

AUTHORITY IN THE CHURCH - A DRAFT SUPPLEMENT TO 24(a)

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)). According to some modern exegetes it appears to have been a concern of the final editors of the Gospels to emphasise the position of Peter in the apostolic community.

However, Peter was not the only prominent member of the Twelve and 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, also, although he was not among the Twelve played a major role in the Church, was conspicuous for the leadership which he exercised, and claimed to share with Peter equal and parallel responsibilities. Gal. 2 (7/8). Because of the tradition that it was at Rome that both these apostles were martyred the church in that city came to be recognised as possessing among the other churches special prerogatives. Its bishop was seen to bear a special responsibility for keeping the Church faithful to the apostolic inheritance received through Peter and Paul, and to exercise among his fellow-bishops functions analogous to those ascribed in the New Testament to Peter.

We agree in finding a scriptural source for collegiality and conciliarity, not in isolated texts, but based on the New Testament as a whole. In a similar overall view of the New Testament the Catholic tradition goes further in finding in the same source the origin of universal primacy.

Even if there is no conclusive evidence in the New Testament that any commission given to Peter was to be transmitted to any successor, certain responsibilities entrusted to the Apostolic Body as a whole, and functions given to particular apostles, have always been regarded as necessary to the continuing mission and unity of the Church.