

Popes: Theology and Doctrine

Dogma: Christ appointed the Apostle Peter to be the first of all the Apostles and to be the visible Head of the whole Church, by appointing him immediately and personally to the **primacy of jurisdiction**. (Vatican Council I)

- The **invisible** head of the Church is Christ

Scriptural Foundation

- Christ distinguished Peter from the other apostles
 - o Mt 10:2, Peter is called the first
 - o Throughout the Gospels, Peter is named first. Andrew was “called” before Peter; placing Peter’s name first indicates primacy
 - o Peter (with James and John) was always in the select group to see special events: healing of the daughter of Jarius (Mk 5:37), Transfiguration (Mt 17:1), Agony in the Garden (Mt 26:37)
 - o The Lord taught from Peter’s boat (Luke 5:3); paid the temple tax for Peter and himself (Mt 17:27)
 - o More significantly, and directed to Peter’s mission, Jesus ordered Peter to strengthen his brethren (Luke 22,32); Jesus appeared to Peter alone before the others (Luke 24:31; 1 Cor 15:5)
- Primacy was **promised** on Peter’s solemn confession (Mt 16:17-19)
 - o Words addressed solely to Peter
 - o Keys: symbols of power, and symbols of a steward of the Kingdom
 - o Power to bind and loose: following Rabbinical language, impose or loosen from bans; interpreting the law, pronouncing something to be permitted or forbidden.
- Primacy was **conferred** when Christ, after the Resurrection, gave the mandate to Peter: Feed my lambs, feed my lambs, feed my sheep
 - o Words are directed solely at Peter (Jn 21:15-17)
 - o Lambs and sheep mean the whole flock of Christ that is the Church
- Primacy was **exercised** by Peter after Christ’s ascension
 - o Peter conducts the election of Matthias (Acts 1:15); first to preach/proclaim on Pentecost (Acts 2:14) etc.

Primacy of Jurisdiction of the Pope

- According to Christ’s ordinance, Peter is to have successors in his primacy of the whole church and for all time (Vatican Council I)
- The successors of Peter in the primacy are the bishops of Rome (Council of Lyons 1274; Council of Florence 1439)
- Testimony to this: Pope St Clement, probably the fourth Pope, third successor to Peter, writing in AD 80 to the Church in Corinth (FOEF I p. 7)
- St Ignatius of Antioch (110): elevated the Roman Church over all others
- St Polycarp (155): came to Rome to negotiate the date of Easter
- St Irenaeus (180): the Roman church has the more powerful principality FOEF I p. 90; the Church of Rome is the great and illustrious church to which, on account of its commanding position, every church, that is the faithful everywhere, must resort. Irenaeus named the succession of bishops of Rome from Peter to current, Eleutherius (174-189)

- St Clement of Alexandria: calls Peter “the chosen one, the selected one, the first among the Disciples, for whom alone, beside Himself, the Lord paid the tax”
- Tertullian recognized the doctrinal authority of Peter (220) FOEF I p. 160
- St Cyprian (251): It is on one man that He builds the Church FOEF I p. 220
- St Cyril of Jerusalem (350): “the head and leader of the Apostles” FOEF I p. 358
- St Ambrose (379): Where Peter is, there the Church is TFNB p. 193
- St Jerome (376): I know that the Church is built upon this Rock (Peter) TFNB p. 193
- St Augustine (400): the pre-eminence of the Apostolic See was always in her; named the succession FOEF III p. 2
- Before the council of Ephesus (431), Papal Legate Philippus clearly states the primacy of the pope
- Council Fathers of Chalcedon (451) receive the dogmatic letter of Pope St Leo with the acclamation, “Peter has spoken through Leo”
- It’s been the constant understanding of the Church—among the fathers, the bishops, the faithful—that the bishop of Rome is the successor of Peter and has primacy over the Church.

Nature of Papal Primacy

- the Pope possesses full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the whole church, not merely in matters of faith and morals, but also in Church discipline and in the government of the Church (Vatican Council I)

Papal **Teaching primacy** – Papal infallibility

- the Pope is infallible when he speaks ex Cathedra (Constantinople (869) and Lyons (1274) taught teaching primacy of the Pope; Vatican I clarified infallibility
 - o “The Roman Pontiff, when he speaks ex cathedra—that is, when in discharge of the office of Pastor and Doctor of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the Universal Church—by the Divine assistance promised to him in Blessed Peter, is possessed of that infallibility with which the Divine Redeemer willed that His Church should be endowed in defining doctrine regarding Faith or Morals”
- CCC 891: The Roman Pontiff enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful—who confirms his brethren in the faith—he proclaims by a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to the faith or morals
- This infallibility promised to the Church is also present in the body of bishops when, together with Peter’s successor, they exercise the supreme Magisterium,” above all in an Ecumenical Council

References:

FOEF = Faith of the Early Fathers, William Jurgens, three volume set. Volume is indicated.

TFNB = The Fathers Know Best, Jimmy Akin

CCC = Catechism of the Catholic Church

All references to councils are from Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma, Ludwig Ott. Doctrine on the papacy: p. 279-289