

2. Infallibility:

To fulfil the teaching office of their pastoral ministry, the Apostles and their successors, the bishops, are given a gift of infallibility in matters of faith and morals. The Pope, as head of the college of bishops, enjoys this gift of infallibility in a unique sense. As pastor and supreme teacher of all the faithful, and charged with the responsibility to confirm his brothers and sisters in the faith, the Pope may proclaim as definitive a point of doctrine touching faith and morals.

When the Church, by her Magisterium, proposes something to be believed as being revealed by God in Jesus Christ, a Catholic is obliged to adhere to the definition with the obedience of faith. When the Magisterium proposes something not in a definitive way but so as to help the faithful in a better understanding of God's Revelation, a Catholic is obliged to give to such teaching the religious assent of his spirit.

It is, therefore, the Pope's role, as it was that of Peter, to guide the community of Christ's faithful, to safeguard them in the truth, and to confirm his brothers and sisters in the faith made possible in Jesus Christ.

- Rev. Kevin Beach

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Who is the Pope?



Pope Benedict XVI

.... What is his role?

.... By whom is he Chosen?

.... Is he infallible?

These and other questions are answered in the following Leaflet which takes only a few minutes to read, so why not take a moment now and turn the page

To understand the role of the Pope today, let us first examine the Biblical foundations and historical development of the papal ministry. From that basis, we will be able to explain the Pope's role in the government of the Church and his teaching office.

A. BIBLICAL

1. The Twelve Apostles:

At the beginning of his public life, Jesus Christ chose twelve men as his Apostles. He gave them the mission to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal (Lk. 9:2). They were the foundation of His Church.

The Church is apostolic in a triple sense:

a. She was built and remains on the foundation of the Apostles (Eph. 2:20; Acts 21:14) the witnesses chosen and sent by Christ;

b. She preserves and transmits the teaching of the Apostles;

c. She continues to be taught, sanctified and directed by the Apostles, until the return of Christ, through the ministry of bishops, those who succeeded the Apostles in their pastoral responsibility.

The role of the Apostles as the witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus and the foundation of His Church is unique and is not transmitted. However, Jesus promised to be with His Church until the end of time (Mt 28:20). The spread of the Gospel until the end of time was the divine mission entrusted to the Church. To ensure the faithful transmission of the apostolic witness, the Apostles instituted successors. These successors, the order of bishops, are the continuing presence of the pastoral ministry of the Apostles in the Church.

2. Peter:

Among the Twelve Apostles, Simon Peter holds the first place. Among the disciples of Christ, Peter is given the greatest prominence in the New Testament accounts of the Church's origins. Jesus gave to Peter

a unique mission. Based on a revelation of God to Peter, Peter proclaimed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Jesus then declared that Simon was Peter, the "Rock", and on this rock Jesus would build His Church which would prevail over the powers of Hell (Mt. 16:18). Peter received the mission to guard the integrity and purity of the faith in Jesus Christ, and to strengthen his brothers and sisters in that faith.

The authority conferred by Jesus on Peter is known as the "power of the keys" (Mt. 16:19). The government of the Church - that is, authority to absolve sins, to make doctrinal judgements and to make disciplinary decisions - was given to the Apostles in general. Peter alone was given the "power of the keys". Jesus also gave to Peter a specific pastoral ministry - "feed my sheep" (Jn. 21:15-17). Thus, Peter was given a unique responsibility in church government and in pastoral ministry.

B. DOGMATIC DEVELOPMENT

1. Bishops:

Jesus Christ, in calling the Twelve, gave them the form of a "college", that is a stable group, and chose Peter from among them as their head. Just as Peter and the other Apostles form, by Christ's initiative, one apostolic college, so the Pope, as successor of Peter and Bishop of Rome, and the other bishops form one episcopal college. The pastoral ministry of Peter and the other Apostles is continued by the bishops under the primacy of the Pope.

2. Pope:

By virtue of his wide-ranging ministry evident in the New Testament and preserved in tradition. Peter is considered to be pastor of the Universal Church. History reveals that the single most notable representative of this ministry of Peter toward the Universal Church has been the Bishop of Rome, the city whose church was founded by Peter and where Peter and Paul are buried. The Pope, as Bishop of Rome and successor of Peter, is the visible and perpetual foundation of unity among the bishops and among Christ's faithful. The Bishop of Rome has, by virtue of his

role as the Vicar of Christ and as Pastor of the entire Church, a full, supreme and universal authority. The college of bishops, when united to the Pope, has a similar authority.

C. CHURCH GOVERNMENT & PAPAL PRIMACY

The beginning of the Church was a unique and creative act of Christ. The Church was and is both a spiritual and visible society, a communion of persons, which needs constant guidance to realize its mission. Thus, Christ perceived the need that someone should govern, have a primacy over, His Church. Therefore, He conferred that authority on Peter. As the Church was to endure through time until the return of Jesus, that authority or office conferred on Peter necessarily provided for succession. In fact, there has been an unbroken succession of popes from Peter to Benedict XVI (The 265th successor of Peter.).

The primacy of the Pope, the recognition that he is the universal Pastor with full authority over the entire Church, preserves the oneness of the church by being a sign of unity, and by being a centre of communication, correction and assistance in the Church's mission. The Pope's primacy is one of service, in service of unity.

D. TEACHING OFFICE

1. Nature:

In order to maintain the Church in the purity of the faith transmitted by the Apostles, Jesus conferred on Her a participation in His own infallibility. "Infallibility" means "immunity from error". It is a gift of the Holy Spirit which protects the Church from error when the Church solemnly defines a matter of faith or morals.

By a supernatural sense of the faith, the People of God under the leadership of the living Magisterium (the teaching office of the bishops) attach themselves indefectibly to the apostolic faith. The pastoral ministry of the Magisterium is ordered, therefore, to safeguard the People of God in the truth. This teaching office is not above the word of God, but serves it.