

Consider at the most six "bad" popes out of a total of 265, which is not as big a proportion (1 in 44) when compared to the one bad apostle (*Judas*) from among the twelve men chosen by the Master. Acknowledging that some popes were bona fide scoundrels, no pope in all of history ever taught heresy.

St. Ignatius of Antioch (25-110 A.D.), who was a disciple of Polycarp of Smyrna (60-155 A.D.), and knew the apostle John, wrote: "where the bishop is... there is the Catholic Church."

Despite all his faults, Constantine legitimized Christianity and made Sunday a public holiday. He presided at the first general Council of the Church at Nicaea in 325 AD. He did much, together with his mother, Helena, to preserve the holy places in Palestine, Rome and elsewhere. He was, however, not eligible to become pope since he was only baptized on his deathbed.

The pope who promulgated the directives of the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., at which Constantine presided, was Pope Sylvester I. He was the 33rd successor of St. Peter, the first bishop of Rome and pope. Peter was martyred c. 67 A.D. and was the first universal pastor of Christ's Church (see Mt 16:19, the "pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15).

Papal infallibility, not impeccability

Christ guaranteed that the faith would never suffer corruption and error. He gave the Church the charism of infallibility (Mt 16:18-19), in which the pope is the official "spokesman" together with the bishops in union with him. The gift has no connection with the Pope's "impeccability" (personal holiness, or lack of it). It is exercised when the Pope officially ("ex cathedra") clarifies or defines an aspect of faith or morals of Catholic Christianity, which has been part of the "deposit of faith" from the very beginning of Christianity. He makes use of this charism very rarely, and only when a belief is not clear, is

under attack or is a cause of confusion to the faithful. For example, the dogma of the Assumption of Mary was defined in 1950. It was not "sucked out of thin air" on that date; it had been a belief of the Church since apostolic times but was "defined" by Pope Pius XII in 1950 after consultation with all the bishops of the Catholic Church.

Universal leadership of the Pope

From earliest times, saints and scholars have witnessed to the Pope's universal leadership and Popes have exercised this charism.

In 96 A.D., Pope Clement sent a strong letter to the church at Corinth resolving a dispute there. It would be unheard of for a bishop to interfere in the affairs of another bishopric were he not recognized as universal pastor, with authority.

On his way to martyrdom in Rome in 110 A.D., Ignatius of Antioch wrote praising the Church of Rome "stamped with the Father's name".

In 150 A.D., Polycarp of Smyrna conferred with Pope Anacletus on the date for the celebration of Easter.

In the late 2nd century Bishop Irenaeus of Lyons refuted "false teachers not in harmony with the Church of Rome." In 250 A.D. St. Cyprian of Carthage questioned whether one still held the faith if one was not united with Peter.

In the 4th century, Ambrose of Milan wrote, "Where Peter is, there is the Church". Augustine, Jerome, Leo and Gregory I expressed similar sentiments.

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Did Peter Have A Successor?

The affectionate title "Pope", by which Catholics refer to the Bishop of Rome, is not found in the Bible. But then neither are the words "Trinity" and "Incarnation". The bishops heading all the great ancient patriarchates of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, are each known as "Pope" to their flocks; the title is not applied to the bishop of Rome only.

The word "pope" comes from the Greek "pappas" meaning "father" and is a scriptural custom started by the apostle Paul: "Even if you have countless guides in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers, for I became your father in Christ through the gospel" (1 Cor 4:14-15). Stephen addressed the Jewish leaders as "my fathers" in Acts 6:12-15, 7:1-2. In 1 Jn 1:12, the apostle John addresses his "dear children", obviously alluding to himself as "father", while in verse 13 he states: "I write to you, fathers".

The Bishop of Rome (the Pope) has several official titles among which are "Supreme Pastor of the Universal Church" and "Servant of the Servants of God".

The place of Peter in the early Church

Peter had a pre-eminent position among the disciples of Jesus in the early Church. He is spokesman at climactic moments such as when Jesus walked on the water (Mt 14:28-32). He is always named

first (Mk 3:16-19), and sometimes the twelve are referred to as *"Peter and his companions"* (Mk 16:17). He is the first witness to Jesus' resurrection (1 Cor 15:5), and Peter's new name *"Cephas"* (rock) has significance (Gal 15:5).

In Acts Peter is the first to proclaim the gospel (Acts 2:14-40) and gives many of the major speeches (Acts 3:12-26). See also Acts 4:8-12 5:3-9, 29-32, 8:2-23, 10:34-43, 11:4-18, 15:7-11. The first miracle after Pentecost is worked through Peter's command (Acts 9:34, 38-41 & 5:15). Peter was the first to receive Gentiles (Acts 10:9-48) and he was the first to command baptism to the Gentiles (Acts 10:46-48).

Jesus' words that Satan would sift Peter's faith as wheat but that afterwards he would turn again and *"strengthen his brethren"* (Lk 22:31-32) were fulfilled.

In Jn 21:15-19 Jesus' threefold question *"do you love Me?"* is a reversal of Peter's threefold denial. Jesus commands that he feed the sheep and the lambs and explains that the shepherd lays down his life for his sheep (Jn 10:11). These words clearly mean that Peter is commissioned to care for Jesus' flock after He departs.

Peter, the rock

There is the well-known statement to Peter in Mt 16:18-19 that He will build His church on the *"rock"*. This passage is not the entire basis for Catholic understanding of Peter's role in the Church. It simply states what all the other New Testament evidence implies:

"... And I tell you, you are Peter (Petros) and upon this rock (taute, petra) I will build My church and the gates of Sheol will not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Mt 16:18-19).

Is the *"rock"* Peter or Peter's faith or God, as in so many Old Testament passages? Jesus

gives Simon a new name: *"Petros"* in Greek. But in Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, Simon's new name is *"Kepha"*.

However, in the original Aramaic in which Jesus spoke these words, the statement is *"You are the Kepha' and upon this (Taute) Kepha' I will build My Church"*. The word *"taute"* (this) immediately after calling Peter *"Rock"* emphasizes that Peter is the rock that Jesus is talking about.

The new name given to Simon, in the context of biblical culture, is extremely important: Abram to Abraham (Gen 17:5), Jacob to Israel (Gen 32:28), Eliakim to Joakim (2 Kings 23:34). Daniel, Ananias, Misael and Azarias are changed to Baltassar, Sidrach, Misach and Abdenago (Dan 1:6-8).

The keys of the kingdom

Note the *"keys"* in Mt 16:19. Keys were the hallmark of authority. Also, Jesus addressing Peter as *"Blessed are you..."* (Mt 16:13) gives the passage the aura of the most important statement He would make to Peter (or to anyone for that matter). Note too how in Is 22:22, Isaiah places *"the key of the house of David on the shoulder of Eliakim"*.

Eliakim was the new *"prime minister"* of Israel under the king *"alone"*. The key has two aspects: the power to rule, authority and permanence – intergenerational succession. He was to have successors. Peter is to be the chief ruler in the New Israel (as Paul calls the Church) under the king, Christ. As in Isaiah, there may have been unworthy persons in possession of the keys, but the position is greater and more permanent than any one person. Just as when Judas hanged himself, a successor was chosen in Acts (*Mathias*), so the pattern was set for the other apostles, headed by Peter who were all to have successors throughout human history.

The authority of Rome

If one looks at the list of bishops in history of the most ancient sees, Rome, Alexandria,

Antioch, Alexandria and Constantinople. Rome emerges, as the only bishopric of the ancient Sees which never taught heresy. The other three all fell at some time or other to Arianism, Monophysitism, Monothelism, and Nestorianism.

Was Peter in Rome, some ask? Peter's First Letter, addressed to Christians in Asia Minor (c 67 AD), was written in Rome, which is identified by Peter as "Babylon" (1 Pet 5:13), for obvious reasons during the reign of Nero. Babylon is a code name for Rome, used more than six times in the Book of Revelation. In addition, Babylon at that time had been reduced to a backwater of inconsequential importance. Peter's presence in Rome is mentioned in extra-Biblical writings such as the Sibylline Oracles, the Apocalypse of Baruch and 4 Esdras. Eusebius Pamphilus, writing in 303 A.D., attests to Peter's two letters having been written in Rome, referring figuratively to the city as *"Babylon"*.

Among the graffiti on the walls surrounding what was long believed to be the actual burial place of Peter under the high altar of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, are inscriptions such as *"Peter within"* in Greek, together with cryptograms of the Key. In 1968 Pope Paul VI officially announced that the bones of the Prince of Apostles had been conclusively identified under the Basilica. The discovery is discussed in detail in John Evangelist Walsh's book *"The Bones of St. Peter"*.

266 Popes

There have been 266 popes in history up to 2013. Peter was pope for 25 years and was martyred by crucifixion upside-down in 67 A.D. by Nero. His successor was Linus, followed by Anacletus, Clement I (96 AD) and so down through the centuries to Pope Francis (2013-). There have been some saints and some scoundrels (*especially during the Dark Ages*), but even *Peter* denied His Lord three times before *"turning back"* (Lk 22:31).