

17. THE PETRINE DOCTRINE ACCORDING TO LEO I

From the fifth century onward, papal claims came to be based more exclusively on the primacy of Peter. Pope Leo I (440-461) gave a considered exposition of the Petrine doctrine of papal authority in one of his sermons.

From Christ and through S. Peter the Priesthood Is Handed On in Perpetuity

Although, therefore, dearly beloved, we be found both weak and slothful in fulfilling the duties of our office, because, whatever devoted and vigorous action we desire to do, we are hindered by the frailty of our very condition; yet having the increasing propitiation of the Almighty and perpetual Priest, who being like us and yet equal with the Father, brought down His Godhead even to things human, and raised His Manhood even to things Divine, we worthily and piously rejoice over His dispensation, whereby, though He has delegated the care of His sheep to many shepherds, yet He has not Himself abandoned the guardianship of His beloved flock. And from His overruling and eternal protection we have received the support of the Apostles' aid also, which assuredly does not cease from its operation: and the strength of the foundation, on which the whole superstructure of the Church is reared, is not weakened by the weight of the temple that rests upon it. For the solidity of that faith which was praised in the chief of the Apostles is perpetual: and as that remains which Peter believed in Christ, so that remains which Christ instituted in Peter. For when, as has been read in the Gospel lesson, the LORD had asked the disciples whom they believed Him to be amid the various opinions that were held, and the blessed Peter had replied, saying, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living GOD," the LORD says, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona, because flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but My Father, which is in heaven. And I say to thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed also in heaven."

S. Peter's Work Is Still Carried Out by His Successors

The dispensation of Truth therefore abides, and the blessed Peter persevering in the strength of the Rock, which he has received, has not abandoned the helm of the Church, which he undertook. For he was ordained before the rest in such a way that from his being called the Rock, from his being pronounced

the Foundation, from his being constituted the Doorkeeper on the kingdom of heaven, from his being set as the Umpire to bind and to loose, whose judgments shall retain their validity in heaven, from all these mystical titles we might know the nature of his association with Christ. And still to-day he more fully and effectually performs what is entrusted to him, and carries out every part of his duty and charge in Him and with Him, through Whom he has been glorified. And so if anything is rightly done and rightly decreed by us, if anything is won from the mercy of GOD by our daily supplications, it is of his work and merits whose power lives and whose authority prevails in his See. For this, dearly-beloved, was gained by that confession, which, inspired in the Apostle's heart by GOD the Father, transcended all the uncertainty of human opinions, and was endued with the firmness of a rock, which no assaults could shake. For throughout the Church Peter daily says, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living GOD." and every tongue which confesses the LORD, accepts the instruction his voice conveys. This Faith conquers the devil, and breaks the bonds of his prisoners. It uproots us from this earth and plants us in heaven, and the gates of Hades cannot prevail against it. For with such solidity is it endued by GOD that the depravity of heretics cannot mar it nor the belief of the heathen overcome it.

Document Three

Title: Boniface VIII's Defense of Papal Supremacy (1302)

WE ARE COMPELLED, OUR FAITH URGING us, to believe and to hold... that there is one holy Catholic... Church, outside of which there is neither salvation nor remission of sins... In this Church there is one Lord... Christ, namely, & the vicar of Christ, St. Peter, & the successor of Peter.

We are told by the word of the Gospel that in this His fold there are two swords—a spiritual, namely, and a temporal... Both swords, the spiritual and the material, therefore, are in the power of the Church; the one, indeed, to be wielded for the Church, the other by the Church; the one by the hand of the priest, the other by the hand of kings and knights, but at the will and sufferance of the priest. One sword, moreover, ought to be under the other, and the temporal authority to be subjected to the spiritual...

Therefore if the earthly power errs, it shall be judged by the spiritual power; but if [the Church] errs it can be judged by God alone, not by man... A spiritual man judges all things, but he himself is judged by no one. This authority, moreover, even though it is given to man and exercised through man, is not human but rather divine, being given by divine lips to Peter and founded on a rock for him and his successors through Christ Himself whom He has confessed; the Lord Himself saying to Peter: "Whoever thou shalt bind," etc. Whoever, therefore, resists this power thus ordained by God, resists the ordination of God...

Indeed we declare, say, pronounce, and define that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff

Literal question: What is the Gospel?

Ruminating questions: Again, why the reference to Peter? What's the deal with all these swords? Explain. What is the rationale (argument) Boniface uses? Why is erring an important part of this document? What point is driven home by the last sentence?