

Peter in the New Testament

The Gospels assign a special position among the Twelve to Peter. Explicit commissions are given to him in Matt. 16 (18-19), Lk 22 (31-32) and John 21 (15-17). There is also evidence that his leadership is recognised in such texts as Mark 16 (7) and John 6 (68), (as also in Acts e.g. 1 (15)); and it appears to have been a concern of the final editors of the Gospels to emphasise the position of Peter among the Apostles.

However, Peter was not the only prominent member of the Twelve e.g. Matt. 17 (1), Luke 8 (51) (James and John), and John 21 (20) (The Beloved Disciple). Moreover concentration on Peter's leadership must not obscure the fact that responsibility for the Church's oversight was entrusted to the apostolic body as a whole. Matt. 18 (18). c.p. Matt. 16 (19).

Paul, too, was conspicuous for the leadership which he exercised, and claimed to share with Peter equal and parallel responsibilities. Gal. 2 (7). Because of the tradition that it was at Rome that both these apostles were martyred the church in that city was recognised as possessing among the other churches special prerogatives, and its bishop was seen to exercise among his fellow-bishops functions analogous to those ascribed in the New Testament to Peter.

The ascription of a Scriptural foundation for universal primacy, as well as for collegiality and conciliarity is based not on

isolated texts but on the New Testament as a whole. Even if there is no conclusive evidence in the New Testament that any commission given to Peter was to be transmitted to any successor, the responsibilities entrusted to this Apostolic Body as a whole, and functions given to particular apostles, were seen to be necessary to the continuing mission and unity of the Church.