

4.9.79: 10.25 a.m.

ARCIC 211 Petrine Texts/2

DRAFT CONTINUATION OF VENICE 24

24(a)

If, as has already been noted (para. 12) the importance of the bishop of Rome among his brother bishops has been explained by analogy with the position of Peter among the other apostles, then it is important to discover what that position really involved. Concentration on Peter's leadership must not obscure the fact that pastoral responsibility was not restricted solely to him. It is significant that words used for the explicit commission to Peter in St. Matthew's gospel are also used for a wider charge to the Church as a whole (compare Matt. 16:19 with Matt. 18:18). Similarly the apostolic foundation upon which the church is built is related to Peter in Matthew 16:18 and to the whole apostolic body elsewhere in the New Testament (e.g. Eph. 2:20). Even though Peter was the spokesman at Pentecost, already the charge to proclaim the gospel to all the world had been given by the risen Christ to the Eleven (Acts 1: 2-8). Paul also, although he was not among the Twelve, was conspicuous for the leadership which he exercised with the authority received from the Lord himself, claiming to share with Peter parallel responsibilities and the same authority as the Twelve (Gal. 2: 7, 8: 1 Cor. 9:1).

While explicitly stressing Christ's will to root the Church in the apostolic witness and mandate, the New Testament also recognized that Peter held a special position among the Twelve. Whether the Petrine texts come directly from Jesus or from the early Christian community, they witness to an early tradition that Peter already held this place during Jesus' ministry. Individually the indications may seem inconclusive, but taken together they provide an overall picture of his prominence which is inescapable.

The most important are: the change of the name Simon to Cephas, his being named first among the Twelve and in the smaller circle of the three (Peter, James and John), the confession of Jesus' Messiahship especially in Matthew (16:16, (cf. Mark 8:29 and Luke 9:20) and John (6:69), the charge to strengthen his brethren (Luke 22:31, 32) and to feed the sheep (John 21: 16-18) and the special appearance to him of the risen Lord (e.g. Luke 24:34, I Cor. 15:5). Although it may have been the intention of the author to underline the parallel apostolic authority of Paul in the latter part of the Acts, yet the first half of the book focusses on Peter's leadership. For instance it is Peter who frequently speaks in the name of the apostolic community, he is the first to proclaim the gospel to the Jews and the first to open the Christian community to the Gentiles. Paul seems to have recognized this prominence of Peter among the apostles (e.g. Gal. 1:18) and accepted the lead given by him at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), yet was prepared to argue strongly with him when he held him to be at fault.

In the eyes of the New Testament writers Peter already holds a position of special importance, not simply because of his own gifts and character but because of his particular calling by Christ. However, the traditions of the New Testament give no precise indication how this role of Peter is exercised differently from that of the other apostles. Indeed the similarity of their roles leads us to conclude that, even when stressing the distinctive features of Peter's ministry, this ministry can never be isolated from that of the other apostles.

As in the teaching of Jesus true leadership is that of service, not of domination over others (luke 22:24-27), so Peter's role in strengthening the brethren is also a leadership of service

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(Luke 22:31, 32). He serves his fellow apostles by helping them to be what they are called to be, even if at the same time in his weakness he may require their help or correction, as is clear in his dispute with Paul. If one accepts the traditional analogy that is drawn between the role of the bishop of Rome among his fellow bishops and the role of Peter among his fellow apostles, these considerations clarify the bearing of that analogy.

Whatever interpretation may be placed upon the New Testament texts concerning Peter, there is in the New Testament no record of any explicit transmission of his leadership. Nor for that matter is there any record in the New Testament of the transmission of a more general apostolic authority. Yet the Church in Rome, the city in which Peter and Paul taught and were martyred, came to be recognized as possessing special prerogatives among the other churches; its bishop was seen to bear a special responsibility for the unity of the Church, for keeping it faithful to the apostolic inheritance, and for exercising among his fellow bishops functions analogous to those ascribed in the New Testament to Peter.

Fathers and doctors of the Church gradually came to interpret the New Testament evidence as pointing in the same direction. There may be those who regard this interpretation as a questionable endorsement of a development that had already taken place. It remains, however, possible even for them to see the primacy of the bishop of Rome as part of God's purpose, serving the realisation of the Church's unity and catholicity.

Nevertheless this Roman leadership has at time been rejected by those who thought it was not faithful to the truth of the Gospel and hence not a true focus of unity. For ourselves we agree that a universal primacy will be needed in a re-united Church and it may

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appropriately be the primacy of the bishop of Rome, a primacy such as we have described in Authority in the Church. It is our hope that our better common understanding of the faith and of history may contribute to the healing of past divisions.