THE PAPACY:

A PHILOSOPHICAL CASE

ABSTRACT. This article aims to provide a philosophical case for the veracity of the doctrine of the papacy. This specific case will be presented as an *a priori* argument that will be formulated in light of the work of Richard Swinburne and Linda Zagzebski—which, in combination, will provide us with grounds for believing in the veracity of the papacy from a philosophical perspective, and thus help to further bolster up the historical arguments that are usually brought in support of this doctrine.

Key Words: Papacy, Primacy, Infallibility, Revelation, Authority

Introduction

According to the doctrine of the papacy, the Bishop of Rome, referred to as the 'Pope' (Latin: *papa*, 'father'),[1] is the 'supreme pontiff' of the universal Church, such that he holds the unique office—originally held by St. Peter, and now by his successors—of leading the Church as the 'vicar', or 'visible head' and 'representative', of Jesus Christ.[2] More specifically, the Pope, as the sole successor of St. Peter (who is the ecclesial 'rock', 'shepherd' and 'strengthener' of his fellow brethren),[3] is the head of the 'college of bishops', in the same manner that St. Peter was the head of the 'apostolic college'—with the term 'college', in both cases, referring to a stable group of individuals, whose structure and authority must be derived from revelation—as the Second Vatican Council (hereafter, Vatican-II) declares, 'Just as in the Gospel, the Lord so disposing, St. Peter and the other apostles constitute one apostolic college, so in a similar way the Roman Pontiff, the successor of Peter, and the bishops, the successors of the apostles, are joined together' (*LG* 22).[4] The establishment of the office of the papacy is thus taken to be by *divine institution*—in the specific sense that it was established by God, through the person of Christ,[5] and has been sustained in existence by him (from the 1st century to the present day). At a structural level, on the basis of the Pope's position as the sole successor of St. Peter, he is the chief pastor and supreme leader of the hierarchically structured, universal body of believers: the Catholic Church, and exercises his authority through the Church's 'magisterium' (Latin for 'teaching office')—where, as stated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 'This Church

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[1] I will be interchanging between the various titles of 'Pope', 'Bishop of Rome', 'Supreme Pontiff', and 'Roman Pontiff' throughout this article. Furthermore, I will often at times use the term 'vicar of Christ', 'chair of St. Peter', 'office of the papacy' or simply 'the papacy' in reference to the role fulfilled by the Pope.

[2] With the 'visibility' of the headship of the Pope emphasising the fact of his role being subordinate to that of Christ, who is the single head of the universal body of believers.

[3] For Peter being the 'rock', see: Matthew 16:13-18; for Peter being the 'shepherd', see John 21:15-17; and for Peter being the 'strengthener' of his fellow brethren, see: Luke 22:31-33.

[4] LG = *Lumen Gentium*

[5] For ease of writing, I will now refer to 'God' rather than 'God, through the person of Christ' as the individual who has established the papacy,

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…subsists in…the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him' (*CCC* 816).[6] Hence, on the basis of this teaching concerning the nature of the office of the papacy, we can identify two central tenets that are at the heart of the doctrine of the papacy:[7]

> (1) (Papacy)   (a) *Universal Primacy*: The Pope possesses full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the whole church—which, in the context of teaching, is exercised authoritatively through the Church's magisterium.
> (b) *Theological Infallibility*: The Pope is infallible when he speaks *ex cathedra*.

The doctrine of the papacy teaches that the Pope—in virtue of him occupying the chair of St. Peter—possesses a position of 'primacy' and 'supremacy', and thus is, as declared by Vatican-II, 'the perpetual and visible source and foundation of the unity both of the bishops and of the whole company of the faithful' (*LG* 23). And therefore, as the council further states '…the Roman Pontiff…as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered' (*LG* 22). More succinctly, as the *Catechism* notes, 'the Pope enjoys, by divine institution, supreme, full, immediate, and universal power in the care of souls' (*CCC* 937). Following Ludwig Ott (2018, 306), in consonance with these declarations, one can understand the nature of the primatial power to be: first, a true *power of jurisdiction*, in that it is a true governing power that is not merely of supervision or direction, but 'has the full power of legislation, and administration of justice (disputed and voluntary jurisdiction) and of its execution'. Second, it is a *universal* power, in that it is one that extends 'personally to the pastors (bishops) and to the faithful, totally and individually, of the whole Church'. Third, it is a *supreme* power, in that there is no specific jurisdiction that possesses a greater, or equally great, power. 'The power of the Pope transcends both the power of each individual bishop and also of all the other bishops together. The bishops collectively (apart from the Pope), therefore, are not equal to or superior to the Pope'. Lastly, it is a *full* power, in that the Pope possesses of himself alone, 'the whole fullness of the Church power of jurisdiction and not merely a greater share than the other bishops taken individually or conjointly'. From the teaching provided by Vatican-II—expressed by (1) and further exposited by Ott—the first central tenet of the doctrine of the papacy is that of the Pope having universal jurisdiction and supreme primacy over the Church—which, in the present analysis, will be focused on *teaching authority* (rather than that of the more general, practical disciplinary governance)—let's term this supreme jurisdictional leadership (i.e. teaching authority): *universal primacy* (hereafter, *u*-primacy).

   In addition to this, the doctrine of the papacy, as expressed by (1), also teaches that the Pope possesses a 'charism of infallibility', as is defined and declared by the First Vatican Council (hereafter, Vatican-I), when it states that

> when the Roman Pontiff speaks *ex cathedra*, that is, when, in the exercise of his office as shepherd and teacher of all Christians, in virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine concerning faith or morals to be held by the whole Church, he possesses, by the divine

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[6] CCC = Catechism of the Catholic Church.

[7] Though stated in a more limited sense below, the supreme power of jurisdiction had by the Pope is not solely limited to teaching authority but also practical (ecclesial and political) discipline and governance. However, in this article, I will be focusing primarily on that of the teaching authority of the office of the papacy and the manner in which the Pope's universal primacy is related to this. This will be further noted again in the main text below.

assistance promised to him in blessed Peter, that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed his Church to enjoy in defining doctrine concerning faith or morals. Therefore, such definitions of the Roman Pontiff are of themselves, and not by the consent of the Church, irreformable *(PA 4)*.[8]

In following Ott (2018, 308), one can further understand this doctrinal teaching as follows: first, the *bearer* of infallibility is 'every lawful Pope as successor of Peter, the Principle of the Apostles. But the Pope alone is infallible not others to whom he transfers a part of his teaching authority'. Second, the *object* of his infallibility is his teaching concerning the domain of faith and morals, and 'above all revealed teaching, but also non-revealed teachings, which are closely associated with the teachings of Revelation'. Third, the *condition* of infallibility is that the Pope speaks *ex cathedra.* 'For this is required: (a) That he speaks as pastor and teacher of all the faithful with the full weight of his supreme apostolic authority…(b) that he have the intention of deciding finally a teaching of Faith or Morals, so that it be held by all the faithful'. Lastly, the *source* of his infallibility is the supernatural assistance of the Holy Spirit, who 'protects the supreme teacher of the Church from error…The Holy Spirit preserves the bearer of the supreme teaching office from a false decision (negative assistance, *assistentia negativa*) and leads him, where necessary, by external and internal grace, to the right knowledge and correct statement of the truth (positive assistance, *assistentia positiva*)'. From the teaching provided by Vatican-I—expressed by (1) and further exposited by Ott—the second central tenet of the doctrine of the papacy is that of the Pope possessing the charism of infallibility in the sense of him being preserved from the possibility of error—in respect to the domain of faith and morals (and other revealed matters)—when he is providing definitive teaching *ex cathedra*—let's term this ability: *theological infallibility* (hereafter, *t*-infallibility).[9]

So, in summary: according to the doctrine of the papacy, the Bishop of Rome occupies a unique office: the office of the papacy—originally had by St. Peter and divinely instituted by Christ—and thus, first, he has *u*-primacy—which provides him with the right to exercise a sovereign and universal teaching (and practical) authority over the entire Church. Second, the Bishop of Rome also has (when exercised within specific contexts) *t*-infallibility—and thus is preserved from error in defining specific doctrines. The notions of *u*-primacy and *t*-infallibility are, therefore, the central theological claims underpinning the doctrine of the papacy. Hence, it would be helpful to see whether there is any successful philosophical case that can be provided for the truth of these tenets. More specifically, a specific question that is now presented to us is: is there any good *a priori* evidence/reasons (i.e. evidence/reasons that are independent of empirical experience or data) to believe the veracity of the central tenets of the doctrine of the papacy—namely, that God has established the office of the papacy—with the holder of this office having *u*-primacy and *t*-infallibility?[10] I believe that there is, and this will

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[8] PA = *Pastor Aeternus*.

[9] The term 'theological infallibility' is preferred here over that of the more general term 'papal infallibility' to ward off conceptual misunderstanding by emphasising the fact that this charism is only operative in relation to theological matters (i.e. faith and morals, and topics related to revelation) and not concerning other, more mundane matters.

[10] I will be interchanging between the terms '*a priori* reasons' and '*a priori* evidence' throughout this article without any change in meaning. Moreover, having this *a priori* evidence/reasons will be of great value in helping to 'bolster up' some of the *a posteriori* (historical) evidence (i.e. evidence that is dependent on empirical experience or data) that has been put forward in support of the doctrine—more on this in section 4 of this article. For an interesting *a posteriori* (probabilistic) argument for the veracity of the papacy, see (Blado, 2019). Further contemporary scholarship concerning the *a posteriori* evidential status of the doctrine will also be noted below.

be demonstrated by providing a two-part philosophical case for the veracity of the doctrine of the papacy. More specifically, the focus of this article will be on, first, explicating a philosophical case for the papacy based on certain elements of an *argument for the Christian revelation* that has been proposed by Richard Swinburne, which will then be re-formulated as an *a priori* argument for there being an individual (and office) that has *u*-primacy.[11] Second, I will then focus on extending the philosophical case proposed by explicating the notion of *epistemic authority* introduced by Linda Zagzebski, and then re-situate this notion within a new context, which will then provide a further extension of our *a priori* argument for there being an individual (and office) that has *t*-infallibility. After this philosophical case has been completed, the focus will then switch to explaining the *value* that this philosophical case can bring to the current debate concerning the veracity of the doctrine of the papacy. In all, with this philosophical case laid out—and the inherent value of it noted—Christians will now have philosophical (*a priori*) reasons (in addition to certain historical (*a posteriori*) reasons) to believe in the veracity of the papacy.

The plan of action is as follows: in section 2 ('A Philosophical Case for the Papacy: Revelation and Universal Primacy'), I detail the nature of Richard Swinburne's argument for the Christian revelation and re-formulate it as an *a priori* argument for the existence of an individual (and office) that has *u*-primacy. In section 3 ('Extension of a Philosophical Case for the Papacy: Authority and Theological Infallibility'), I seek to provide an extension to the argument of the previous section by focusing on the notion of epistemic authority put forward by Linda Zagzebski—with an application of it being made within a new context—in order to provide some *a priori* reasons to believe in the existence of an individual (and office) that has *t*-infallibility. In section 4 ('The Value of a Philosophical Case for the Papacy'), I detail the inherent value of the type of philosophical case that has been proposed in the article and why others should pursue this type of approach (in addition to the more traditional historical approach). Finally, there will be a concluding section ('Conclusion') that will summarise the case that has been argued in this article.

A Philosophical Case for the Papacy: Revelation and Universal Primacy

The first tenet of the doctrine of the papacy centres on the notion of universal primacy, which was construed in the previous section as follows:

> (2) (U-Primacy)   The Pope possesses full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the whole church—which, in the context of teaching, is exercised authoritatively through the Church's magisterium.
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The notion of the 'universal' primacy of the Pope (usually) focuses on expressing the fact that the Pope has sovereign authority to govern the Church theologically *and* practically. However, as noted previously, the specific focus of our analysis—and defense of the notion of *u*-primacy—will be on that of the universal *teaching authority* of the Pope—which, nevertheless, is the theological basis for his practical authority as well. The notion of *u*-primacy is—what I term—a *non-derivative* notion—where a non-derivative notion is one that expresses the fact of God having performed a *direct action*—which, in this context, is that of him having performed

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[11] When I use the term 'argument', I do not mean to say that a formal argument or syllogism will be presented in this article. Rather, I am using the term in the general sense of 'reasons to believe a certain conclusion', which will be presented in an informal fashion throughout.

the *direct action* of establishing the office of the papacy—with its holder then being required to have *u*-primacy in order to fulfil this role.[12] Now, the focus of our assessment of the veracity of the (non-derivative) notion of the universal teaching authority of the Pope (i.e. *u*-primacy) will be grounded on (a certain element) of an *a priori* argument for the veracity of the *Christian revelation* that has been provided by Richard Swinburne (1992, 2007),[13] and which we can now explicate within our specific context as follows: on the basis of the existence of the various phenomena of reality (such as the existence of the universe and its features), we have good reason to believe that there is a God, who is the omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly free and perfectly good creator and sustainer of all things. Now, firstly, as the creator (and sustainer) of all things, God has made individuals with certain capacities—such as the capacity to live a *morally good life*—with the potential for those who do live this life to go on to live (after their physical death) a supremely worthwhile life in Heaven. Secondly, as omniscient, God would know of the truth value of every proposition—including that of moral truths—and thus, he would know that it is good that all individuals pursue this type of life. Hence, thirdly, based on his perfect goodness—which is that of him inevitably performing the best action/kind of action if there is one, many good actions and no bad actions—he would inevitably seek to help all individuals to achieve this end (of living a morally good life). Now, God could have created individuals already formed with morally good characters the that are fit for Heaven; however, it is indeed a good thing that God should provide individuals with the opportunity to choose— in an undetermined manner—what type of person that they are to be, and through their own deliberate choice, form a character that is suitable for Heaven (Swinburne, 2007). Hence, based on the goodness of God performing the action of providing individuals with this opportunity, he would thus seek to create individuals who can then freely choose to pursue the path of becoming morally good. However, if individuals are to truly have this opportunity to make this type of choice, then they will need information, according to Swinburne (1992, 116), 'as to what kind of life is a saintly life, is supremely worth living, and how to take steps to live that life'. Thus, given that God is perfectly good—and thus would inevitably perform the best action or good action if there is one—he would then *inevitably* provide this revelatory information (i.e. propositional revelation)—the content of which will be of four kinds that can be stated succinctly as such:[14]

(3) (Revelation)	(a) *Moral information*: a revelation of a body of information containing propositions that concern general moral truths.
	(b) *Theological information*: a revelation of a body of information containing propositions that concern certain theological facts.
	(c) *Historical information*: a revelation of a body of information containing propositions that concern certain historical facts about the incarnation and atonement.

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[12] Further clarity will be brought to this terminology in the next section when the notion of a 'direct' term is introduced.

[13] I emphasise here that this is only a 'certain element' of the argument, as Swinburne also provides a further extension of this argument to support belief in the superiority of the Christian revelation over that of other purported revelation—and also that of the veracity of scripture and Christian morality—each of which will not be utilised or commented on in this article.

[14] This conception of revelation assumes, rather than argues for, the truth of Christian theism. However, this assumption is unproblematic for our philosophical case as it does not aim to establish the veracity of Christian theism but only a central tenet of it—namely, the papacy.

> (d) *Eschatological information*: a revelation of a body of information containing propositions that concern certain facts about the afterlife that could be emotionally motivating.

For (a): Moral information, God would seek to provide a revelation that includes propositions concerning various general moral truths—namely, that of which particular actions are good or bad, obligatory or wrong (for example, it being obligatory for individuals to show gratitude to their benefactors and make atonement for wrongdoing, and that it is wrong to kill unjustifiably or to offer up sacrifices to idols etc.). Now, natural reason can indeed discover a number of these general moral truths unaided; nevertheless, by God providing a revelation concerning which the purported truth is, in fact, a moral truth, one's confidence in their truth would surely increase—which would be important in helping individuals to not merely do what they believe to be good but to actually do what is in fact good (Swinburne, 2007).

For (b): Theological information, God would seek to provide a revelation of propositions that concern the existence and nature of God—which will enable individuals to interact with him better. That is, a God who created rational individuals would want them to interact with him, and thus they would need more information concerning his existence and what he is like, in order to appropriately interact with him, and give him the worship that he deserves. Moreover, this revelation would also enable individuals to apply the moral truths revealed in (a) by them knowing that God has a nature that is worthy of worship, and so it is him that we have an obligation to worship, show gratitude towards, and make an atonement for any wrongs (i.e. sins) committed against him. As with some of the moral truths, various facts concerning the nature and existence of God can be discovered by reason alone; however, again, by God providing a revelation that includes this information, one's confidence in the truth of it will be increased—which will strengthen one's belief in him and desire to offer him worship and devotion.

For (c): Historical information, God would seek to provide a revelation that includes propositions concerning the fact of him having become incarnate and provided an atonement for the sins of humanity. That is, it seems to be the case that it is very difficult for humans to make atonement for their sins, and thus, God, being perfectly good, would desire to help other individuals to make this necessary atonement for their wrongdoings (Swinburne, 2007). God can help humans to make this atonement by himself becoming incarnate and living a perfect life that can then be offered up as an atoning sacrifice on their behalf. If God has indeed performed this action,[15] it is (very plausible) that the fact of this having occurred in history—that is, it being an accessible historical fact who God incarnate was and how the atonement he provided was made—would be part of the information that individuals need to live morally good lives—especially due to the fact that for the atonement to be efficacious for an individual they will need to attach their repentance (and apology) to it, and offer it as their own (Swinburne, 2007).

For (d): Eschatological information, God would seek to provide a revelation that includes propositions concerning the existence of an afterlife—such as there being a Heaven for those who have lived morally good lives, and that there is a Hell for those who have not. The provision of this information will provide a valuable emotional encouragement for individuals to pursue the goal of living morally good lives, so as to be rewarded with Heaven, and avoid going to Hell—where, without this information, individuals would not know, from reason

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[15] For a historical and probabilistic argument in favour of the incarnation, see (Swinburne, 2003).

alone, that there is, in fact, a reward (or punishment) that is associated with the type of life that they live.

Hence, for each of these four kinds of reasons—and based on God's perfect goodness—one has good reason to believe that God's inevitable action of providing individuals with the opportunity to live morally good lives would necessarily be supported by him also ensuring that individuals have access to this body of information that would be accessible through him having provided a propositional revelation—in short*, God would inevitably provide a propositional revelation*. The important question now is: how would he reveal it, and what form would it take? In answer to the former question, one can see that, as one of the central purposes of such a revelation is to provide an opportunity for one to choose whether to pursue the goal of becoming a morally good person—and thus go to Heaven—or not—and thus go to Hell—it is thus plausible that God would seek to provide the further opportunity for one to choose whether to discover by investigation the correct way for one to fulfil this goal—or to neglect to do so. Hence, the revelation provided by God would not be too open; rather, it would be one that needs to be searched out and found (Swinburne, 2007). Furthermore, as it is a good state of affairs for one to help other individuals to improve their overall wellbeing (which could be that of their spiritual and material wellbeing), it is plausible that it is also good that the revelation provided by God be one that individuals can cooperate together in finding out its existence and content. Thus, as Swinburne (1992, 117) writes, 'It might be expected that the availability of revelation in part or more fully only to some should reinforce that opportunity - two could cooperate in discovering the revelation, or one could tell another about it'. Therefore, for these reasons, even though it is good that God's propositional revelation should be accessible and/or discoverable, it is also good that it should not be overly evident—even to the individuals that have discovered it—that they have, in fact, discovered this revelation, as, by this, one will be able to manifest an overall commitment to the goals that have been offered by it, through them having pursued it in conditions of uncertainty (Swinburne, 2007).

Now, in answer to the latter question, the form of revelation that God would seek to provide would be a 'culture-relative revelation'—which a revelation that is expressed in the scientific, historical and theological presuppositions of the culture in which the revelation was addressed, and it would provide moral instruction that is directly applicable to the situation of the individuals within that cultural setting. The expression of the content of this cultural-relative revelation, according to Swinburne (2007, 99), would be such that

> the doctrine of creation might be expressed on the presupposition that the world was as described by the then current science, for instance, as a flat Earth, covered by a dome, above which was Heaven—"God made the Heaven and the Earth." On the presupposition that the world came into existence 4,000 years earlier, it would teach that it was then that God caused it to be. It would teach that God had made atonement for our sins, using the analogies of sacrifice and law familiar to those in the culture. It would teach the moral truths which those living in that culture needed to know (e.g. those concerned with whether people ought to pay taxes to the Roman emperor, or to obey the Jewish food laws); but it would contain no guidance on the morality of artificial insemination by donor, or medical research on embryos. It would offer the hope of Heaven to those who lived the right life. And it would express this hope using a presupposition of the culture that Heaven was situated spatially above the Earth.

This form of revelation would be effective in providing its *immediate* recipients with the needed guidance for how to live their lives, which would include, for example, that of having the right disposition towards God, how to utilise the atonement that he has provided for their

wrongdoings, and how to attain the goal of getting to Heaven—in short, it would provide the needed information (noted previously) of how they are to live morally good lives. That its information and moral instruction is limited to that which is relevant to the culture that it is revealed within—and that it might include false scientific and/or historical presuppositions (such as that the Earth is non-spherical or that there was a global flood sometime in the past)— would not make any difference to the religious content of the message—namely, the kind of life that one is to live and the worship that is to be offered to God—nor would it lessen the worship worthiness of God and the desirability of attaining the goal of living in Heaven (Swinburne, 2007). Thus, where the problem will, in fact, lie with this type of revelation would be the fact of it *not* being possible to be transmitted, as it is, to those of another culture or of a distant generation—it would not be a *cross-cultural* or *transgenerational* revelation. As Swinburne (1992, 120) notes, 'Such a revelation would be of little use to the philosophers who met on Mars' Hill, Athens, in the first century A.D.; let alone to literate and numerate Anglo-Americans of today'. And why this would be so, is due to the fact of it being 'clothed' in the presuppositions of the culture that it was revealed—which, on the one hand, allows the message to be communicated more effectively to its recipients (by the (potentially false) assumptions that that the revelation is cast in being understood by them). However, on the other hand, unless there is a clear public means by which one can distinguish presupposition from the message being communicated (e.g. information concerning the nature of God, and the means in which he is to be worshipped—rather than information concerning the nature of what and how he created things) cultures and generations far removed from the one in which the revelation was provided would not be able to access this message. This revelation would not be of use outside of this culture (and in a distant generation)—as other cultures (and distant generations) potentially might not know what is taken for granted by the culture (and generation) under question or what information are common assumptions of that culture (and generation), and thus should be taken as presuppositions rather than the message of the propositional revelation.

Two ways in which this issue could be dealt with would be: first, God providing a 'culture-independent revelation', rather than a culture-relative one, and, second, by God providing an accompanying 'authoritative mechanism' that could effectively, and continually, communicate the culture-relative revelation cross-culturally and transgenerationally. Through a process of elimination, we can see that God would seek to use the second way of dealing with our problem—and thus would not seek to utilise the first option: a culture-independent revelation. A culture-independent revelation is one that could be in the form of a creed that is formed of sentences that do not utilise any scientific or historical propositions. Thus, for example, as Swinburne (2007, 101) writes, with a culture-independent revelation, 'God would aim to give us the doctrine of creation without using any such cultural presupposition as that the universe consists of a flat Earth covered by a dome by giving us instead the sentence "God created everything"'. Now, why God would *not* seek to provide this type of revelation is due to the fact that this type of revelation would not serve the purpose for which it was provided—namely, that of providing sentences that are effectively communicable across cultures and generations. And, why this would be so is simply because of the removal of presupposition—and thus the increase in the logical rigour of the sentences that would be had by a culture-independent revelation—would, first, make it less accessible to the relatively uneducated members of society (which would be a large percentage of the population)—which can be seen, for example, in the increase in rigour that is had with the statement 'God created everything' to 'God causes or permits other beings to cause or permit the occurrence of all logically contingent

events apart from any, the occurrence of which is entailed by his own existence'.[16] Second, it would also open the possibility of misunderstanding, especially if it is translated into other cultures and languages that will interpret the terms in potentially differing ways than what was intended. One could indeed avoid the latter problem by making the culture-independent revelation more logically rigorous; however, as there is no maximum degree of rigour, the possibility of misunderstanding will still remain as new questions and issues are raised against the more rigorous terms. Thus, as Swinburne writes:

> New cultures always raise new questions of interpretation, and the consequences of unreformed old sentences for their concerns become unclear. Yet, Sentences of a human language only have meaning to the extent to which its speakers can grasp that meaning; and as (being only human) they cannot conceive of all the possible concerns of future cultures, they cannot have sentences whose consequences for the concerns of those cultures are always clear.

Hence, as God has chosen to provide a revelation through the vehicle of human language—which is something that is indeed a 'feeble' vehicle for conveying an unequivocal message cross-culturally and transgenerationally—through a process of elimination it is clear to us that God will utilise the second option of providing an accompanying authoritative mechanism that can, in some manner, support this vehicle. In short, *God would inevitably provide a propositional revelation and accompanying authoritative mechanism*.

Now, practically, this accompanying authoritative mechanism—which we can now re-term a 'magisterium' (with this term referring to a *general teaching office*, rather than that of the more specific *Roman magisterium*)—would provide *continuing guidance*, that will be able to make a distinction between the message of the revelation and the presuppositions, in which it is clothed. Hence, through this action, it would provide a means of *sovereign governance* over what is the correct interpretation of this message and how it is to be practically applied in each of the lives of the recipients of God's revelation—namely, the entire Church. And this must be the case, according to Swinburne (1992, 124), 'if the revelation is not to die out', as, for example, 'if the Bible were finished in 100 AD, and buried in the sands of Egypt by the last living Christian who was then executed in the persecutions, and then dug up again by the Reformers in 1500 AD, they would have produced far more diverse theologies than ever they did'. This magisterium would thus need to be operative in more than one culture and generation or, more specifically, universally across all cultures and generations—as given that the propositional revelation has been provided by God to all people, this magisterium would need to be operative universally in order to render the content of this revelation as accessible to all of these people—in short, this authoritative accompanying magisterium would enable God's revelation to be communicated and accessed cross-culturally and trans-generationally.[17] Thus, the important question now is: what form must this authoritative accompanying magisterium take? Well, there are (at least) three forms in which this authoritative magisterium could be conceptualised as: first, as a hierarchical structure that has a singular individual that possesses supreme authority (i.e. *u*-primacy)—let's term this form 'Singular-Authority'. Second, as a hierarchical structure centred on a partnership between two individuals that would possess equal authority (i.e. together as a partnership, each would possess *u*-primacy)—let's term this

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[16] The latter statement being found in (Swinburne, 2016, 130).

[17] Swinburne, in his writings on the topic of the Christian revelation, does not proceed to identify what form the authoritative magisterium would have, and thus the following method of identification of this magisterium, and the extension of the argument for a specific form of it, is original to this article.

form 'Partner-Authority'. And, third, as a non-hierarchically structured group of individuals that would each possess equal authority, but with the exercising of their authority being through majority opinion and/or consensus (i.e. together as a group, they would possess u-primacy)— let's term this form 'Group-Authority'. The question that now presents itself is: which form would God utilise for the authoritative magisterium that accompanies his propositional revelation? We can answer this question (again) through a process of elimination, starting with Partner-Authority, proceeding onto Group-Authority and then ending with Singular-Authority. First, for Partner-Authority, we can affirm the position that God would *not* provide a Partner-Authority magisterium, due to the fact that this form is open to be frequently plagued by a pertinent issue—which we can call the *stalemate problem*, and explicate at a general level as follows: as both of the individuals involved this type of partnership share an equal authority, if one of the partners decides on one course of action, and the other partner decides on an alternative, incompatible course of action, then there will be a stalemate on what course of action is to be carried out. The only way out of this issue would be for one of the partners to concede their position and permit the other individual's course of action to be carried out. However, it could be the case that a concession by one of the partners cannot be made on a number of occasions, and thus the partners would remain in a stalemate. This scenario would be like two individuals who are approaching each other on the pavement with the only way, besides chance, for them not bumping into each other would be if there is a specific rule given by an authoritative rule giver that each of them should walk on different sides (Swinburne, 2008, 31). Yet, as each of the partners is of equal authority, there cannot be an authoritative rule giver amongst the partnership—and thus, hopeful concessions and—on numerous occasions—chance (such as flipping a coin) would have to rule the day. Thus, given the difficulty of an equal partnership in making and carrying out important decisions, it is plausible that God would not utilise Partner-Authority as the magisterium to support his propositional revelation. More specifically, the two individuals that are given the equally authoritative role of being the authoritative magisterium that is to correctly, and clearly, interpret God's revelation, and detail the morally good actions that are prescribed by it, might reach a stalemate concerning how to correctly perform their role. As one of the individuals might believe that a particular interpretation of—or a moral action prescribed by—the propositional revelation is correct, whilst the other individual might believe that an alternative, incompatible interpretation of—or a moral action prescribed by—the propositional revelation is the one that is correct—which would result in a stalemate concerning what interpretation is to be passed on by them to the other members of the cultures that the revelation has been made available to. Thus, the only way to deal with this issue is for one of the individuals to concede their position concerning which interpretation is correct, and hence adopt the other individual's position and interpretation. However, it might be the case that this concession cannot be made on a number of occasions, and thus the stalemate would remain—unless chance was to play a role in the decision making. However, as God plausibly wants to provide a magisterium that can effectively interpret his revelation—so that individuals can access the information necessary for them to live morally good lives and be rewarded with a place in Heaven for doing so—he would want to utilise an *effective* magisterium for the task at hand, which provides reason to disaffirm the view that God would provide a Partner-Authority magisterium.

Second, for Group-Authority, we can also affirm the position that God would *not* provide a Group-Authority magisterium, due to the fact that, firstly, the existence of a consensus amongst a group may itself not be evident on frequent occasions, or it might be quite evident that

individuals cannot reach a consensus, given the diversity of beliefs and motives held by the individuals of the group. Secondly, and more importantly, this would also be due to the fact that issues that can be raised against the general reliability of consensus and/or majority opinion as a truth-indicating methodology—let's term this issue the *reliability problem*. More precisely, concerning the effectiveness of consensus and majority opinion as a truth-indicating methodology, Nigel Warburton (1996, 134) notes, that taking 'statements to be true simply because they are generally agreed upon...is not a reliable way of discovering the truth on most issues; just because there is general agreement that something is true it doesn't follow that it is true'. For example, in the 14th century, there was a consensus among people concerning the shape of the world—namely, it being flat—yet it doesn't follow from the fact that most people at that time thought that the world was flat that it in fact is. If experts concerning a specific issue believe a certain thing to be the case, then it is indeed an indicator of truth. However, it is not the fact of them *believing* this specific thing that *makes* it true; rather, the truth of their belief depends on the manner in which it does (or does not) correspond to reality (Warburton, 1996). Thus, just because experts in a specific field agree on something to be the case doesn't show that what they agree upon is, in fact, true. Furthermore, at a general level, specific reasons why a consensus that is reached by a group does not function as a reliable indicator of truth is, firstly, individuals are often gullible—in that they can be misled to believe a range of false things. Secondly, individuals are often prone to wishful thinking of various kinds—such that individuals frequently want to believe what they wish was, in fact, true, even if this specific thing does not correspond to reality, or even if there is overwhelming evidence against this cherished belief. Thirdly, individuals can also be influenced to reach a consensus—such as a political authority pressurising individuals to reach a consensus in favour of the authority's position. Moreover, when there is no consensus that can be reached among a group, an even less reliable method for determining truth is that of relying on majority opinion—as, on most important issues and questions, the majority of people can be ill-informed concerning the matter, and thus, as Warburton (1996, 135) writes, it is surely 'better to rely on a minority of experts who have had time to study the available data rather than the hastily formed views of the majority'. Hence, given the difficulty of reaching a consensus on important topics *and* the reliability problem that can be raised against the consensus and majority opinion methods, it is plausible that God would not utilise Group-Authority as the form of the magisterium to support his propositional revelation. More precisely, the group of individuals that are tasked with fulfilling the role of being the authoritative magisterium that is to correctly, and clearly, interpret God's revelation—and detail the morally good actions that are prescribed by it— might never reach a consensus on how to correctly understand the message of this revelation and carry out its actions—as the individuals that form this group might have different beliefs concerning the correct understanding of this revelation and how best to carry out the actions prescribed by it—and different motivations that might be fuelling the way in which they understand this revelation. Moreover, even if the group is able to reach a consensus, one does not have good reason to believe that the consensus that is reached is a reliable indicator of truth, due to the fact that the individuals might be misled concerning the matter under question, choose to side with the interpretation that fits their own wishes, or they could be influenced by an independent authority to reach the consensus that they do. And furthermore, if there again is not a consensus, but there is some form of a majority opinion, then, as not all members of the group will be experts (as God might have tasked them with the role of being a member of the group because of their holiness rather than their theological expertise), or that *each* of them

is guided by the Holy Spirit in forming their theological beliefs, one does not have good reason to believe that the majority opinion is not ill-formed. Therefore, as God desires for individuals to know the truth of the matter concerning his revelation (as if they were to believe falsehoods concerning it, their beliefs and actions could lead to them failing to pursue the path of living a morally good life, and thus obtaining a place in Heaven) he would thus want to utilise a *reliable* magisterium that enables individuals to access this truth, which, therefore, provides reason to disaffirm the view that God would provide a Group-Authority magisterium.

So, by the process of elimination, we are left with Singular-Authority as the candidate form of the authoritative magisterium that will accompany God's propositional revelation. The important question now is: what will the nature of Singular-Authority be, and—apart from the reasons against adopting Partner-Authority and Group-Authority—what possible benefits can be put forward in support of God utilising this specific form? The nature of Singular-Authority can be best conceived of as that of a hierarchical structure that is ordered in such a way that there is a particular individual having u-primacy—who we can term the Pope—and who functions as the head and ground of this structure—which, in this specific context, can be understood as the ability to make authoritative declarations concerning the correct interpretation of God's cultural-relative revelation (which would include, among other things, him being able to distinguish between the central message of God's revelation and the cultural presuppositions) and exercise governance over the recipients of this revelation—that is, the cross-cultural and transgenerational communities that are formed by, and adhere to the message of this propositional revelation. This authoritative individual could exercise his authority frequently or, instead, make pronouncements from time to time on which interpretations are correct (and how the communities are to best be governed). Furthermore, this individual's role could be exercised directly—by, for example, making these pronouncements without discussion or consultation with others—or it could be mediated through a group (or conciliar structure)—with the individual (by themselves or through others) making these pronouncements after a period of discussion or consultation.

Now, conceiving of the accompanying authoritative magisterium in this manner—namely, as Singular-Authority—would grant an all-or-nothing status to the declarations made by the magisterium where, as Swinburne (1992, 124) notes:

> you believe that or nothing; there is little scope for an individual to work out for himself which parts of revelation fit best with other parts and with what his natural reason tells him about God…otherwise, of course, the individual will have plenty of work to do to work out if there is an infallible authority - and part of that work will consist in considering whether the "interpretations" proclaimed by a given purported authority are plausible interpretations of the original revelation.

Certainly, by God utilising Singular-Authority, there would be fewer opportunities presented to individuals to work out the nature of God's propositional revelation themselves—which, in a certain sense, is a drawback. However, by God seeking to pursue this form of the accompanying authoritative magisterium, two important possible benefits can be made available, which (plausibly) outweigh this specific drawback. This can be seen as follows: God's (ultimate) desire for providing a propositional revelation, as noted previously, is to help individuals to live morally good lives—which is brought about by him inevitably providing the necessary information for them to achieve this end. Two ways in which individuals could fail to reach this goal could be by them, firstly, having incorrect beliefs concerning the content of

God's propositional revelation—such that they have an incorrect understanding of his nature, or what is, in fact, a moral truth (e.g. that it is not obligatory to show gratitude to one's benefactors) etc.—and, secondly, by them failing to correctly apply that revealed information (e.g. moral truths) to their lives. God, through the authoritative magisterium that he provides to accompany his propositional revelation, would thus ensure that individuals do not face these difficulties, which can be achieved by utilising a Singular-Authority magisterium. More precisely, the authoritative magisterium that is provided in the form of Singular-Authority would have the first possible benefit of establishing a *unity of belief*, and the second possible benefit of establishing a *unity of action*. A single authoritative individual could establish a unity of belief among the (cross-cultural and transgenerational) communities, established by God's revelation, by him declaring (directly or mediately) what the correct interpretation of the message of this revelation is—that is, for example, what the correct understanding of God's nature is, or what the moral truths are etc.—and by his authority being unopposed (by other individuals of similar authority), members of the communities will adhere to this interpretation, and thus there would be a unity of belief among them.[18] Furthermore, a single authoritative individual could establish a unity of action among the aforementioned communities by also declaring (directly or mediately) what the correct application of God's revelation is—that is, for example, that acts of abortion and euthanasia are not to be carried out (and enforcing a uniform application of this), and by his authority again being unopposed (by other individuals of similar authority), members of the communities would thus also adhere to this practice, and hence there would be a unity of action among them. Therefore, in addition to the issues raised earlier against the other forms, certain *a priori* considerations thus do seem to favour God choosing to use the form of Singular-Authority, over that of the other possible forms, in order to ensure the reliable and effective preservation and promulgation of his revelation. We can thus provide a helpful illustration mapping out where we have got to thus far in formulating our case:

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[18] This is not to say that individuals might not oppose his authority—by proposing and promoting an alternative interpretation of God's revelation—however, as the authority of these individuals would be subordinate to that of single authoritative individual, their interpretation of God's revelation would not be understood to be *the* position of the magisterium—and thus would not be taken to be the correct understanding of God's revelation.
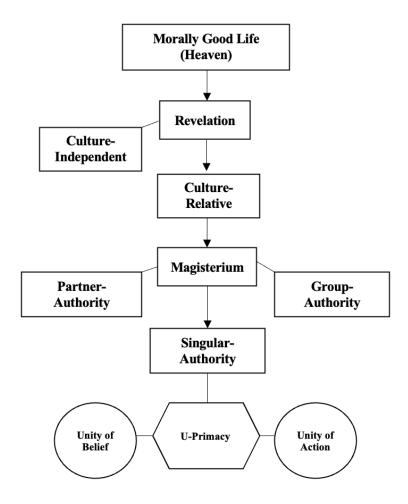
Figure 1. U-Primacy Sequence

Hence, the position that we have reached now is that of, if there is a God, then there are good *a priori* reasons to, first, expect that he would inevitably provide a propositional revelation that would aid individuals in living morally good lives (and thus them obtaining a place in Heaven). And, second, we would also expect God to inevitably provide an authoritative magisterium that accompanies this revelation, identified now as a hierarchical structure that is grounded on a single individual with *u*-primacy (i.e. Singular-Authority)—who we have termed the Pope—and who will exercise his supreme authority directly and/or mediately, frequently, or from time to time, in a manner that helps to preserve and rightly interpret God's revelation for new cultures and generations—and rightly govern, in line with the revelation, the application of it to the lives of the individuals that are part of these cultures and generations. We thus have good *a priori* reasons to believe in the first central element of the doctrine of the papacy. The question now is: can the same be said for the second element of this doctrine? To an examination of this question, we now turn.

Extension of a Philosophical Case for the Papacy: Authority and Theological Infallibility

The second tenet of the doctrine of the papacy, centres on the notion of theological infallibility, which we construed previously as follows:

(4) (T-Infallibility)   The Pope is infallible when he speaks *ex cathedra*.

This notion of the infallibility of the Pope focuses on expressing the fact that, within his authoritative teaching office, the Pope is preserved—by the Holy Spirt—from erring when defining as divinely revealed certain doctrines concerning faith and morals (and other revealed matters). The notion of *t*-infallibility is—what I term—a *derivative* notion—where a derivative notion is *not* one expresses the fact of God having performed a *direct action*—but, rather, given that God has performed the direct actions of establishing the office of the papacy—with its holder having *u*-primacy—then there are certain *derivative conditions* that are needed for this individual to exercise his *authority*—in a manner that other individuals will rationally ascent to this authority—requires that he also possess *t*-infallibility—in short, *t*-infallibility is required for the effective exercise of the Pope's teaching authority (i.e. *u*-primacy). Now, the focus of our assessment of the veracity of the (derivative) notion of the infallibility of the Pope (i.e. *t*-infallibility) will be on *extending* the philosophical case (*a priori* argument) that has been presented thus far by performing an *a priori* analysis of the notion of *epistemic authority* that has been provided by Linda Zagzebski (2012a,b, 2016, 2020), and which we can now explicate, within our specific context, as follows: an epistemic authority is one that possesses normative power to generate reasons for others to do or believe something *pre-emptively*. More specifically, a given individual believes a certain proposition p, on epistemic authority, if it is the case in which that individual has a *content-independent* reason to believe *p* based on the fact that the authority believes *p* (or tells them that *p*), and that reason *pre-empts* their other reasons for and against believing *p* (Zagzebski, 2012a).

Hence, there are two important concepts that are at the heart of this notion of epistemic authority: *content-independence* and the *pre-emption thesis*—with both of these notions being applications to the realm of belief of well-known general conditions on authority proposed by Joseph Raz.[19] I will now explicate these two notions within the context of practical authority first, and then proceed, in turn, to show how it applies to the important notion of epistemic authority as well. First, the notion of content-independence, expresses the case when (within the domain of action) a given utterance is authoritative, according to Zagzebski (2012b, 118), 'it gives the subject a reason to follow the directive which is such that there is no direct connection between the reason and the action for which it is a reason'. Thus, in situating this within our current theological context, as a practical authority, the Pope—in the case when he has directed a certain action—might have directed a different action, and if he had done so, the subjects of the directed action would have had a reason to perform that other action instead. Importantly, the notion of content-independence is compatible with the need for one to have reasons to accept a specific authority *as* an authority—which, in the present context, is provided by God having established the Pope as the head of the authoritative magisterium that accompanies his propositional revelation—and so under the assumption that a given subject has reason to accept the legitimacy of this authority, the subject thus has reason to do what the

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[19] I will not be further explicating Zagzebski's elucidation of Ratz's thought, for this, see (Zagzebski, 2012a) the works noted in n42. However, Zagzebski sees the notion of content-independence to have been proposed by H. L. A. Hart.

Pope says—and to do it simply based on the fact that the Pope has said so. The notion of content-independence can now be extended to epistemic authority. That is, if there is an epistemic authority that parallels practical authority (i.e. authority in the domain of action), the authoritative person, as noted by Zagzebski (2012b, 118), 'gives the subject a reason for belief that is not dependent on the content of the authority's belief'. Hence, as an epistemic authority, if the Pope had believed a different proposition, his subjects would have had reason to believe that other proposition instead.

Second, the notion of pre-emption, or more specifically, the pre-emption thesis, within the domain of action, expresses the fact, as noted by Zagzebski (2012a, 107), 'that an authority requires performance of an action is a reason for its performance that replaces other relevant reasons and is not simply added to them'. This specific thesis emphasises the important point that for an individual to act on authority, that individual must take a specific authoritative directive as their reason for doing the action, and replace their other reasons for and against doing the action (Zagzebski, 2016). Thus, an individual—such as a Roman Catholic—might have reasons for and against campaigning against abortion—in favour of campaigning, it will publicly make the pro-life position heard by the masses, and in favour of not campaigning, it might curtail the liberty of a woman to have an abortion— if the Catholic was to take each of these reasons into account, gave them each a certain weight, and then decided once all things were considered to campaign, they would not be acting on authority (Zagzebski, 2020). Rather, acting on authority would only occur, in this specific case (and others like it), if the fact that the Pope, or the magisterium, says that one should campaign, is then the reason that the Catholic does campaign. Hence, as Zagzebski (2016, 20) notes, authority 'is fundamentally the normative power to give others pre-emptive reasons'. Now, as with the notion of content-independence, the pre-emption thesis can also be extended to epistemic authority. That is, if there is epistemic authority, then there will be situations in which the fact that the authority has a belief that p is a reason for an individual to believe p that pre-empts their own reason for believing in p or its negation—that is, the individual does not add the fact of the authority's belief to their own considerations for and against that specific belief. More precisely, as Zagzebski (2012b, 119) notes, the pre-emption thesis for epistemic authority expresses the 'fact that the authority has a belief p is a content-independent reason for me to believe p that replaces my other reasons relevant to believing p and is not simply added to them'. Importantly, however, the pre-emption thesis does not say whether or not an individual *should* believe on authority; thus, one can ask what the justificatory grounds would be for an individual believing in a pre-emptive way? An answer to this question can be provided by an additional thesis termed the *Normal Justification* thesis. The Normal Justification thesis states that the normal way for one to demonstrate that an individual has authority over another individual is to show that the subject under question is more likely to act for their own ends *if* they accept the directives of the authority under question and tries to follow them, rather than them trying to act for those ends directly (Zagzebski, 2012a). In other words, as Zagzebski (2016, 20) notes, 'given that each self-directing person has reasons for which she acts, it is rational to act on those reasons the best way she can'. In our theological context, it could be the case that the best way that this individual can act is to adopt an indirect strategy: do what the Pope says to do. If the individual can act on their own reasons better by doing what the Pope says to do rather than by acting independently—acting on the authority of the Pope is what self-direction is telling them to do (Zagzebski, 2020). By acting on the Pope's directive pre-emptively, the individual is allowing this authority to stand in for her in reaching her ends. These ends can also be of an

epistemic nature—such that individuals are seeking truth in a number of domains of inquiry, and we have reason to believe that there are other, specific individuals whose authority in these specific domains can be justified by a certain specification of the Normal Justification thesis, that can be stated, according to Zagzebski (2016, 21), as such:

> (5) (EN-Justification)   The epistemic authority of an individual is justified for a certain individual by the subject's conscientious judgment that they are more likely to form a true belief and avoid a false belief if they believe what the authority tells them than if they try to figure out what to believe themselves.

In the present theological context, the general principle expressed by the *Epistemic Normal Justification* thesis—which is the central thesis of our argument here—is that of it being the case that as long as an individual can judge that the Pope's process of figuring out the truth about issues concerning, for example, faith and morals, is better than theirs—i.e. that the Pope's belief will survive that individual's conscientious self-reflection better than the belief that they get on their own—then the individual should let the Pope stand in for them in determining whether a proposition in the relevant domain is, in fact, true—in other words, if one can conscientiously judge that the Pope's belief is likely to be better than theirs, then one should make the deference—with the dereference that is made here being able to serve the truth-seeking goals of the individual under question. One can ask the question though of what grounds does someone have for making this deference to the Pope in this specific context? The simple answer to this question is that the justificatory grounds is provided by the Pope's *t*-infallibility where, due to the fact that he is preserved from error in this domain of inquiry by the Holy Spirit, his process of figuring out the truth would be better than any other individuals—as the truth is given to him by *God* (i.e. positive assistance, *assistentia positive*)—and thus an individual's conscientious judgment would lead them to believe that the Pope's belief is indeed better than their own—in other words, the Pope's belief concerning an issue of faith and morals (or another revealed issued) will survive that individual's conscientious self-reflection better than the belief that they get on their own. And, hence, one should defer to the Pope in determining the truth of that belief for them—and all other beliefs within this domain of inquiry. However, despite the clarity of this justificatory thesis—and its helpfulness in elucidating the role that *t*-infallibility can play epistemically—two important issues can be raised, at a more general level,[20] against the truth-seeking process at the heart of it: first, issues can arise concerning this process when there are competing authorities, who are more likely to obtain the truth concerning a certain matter than the subject under question, but also are in disagreement with one another—with the subject under question also not being in a position to judge which one is, in fact, more authoritative. In this specific situation, it seems to be the case that the most reasonable thing would be to withhold judgement concerning the matter —let's term this issue the *competing authorities problem*. Second, issues can also be raised against this process when an individual is in a situation where the putative authority is more likely to get the truth concerning a matter than the subject under question—given the experience, skills and background knowledge of the authority—yet the authority is only slightly more likely to do so (Zagzebski, 2012a). This is especially evident in cases where an individual has already formed a certain belief on the matter, and thus they would (plausibly) be less certain that the

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[20] These two issues were raised at a general level by Zagzebski; however, their exposition within a theological context are original to this article.

authority is superior to them in this case (and their judgement concerning this issue is correct) then they are certain of the truth of the belief that they have affirmed. There is thus an evident difficulty in a given individual being confident that another individual really is superior to themselves in the relevant respect, and thus the rational option would not be to defer to the authority in such a situation—let's term this issue the *superiority problem*.

In response to the first issue: the competing authorities problem, is not, in fact, an issue within our present theological context, as, given that God has good reason to provide a propositional revelation, as noted previously, he will inevitably provide an accompanying magisterium that is to be conceived of as having a singular authority structure (i.e. Singular-Authority form)—with the individual who possesses this authority being the Pope—hence, there are no competing authorities available, as all other individuals would be subordinate to the Pope. And thus, even if there are individuals who might disagree with the Pope concerning the truth of a certain proposition, each of the members of the societies that the Pope has jurisdiction over—which is every society— would be in a position to judge who is more authoritative—which in every case would be the Pope—and thus defer to his judgement. In response to the second issue: the superiority problem, one can see that a plausible way to deal with this issue is to now bring back into the discussion the notion of *t*-infallibility. And why one needs to do this can be seen by understanding that, in a general context, as Warburton (1996, 132) notes, there are issues concerning believing something to be true on authority, as the 'principal difficulty for someone faced with an expert's opinion is to decide how much weight to give it. The main points to bear in mind are that even if you establish that someone really is an expert in the field, he or she is still *fallible*'. Though an individual might be an expert in a specific domain of inquiry, the fallibility of this individual—irrespective of their expertise—provides some grounds to doubt the truth of their belief, judgement and overall epistemic superiority—which would therefore also provide grounds for not seeking to hold their belief pre-emptively. However, if one was to take an individual to possess a charism of *t*-infallibility*—as the Pope is taken here to possess—then, again, irrespective of the expertise of this particular individual, one would not be faced with a problem. That is, more fully, if the Pope is infallible in such a manner that he is preserved from the possibility of error when speaking *ex cathedra*—in respect to faith and morals (and other revealed matters)—then one *cannot* be in a situation where they are deliberating whether the Pope is less superior to them (and is correct concerning a certain judgement in this domain of inquiry) than they are about their own belief concerning the truth of the judgement that they have arrived at. As, given that Pope cannot err on this matter, one will be able to be certain about the veracity of his judgement. Hence, each culture and generation would be able to defer to the Pope on these specific matters. That is, given the Pope's infallibility, the epistemic authority of the Pope, in the domain of faith and morals, would be such that each individual's conscientious judgment would result in them believing that they are more likely to form a true belief and avoid a false belief within this domain if they believe what the Pope declares than if they were to try to figure out what to believe themselves—each individual should thus allow the Pope to stand in for her in this specific domain. This would not be the case, however, if the Pope did, in fact, lack infallibility, as there would be no reason to privilege his judgement over that of one's own—especially in the case of one having greater expertise than him in this specific domain.[21] Thus, individuals could potentially be in a position of scepticism concerning the truth of declarations made by the Pope and thus seek regularly not to defer to the Pope's judgement in this even

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[21] As a Pope does not have to be a theological expert.

narrow domain. In other words, one would lack a justification for making a pre-emptive deference to the Pope's beliefs (and judgements) in the domain of faith and morals. Yet, if this is the case, then this would indeed be problematic, given the prior position reached of God having established him as the single authority that, within the hierarchical structure of the authoritative magisterium, is to correctly interpret his revelation. Hence, there thus seems to be an intimate connection between the *u*-primacy of the 'head' of the authoritative mechanism— that accompanies God's propositional revelation—and his *t*-infallibility. In other words, a charism of *t*-infallibility is needed to secure the type of primacy required, and argued for in the previous section. Thus, by one affirming the veracity of *t*-infallibility, one can indeed ward off this potential scepticism and, instead, have a justification for making a pre-emptive deference to the Pope's beliefs (and judgements) in the domain of faith and morals—as one does not have to weigh the likelihood of the truth of the Pope's definitive judgement over one's own—due to the fact that in each case, when a definitive declaration has been provided by him, the truth of this declaration is *guaranteed*. This thus further strengthens the authority of the magisterium that accompanies God's propositional revelation, as by the Pope possessing the charism of *t*-infallibility, his declaration concerning the content of this revelation—with this being limited to content concerning faith and morals (and other revealed matters)—must be given ascent by all, and thus he functions as an ultimate arbitrator and decision-maker who possesses a kind of 'normative epistemic power'—where what Pope believes (and declares) gives all other individuals reason to believe the same thing that replaces their other reasons relevant to that belief. In other words, it gives each recipient of God's revelation reason to take the Pope's own beliefs (concerning faith and morals)—and the solemn declarations that express them—pre-emptively on the grounds that the Pope believes this (and has declared it to be so). This, however, is not to say that one *must* make this deference to the Pope's belief and judgement in every domain of inquiry as, according to *t*-infallibility, the Pope is not preserved from error *tout court*, but only in the domain of faith and morals (and concerning other revealed matters).[22] And thus, individuals can indeed resist believing *pre-emptively* on areas outside of this narrow domain—but should, and, in fact, must—if they are aiming to pursue the path of truth-seeking—affirm the veracity of the Pope's beliefs (judgements) concerning the matters of faith and morals, and seek to also adopt these beliefs themselves.

Hence, certain further *a priori* considerations seem to also favour God inevitably choosing to bestow upon the papal office—and thus the holder of this office—the charism of *t*-infallibility, in order to further ensure the united preservation and promulgation of his revelation. We can now further develop our previous illustration, which will be helpful in mapping out the conclusion that we now have reached:

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[22] Though, given his *u*-primacy, one should hold with great weight the position of the Pope concerning the matter.
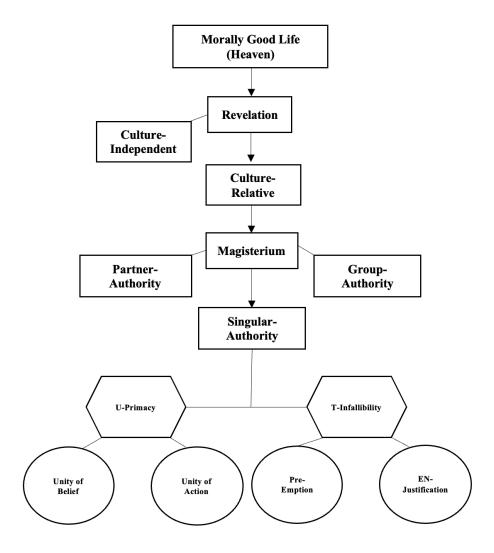
Figure 2. U-Primacy & T-Infallibility Sequence

Thus, the position that we have now arrived at is that of the fact that, if there is a God, then there are good a priori reasons to expect him to provide a propositional revelation that is accompanied by an authoritative magisterium, identified as a hierarchical structure that has a single individual in authority: the Pope, who exercises universal jurisdiction across the different cultures and generations that have been formed by God's revelation (i.e. he has *u*-primacy). However, given the nature of this primacy, and the need for the Pope to fulfil the role of being an epistemic authority in the domain of faith and morals, there is good reason to believe that he would be preserved from erring in his definitive teaching in these areas—so as to provide justificatory grounds for individuals believing (content-independent) propositions pre-emptively—by it being the case that when it comes to matters of faith and morals, one has justification for trusting the judgment of the Pope on the basis that their own beliefs would have a higher probability of being true if they believe what the Pope believes and declares. Thus, we would expect the 'head' of the authoritative magisterium accompanying God's propositional revelation to not only have *u*-primacy but also to be infallible in his authoritative teaching (i.e. have *t*-infallibility). We thus have good *a priori* reason to believe in the first and

second elements of the doctrine of the papacy—and thus the existence of an individual (and office) that possesses these characteristics—which completes are formulation of the philosophical (*a priori*) case for the veracity of the doctrine of the papacy. In short, one can affirm the truth of the doctrine of the papacy, on the basis of God inevitably providing a revelation that needs to be interpreted by an authoritative magisterium, that would include within it a single authoritative individual, who has universal primacy and—in certain contexts—can, and does, provide infallible teaching that is required to be believed by all. Now that our philosophical case has been completed, one can ask the question: what value does such a case provide to the question concerning the truth of the doctrine of the papacy? As isn't this just pointless, 'armchair' philosophy that has no bearing on the question of whether God has (historically) established the papal office (with an individual possessing *u*-primacy and *t*-infallibility) or not. To these questions, we now turn.

The Value of a Philosophical Case for the Papacy

Traditionally arguments for the veracity of the doctrine of the papacy have taken the form of *a posteriori* historical argumentation, where an individual collects the relevant scriptural evidence for the establishment of the Petrine office—and the primacy of St. Peter (such as him being the ecclesial 'rock', 'shepherd' and 'strengthener' of his fellow brethren)—and the relevant post-scriptural evidence from the first millennium of the Christian Church in support of the continuation of this Petrine office—and primacy—in the successors of Peter to the bishopric of Rome (such as that of the writings of various Church Fathers). An individual then proceeds to weigh this evidence and reach a conclusion concerning the veracity of the doctrine of the papacy, and its central tenets of *u*-primacy and *t*-infallibility. This is the traditional method, and so one can ask why it would be of any value utilising a purely philosophical (or 'armchair') *a priori* case to defend a doctrine that seems to need to be grounded in history rather than that of philosophy? In short, what is the value of providing a philosophical case for the doctrine of the papacy, as has been the focus here? As noted previously, the argument that has been formulated thus far is not one that seeks to change the conversation from the historical grounding of the papacy, to that of its philosophical grounding. Rather, the aim of this argument is to support the aforementioned historical argument that has been traditionally put forward in support of this doctrine—which was shown to be successful in the previous two sections by a strong case being put forward for the truth of the central tenets of the doctrine (i.e. *u*-primacy and *t*-infallibility). In addition to this, however, one can also see that there are two further benefits to the approach taken here—which we can term 'Evidence Determination' (hereafter, *E*-Determination) and 'No-Grand Deception' (hereafter, *NG*-Deception). *E*-Determination and Deception can be found in 'nucleus' form—in a similar context—in the work of Swinburne.[23] We can understand the first benefit of *E*-Determination as follows:

> (6) (E-Determination)　　A philosophical case for the papacy allows for one to make a correct assessment of the doctrine of the papacy, relative to the total evidence, and thus provide grounds for one to affirm its veracity.

More specifically, the value that is *E*-Determination is that of the philosophical case for the papacy providing one with the ability to determine the strength of the historical evidence needed to correctly assess the truth of the doctrine and, through this assessment, enabling one

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[23] This context is that of an argument for the resurrection of Jesus.

to reach a judgement concerning its veracity, on the basis of the *total evidence*. More precisely, as Swinburne (1989, 4) notes, one can first understand that there is a close relationship between 'prior' (*a priori/background*) evidence and 'posterior' historical evidence, and thus:

> If your background knowledge of what the world is like shows some detailed historical claim to be quite likely, then you will need little in the way of historical evidence in order rationally to believe it. Conversely, if your background knowledge shows some detailed historical claim to be rather unlikely, then you will need a lot in the way of historical evidence in order rationally to believe it. If you have strong reason to believe on the basis of some biological theory that there are Abominable Snowmen living in the Himalayas, you may reasonably take some rather unclear marks at some place as good grounds for believing that Abominable Snowmen were at that place. But if you have no background reason for believing that there are such creatures, you would need a lot of detailed footprints and a few sightings before you could reasonably believe that the footprints were theirs.

Now, the assessment of the veracity of the doctrine of the papacy—that is, the hypothesis that God established the office of the papacy (with an individual that has *u*-primacy and *t*-infallibility)—seems to indeed be of this kind. For if God *did* establish the office of the papacy, then he would only have done so far in so as he had reason to do so; and if he didn't have reason to do so, then a divinely instituted papacy is indeed not to be expected. So, to determine whether God established the office of the papacy, it is not enough to simply investigate whether the detailed historical evidence (e.g. the letters of St. Clement, St. Ignatius and St. Irenaeus etc.) is the kind of evidence to be expected if God did indeed establish the papacy, but not otherwise. One must also investigate whether the *prior* (*general background*) *evidence*—in the form of *a priori* evidence/reasons—supports the view that there is indeed a reason for God to establish the papal office, with its holder having the specific features that he has (i.e. *u*-primacy and *t*-infallibility), or whether there is no reason for God to have done this. The philosophical case for the papacy cannot show, with *historical certainty*, that a specific individual, or ecclesial group (such as the Roman Church) is, in fact, the authoritative magisterium that would accompany God's revelation—that is a task for the historian. But what the philosophical case can show is *how strong the historian's evidence actually needs to be*. And this is a very crucial point that can be raised against a current tide of argument in the literature against the veracity of the doctrine of the papacy—where individuals, such as Eamon Duffy (2014), Robert Eno (2008), Peter Lampe (2006), Kenneth Collins and Jerry Walls (2017),[24] have raised issue with the lack of substantial detailed historical evidence for the doctrine (which we would expect to find in the writings of certain individuals in the early church such as St. Clement (99 CE), St. Ignatius (108 CE), St. Irenaeus (202 CE), Hermas (140 CE), and Justin Martyr (165 CE) etc.)— and thus we seemingly have good reason to doubt the veracity of the doctrine. However, against this current tide, in so far as the prior evidence (that is, the *a priori* evidence for God having established the office of the papacy (for the reasons detailed previously)) supports the view under question, we shall need a lot less by way of detailed historical evidence in order for it to be overall probable on our total evidence that God has indeed done this. Conversely, in so far as our prior evidence supports a rival view—such as, for example, that of God not seeking to provide any revelation to aid humanity in becoming morally good; or, God desiring to provide a culture-independent revelation; or desiring to provide a culture-relative revelation that has an

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[24] For a response to Collins and Walls, see (Sonna, 2021). And for a more general response to the current tide in the contemporary literature (that includes some of the aforementioned scholars), see (McNabb, 2021).

accompanying authoritative magisterium that takes the form of Partner-Authority or Group-Authority etc.—one would need an *immense* amount of posterior historical evidence in order for the *total evidence* to make it probable that God did, in fact, establish the office of the papacy. Thus, one important value of putting forward a philosophical case for the papacy is that it, among other things, allows one to *determine how strong the historical evidence needs to be* in order to assess whether or not the doctrine of the papacy is indeed likely to be true—with the correct position being that there is a need for less historical evidence for one to affirm the veracity of the doctrine of the papacy, given the strong *a priori* evidence. Hence, despite the intentions of Duffy, Eno, Lampe, Collins and Walls, even if there is no *substantial* historical evidence in favour of the doctrine, the strong prior (*a priori*) evidence can render the doctrine true, relative to the total evidence—that includes the prior (*a priori)* evidence as a large part of it. Thus, what we can see here is that without one taking into account the philosophical background, in the form of prior (*a priori*) evidence and argumentation, one can indeed reach an erroneous position concerning the veracity of the doctrine of the papacy. Especially based on the fact that our philosophical investigation has enabled us to see that we do have good, *a priori* reason to believe that God would inevitably seek to provide a (culture-relative) propositional revelation, and thus would also inevitably provide an accompanying authoritative magisterium, hierarchically structured and centred on a single individual, the Pope, who has universal primacy and is infallible (in certain specific contexts). Hence, even if the detailed (posterior) historical evidence for the establishment of this office is indeed sparse, this does *not* negate the fact that the office will be established by God *as soon as he provides* (or, at least, *completes*) *his revelation*—so that the recipients of this revelation can access it, and apply its message to their lives. In other words, on the basis of God's provision of a propositional revelation, we will also have the establishment of the office of the papacy, with the holder of this office having *u*-primacy and *t*-infallibility, and we can rationally believe in this, even if, for some reason or another, we do not currently have substantial historical evidence in favour of this—but only some amount of historical evidence, here and there. In short, the *a priori* evidence and some amount of historical evidence (which we can find in the writings of individuals such as, for example, St. Clement (99 CE), St. Ignatius (108 CE) and St. Irenaeus (202 CE), in the ante-Nicene period, and Pope Leo the Great (461 CE), Hormisdas (523 CE), Pope Gregory the Great (604 CE), in the Nicene period).

Turning our attention now onto our second benefit: *NG*-Deception, which we can understand succinctly as follows:

(7) (NG-Deception)   A philosophical case for the papacy allows one to affirm the veracity of the doctrine of the papacy, on the basis that God will not permit grand deception—which would be had if the doctrine was, in fact, false.

More precisely, the value that is *NG*-Deception is that of the philosophical case for the papacy allowing one to also affirm the veracity of the doctrine of the papacy, on the basis that God will not permit grand (universal) deception—which would be had if the doctrine was in fact false. More specifically, on the basis of our philosophical case, we have seen that there is *a priori* reason in support of the view that—in providing a propositional revelation—God will also inevitably provide an accompanying authoritative magisterium—that is centred on a single authoritative individual. Yet, based on the available historical evidence, there is no other Christian ecclesial body—outside of the Roman Church (i.e. the Pope and the college of bishops in communion with him)—that claims to be a candidate for having fulfilled our *a priori*

expectations for what an accompanying authoritative mechanism will indeed be like. That is, on the one hand, as has been argued in this article throughout, we do have good reason to believe that God would provide an authoritative magisterium (hierarchically structured and centred on a single individual authority) that accompanies his propositional revelation—and on the other hand, it is indeed a historical fact that the Bishop of Rome has consistently made the claim of being the single authoritative individual that is the head of the authoritative accompanying magisterium—and thus the Roman Church being identified as the accompanying authoritative magisterium. We can see the claim being made in our historical records, in 'nucleus' form, in the 1st to 3rd century in the writings of St. Clement (99 CE), St. Ignatius (108 CE), St. Irenaeus (202 CE), St. Hippolytus (236 CE), and then more explicitly in 3rd to 4th century with Pope Stephen I (257 CE), and then throughout the first millennium of ecclesial history by individuals such as Pope Damasus (384 CE), Pope Innocent I (417 CE), Pope Boniface (418 CE), Pope Celestine (432 CE), Pope Leo the Great (461 CE), Pope Hormisdas (523 CE), Pope Gregory the Great (604 CE)—with recognition of some of these claims to authority also being provided by the Council of Nicaea (351 CE), the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE) and authoritative documents such as the *Formula Hormisdae* (519 CE) (among other documents).[25] Yet, there is no other candidate in the first millennium of ecclesial history—that is extant—that has made a claim to have fulfilled our *a priori* expectations of what the accompanying authoritative mechanism will indeed be like—as each of the alternative candidate ecclesial bodies, such as the Eastern Orthodox Church and Oriental Orthodox Churches, assume a type of Group-Authority structure—with there being no detailed historical evidence in support of individuals within these ecclesial bodies seeking to adopt the expected Single-Authority structure that is to be had by the authoritative magisterium that accompanies God's propositional revelation. Thus, the non-existence of any other plausible candidate (consistently) claiming to have fulfilled our *a priori* expectations shows that the aim to fulfil such a thing by a given ecclesial group is not a common aim, despite God wanting this aim to be fulfilled (as he desires that there be an accompanying authoritative magisterium). Thus, if God did not, in fact, establish the Roman Pontiff, and the Roman Church as a whole, as *the* authoritative mechanism but has established another figure or ecclesial body, or plans to establish one in the future, then, given our *a priori* expectations (that God will inevitably seek to fulfil), and the fact of there being no other plausible candidate, it would be *deceptive* of him to bring about (or permit other individuals to bring about) the existence of the amount and kind of historical evidence that there is for the Roman Pontiff and Church having fulfilled this expectation—since if he brings this about (or permits other individuals to bring this about) when the Roman Pontiff and Church are not this mechanism, God would be deceiving us (or allowing a deception to occur by some other entity like the devil) on a matter of vast importance for the human race. In other words, God would allow individuals to rationally believe that the Roman Pontiff and Church is this authoritative magisterium—and thus follow these instructions of him and it—when, in fact, they are not as another individual (and body of believers), yet to be discovered, are it. This would thus be like, as Swinburne (2003, 64) notes in a similar context,

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[25] For a helpful detailing of the primary source documents that are relevant to the issue of the authority of the papacy, see (Giles, 1952).

> leaving someone's fingerprints at the murder scene when they had not committed the murder,
> or spreading a rumour that someone had won a presidential election and therefore had the right
> to give orders to soldiers to kill, when that person had not won the election.

In virtue of his perfect goodness, God would not do this sort of thing—that is, he would not thus deceive (or permit such a massive deception). Hence, we can reasonably conclude that, if there is a God that has provided a propositional revelation—that will be accompanied by an authoritative magisterium—this evidence is not misleading. Given the conclusion reached by our explication of the value of a philosophical case for the papacy which—in addition to the value had by the success of our *a priori* argument—has been shown to revolve around *E*-Determination and *NG*-Deception, we can provide another helpful illustration in Figure 3 of a threshold of rational acceptance of the veracity of the papacy (where we depict this as a vector diagram with a one-dimensional quality space that has 'T' representing the threshold for rational acceptance of the truth of a set of propositions, 'C1' and the 'smaller arrow' representing the case for the papacy that only takes into account the historical evidence—which is represented by 'H'—'C2' and the 'larger arrow' representing the case for the papacy that takes into account the total evidence—namely, the *a priori* evidence and historical evidence—with the former being represented by 'A', and the latter being represented again by 'H'):
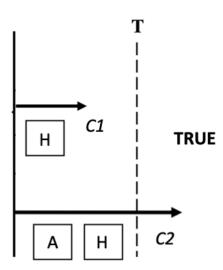

Figure 3. The Threshold for Rational Acceptance of the Papacy

What we can see here is that of the value had by our philosophical case, which is that of the significant role that the *a priori* evidence can play in our assessment of the veracity of the papacy. If one was to proceed with the traditional case for the papacy (i.e. C1 in our diagram)—which is that of arguing for its veracity on the basis of the historical evidence alone—one probably does not have good grounds for rationally accepting the truth of the papacy—which, as noted previously, has been the position of a number of scholars assessing the matter. However, if one were to proceed with the philosophical case for the papacy (i.e. C2 in our diagram)—which argues for its veracity on the basis of the *a priori* evidence (based on God's provision of a propositional revelation and accompanying authoritative magisterium, that centres on the single authority of the papacy) *and* the historical evidence (e.g. the writings of

St. Clement, St. Ignatius, St. Irenaeus and the various holders of the papal office in the first millennium etc.), then one does indeed have good grounds for rationally accepting the truth of the papacy. Thus, a philosophical case for the doctrine of the papacy is indeed one that does have value in enabling us to ascertain the truth of a doctrine that has played such a central role in the life of the Church.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the central focus of this article was to provide a philosophical case for the doctrine of the papacy. This specific case was presented in the format of an *a priori* argument that was formulated by utilising the work and argumentation of Richard Swinburne for the Christian revelation, and the work of Linda Zagzebski on the notion of epistemic authority. Utilising this argumentation and notion provided strong philosophical grounds for believing the truth of the central tenets of the doctrine of the papacy (i.e. *u*-primacy and *t*-infallibility)—and thus the type of philosophical approach to the assessment of this central doctrine is of great value to the various individuals who are involved in the perennial debate concerning its veracity.

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