shepherd of the whole flock [Jn 21:15-17]. "The office of binding and loosing which was given to Peter was also assigned to the college of apostles united to its head" [LG 22 §2]. This pastoral office of Peter and the other apostles belongs to the Church's very foundation and is continued by the bishops under the primacy of the Pope.⁶

Therefore, John 21:15-17, together with Matthew 16:18, 19, are the two texts upon which the primacy of Peter as head of the Church is based. Moreover, the line of Popes following him were his successors in this office.

The analysis of John 21:15-19 in this chapter therefore completes the study of the three texts often taken together as foundational to the Catholic doctrine of the papacy.⁷

Structural and Lexical Analysis of the Text

The relevant portions of John 21:15-19 consist of three questions by Jesus, Peter's three answers, and then Jesus' response to those answers. The Greek is as follows.

First exchange (verse 15):

αγαπας⁸ με πλεον τουτων⁹;
[You love me more than these?]
ναι, κυριε, συ οιδας¹⁰ οτι φιλω¹¹ σε
[Yes, Lord, you know that I love you]

6 Ibid., paragraph 881, p. 233; the Scripture references in the footnotes of the catechism are placed within the quotation in brackets.

7 Matt. 16:13-20; John 20:21-23; 21:15-19.

8 2nd person singular present active indicative of αγαπαω (*agapaō*), to love.

9 A genitive plural: "these." But the masculine, feminine, and neuter for this pronoun all have the same form, so it could be "these [men]" or "these [things]."

10 2nd person singular perfect active indicative of οιδα (*oida*), to know; a perfect form but used as a present in the NT (AG, p. 558).

11 1st person singular present active indicative of φιλω (*phileō*), to love.

βοσκε¹² τα αρνια¹³ μου
[Feed my lambs]

Second exchange (verse 16):

αγαπας με;
[You love me?]
ναι, κυριε, συ οιδας οτι φιλω σε
[Yes, Lord, you know that I love you]
ποιμαινε¹⁴ τα προβατια¹⁵ μου
[Shepherd my sheep]

Third exchange (verse 17):

φιλεις¹⁶ με;
[You love me?]
κυριε, παντα συ οιδας, συ γινωσκεις¹⁷ οτι φιλω σε
[Lord, all things you know, you know that
I love you]
βοσκε τα προβατια μου
[Feed my sheep]

These three exchanges are the same in basic structure and almost identical in terminology, though with four possible plays on words.

(1) Jesus' word for "love" changes in his three questions: αγαπω (*agapaō*) in the first two exchanges and φιλω (*phileō*) in the third; Peter's word remains the same in all three: φιλω (*phileō*).

(2) Peter's word for "know" changes in his three claims that Jesus knows he loves him: οιδα (*oida*) in the first

12 2nd person singular present active imperative of βοσκω (*boskō*), to feed [as a herdsman] (AG, p. 144).

13 αρνια (*arnia*), plural of αρνιον (*arnion*); αρνιον is a diminutive of αρην (*arēn*) "but no longer felt to be a dim. in NT times" (AG, p. 107); *sheep, lamb*.

14 2nd person singular present active imperative of ποιμαινω (*poimainō*), to tend a flock (AG, p. 690).

15 προβατια (*probatia*), plural of προβατιον (*probatia*): προβατιον is a diminutive of προβατον (*probaton*), thus meaning *lamb*, but often used without the diminutive sense to mean simply *sheep* (AG, p. 709). Although the UBS apparatus does not take note of it, according to Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, V:321, some MSS have προβατα (plural of προβατον) in both vv. 16 and 17.

16 2nd person singular present active indicative of φιλω (*phileō*).

17 2nd person singular present active indicative of γινωσκω (*ginōskō*), to know.

two exchanges; γινώσκω (*ginōskō*) in the third.

(3) Jesus' imperative word changes in his three commissions to Peter: βόσκω (*boskō*) in the first and third exchanges; ποιμαίνω (*poimainō*) in the second.

(4) Jesus' term changes for those to whom Peter is to minister: ἀρνία (*arnia*) in the first exchange; προβάτια (*probatia*) in the second and third.

Whether (1) represents a play on words is hotly debated. Among those who argue that a distinction is intended by the use of the two different words for love, the most common view is that *agapaō* represents a higher type of love, whereas *phileō* represents a lower form of love.¹⁸ However, others who see a distinction completely reverse the meanings, making *phileō* represent that love which is of a higher order.¹⁹

The issue is not whether αγαπάω (*agapaō*) and φιλέω (*phileō*) are identical in meaning. They are probably not. According to George Turner,

Although *phileō* and *agapaō* appear to be used interchangeably in several passages (Prov. 8:17,

18 For example, Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, V:321, describes αγαπάω as "high and devoted love" and φιλέω as "the humbler word...for love as a friend." Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, IV:452, writes, "One of these two words [*agapaō*] means a higher, calmer, nobler kind of love than the other...The other of the two words means a more passionate and lower kind of love." Also, Alford, *The Greek Testament*, I:917, writes, "The distinction seems to be that αγαπάω is more used of that reverential love, grounded on high graces of character, which is borne towards God and man by the child of God;--whereas φιλέω expresses more the personal love of human affection." Westcott, *The Gospel According to St John*, II:367, calls the love implied by φιλέω "natural love...of which he [Peter] could be sure" and that by αγαπάω "that higher love...which was to be the spring of the Christian life..."

19 For example, Richard Chenevix Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973; original publication date, 1880), pp. 42-43, writes, "At this moment, when all the pulses in the heart of the now penitent Apostle are beating with a passionate affection toward his Lord, this word [*agapaō*] on that Lord's lips sounds far too cold; to very imperfectly express the warmth of his affection toward Him...He [Peter] therefore in his answer substitutes for the αγαπάω of Christ the word of a more personal love, φιλέω (ver. 15). And this he does not on the first occasion only, but again upon a second. And now at length he has triumphed; for when his Lord puts the question to him a third time, it is not αγαπάω any more but φιλείς."

LXX; Jn. 13:23; cf. 20:2; 12:25; cf. 1 Jn. 2:15; Rev. 1:5; cf. 3:19), their meanings are not necessarily identical. For example, *agapaō* never means "to kiss," but *phileō* does (Gen. 27:26, LXX; Mk. 14:44; Lk. 22:47).²⁰

The issue rather is whether John intended a distinction in his use of these two verbs in 21:15-19. Despite the popularity of the view that sees some kind of distinction between them in this passage, it seems that a stronger case can be made against that view. The following arguments are offered.²¹

- That competent scholars have taken exactly opposite views regarding which of the two words represents a higher form of love indicates the difficulty involved in trying to define a distinction between them.
- John's writing elsewhere shows a tendency to employ variations in terms when no real difference in meaning is intended.²²

20 George A. Turner, "Love," *ISBE*, III:176.

21 The view that there is no substantive difference is not lacking support from numerous scholars either. See, for example, Gustav Stählin, "φιλέω," *TDNT*, IX:135" "...throughout the Gospel ἀγαπᾶω and φιλέω are synonym." He also includes a long list of scholars taking this view in his n. 196. Morris, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, pp. 871-73, builds a strong case for synonymy. Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, II:1103, adds a bit of humor to the debate: "In his work *Agape in the New Testament*, III, 95, C. Spicq writes with confidence: 'Commentators are divided about the respective value of the two verbs, but those who make them synonymous either ignore the semantics of *agape* or minimize the importance of the scene.'" Brown then goes on to comment, "Despite the danger of being guilty of one of those two crimes, the present writer is forced to align himself with scholars ancient (the OL [Old Latin] translators, Augustine) and modern (Lagrange, Bernard, Moffatt, Strachan, Bonsirven, Bultmann, Barrett, etc.) who find no clear distinction of meaning in the alternation of *agapan* and *philein* in vss. 15-17." Finally, he states three arguments in favor of this view, which are also included in my list following.

22 Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 873. In a note on John 3:5, Morris gives numerous examples. "It must be borne in mind that it is John's habit in repeating a statement to make minor variations. This happens in a twofold variation (compare 7:30 and 44; 3:17 and 12:47). For threefold variation with two the same see 6:35, 48, 51, and with all three different 1:32, 33, 34 (three different Greek verbs for seeing), or 5:8, 11, 12. For multiple variation consider the references to Judas Iscariot in 6:71; 12:4; 13:2, 26, 29. The variations are unimportant, but no two of these are identical. Even when he is expressly quoting, John does this kind of thing as we see

- The previous point is rendered more significant by the fact that Jesus and Peter conversed in Aramaic, in which the same word almost certainly would have been used throughout the exchange by both Jesus and Peter.²³
- In the first two exchanges, Peter's response is "Yes, Lord!" This definitely implies an affirmative answer to Jesus' question. "Peter seems concerned that his love is called in question, not as to the precise quality of love that he displays. He is accepting Jesus' word, not declining it."²⁴
- In the third exchange, John now for the first time puts *phileō* in the mouth of Jesus. Yet John also portrays Peter as highly "grieved" that Jesus should ask the question a **third time**, i.e., the same question, despite the fact that John used "*phileis me?*" for this third question after having used "*agapas me?*" for the two previous exchanges. This concern on the part of Peter plus John's use of *phileō* in the question at which Peter was grieved both imply that the words are being used by John interchangeably. Neither Peter nor John see any difference in the three questions asked by Jesus.

by comparing 1:48 and 50, or 6:44 and 65. Many more examples could be cited. It is clearly a mark of Johannine style. It is fair to say that the sense is not distorted by the stylistic variations, but the variations are real" (p. 217, n. 30).

23 Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, II:1103, makes the following point: "In Hebrew and Aramaic there is one basic verb [אהב] for expressing the various types of love, so that all the subtlety of distinction that commentators find in the use of the two [Greek] verbs in 15-17 scarcely echoes the putative Semitic original. We note that LXX uses both verbs to translate Heb. 'āhēb, although *agapan* is twenty times more frequent than *philein*. In the Syriac translations of 15-17 only one verb is used." Of course, with changes in vocal emphasis, intonation, or hand gestures, a distinction could be drawn in Aramaic even though using the same word. One could perhaps argue that this is what John was trying to capture by using the two different Greek words. Tenney, *The Gospel of John*, p. 202, makes essentially this suggestion. However, the fact that in Aramaic the same word would have been used, predisposes one, in the absence of strong evidence to the contrary, to assuming that no distinction was meant. This predisposition is especially justified in view of John's writing style noted in the previous footnote.

24 Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 873.

- John seems clearly to use these same two words interchangeably elsewhere in his Gospel. When referring to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," he uses *agapaō* in 13:23 and 21:20 but *phileō* in 20:2.

Therefore, it seems quite probable that John is using the two Greek words interchangeably for the sake of variation, a characteristic of his literary style.

Regarding variations (3) and (4), although there are slight differences in meaning, most commentators take the variations again to be stylistic. The meaning is simple and straightforward: "Peter is being commissioned to tend the flock of Christ."²⁵ In view of the obviously parallel use of *oida* and *γινώσκω* in the same sentence of Peter's third response, the same conclusion holds true for (2): the variation is simply stylistic.

Interpretive Issues

At least three issues present themselves.

"More Than These"

What is the meaning of "more than these" in the first exchange? There are three possibilities:

1. "Do you love me more than these men love me?"
2. "Do you love me more than you love these men?"
3. "Do you love me more than you love these things?"

Few have taken the second interpretation, although it is grammatically allowed.²⁶ Though rejecting it, Morris

25 Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 874. Alford, *The Greek Testament*, I:918, thinks there is an important distinction to be observed in both pairs of words, but the implications he attaches to these variations of terminology seem highly fanciful. If one is going to make any distinctions, Ryle's is much more sensible: "When our Lord spoke of 'lambs,' I believe he meant the least, the weakest, and feeblest members of that flock which is His Church" (*Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, IV:450).

26 Blass, Debrunner, and Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and*

acknowledges that the interpretation is also possible contextually: after all, Peter had denied the Lord but remained with these friends and gone fishing with them.²⁷

In the third interpretation, "these things" can be taken either of the fish just caught or of the fishing equipment and all that it stood for as a way of life. However, if this were Jesus' intent, it seems unlikely that Peter would make no reference at all to the phrase in his answer. If, on the other hand, the comparison involved people, Peter might indeed be inclined to make no comment on it!²⁸

Therefore, the most likely view is interpretation one.²⁹ A possible objection might be that Jesus would not invite Peter to make such a comparison. However, as Morris points out, Peter had previously professed greater devotion to Christ than that of the other disciples.³⁰ "It may be that Christ is asking Peter whether, in the light of what has since happened, he still thinks that his love for Christ exceeds that of all the others."³¹

Why Was the Question Repeated Three Times?

Speculative reasons for the threefold repetition of the question are not difficult to find.³² However, the most likely answer is simply that these three exchanges between Jesus and Peter are tied to his threefold denial of Jesus just before his crucifixion.

He has three times denied his Lord. Now he has three times affirmed his love for Him, and three times he

Other Early Christian Literature, p. 99 [§185(1)].

27 Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, pp. 870-871.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 871. Although some have opted for view 3 (Alford, *The Greek Testament*, I:917, cites Whitby and Bolten), Tenney, *The Gospel of John*, p. 202, sees it as the least likely of the three. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St John*, II:367, states that "it is unnatural to suppose that $\rho\upsilon\tau\omega\nu$ is neuter, and that the Lord refers to the instruments or fruits of the fisher's craft."

29 Westcott, Ryle, Tenney, and Morris all think this is the most likely interpretation.

30 See Matt. 26:33; Mark 14:29; cf. John 13:37; 15:12-13.

31 Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, pp. 870. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St John*, II:367, also argues similarly.

32 Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, IV:451, lists one of them: "the threefold object of St. Peter's ministry: viz., the Gentiles, the Jews, and the dispersed ten tribes." He then correctly dismisses it as "fanciful."

has been commissioned to care for the flock.³³

Ryle is of the same opinion:

I cannot for a moment doubt that our Lord asked Peter this remarkable question three times, in order to remind him that he had denied Him thrice. Our sins ought never to be forgotten by us, though they are wiped out of the book of God's remembrance. The very "grief" which Peter felt at being thrice asked about his love, was intended to do him good. It was meant to remind him that if he was grieved to be asked thrice, "Lovest thou Me?" how much more must his Master have been grieved when he thrice denied Him!³⁴

Was Peter Crucified?

Although it is relatively clear that verses 18 and 19 imply that Peter would die a martyr's death, do they necessarily imply crucifixion? Morris summarizes the evidence that in the early church, the phrase "stretch out your hands" in verse 18 was used of crucifixion³⁵ but then adds that "unless we can be sure of this [meaning of the phrase] we cannot hold that the verse points to more than martyrdom in some form."³⁶ Moreover, the word order is against the crucifixion interpretation. The stretching out of the hands precedes being "carried" or "led" to where Peter does not want to go.

The Purpose of This Exchange between Jesus and Peter

To evaluate the Roman Catholic interpretation of this exchange between Jesus and Peter, it is necessary to determine the purpose of Jesus in conducting it.

As pointed out in the previous section, there can be little doubt that this exchange is a response to Peter's

33 Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 875. Tenney, *The Gospel of John*, p. 201, agrees: "The three questions Jesus addressed to Peter stand in contrast to Peter's three denials."

34 Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, IV:451-452.

35 Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 876, n. 52.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 876.

threefold denial of Jesus prior to the crucifixion. Perhaps the best analysis of its purpose or goal is found in Ryle.

The object of our Lord in addressing Simon Peter in these verses should be carefully remembered, and not misunderstood. That there was a distinct object in singling him out from the seven disciples sitting round our Lord, and specially speaking to him, I cannot doubt. But what was that object? This question can only be answered by considering the peculiar character of St. Peter, and the peculiar circumstances of his history during the last day of our Lord's ministry, before the crucifixion. None had made so high a profession. None had spoken so confidently of his own strength. None had shown such instability in the hour of trial. None had fallen so sadly, by denying his Master three times. Remembering all this, I believe that our Lord had a special object in addressing Peter on this occasion; and I see a special wisdom in the address and conversation being recorded, as taking place before six witnesses.

(a) I believe our Lord's first object was to remind Peter of his sad fall, through over-confidence, and want of watchfulness and prayer. He would have him know that, though raised, pardoned and forgiven, he must never forget what had happened. Three times he had denied his Master. Three times he must be publicly asked whether he loved his Master....

(b) I believe our Lord's second object was, as Cyril remarks, to restore Peter to his former position as a trusted Apostle and minister in the presence of six witnesses. The thought might possibly come across the minds of some Christians, in future days, that Peter forfeited his claim to be an Apostle and leader of the Church, by his thrice repeated denial of his Master. Our Lord in mercy guards against this possibility, by publicly commissioning Peter once more to do the work of a pastor in the Church.

(c) I believe our Lord's third object was to teach Peter what should be the primary aim of an Apostle and minister. The true qualification for the ministerial office, he must learn, was not high profession of more courage and zeal than others, not

loud talk, or even readiness to fight; but loving, patient usefulness to the souls of others, and diligent care for the sheep of Christ's flock.³⁷

Having analyzed the likely purpose of this exchange with Peter, the Roman Catholic view of this text can now be addressed.

Critique of the Roman Catholic View

The view of the Catholic Church is that Peter in this exchange with Jesus was commissioned to be the shepherd of "all his [Christ's] sheep."³⁸ More explicitly, this text, together with Matthew 16:17-19, demonstrates that Peter is made the head of the entire Church of Christ:

The "power of the keys" designates the authority [given to Peter] to govern the house of God, which is the Church. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, confirmed this mandate [to Peter] after his Resurrection: "Feed my sheep" [John 21:15-17].³⁹

However, this view is reading far more into the text of John 21:15-19 than is justified. How does the simple directive, "Feed my sheep," which could be given to any pastor, imply all this?

Roman Catholic scholar Raymond Brown in commenting on the two Greek imperatives used by John stops short of making such claims based on this text.

As for the verb, in LXX both *boskein* and *poimainein* translate Heb. *rā'āh*, and so we can be dubious about attempts to find a sharp distinction between them

37 Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, IV:446-447. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, II:1115, makes an interesting point regarding the contrast between what Jesus asks Peter and what he tells him to do. "The love demanded from Peter is for Jesus and not explicitly the flock; it is a love of total attachment and exclusive service (cf. Deut vi 5, x 12-13). The logical connection with the command given to Peter is that, if Peter is so devoted to Jesus, then Jesus can entrust his flock to Peter with the assurance that Peter will comply with Jesus' will."

38 *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 344.

39 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraphs 551-553, p. 142; the Scripture references in the footnotes of the catechism are placed within the quotation in brackets.

(the Vulgate of 15-17 uses *pascere* to translate both). Yet, if they are largely synonymous, *poimainein* covers a somewhat broader field of meaning. *Boskein* is used both literally and figuratively (Ezek xxxiv 2) for feeding animals. *Poimainein* includes such duties toward the flock as guiding, guarding, and feeding, whether literally (Luke xvii 7) or figuratively (Ezek xxxiv 10; Acts xx 28; I Pet v 2; Rev ii 27, vii 17); equivalently it may mean "to rule, govern" (II Sam vii 7; Ps ii 9; Matt ii 6). A sentence from Philo, *Quod deterius VIII #25*, catches the nuance of the two verbs: "Those who feed [*boskein*] supply nourishment...but those who tend [*poimainein*] have the power of rulers and governors." Combined, the two verbs express the fullness of the pastoral task assigned to Peter.⁴⁰

As with *phileō* and *agapaō*, the fact that Jesus would have used the same Hebrew or Aramaic word in this exchange with Peter suggests the strong presumption that John again used close synonyms to achieve variation for stylistic purposes, slightly different nuances notwithstanding. Apparently, Jerome also drew this conclusion when he used the same Latin verb for both *boskein* and *poimainein* in the Vulgate. However, even if by using these two Greek verbs it was John's intent to "express the fullness of the pastoral task assigned to Peter," this same fullness must be assigned to the task of all the apostles, as the arguments to follow show.⁴¹

40 Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, II:1104-05; brackets original.

41 Again, liberal Catholic scholars like Raymond Brown no longer argue that Catholic dogma need be defended by the original intent of the passages historically used for such a defense. See the earlier discussion of this notion in the section, "The Roman Catholic View" in chapter 13. Concerning John 21:15-17, Brown has the following comment: "The First Vatican Council in 1870 cited John xxi 15-17 along with Matt xvi 16-19 in relation to its dogmatic definition that 'Peter the apostle was constituted by Christ the Lord as *chief of all the apostles* and as visible head of the Church on earth'" (*The Gospel According to John*, II:1116; emphasis original). However, Brown goes on to suggest the view that "Vatican I was not necessarily defining for Catholics the limited meaning the biblical passage had for its author at the moment it was written, but rather *the broader meaning it had and has for the Church in the light of a living tradition and ecclesiastical history*" (II:1117; emphasis added). As pointed out in chapter 13, such a view presupposes the idea that the use of a text in support of a doctrine is not limited to the original intent of its author. Somehow its meaning can grow through "living tradition and ecclesiastical history" and in that way support the doctrine. To those who have a high view of Scripture, there is no justification for this approach to doing

In response, then, to the official position of the Catholic church on this text, the following points should be carefully noted.

(1) Peter does not consider himself to be the sole or primary shepherd of Jesus' flock. In his first letter he clearly considers himself just one of many fellow "shepherds" or "elders":

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight...⁴²

(2) So far from the New Testament giving evidence that Peter became the shepherd over the entire Church, it specifically indicates that Peter's ministry was limited to the Jews:

But on the contrary, [James, Peter, and John] seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter *had been* to the circumcised (for He who effectually worked for Peter in *his* apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we *might go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.⁴³

Note also in this text that Peter's ministry is placed on the same level as James and John. In a statement that places Peter's name in a list of two other names, there is no hint of Petrine primacy.

(3) As has been pointed out, the likely intent of this exchange initiated by Jesus was to confirm, in view of Peter's recent fall, a complete restoration to his position among the apostles and hence the apostolic office. Nowhere is there any hint in this text that he is here accorded any absolute primacy over the other

theology. The original intent alone has divine authority.

42 1 Pet. 5:1-2.

43 Gal. 2:7-9.

apostles.

This threefold injunction does not necessarily give Peter the sole responsibility for the oversight of Christ's followers; all of his spiritually mature disciples were called to be shepherds (cf. 1 Peter 5:2). This challenge to Peter demanded a total renewal of his loyalty and reaffirmed his responsibilities.⁴⁴

(4) There is no evidence anywhere in the New Testament that Peter ever exercised primacy over the other apostles or acted as the head of the church and vicar of Christ on earth. Ryle cites these contrary examples:

The Roman Catholic theory, that our Lord specially addressed Peter, on this occasion, in order to mark him out as head of the Church, is one which I repudiate as preposterous, unreasonable, improbable, and utterly destitute of solid foundation. Neither here, nor elsewhere, is there a tittle of evidence to show that any primacy was ever intended to be given to Peter. On the contrary, the fact that our Lord specially appeared on one occasion to James alone [1 Cor. 15:7], and that afterward James was the presiding Apostle in the first Council at Jerusalem [Acts 15], would seem to indicate that, if He conferred primacy on any Apostle, He conferred it on James. But there is no proof that primacy was conferred on any one at all.⁴⁵

Ryle goes on to cite Whitby:

Whitby observes, "Those who argue for Peter's supremacy above other Apostles, from this passage, are vain in their imagination. If by these words Christ required Peter to feed all His sheep and

44 Tenney, *The Gospel of John*, p. 202. Morris makes the same point: "This triple affirmation, accompanied as it was by a triple commission from Jesus, must have had the effect of giving an almost 'official' sanction to his restoration to his rightful place of leadership. Yet this [restoration] should not be pressed too hard in the manner of some exegetes. Peter is accorded no absolute primacy, and in particular there is nothing in this passage to indicate that he was in any way superior to John. Throughout this chapter John is regarded as specially close to his Lord" (*The Gospel According to John*, pp. 869-70).

45 Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, IV:447.

lambs, it is certain he was wanting in his duty. He never exercised an act of supremacy over the rest of the Apostles; but being sent by them, obeyed (Acts viii.14), and being reprov'd by St. Paul, held his peace (Gal. ii.11-16), and was so far from feeding all Christ's sheep, that he never fed any of the province of St. Paul."⁴⁶

46 Ibid., IV:451.