

PETER AS WITNESS TO EASTER

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The article shows how the role of Peter as the official witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ continues to be neglected by such scholars as Martin Hengel, Christian Grappe, and Rudolf Pesch. Paul, Mark, Luke (in both his Gospel and Acts), and John offer historical and theological grounds for interpreting Peter's primary (but not exclusive) role in emerging Christianity as that of spreading and gathering the community through the power of his Easter message. The article concludes by suggesting how the Petrine witness to Easter expresses itself in the ministry of the bishop of Rome.

IN 2010, FOUR YEARS AFTER Martin Hengel's *Saint Peter: An Underestimated Apostle* appeared in German, it was published in English.¹ This learned book has established itself as a significant contribution on Peter and his role in the emergence of Christianity. It belongs not only with such earlier landmark works as Oscar Cullmann's *Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr* and the ecumenical collection of essays *Peter in the New Testament*,² but also with recent studies by authors like Christian Grappe and Rudolf Pesch.³

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¹ Martin Hengel, *Der unterschätzte Petrus: Zwei Studien* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006); *Saint Peter: The Underestimated Apostle*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

² Oscar Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple, Apostle, Martyr; A Historical and Theological Study*, trans. Floyd V. Filson (London: SCM, 1962); Raymond E. Brown, Karl P. Donfried, and John Reumann, eds., *Peter in the New Testament: A Collaborative Assessment by Protestant and Roman Catholic Scholars* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1973).

³ Christian Grappe, *Images de Pierre aux deux premiers siècles* (Paris: Universitaires de France, 1995); Rudolf Pesch, *Die biblischen Grundlagen des Primats*, *Quaestiones disputatae* 187 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2001). See also Rudolf Pesch, *Simon Petrus: Geschichte und geschichtliche Bedeutung des ersten Jüngers Jesu Christi* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1980) 49–50 (on Peter as “witness of Easter faith”).

Hengel argues that “the historical and theological importance of the fisherman from Bethsaida has been generally underestimated within both evangelical [= Protestant] and Catholic exegetical circles.” He applies his wide learning to establish Peter’s “overarching importance” for all four Gospels and, more generally, for Jewish *and* Gentile Christianity.⁴ Peter proved to be “the apostolic foundational figure” in the emerging church. The key texts for Hengel’s argument are Jesus’ promise to Peter in Matthew 16:17–19 and, to a lesser extent, the promise in Luke 22:31–32, along with the commission in John 21:15–17.⁵ Yet Hengel, like so many earlier and later writers, has little to say about the resurrection of Jesus and Peter’s decisive function as Easter witness. In Hengel’s study (and elsewhere), it is this that continues to be generally underestimated.

In this article I first discuss the work of Hengel, Pesch, and Grappe, and then illustrate a pervasive inattention to the role of Peter as witness to the resurrection. That will prepare the ground for exploring exegetically, historically, and theologically, the importance of the Easter function of “the fisherman from Bethsaida.”⁶

THREE VIEWS OF PETER

Martin Hengel

Hengel spends over 100 pages arguing for the fullness of Peter’s power that was exercised in proclamation and leadership for the emerging church. Apropos of Matthew 16:17–19, he elucidates the nickname that functioned as a honorific name, *Kêphā* as “Rock,”⁷ insists that, as the one who alone has “the power of the keys,” the Matthean Peter was not simply the “typical disciple,”⁸ and argues that long before Matthew wrote his Gospel, Peter was already the foundational, apostolic figure in the church.⁹ In particular, he was *the* great witness to the teaching and activity of the earthly Jesus; shortly after the martyrdom of Peter, his disciple Mark wrote a Gospel

⁴ Hengel, *Saint Peter* 32, 36, 45, 53.

⁵ *Ibid.* 30–31.

⁶ In “Peter as Easter Witness,” *Heythrop Journal* 22 (1981) 1–18, I showed how earlier scholars, especially theologians, had widely neglected the priority of Peter’s witness to the resurrection. This situation has hardly changed over the last 30 years. In *The Remembered Peter: In Ancient Reception and Modern Debate* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), Markus Bockmuehl treats in a balanced fashion various Petrine themes, but hardly discusses Peter’s witness to the resurrection. See, however, William Thomas Kessler, *Peter as the First Witness of the Risen Lord: An Historical and Theological Investigation* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1998).

⁷ Hengel, *Saint Peter* 20–25.

⁸ *Ibid.* 25–28.

⁹ *Ibid.* 28–36.

that transmitted the witness of Peter.¹⁰ Luke and, even more, Matthew were to draw on Mark and maintained “the overarching importance of Peter,” an importance reflected not only in John but also in Acts and in such Pauline letters as Galatians and 1 Corinthians.¹¹

When reaching these and other conclusions about Peter, Hengel draws magisterially on a wide range of ancient and modern authors and generally establishes his case convincingly. He did not persuade me on a few points, like his late dating of Matthew’s Gospel (around AD 95). But these are minor issues; my questioning centers on what he said (or rather did not say) about the resurrection of the crucified Jesus. Hengel names Peter as “the decisive apostolic witness,”¹² but—normally—without stating that the heart of this witness concerned the unique divine action in raising Jesus from the dead and making his glorious existence the beginning of the end for all history and of a new life for a transformed world.

Hengel refers to the appearances of the Resurrected One and what he did for the disciples (in the plural) by giving them “the experience of the forgiveness of their guilt.”¹³ Then he mentions Peter “as the first to see the Resurrected One,” a vision that meant “both forgiveness and a new acceptance.”¹⁴ I had expected Hengel to say much more than that, by appreciating the appearance of the risen Jesus to Peter, who was named in the ancient “summary of the gospel” in 1 Corinthians 15:5 not by his personal name “Simon” but as “Cephas.” This marked the beginning of Peter’s role as “the Man of Rock,” who witnessed to the heart of the Christian gospel, the utterly startling resurrection of Jesus from the dead.¹⁵

When characterizing Peter as “the recipient of the first appearance (protophany) of the Resurrected One,”¹⁶ Hengel nowhere cited or even referred to Matthew 28:9–10 (where Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary” are the first to encounter the risen Jesus) or to John 20:11–18 (where Mary Magdalene alone is the recipient of the first appearance). May anyone, without further discussion, simply assume that Peter was the first to see the risen Lord? For Hengel this question proved even more pertinent since he spent pages arguing persuasively for the centrality of Peter in Matthew’s Gospel. If Matthew made Peter as foundational, apostolic witness even more central than Mark had done, why did that Evangelist introduce Mary Magdalene and her companion as the first persons to whom the risen Jesus appeared? The “rival” claims of Peter

¹⁰ Ibid. 36–48.

¹² Ibid. 82; see also 99.

¹⁴ Ibid. 44.

¹⁶ Ibid. 29; see also 34, 44, 66 n. 215, 88, 100. Hengel notes, however, the claim expressed in the *Gospel of the Hebrews* that the first appearance of the risen Jesus was to his “brother” James (ibid. 9).

¹¹ Ibid. 48.

¹³ Ibid. 43.

¹⁵ Ibid. 22.

and Mary Magdalene to be recipients of the protophany need to be explored.¹⁷ I cannot avoid the suspicion that when the resurrection of Jesus is quietly taken for granted and its dramatic importance is not (fully) appreciated, the question of who received the protophany can become quite secondary.

Glibly assigning Hengel's silence to male chauvinism would find no support from the way in which, when treating later in his book the family of Peter and other apostolic families, he happily drew on Richard Bauckham's *Gospel Women*, a work that champions the female disciples of Jesus.¹⁸ It was rather a certain reluctance to recognize the full importance of Christ's resurrection and its first dramatic disclosure that seems to have affected Hengel. Rightly making much of Peter's new name, he took "Rock" to describe "the entire thirty-five years" of the apostle's activity, from "his call to his martyrdom in Rome."¹⁹ But receiving a foundational appearance of the risen Christ stood out among the many items that made up the whole story—from call to martyrdom.

Some lecturing in Rome helped prompt Hengel's study of Peter. Hence it is no surprise to find him singling out Matthew 16:18–19, Luke 22:31–32, and John 21:15–18 as texts that impress "anyone who visits St. Peter's Basilica in Rome" and point "*back to the reality of the special, unique 'apostolic service' that the Man of Rock performed for the growing church.*"²⁰ Hengel is not alone in privileging the three texts from Matthew, Luke, and John. Rudolf Pesch names them as the three "classical texts" establishing Peter's primacy.²¹ But what of three other texts that, as we shall see, connect even more clearly the service of the Man of Rock with the resurrection of Christ: Mark 16:7, Luke 24:34, and 1 Corinthians 15:5?

Rudolf Pesch

As Hengel would do five years later, Pesch dedicates pages to the origin, age, and meaning of Matthew 16:16–19, but includes further scholars (such as Jürgen Roloff) in the discussion. Did these "classical texts" derive from

¹⁷ See Gerald O'Collins, S.J. and Daniel Kendall, S.J. "Mary Magdalene as Major Witness to Jesus' Resurrection," *Theological Studies* 48 (1987) 22–38.

¹⁸ Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: A Study of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002); see Hengel, *Saint Peter* 108–10, 122.

¹⁹ Hengel, *Saint Peter* 100.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 99, emphasis original. The key "appearance-to-Peter" texts (Lk 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5), which I examine below, are notable for their absence in St. Peter's Basilica. Obviously popes have not been very interested in linking their primacy to Peter *precisely* in his function as "first witness to the resurrection."

²¹ Pesch, *Die biblischen Grundlagen des Primats* 60.

the earthly Jesus himself (a few scholars), from Peter's Easter encounter with Jesus (Pierre Grelot), from an early Christian tradition, and/or from the Evangelist himself (the majority of commentators)?²² Like Hengel and other recent scholars,²³ Pesch associates the Gospel of Mark with Peter. This allows Pesch to call Peter *the* "eyewitness and servant of the word" (Lk 1:2).²⁴ This authoritative eyewitness could hand on and guarantee the tradition about the earthly Jesus' teaching and activity. The authority of Peter stood, above all, behind the Passion Narrative in Mark's Gospel.²⁵

As Hengel would do, Pesch simply states, without examining the case of Mary Magdalene, that Peter was the first to see the risen Jesus.²⁶ Likewise, Pesch does not clearly recognize the full import of Peter's seeing the risen Lord. A chapter on the authoritative roles of Peter lists six areas: authority for the mission, exorcising and healing, teaching, discipline, reconciliation (the "binding and loosing"), and leadership.²⁷ In the section on teaching, Pesch spends less than one page on Peter as the one who received the first Easter appearance" and "formulated Easter faith."²⁸ Something similar happens when Pesch sketches Peter's connection with various steps in the process of the church's emergence: "Israel's rejection of Jesus; the Last Supper; the condemnation of Jesus; the renewal of fellowship with the Risen One; the restoration of the 'figure of the Twelve'; Pentecost; the opening and ratification of the Gentile mission."²⁹ The unique divine act that was Jesus' resurrection from the dead towers over the other events; I also show how Peter's authoritative role as witness to the risen Christ towers over his other roles.

Pesch does his exegetical work on Peter carefully and is constantly persuasive. But he fails to acknowledge the huge significance of the resurrection as the beginning of the new creation, a significance that shapes Peter's primacy as Easter witness. One finds a similar gap in the longer book by Christian Grappe.

²² Ibid. 21–26, 31–39.

²³ See, e.g., Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

²⁴ Pesch, *Die biblischen Grundlagen des Primats* 39–41, 48.

²⁵ Ibid. 79.

²⁶ Ibid. 40, 41–42, 63, 79, 80, 87.

²⁷ Ibid. 85–91.

²⁸ Ibid. 87–88.

²⁹ Ibid. 57. Apropos of the origin of Christian faith in Jesus' resurrection, over the years Pesch changed his position in important aspects but continued to differ from my analysis of the emergence of Easter faith; see Gerald O'Collins, S.J., *Jesus Risen: An Historical, Fundamental, and Systematic Examination of Christ's Resurrection* (New York: Paulist, 1987) 110, 120; O'Collins, *Believing in the Resurrection: The Meaning and Promise of the Risen Jesus* (New York: Paulist, 2012) 77, 83–85.

Christian Grappe

In *Images de Pierre aux deux premiers siècles*, Christian Grappe explores nine images of Peter: as disciple, martyr, repentant sinner, pastor, writer, the receiver of revelations who guaranteed the tradition, the confessor of faith who became the destroyer of heresy, the foundation (the Rock) who founded communities, and the first disciple who became the necessary point of reference.³⁰ The classic ecumenical study *Peter in the New Testament* listed seven images: missionary fisherman, pastoral shepherd, martyr, recipient of special revelation, confessor of the true faith, magisterial protector, and repentant sinner.³¹ That study noted the extensive presence of Peter in the Christian Apocrypha, gnostic works, and other postbiblical sources,³² but did not draw on that material for its study of Peter. The scope of Grappe's work, however, involves him in examining the Apocrypha, the gnostic writers (who claimed to receive further revelations), and such mainline second-century writers as Ignatius, Justin, Irenaeus, and Clement of Alexandria.

Grappe recognizes the significance of the witness to Christ's resurrection coming from Peter as being the first recipient of an Easter appearance. Unlike Hengel and Pesch, Grappe recalls the "rival" cases of Mary Magdalene and James, and spends pages on what both the New Testament and second-century sources say about Mary's encounter with the risen Jesus.³³ Yet it was Peter's role as the first, official witness to the resurrection, expressed in the early confession of faith (1 Cor 15:5), that underpinned his central significance.³⁴ Like Pesch, Grappe understands Mark 16:7 to refer to the primary appearance to Peter.³⁵ Hence three texts testify to the protophany to Peter (Mk 16:7, Lk 24:34, 1 Cor 15:5), unlike the three "classical texts" (Mt 16:18–19, Lk 22:31–32, Jn 21:15–17) that do not invoke the resurrection and the risen Lord's appearance to Peter, or at least do not emphasize that primary appearance as such.

³⁰ In her *Peter: Apostle for the Whole Church* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1994), PHEME PERKINS refers to Peter as witness to the risen Christ only rarely (3, 8, 33); and, somewhat like Grappe, she presents Peter much more in such roles as exemplary disciple (who eventually suffers martyrdom), founder, universal apostle, and shepherd.

³¹ *Peter in the New Testament* 162–68. I should note that Peter as Easter witness does *not* explicitly feature among these seven images that conclude and summarize the study, even though the work has already examined the three key texts that concern Peter's witness to Christ's resurrection: 1 Corinthians 15:5 (33–36), Luke 24:34 (125–28), and Mark 16:7 (69–73).

³² *Ibid.* 21 n. 47.

³³ Grappe, *Images de Pierre* 152, 201–5.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 275.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 155. Willi Marxsen and some others have understood Mark 16:7, along with 14:28, to refer not to postresurrection appearances but to the parousia that will occur in Galilee. For references and a convincing list of reasons that tell against

Yet Grappe, like Hengel and Pesch, does not seem to appreciate the enormous impact and significance of Christ's resurrection from the dead. He "downsizes" the resurrection and so downsizes the significance of Peter precisely as Easter witness (absent from his nine images listed above). This is to underplay the utterly amazing, world-shattering act of God, the resurrection of Christ, which inaugurated the transformation of the universe and the final kingdom of God. From this resurrection flows the power that will resurrect and transform human beings and their world (1 Cor 15:20–28). Hence we should see the resurrection of the crucified Jesus as the focal point of the gospel, which established the identity of Peter as *the* Easter witness. Proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus, Peter at the head of other Easter witnesses could guarantee its trustworthiness and bring into being the fellowship of Christians.

LACK OF ATTENTION TO PETER AS EASTER WITNESS

Traditionally both those who champion the Petrine ministry and those who reduce or even denigrate it have generally shared the same conviction about the central texts to be studied in the New Testament. On October 17, 1978, Pope John Paul II expressed this wide consensus when, in the address that opened his pontificate, he cited Matthew 16:18–19, Luke 22:31–32, and John 21:15–17 and stated: "We are completely convinced that all modern inquiry into the Petrine ministry must be based on these three hinges of the gospel."³⁶ Two of these three texts occur in the pre-Easter situation: the first text promises Peter "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" and the power to "bind" and "loose"; in the context of Jesus' imminent death, the second text promises that the faith of Peter will not fail and that he will "lend strength" to the other disciples. On the far side of the resurrection, the third text establishes Peter as the pastor who must shepherd Christ's "lambs" and "sheep." These three classic texts have featured prominently in the defense of the Petrine/papal primacy (as well as in debates about and opposition to that primacy). They point to the function(s) of Peter instituted, or at least promised, by the pre-Easter Jesus.

These three texts about Peter have been repeatedly cited when examining or legitimating the pastoral ministry of Peter (and his successors) for the universal church. Let me cite several examples. The first (Mt 16:18–19)

this explanation, see Christopher Bryan, *The Resurrection of the Messiah* (New York: Oxford University, 2011) 285; and Joel Marcus, *Mark 8–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2009) 1081.

³⁶ *Origins* 8 (1978) 292.

and the third (Jn 21:15–17) of the “big three” texts feature prominently in the First Vatican Council’s teaching on the Petrine primacy,³⁷ while the second (Lk 22:31–32) of these three texts turns up in the council’s statement on the pope’s infallible magisterium.³⁸ More than a century later, in its first report on “Authority in the Church” (Venice, 1976), the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) mentioned only three biblical texts when it came to “conciliar and primatial authority” with their attendant “problems and prospects”: Matthew 16:18–19; Luke 22:31–32; and John 21:15–17 (no. 24).³⁹ In its second statement on “Authority in the Church” (Windsor 1981), ARCIC listed a range of Petrine texts from the New Testament (nos. 2–9), paying particular attention to the “big three” texts, each of which it mentioned twice.⁴⁰ The same three texts received the primary emphasis when John Paul II presented the bishop of Rome’s “ministry of unity” in his encyclical *Ut unum sint* (May 25, 1995), even if he added at once: “It is also significant that according to the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians the Risen Christ appears to Cephas and then to the Twelve.”⁴¹ The Windsor statement from ARCIC had likewise remarked in passing on this “special appearance” of the risen Jesus to Peter, noting that it is also attested by Luke 24:34 (no. 3).⁴² But both the Windsor statement of 1981 and John Paul’s encyclical of 1995 privilege the “big three” texts when they reflect on the ministry of Peter (and his successors).

To conclude this picture of these three texts persistently taking attention away, at least implicitly, from Peter’s role as Easter witness, let me mention two further pertinent authors: Jean-Marie-Roger Tillard and John Michael Miller. Tillard’s *The Bishop of Rome*, while being a valuable ecumenical work on Peter and the papacy, refers on only two pages to Peter as Easter witness.⁴³ Miller identifies the scriptural foundation for the Petrine ministry and notes in that section the apostle’s role as witness to the risen Lord, but makes very little of it.⁴⁴ The 21 theses on the Petrine ministry of the

³⁷ Heinrich Denzinger and Peter Hünermann, eds., *Enchiridion symbolorum: Definitionum et declarationum*, 37th ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1991) 3053 (hereafter DzH). See also Josef Neuner and Jacques Dupuis, eds., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, 7th ed. (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2001) 819 (hereafter ND).

³⁸ DzH 3070; ND 836.

³⁹ ARCIC, *The Final Report* (London: SPCK, 1982) 64.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 81–85.

⁴¹ John Paul II, *Ut unum sint* no. 91; in *Origins* 25 (1995) 69.

⁴² ARCIC, *Final Report* 82.

⁴³ J. M. R. Tillard, *The Bishop of Rome*, trans. John de Satgé (London: SPCK, 1983) 112–13.

⁴⁴ John Michael Miller, *The Shepherd and the Rock: Origins, Development, and Mission of the Papacy* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1995) 12–49, 31–33.

pope, with which he concludes his study, refer to Christ's incarnation and divine sonship but include nothing about the ministry of proclaiming Christ's resurrection.⁴⁵

In theology and in official teaching but, as I will indicate, not in the New Testament, Peter as Easter witness has been left almost completely in the shadows. What if we take up a possibility offered by Paul, Mark, and Luke for interpreting the Petrine ministry: namely, an interpretation based on understanding Peter's primary (but not exclusive) role in the emerging church to be that of spreading and gathering the community through the power of his Easter message?⁴⁶

THE TESTIMONY OF PAUL, MARK, AND LUKE

The Testimony of Paul

In 1 Corinthians 15:3–5, we have a formula of Christian proclamation that Paul may have received as early as his stay in Damascus after the meeting with the risen Lord that radically changed his life and gave him his apostolic vocation.⁴⁷ The three verses run:

I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received:
that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures,
 and *that* he was buried,
that he has been raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures,
 and *that* he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

The fourfold repetition of “that” (*hoti* in Greek) emphasizes “each element in turn.”⁴⁸ The two key affirmations are “that he died” and “that he has been raised”; in both cases, a further affirmation “confirms” what the formula proclaims. We know that “he died,” because “he was buried.” We know that “he has been raised,” because “he appeared to Cephas, then to

⁴⁵ Ibid. 346–70, at 363 and 365.

⁴⁶ Regarding the Petrine Epistles, 1 Peter may have been written by Peter; the later 2 Peter almost certainly did not come directly from Peter. While mentioning Jesus' resurrection (1 Pt 1:3, 21; 3:21) and echoing the language of shepherding and martyrdom found in John 21:15–19 (see 1 Pt 5:1–4) 1 Peter has nothing clear to say about any appearance of the risen Christ to Peter. The reference to Peter as one who “shares” in Christ's “glory” (1 Pt 5:1) seems to refer to what will be revealed in the future, rather than to Peter having been the first (male) disciple to meet and witness to the risen Jesus. Second Peter 1:16–18 recalls Peter's experiencing, not Christ's resurrection, but his transfiguration—a passage that second-century gnostics took up and developed (see Grappe, *Images de Pierre* passim).

⁴⁷ On 1 Corinthians 15:1–11, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2008) 539–57.

⁴⁸ Bryan, *Resurrection of the Messiah* 263.

the twelve.” Burial underlines the reality of the death. The resurrection reverses the burial and so indicates an empty tomb.⁴⁹

The protophany to Peter is not the only appearance of the risen Christ reported. Paul adds at once an appearance “to the twelve,” which presumably involved a second appearance to Peter, and also adds appearances to “more than five hundred” followers of Jesus, to James (presumably the brother of the Lord, who had not “believed” in him [Jn 7:5]), “to all the apostles” (with the “apostles” constituting a wider group than “the twelve”), and lastly to Paul himself (1 Cor 15:6–8). So the whole passage testifies to appearances to three individuals (Cephas, James, and Paul) and to three groups (“the twelve,” the “more than five hundred” followers, and “all the apostles”). It is not totally clear where the pre-Pauline formula ends. A few scholars hold that the formula ends with “he appeared,” while many maintain that the formula includes the name of “Cephas” and perhaps also “the twelve.” Otherwise the formula would be left hanging at “he appeared,” and with the inevitable question unanswered: “to whom did he appear?” Whatever one’s view about this, it is clear that Paul depends on previous tradition(s) for his information about the names of those to whom the risen Jesus had appeared. It is also clear that, in writing to the Corinthians to whom Cephas had most probably also preached (see 1 Cor 1:12, 3:22, 9:5),⁵⁰ Paul wants to affirm harmony in the apostolic proclamation of the resurrection and in the faith it had evoked: “whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim [Easter kerygma] and so you have come to believe [confession of faith]” (1 Cor 15:11).

According to the kerygmatic (and creedal) formula cited by Paul (1 Cor 15:3–5), Cephas was the first disciple (or at least the first male disciple) to whom the risen Lord appeared. Below I show how a similar formula in Luke 24:34 upholds the protophany to Simon Peter. The testimony offered by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 allows this conclusion: by witnessing to his foundational Easter experience, Peter as Cephas offered firm and rock-like witness to the very center of Christian faith, the resurrection from the dead of the crucified Jesus.

The Testimony of Mark

When transmitting the witness of Peter, Mark makes him serve as an *inclusio* that frames the whole Gospel. At the start Jesus calls Simon (Mk 1:16–18), to whom he soon gives the name of “Peter” (Mk 3:16). Then at the end of the Gospel, in an open and empty tomb, an interpreting angel

⁴⁹ On the empty tomb see *ibid.* 50–51, 264; and O’Collins, *Believing in the Resurrection* 80–99.

⁵⁰ On Peter’s visit and preaching in Corinth, see Hengel, *Underestimated Apostle* 66–78.

says to Mary Magdalene and her two companions: “go, tell his disciples and Peter that he [Jesus] is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him” (Mk 16:7).

Joel Marcus agrees with many scholars in holding that “and to Peter” echoes the tradition that Jesus appeared first to Peter⁵¹ and, at the same time, suggests a double entendre on the part of the Evangelist. “On the one hand, the women are to announce the news *especially* to Peter, the first disciple to be called,” “the first to recognize Jesus’ messiahship,” and the one who would soon “be granted the first resurrection appearance.” On the other hand, the women were “to proclaim the message *even* to Peter,” whose opposition to Jesus’ coming fate “earned him the epithet ‘Satan’” (Mk 8:33) and who three times was to deny knowing Jesus (Mk 14:66–72).⁵²

While acknowledging that 1 Corinthians 15:5 reports the protophany to Peter, Frederick Lapham claims that “nowhere in the Gospel record is there any hint that Peter was the *first* witness of the Resurrection” (emphasis original).⁵³ To be sure, Mark’s Gospel presents three women as those who discovered the empty tomb and heard from an angel the astonishing news of the resurrection. But they did not see the risen Jesus himself. Yet Marcus and other scholars, *pace* Lapham, find Mark hinting that it is Peter who will soon be granted the first appearance of the risen Lord. Moreover and quite clearly, Luke adds his witness that, at some moment after visiting the empty tomb (Lk 24:12),⁵⁴ a visit that led Peter to “wonder” but not yet to believe in the risen Christ, the protophany was granted to Simon Peter.

⁵¹ For examples see Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 797, 801; and Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002) 347 n. 34. Writing nearly 40 years ago, the authors of *Peter in the New Testament* remarked that “many scholars have concluded from this verse [16:7] that Mark was aware of the tradition that Jesus had appeared first to Peter” (71).

⁵² Marcus, *Mark 8–16* 1086.

⁵³ Frederick Lapham, *Peter: The Myth, the Man and the Writings* (London: Sheffield Academic, 2003) 9; see also 239. After this flat denial, curiously Lapham then recognizes that “Luke does in fact record, in the Emmaus story, that the Lord had appeared to Simon (24.34)” (9 n. 22).

⁵⁴ On this verse, which current scholarship recognizes as belonging to the original text of Luke’s Gospel, see François Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, vol. 4, *Lk 19,28–24,53* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 2009) 531–34; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke X–XXIV* (New York: Doubleday, 1985) 1547–48; Daniel A. Smith, *Revisiting the Empty Tomb* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010) 115–18. Andrew T. Lincoln (*The Gospel according to St John* [New York: Continuum, 2005] 489, 491, 495) shows how, by adding the figure of the beloved disciple, John 20:3–10 elaborated on the tradition of Peter running to the tomb in Luke 24:12.

The Testimony of Luke

At the end of the Emmaus story Luke quotes a traditional formula: “The Lord was really raised, and he appeared (*ōphthē*) to Simon” (Lk 24:34), a formula that converges with what we have seen in 1 Corinthians 15:4–5 (Christ “has been raised” and “appeared [*ōphthē*] to Cephas”).⁵⁵ Seemingly Luke introduces the early formulation about the appearance to Simon Peter to head off any impression that the Emmaus appearance is the primary one. Luke defers to the tradition of a first appearance to Peter. Even before Cleopas and his companion return, Peter’s testimony to his meeting with the risen Lord has brought to Easter faith “the eleven” and “those who were with them” (Lk 24:33). Simon’s encounter with the living Jesus has shifted the community in Jerusalem from their incredulity and persuaded them that the message that the women brought from the angels about the resurrection (Lk 24:9–11) is “really” true. The report from Emmaus and the subsequent appearance of the Lord reinforce and clarify this Easter faith, but do not create it for the first time.

Luke has prepared his readers for this role of Peter as agent of faith in the resurrection of Jesus. This is the thrust of what Jesus promises at the Last Supper, even while foretelling Peter’s denial: “I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (Lk 22:32).⁵⁶ The primary appearance of the risen Lord to Simon Peter enables the Apostle to play just that role. He “turns back” and “strengthens” his fellow disciples by the power of his Easter faith. The connection between Luke 24:34 and 22:32, as Robert Tannehill points out, “is reinforced by the fact that they are the only places in Luke where Peter is called Simon after the formal indication in 6:14 that Jesus gave Simon a new name.” Tannehill adds: “Simon is warned and charged with responsibility in 22:31–32, and he begins to fulfill that responsibility by bearing witness to the risen Jesus before Jesus’ other followers.”⁵⁷

Testimony from Paul, Mark, and Luke converges to support a primary appearance to Peter. Yet, at first glance, they and other New Testament authors do not seem to contain any story of this protophany of the risen Christ. Do we then look in vain for a vivid narrative of an appearance to Peter that could be like that of Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:11–18)?

⁵⁵ On Luke 24:34, see Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* 4:564; and Fitzmyer, *Gospel according to Luke X–XXIV* 1569.

⁵⁶ On this verse see Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* 4:273–77.

⁵⁷ Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 1:293.

THE STORY OF AN APPEARANCE TO PETER

Like others, Andrew Lincoln is open to the idea that Luke knew of a postresurrection miracle involving Peter and a great haul of fish but, given the Evangelist's "exclusively Jerusalem-oriented ending," inserted the story earlier—in the context of the call of Peter and other first disciples (Lk 5:1–11). Peter's words ("go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man") make good sense if they originally came after his denials during the passion and on the occasion of his meeting the risen Lord.⁵⁸ In modern times it has been Raymond Brown who, appealing to this Lukan passage and other passages, has stood out for arguing that a primary appearance to Peter at the Sea of Tiberias in Galilee lies behind the catch of fish in John 21:1–14 and the rehabilitation of Peter in John 21:15–17.⁵⁹ Where Luke 5 relates the haul of fish to the calling of Peter, John 21 relates it to his installation as leader.

Brown recognizes, of course, the *prima facie* difficulty that Peter has six companions in John 21, whereas Luke 24:34 ("the Lord appeared to Simon") and 1 Corinthians 15:5 ("he appeared to Cephas") seem to suggest an appearance to Peter alone. Yet the presence of "silent" companions in the appearance to Peter cannot be simply excluded. After all, Paul speaks of an appearance to himself (1 Cor 15:8), and Luke three times indicates that others were present when Paul met the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:7, 22:9, 26:13). Like Paul's companions on the road to Damascus, Peter's fishing companions, apart from the Beloved Disciple whom the Evangelist may well have added to the narrative, do not play an important part in the story of the risen Jesus appearing on the shore and then disappear entirely in the dialogue that rehabilitates Peter. As Lincoln was to suggest (see above), Brown observes that the rehabilitation scene, "made to correspond to Peter's denials, is more intelligible in the context of Jesus' first appearance to Peter."⁶⁰

Brown also proposes that elements from the story of the appearance to Peter "have been preserved in fragments from the Synoptic description

⁵⁸ Lincoln, *Gospel according to St John* 514–15. On Luke 5:1–11 containing elements of the "lost" appearance to Peter, see Brendan Byrne, "Peter as Resurrection Witness in the Lukan Narrative," in *The Convergence of Theology: A Festschrift Honoring Gerald O'Collins, S.J.*, ed. Daniel Kendall and Stephen T. Davis (New York: Paulist, 2001) 19–33, at 24–29.

⁵⁹ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII–XXI* (New York: Doubleday, 1970) 1085–92, 1110–12. See also Brown, "John 21 and the First Appearance of the Risen Jesus to Peter," in *Resurrexit: Actes du symposium international sur la résurrection de Jésus, Rome 1970*, ed. Barnabas M. Ahern, Édouard Dhanis, and G. Ghiberti (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1974) 246–65.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 1087.

of Jesus' ministry."⁶¹ He cites three possible places for finding such postresurrectional material: Peter's walking on the water (Mt 14:28–33), Peter as the foundation rock of the church (Mt 16:16b–19), and the call of Peter and miraculous catch of fish (Lk 5:1–11). An Easter location for some of the themes in these three passages is possible. As regards the third, it is more than possible and even probable that some of its elements originally belonged to a story of the risen Christ appearing to Peter when the latter was fishing.⁶²

Having reached some exegetical conclusions (about Peter being a primary Easter witness) and a plausible view of where the appearance of the risen Lord to Peter took place (at the Sea of Tiberias), we need to face a central question already mentioned above: was Mary Magdalene chronologically the first to see Christ risen from the dead?

MARY MAGDALENE AS EASTER WITNESS

All four Easter narratives found in the Gospels feature Mary Magdalene at the discovery of the empty tomb, and always name her in first place, whether she has two other women as companions (Mk 16:1–8), only one woman companion (Mt 28: 1–10), more than two other women companions (Lk 24:1–11), or seemingly goes alone and returns alone to the tomb (Jn 20:1–2, 11–18). According to Matthew 28:9–10, along with her solitary woman companion (“the other Mary”), Mary Magdalene encounters the risen Jesus and, after having been commissioned by an “angel of the Lord” to tell the “disciples” to keep the rendezvous in Galilee (Mt 28:7), is now commissioned a second time and by the risen Jesus himself to tell “my brothers” to keep the rendezvous. John 20:11–18 pictures her alone when the risen Lord appears to her and instructs her to tell “my brothers” that he is “ascending” to the Father.⁶³ According to the (second-century) appendix to Mark's Gospel, the risen Jesus “appeared first” to Mary Magdalene; she

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid. 1087–92. On possible postresurrectional elements in Matthew 14:28–33, see Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001) 317–23, at 318; and John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005) 595–603. On such postresurrectional elements in Matthew 16:16b–19, see Luz, *Matthew 8–20* 353–77, at 356, 358; Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew* 661–82. On probable postresurrectional elements in Luke 5:1–11, see François Bovon, *Luke 1: Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50*, trans. Christine M. Thomas, ed. Helmut Koester (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002) 166–72; and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX* (New York: Doubleday, 1981) 559–70, at 560–62.

⁶³ Matthew possibly knew this longer tradition about an appearance to Mary Magdalene but abbreviated it (Mt 28:9–10); see Bryan, *Resurrection of the Messiah* 329 n. 82. Her prestige is hinted at: Matthew 28:9 is the only text in the New Testament that speaks of Jesus “meeting” someone else.

then “told those who had been with him” that Jesus “was alive,” but they would not believe her (Mk 16:9–11). Of all the Easter texts, this is the only one that formally states that the resurrected Christ *first* appeared to anyone.⁶⁴

The Gospels converge in presenting Mary Magdalene as *the* primary and preeminent witness to the discovery of the empty tomb. What of her being the recipient of the first appearance of the risen Christ (Mt 28:9–10; Jn 20:11–18)—something explicitly asserted by Mark 16:9, apparently depending on John 20:11–18?⁶⁵ Any answer here must reckon with the fact that neither Mary Magdalene nor any other women are mentioned by Paul in the list of three individuals to whom the risen Jesus appeared (1 Cor 15:5–8): Cephas, James, and Paul himself. Paul also lists three groups: “the Twelve,” more than 500 “brothers,” and “all the apostles.” While women did not belong to the first group, they were presumably represented in the crowd of over 500 “brothers and sisters” or “fellow Christians,” and could well have numbered among “all the apostles.” At the end of Romans, Paul names among his collaborators Andronicus and Junia (a married couple?) as “distinguished among the apostles” (Rom 16:7).⁶⁶ Understanding “apostles” to extend beyond “the Twelve,” Paul makes room for women among the apostles for two reasons: they could be witnesses to the risen Christ (for this qualification of apostleship see, e.g., 1 Cor 9:1) and sent on mission for Christ, like Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25; 4:18).⁶⁷ The concluding chapter of Romans opens by praising Phoebe and Prisca, includes further positive remarks about other women, and shows how comfortable Paul is with the prestige and leadership roles of women (Rom 16:1–16).

Did Paul know the tradition of an appearance to Mary Magdalene? It could be that he was aware of appearances in Galilee but not of appearances in Jerusalem, where Mary Magdalene met the risen Lord. If Paul knew about that meeting, why then did he not name Mary Magdalene, or at least not name her expressly, in 1 Corinthians 15:5–7? He might have suppressed her name as an Easter witness, since he was sensitive to the fact that the testimony of women was, more or less, not accepted in

⁶⁴ On these texts (in Matthew) see Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, ed. Helmut Koester (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005) 590–608; Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew* 1240–54; (in Mark) Collins, *Mark* 779–801; Marcus, *Mark 8–16* 1079–87; (in Luke) Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas* 4:523–31; Fitzmyer, *Gospel according to Luke X–XXIV* 1532–53; (in John) Lincoln, *Gospel according to St John* 488–89, 491–96.

⁶⁵ On Mark 16:9 see Collins, *Mark* 808.

⁶⁶ Some translate this phrase as “distinguished in the eyes of the apostles.” See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (New York: Doubleday, 1993) 739–40.

⁶⁷ On the qualifications and functions for “apostles” in the early church, see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Doubleday, 1998) 196–97.

Judaism—the community in Corinth included Jewish as well as Gentile Christians. However we construe the “silence” of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, we cannot allege that the early church as a whole placed little or no value on women’s testimony. Otherwise how could we account for the preeminence of Mary Magdalene and other (named) women both as witnesses to the empty tomb (all four Gospels) and as those who bore to the other disciples the angelic message about Jesus’ resurrection (the Synoptic Gospels)?

Two of the Gospels, Matthew and, at greater length, John, testify to a protophany to Mary Magdalene. For at least one good reason we can hold that this tradition is early and historically reliable. It runs counter to “trend” to assign the first appearances to Peter and other male disciples.⁶⁸ With her “I have seen the Lord” (Jn 20:18), Mary emerged as equal to Peter and other male disciples in her witness to the resurrection. Did the appearance of the risen Jesus to her precede chronologically that to Peter? Matthew and John (*pace* Paul, Luke, and perhaps Mark) would encourage this conclusion, which has been long favored by the liturgical language used for her liturgical feast on July 22.

Some have pointed to conflicts between Mary Magdalene and Peter⁶⁹ that are found in gnostic and other apocryphal works of the second and third centuries and that speak of the risen Christ appearing to her, communicating new revelations, and creating her authoritative role that male leaders in the church then suppressed.⁷⁰ This material, even though it seems a later, odd spin-off from, rather than a reliable guide to, what was happening in mainstream Christianity, has been used to argue for serious divisions in the early church over apostolic authority.⁷¹ Here we should recall that, from the late first century to the end of the second century, such writers as Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus have various things to say about issues and problems in the early church but nothing at all to say about any debates over women legitimately transmitting apostolic revelation and tradition and, in particular, nothing to say about any conflict between Mary Magdalene and Peter. Clement goes

⁶⁸ See Luz, *Matthew 21–28* 606.

⁶⁹ In John’s Gospel, when Mary Magdalene discovers the tomb of Jesus to be open, she goes at once to inform “Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved.” Then they both run to inspect the tomb (Jn 20:2–10). This episode suggests closeness rather than conflict between Mary and Peter (and other male disciples).

⁷⁰ Among these later apocryphal works, see, e.g., *The Gospel of Mary*, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 3rd ed., ed. James M. Robinson (Leiden: Brill, 1988) 523–27.

⁷¹ See O’Collins and Kendall, “Mary Magdalene as Major Witness to Jesus’ Resurrection” 640–43.

out of his way to praise women like Esther and Judith for what they had done for their people (*I Clement* 55), while Irenaeus famously places Jesus' mother as the New Eve alongside her son as the New Adam. The appendix to Mark (16:9–20), which many scholars date to the first half of the second century, has nothing to say about any debates over the testimony and authority of women. Rather it highlights the role of Mary Magdalene as primary Easter witness and the male disciples' failure to accept her testimony. If serious divisions existed in mainstream Christianity over the separate authority of Mary Magdalene and of male disciples headed by Peter, why does none of this conflict show up in the work of writers from Clement to Irenaeus? The case for such gender conflict during the early years of Christianity is, as Philip Jenkins points out, quite weak.⁷²

Apropos of Mary Magdalene in her role as Easter witness, many cite Hippolytus of Rome referring in the third century to the women at the tomb of Jesus as “apostles,” which developed into Mary Magdalene often being called *apostola apostolorum* (the apostle of the apostles). Soon after the Council of Chalcedon in 451, Pope Leo the Great named her a figure of the church (*personam Ecclesiae gerens*). In the following century Pope Gregory the Great referred to her as “another Eve,” since she announced to the other disciples life and not death.⁷³ But in emerging Christianity, it was Peter who had taken the primary role as official proclaimer of the Lord's resurrection.

PETER AS EASTER WITNESS

Peter functions as bridge figure for Luke, being the last disciple to be named in the Gospel (Lk 24:34) and the first to be named in the Acts of the Apostles (1:13). In Luke-Acts Peter has significant things to do: for instance, taking the initiative to find a substitute member for the Twelve after the defection of Judas (1:15–26); conferring, along with John, the gift of the Holy Spirit (8:14–17); performing miracles by healing the sick and even raising the dead (3:1–10; 5:15–16; 9:32–42); playing a key role in admitting Gentiles into the Christian community without imposing on them the observance of the Torah (10:1–11:18; 15:1–29).

But Peter's major function is that of being, right from the day of Pentecost and along “with the eleven” (Acts 2:14) and “all” the other disciples

⁷² Philip Jenkins, *Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way* (New York: Oxford University, 2001) 133–47.

⁷³ Hippolytus, *De Cantico* 24–26 (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 264.43–49); Leo I, *De ascensione Domini sermo* 2.4 (Sources Chrétiennes 74.280–81); Gregory I, *De apparitione Christi Magdalenae facta* (Patrum opuscula selecta 7, hom. 25 [Innsbruck: Libreria Academica Wagneriana, 1892] 189).

(Acts 2:32), the leading, public witness to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.⁷⁴ Just as Peter's "turning back" and witnessing to the resurrection had "strengthened" his "brothers" (Lk 22:32), so his witness to the risen Jesus now reaches out to those who have come to Jerusalem from the wider world. He speaks with and for a college or official group of Easter witnesses in announcing the good news: "This [crucified] Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses" (Acts 2:32). Peter stands "with the eleven" (Acts 2:14) and proclaims a resurrection of which "*we* are witnesses" (Acts 3:15, emphasis added). For Luke, Peter leads the others in being the example *par excellence* of an authoritative eyewitness (to the risen Lord) and minister of the (Easter) word (Lk 1:2). The first half of Acts presents various dimensions of the leadership role that Peter exercised in the life of the early church. But the heart of the matter was his preeminence among the official witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus (e.g., Acts 3:13–15; 4:10; 5:30–32).

Neither Luke nor any other New Testament author allows us (1) to separate Peter from Mary Magdalene, the Twelve, Paul, and other Easter witnesses. Nor do they encourage us to (2) reduce the Petrine function simply to that of being a witness to the resurrection. Nor do they permit us (3) to isolate Peter's experience of the post-Easter Jesus from all that has gone before. The watershed of Easter does not invalidate or cancel what has happened to Peter through his closeness to Jesus and leadership of the Twelve. If Peter holds a special leadership role in the early church, this is associated not only with his function as *the* Easter witness but also with a position he has already enjoyed during Jesus' ministry. Nevertheless, it is Easter that brings Peter the new, worldwide function of being the leading Easter witness as missionary, shepherd, and rock—an activity that eventually leads to his final "witness" as martyr.

Understanding and interpreting this Petrine function primarily (but not exclusively) in the light of the Easter appearance to him looks attractive from the point of view of the liturgy and of God's self-revelation. First, this interpretation links Peter expressly with the center of the church's life of worship, the resurrection of the crucified Jesus. Not only baptism and the Eucharist but also all the sacraments focus on and draw their power from the Paschal Mystery. Second, this vision of his function expresses Peter's relationship with the climax of divine self-revelation: the resurrection of the Crucified One, through which Jesus was revealed as the effective Messiah, Lord, and Son of God. Highlighting what the New Testament reports about Peter's role as Easter witness moves us to the center of our

⁷⁴ On these passages about Peter's witness to the resurrection, see Charles Kingsley Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994); and Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles* (New York: Doubleday, 1998).

christological confession. The events of the first Good Friday and Easter Sunday form the highpoint of the saving self-communication of the tripersonal God, which was proclaimed by Peter and eventually enshrined in the church's Creed.

Prioritizing Peter's role as Easter proclaimer has a further theological advantage. Those who follow Vatican II in setting the (prophetic) service of the word ahead of the (priestly) sacramental ministry and the (kingly) shepherding and leading of Christ's flock should be attracted to my account of the Petrine function.⁷⁵ This account attends primarily (but not exclusively) to the prophetic service of the word in witnessing to the resurrection (on the basis of Peter's meeting with the risen Jesus).

When prioritizing Peter's Easter witness, we need to recall that the New Testament does not offer a single, monolithic tradition about him. He can be depicted as fisherman or missionary (e.g., Mk 1:16–18; Lk 5:10), shepherd (e.g., Jn 21:15–17), rock (e.g., Mt 16:18), repentant sinner (e.g., Mk 14:72), and martyr (Jn 21:18–19; see also 13:36). We can relate these different images to that of Easter witness. In the opening chapters of Acts, Peter's missionary "fishing" takes the form of proclaiming the resurrection. The shepherding vocation comes to him from the risen Christ. Peter's role as "rock" receives its legitimacy from the crucified and risen Jesus, who is "the living stone," "the cornerstone," and "the stone of scandal" (1 Pt 2:4–8). Peter's repentance has its context in the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus (Lk 22:61–62; 23:49; Jn 21:15–17); he will suffer martyrdom in the service of the risen Lord (Jn 21:18–19). In short, the different images of Peter and traditions about him converge on his function as Easter witness. In the words of Raymond Brown and his colleagues, "the important tradition about Peter having been the first of the major companions of Jesus' ministry to have seen the Lord after the resurrection" provided "very likely" the "original context for much of the New Testament material about Peter."⁷⁶

PETER AND THE POPE

As regards the way Peter's leadership should be or was in fact handed on, the New Testament contains no explicit directions. The Acts of the Apostles contains nothing about Peter's later life. They describe Paul's coming

⁷⁵ See, e.g., the order in which the 1964 Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, expresses the triple *munus* or office of bishops: first, the teaching/prophetic role of the bishops, and then their priestly role in worship and their pastoral/kingly role in leadership (nos. 25–27).

⁷⁶ Brown et al., *Peter in the New Testament* 165.

to Rome (Acts 28:11–31) but not his martyrdom there. John’s Gospel points to Peter’s martyrdom (Jn 21:18–19), but does not specify how⁷⁷ or where it took place. Nevertheless, Rome was the city where Peter and Paul suffered death for their Master.⁷⁸ The Church of Rome came to be recognized as exercising a unique responsibility for all the communities of Christians. As successor of Peter, the bishop of Rome was acknowledged to be called in a special way to do two things. He was *both* to proclaim the saving truth revealed by Christ *and* to keep all Christians united in their faith.⁷⁹

Here “called in a special way” does *not* mean “called as the only one” or “called exclusively.” Peter’s role of leadership did not isolate him from the other apostles. Paul and the other apostolic missionaries also witnessed authoritatively to the good news, centered on the resurrection of the crucified Jesus, and set themselves to maintain unity among the churches. Likewise the special responsibility of the bishop of Rome to uphold the truth about Christ and preserve Christian unity is a function also exercised with other bishops (and, indeed, all Christians).

What light could my presentation of Peter’s primary role throw on the nature of the papacy? From his primary role as Easter witness I draw five conclusions for the ministry of the bishop of Rome:

(1) The church was founded on *all the apostles* (Eph 2:20), the official witnesses to Jesus Christ. They proclaimed the resurrection of the crucified Savior, admitted all nations into the new community, and authoritatively guided the emerging church. In this college of witnesses Simon Peter stood out as *the* foundational witness to Jesus’ resurrection. His new name, “Cephas,” suggested his special function. To him alone was addressed the promise: “On this rock I will build my church” (Mt 16:18).

(2) The mission given to Peter and the other apostles was partly but not totally handed on to their successors, the bishop of Rome and the other bishops. I say “not totally,” because certain functions died with the apostles. Under the risen Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit they were called to preach the resurrection of the Crucified One and so bring the church into existence. Once achieved, this founding of the church could never be repeated. Pope, bishops, and other believers bear—in different

⁷⁷ C. K. Barrett finds a reference to Peter’s death by crucifixion in John 21:18–19 (*The Gospel according to John*, 2nd ed. [London: SPCK, 1978] 585); so too does Lincoln, *Gospel according to St John* 318–19.

⁷⁸ For the data, debates, and bibliographies about Paul, Peter, and their martyrdom in Rome, see Frank Leslie Cross and Elizabeth Anne Livingstone, eds., “Paul, St” and “Peter, St,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University, 2005) 1243–46, 1269–70.

⁷⁹ Among many publications on the bishop of Rome, see Tillard, *The Bishop of Rome*; and James F. Puglisi, ed., *How Can the Petrine Ministry be of Service to the Unity of the Universal Church?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

ways—the common responsibility of nourishing Christian life and mission and so keeping the church in a flourishing existence. They are all called to maintain the good state of the community, but not to found (or refound) the church.

Hence the words “on this rock I will build my church” do not apply to the bishop of Rome in precisely the way they apply to Peter. In the case of the pope the meaning would rather be: “on this rock I will preserve my church in existence.”

(3) Nevertheless, the mission given to Peter and the other apostles was partly handed on to their successors. Some details of this succession would be these:

(a) The bishop of Rome has a relationship to his fellow bishops that is *like* that of Peter to the other apostles. Together they share the major responsibility for spreading the good news of the risen Christ, leading the church with authority, and maintaining the sacramental life of the community. In the life of the church, the bishops with the pope are the primary preachers, pastors, and celebrants of the liturgy.

(b) Among all the bishops, the bishop of Rome, like Peter, has a special role of leadership to serve the whole church with love (Jn 21:15–17) and through suffering (Jn 21:18–19). His special service aims at maintaining the true faith and unity of all Christians.

(4) Christian Grappe and Raymond Brown and his colleagues, in listing “repentant sinner” among the major images of Peter (see above), drew attention to the shadow side of the chief apostle’s exercise of his ministry. Rather than being surprised at human weaknesses and limitations in the ministry of Peter’s successors, we should expect them. Even after the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit, Peter could at least on one serious occasion appear to limit true Christian freedom (Gal 2:11–21).⁸⁰ Among all the disciples only Peter is reported to have confessed his sinfulness so strikingly: “Simon Peter . . . fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying: ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord’” (Lk 5:8).

The conclusion from this confession seems clear. The shadow side of the papacy, far from ruling out the Petrine succession, belongs to it. We should not be surprised if, like Peter, the bishop of Rome at times fails in the way he exercises his special function of leadership for the whole church.

(5) In this article I have shown how Peter fulfilled his ministry, primarily but not exclusively, through being *the* official witness to Christ’s resurrection from the dead. This suggests that among the various titles exercised by the bishop of Rome the primary one could be recognized as being *the* proclaimer of the Lord’s victory over death. I need to work this out in a little detail.

⁸⁰ On Paul’s conflict with Peter at Antioch, see Hengel, *Saint Peter* 57–65.

The pastoral jurisdiction and teaching function of the pope, defined by the First Vatican Council (1869–1870), can be contextualized by recalling the Petrine ministry of being the primary witness to the risen Christ. Vatican I described the papal office as a “perpetual principle and visible foundation of the *unity*” that belongs to the bishops and the whole church.⁸¹ It is above all through being the primary, official proclaimer of the central truth, “Jesus is risen,” that the pope expresses and supports this unity. Vatican I went on to describe the goal of papal primacy: “by preserving unity, both in communion and the profession of the same faith, the Church of Christ may be one flock under one supreme shepherd.”⁸² Now the church as a community of believers brings together those who confess Jesus as risen Lord and through sharing this faith are bound in love to each other. Their faith and communion are served by the pope (as primary teacher and pastor) proclaiming through word and deed *the event* which more than anything else founded the community of believers: the resurrection of the crucified Christ (along with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit).

The Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium* (no. 25), put “preaching the Gospel” ahead of pastoral and liturgical roles as the most important duty of bishops. No less than the other bishops, the bishop of Rome must fulfill this duty, which, in a 1975 apostolic exhortation, Pope Paul VI called “the preeminent ministry of teaching the revealed truth.”⁸³ One might reasonably comment that “the Gospel” to be preached and “the revealed truth” to be taught primarily concern and essentially derive from the resurrection of the crucified Jesus.

In recent decades contacts between Catholics and other Christians have highlighted more and more the need to find real *unity* in confessing the *truth* of faith. How best can we describe that unity and truth? The central truth of Christian faith can be formulated by saying, “The crucified Son of God is risen from the dead to give us the Holy Spirit.” The Easter mystery says it all. It is the basic truth to be maintained and passed on by Christians. They are baptized into Christ’s death and resurrection (Rom 6:3–11) to live together as God’s new Easter people.

What more could we expect from the bishop of Rome than that, like Peter, he strengthen the whole church’s faith in Christ’s resurrection? How could he better serve the unity of an Easter people than by proclaiming insistently the event that brought the church into existence: the resurrection of the crucified Jesus followed by the coming of the Holy Spirit? To be

⁸¹ DzH 3051; ND 818, emphasis added.

⁸² DzH 3060; ND 826.

⁸³ *Evangelii nuntiandi* no. 67, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi_en.html (accessed January 4, 2012).

sure, the pope must also lead the church with loving authority and celebrate the sacraments. But his great task for all the world is to announce through word and deed the news that lies at the heart of Christianity: Jesus is risen!

A Lutheran-Catholic report, on which I have drawn, observes that “no matter what one may think about the justification offered by the New Testament for the emergence of the papacy, this papacy in its developed form cannot be read back into the New Testament.”⁸⁴ In general, one can only agree with this statement. Nevertheless, there is one yearly ceremony in which, by proclaiming the resurrection, the pope strikingly symbolizes and even parallels Peter’s central function as Easter witness. Each year millions of people see on television or follow by radio the pope’s Easter broadcast. In many languages he announces to the city of Rome and the world the glorious news that gave rise to Christianity: “Christ is risen. Alleluia!”

Of course, we should respect the great differences between our cultural and historical setting in the 21st century and that in which nearly 2,000 years ago Peter carried out his ministry. Nevertheless, one need not strain to find some parallel between what the pope does at Easter and what Luke pictured happening at Pentecost. In Jerusalem Peter stood up to announce Jesus’ resurrection to “Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs” (Acts 2:8–11). Today the television cameras catch the faces of those who have come to Rome from all over the world, so that they can stand in St. Peter’s Square on Easter Sunday and hear from Peter’s successor the great news that has forever changed human history: “This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are witnesses” (Acts 2:32). Peter’s witness to the resurrection lives on strikingly in the pope’s Easter proclamation. In that special way the bishop of Rome visibly serves and strengthens the church’s faith by reenacting before all the world the primary role of Peter as fundamental witness to Jesus risen from the dead.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Brown et al., eds., *Peter in the New Testament* 8.

⁸⁵ For more on this see William Henn, “The Church as Easter Witness in the Thought of Gerald O’Collins, S.J.,” in *The Convergence of Theology* 208–20.