

The Primacy of St. Peter and the Papacy

These notes are from *Catholic Apologetics* by Fr. John Laux, Section III, Chapter III, IV and V: *Primacy of St. Peter and Roman Pontiff, Infallibility of the Pope, pp 103-118*

The Primacy of St. Peter

- **The Apostolic Church of Christ first appeared built upon the foundation of the twelve Apostles with Jesus himself as the corner stone.**
 - Mark of Apostolicity, in connection with 12 Apostles was present from beginning.
 - Twelve apostles represented the twelve tribes of Israel.
 - They sought to fill a vacancy in their number as soon as Judas Iscariot died.
- **One the occasion of the election of Matthias, Peter took a leading part.**
 - One of the 12 was recognized as leader from beginning of the Church (before Pentecost).
 - At Pentecost Peter also took a primary role. Also first to baptize the gentile Cornelius. Also took leading role at Council of Jerusalem.
 - Paul calls Peter "pillar of the Church" (with James and John), and goes to Jerusalem to visit him.
 - Acts of the Apostles and Epistles of Paul make it clear that Peter was leader of the Apostles.
- **Why was Peter considered the Leader of Apostles?**

At Mt. Hermon Jesus asked disciples "Who do men say the 'Son of Man' is? Peter answered 'Thou art Christ, Son of the Living God.' Jesus answered. 'by Father who is in heaven has revealed this. 'Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, it shall be bound also in heaven. . . (Matt. 16:13-20). Jesus Promises to Peter:

- He is the rock foundation of the Church.
- He has the keys to household of God, has power over souls.
- He has power of "binding" and "loosing" sin.
- He has power to impose obligations on members of the Church.
- **Jesus renamed Simon Bar-Jona 'Kephas' in Aramaic which means 'Rock'.** — In Greek this is rendered 'Petras', or 'Peter'. — At the time Jesus named Peter, meaning 'the Rock', the name was not in common use. From that time on Simon was always referred to as Peter.
- **Jesus again promised primacy to St. Peter after the Last supper** — Jesus prayed specifically for Peter. "Satan hath desired to have you . . . But I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not, and thou being once converted confirm thy brethren" (Luke 22: 31).
- **Jesus conferred the Primacy on Peter after the resurrection at the sea of Galilee.** — Jesus asked "Do you love me?" . . . then "Feed my sheep" three times. In Greek kings and rulers were called shepherds.
- **Peter was considered 'primus inter pares', First among his peers.** The supreme head of bishops.
- **Place of Peter's death is marked by ancient Monuments.** Thought to have died at the hands of Nero soon after the burning of Rome, but death not mentioned in the Acts.

- **Story of Peter being crucified upside down comes from 2nd century apocryphal 'Acts of Peter'.**

The Primacy the Roman Pontiff

- **Primacy and necessity of a permanent institution**
 - Protestants acknowledge Peter's primacy, but deny it was transferred to Bishopric of Rome.
 - It clear from Jesus conference of Primacy that it was institutional, not personal.
 - Institution must be protected from the Gates of Hell. Must last until the end of time.
 - Church must be guided by living men, not dead men.
- **Who are the legitimate successors of Peter?,**
 - Primacy of Rome claimed by Clement by 96 A.D.
 - No other Diocese (Antioch, Jerusalem, Ephesus, Alexandria) claimed primacy.
 - Constantinople claimed *as successor to Rome***
 - 1 Peter makes reference to Peters residence in Rome (Babylon).
 - Ignatius of Antioch writes to Romans "I do not instruct you as Peter and Paul."
 - May references to martyrdom of Peter and Paul in Rome by 2nd century.
- **Bishops of Rome were conscious of their ruling power, and exercised it.**
 - St. Irenaeus: "on account of her superior headship all other churches should be in communion. . . "
 - Primacy first exercised by Clement in 96 A.D. in a letter to Church of Corinth.
 - Clement was recognized as head of Church while John was still alive and head of Church in Ephesus.
- **Importance of Primacy of Rome increased with the Growth of the Church.**
 - Many powers latent in the primacy of the Pope were not fully realized until the welfare of the Church demanded them.
 - Do modern popes wield too much power? How else to run a global religion?
- **Primacy of Bishop of Rome does not confer higher power . (Still a bishop).**
 - Episcopacy is highest holy order.
 - Primacy is spiritual. It does not confer temporal power.
- **The pope receives the authority to rule the church directly from God, not from those who elected him. — "You are Peter and on this rock *I* will build *my* Church."**
- **History of the Papacy for 19th centuries proves its value**
 - It has helped spread gospels throughout world
 - It helped save Christianity from Islam
 - It has opposed heresy
 - It has defended liberty against Absolutism. In both medieval and modern times.
 - It has fought for protection of the family and the sanctity of marriage.
- **Opponents of the Papacy refer to the fact of Bad Popes as evidence the institution cannot be divine.**
 - Bad Men undoubtedly have been Popes. But bad men were high priests of the Old Law yet office of High Priest was Divine.
 - None of Bad popes have propagated false doctrines or wicked laws.
 - God may be showing it is he himself rules the Church.

The infallibility of the Pope

- **Infallibility of the Pope declared by Pope IX at Vatican I in 1870.**
 - Pope is protected by divine guidance against error when ruling on matters of faith and morals.
 - Infallibility is confined to when he speaks "Ex Cathedra"(as head of the whole Church) on matters of faith and morals.
 - Popes can 1) be guilty of sin, 2) hold erroneous views in matters of faith, 3) error in other ways. Infallibility is reserved for official teaching documents promulgated officially.
- **Infallibility does not depend on virtue or learning of the Pope, but on the activity of the Holy Spirit.**
 - Jesus promised the Holy spirit would assist the Church. "I have prayed for thee. . ."(Luke 22:32).
 - Vatican I did not introduce a new doctrine, but merely defined the way in which Christ provided that his Church would be protected from error.
- **Some Objections answered:**
 - All men are fallible, so the Pope can err as well.
 - "Catholics make an omniscient God of the Pope"
 - Protestants erroneously say that the Pope can stamp any statement with infallibility.
 - Protestants maintain that authority, not conscience is Catholic guide.
 - Non Catholics boast of their freedom relative to the enslaved intellect of the Catholics.
- **The Infallibility of the Pope is a necessity.**
 - Has not God clothed his apostles with powers far more exalted: miracles, prophesy, divine inspiration.
 - Pope's only mission is to preserve God's revealed truths from error.
 - Living Pope is needed since Christ is no longer bodily with us to preserve his teachings.
- **Protestants claim the Bible is infallible.**
 - Therefore, the magisterium of the Catholic Church must have been infallible for at least four centuries, since it defined the Canon of scripture.
 - Protestants claim their own personal interpretation of the Bible is infallible