



The Papacy

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Where does the title Pope come from?

The title *pope*, was once used with far greater latitude. However, it is now employed solely to denote the [Bishop](#) of Rome, who, in virtue of his position as successor of [St. Peter](#), is the chief pastor of the whole [Church](#), the Vicar of Christ upon earth.

Ecclesial Latin '*papa*' comes from the Greek '*papas*', a variant of '*pappas*', which means father.

The current Pope Francis I was elected in 2013 after the resignation on Benedict XVI:



Scriptural basis for the existence of the Papacy

The proof that Christ constituted [St. Peter](#) head of His Church is found in the two famous Petrine texts, Matthew 16:17-19, and John 21:15-17.

Matthew 16

¹⁷Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you that you are Peter,^[1] and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades^[2] will not overcome it.^[3] ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be^[4] bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be^[5] loosed in heaven."

In Matthew 16:17-19, the office is solemnly promised to Simon Peter. The statements made here are manifestly personal to Peter. "That you are Peter [*Cepha*, transliterated also *Kipha*] and on this rock [*Cepha*] I will build my Church." The word for Peter and for rock in the original Aramaic is one and the same. Peter is to be the rock of the Church.

Here then Christ teaches plainly that in the future the Church will be the society of those who acknowledge Him, and that this Church will be built on Peter. Peter is to be to the Church what the foundation is in regard to a house. He is to be the principle of unity, of stability, and of increase. He is the principle of unity, since what is not joined to that foundation is no part of the Church; of stability, since it is the firmness of this foundation in virtue of which the Church remains unshaken by the storms which buffet her; of increase, since, if she grows, it is because new stones are laid on this foundation.

In the following verse (Matthew 16:19) He promises to bestow on Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven. In all countries the key is the symbol of authority. Thus, Christ's words are a promise that He will confer on Peter supreme power to govern the Church. Peter is to be His vicegerent, to rule in His place.

John 21

¹⁵When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

¹⁶Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

¹⁷The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

¹⁸Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

The promise made by Christ in Matthew 16:16-19, received its fulfilment after the Resurrection in the scene described in John 21. Here the Lord, when about to leave the earth, places the whole flock -- the sheep and the lambs alike -- in the charge of Peter. The term employed in 21:16, "Take care of my sheep" indicates that his task is not merely to feed but to rule. He makes Peter the shepherd of [God's](#) flock to take the place of Himself, the Good Shepherd.

[Historical evidence that Peter was Bishop of Rome](#)

It is now acknowledged by all historians of note that [St. Peter](#) visited Rome and suffered martyrdom there.

In the middle of the third century St. Cyprian expressly terms the Roman See the Chair of St. Peter, saying that Cornelius has succeeded to "the place of Fabian which is the place of Peter" (Ep 55:8; cf. 59:14).

With this and numerous other references, in 250AD the Roman episcopate of Peter was admitted by those best able to know the truth, not merely at Rome but in the churches of Africa and of Asia Minor.

[Historical evidence that the successors of Peter in Rome assumed Supreme Headship of the Church](#)

It is further a fact that history bears complete testimony that from the very earliest times the Roman See has always claimed the supreme headship of the Church, and that that headship has been freely acknowledged by the universal Church.

The first witness is St. Clement, a disciple of the Apostles, who, after Linus and Anacletus, succeeded [St. Peter](#) as the fourth in the list of popes. In his "Epistle to the Corinthians", written in 95 or 96, he bids them to: "...render obedience unto the things written by us through the Holy Spirit".

Thus, at the very commencement of church history, before the last survivor of the Apostles had passed away, we find a Bishop of Rome, himself a disciple of [St. Peter](#), intervening in the affairs of another Church and claiming to settle the matter by a decision spoken under the influence of the Holy Spirit. Such a fact admits of one explanation alone. It is that in the days when the Apostolic teaching was yet fresh in men's minds the universal Church recognized in the Bishop of Rome the office of supreme head.

Indeed, from the beginning of the fourth century there is no question about the supremacy of Rome over the rest of the Church.

The primacy of [St. Peter](#) and the perpetuity of that primacy in the Roman See are dogmatically defined in the canons attached to the first two chapters of the Constitution "Pastor Aeternus", Vatican I (1869 – 1870), Pius IX:

- "If anyone shall say that Blessed Peter the Apostle was not constituted by Christ our Lord as chief of all the Apostles and the visible head of the whole Church militant: or that he did not receive directly and immediately from the same [Lord Jesus Christ](#) a primacy of true and proper jurisdiction, but one of honour only: let him be anathema."
- "If any one shall say that it is not by the institution of Christ our Lord Himself or by divinely established right that Blessed Peter has perpetual successors in his primacy over the universal Church: OF that the Roman Pontiff is not the successor of Blessed Peter in this same primacy. -- let him be anathema" (Denzinger-Bannwart, "Enchiridion", nn. 1823, 1825).

In this case the dogma that the Roman pontiff is at all times the Church's chief pastor would be the conclusion from two premises -- the revealed truth that the Church must ever have a supreme head, and the historic fact that [St. Peter](#) attached that office to the Roman See.

[The Pope's Universal Jurisdiction](#)

Not only did Christ constitute [St. Peter](#) head of the Church, but in the words, "...whatever you bind on earth will be^[4] bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be^[5] loosed in heaven", He indicated the scope of this headship. The expressions binding and loosing here employed are derived from the current terminology of the Rabbinic schools. A doctor who declared a thing to be prohibited by the law was said to *bind*, for thereby he imposed an obligation on the conscience. He who declared it to be lawful was said to *loose*.

These words of Christ conveyed the promise to [St. Peter](#) of legislative authority within the Kingdom, over which He had just set him, and legislative authority carries with it as its necessary accompaniment judicial authority

Further, Peter's authority is subordinated to no earthly superior. The sentences, which he gives, are to be forthwith ratified in heaven. They do not need the antecedent approval of any other tribunal. He is independent of all save the Master who appointed him.

Peter and his successors have power to impose laws and power likewise to grant dispensation from these laws, and, when needful, to annul them. It is theirs to judge offences against the laws, to impose and to remit penalties. This judicial authority will even include the power to pardon sin. For sin is a breach of the laws of the supernatural kingdom.

The authority of Peter and his successors however does not extend beyond the Church. With matters that are altogether extrinsic to the Church they are not concerned.

The Church has claimed and exercised these powers from the very first. When the Apostles, after the Council of Jerusalem, sent out their decree as vested with Divine authority (Acts 15:28-30), they were imposing a law on the faithful:

"...²⁸It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: ²⁹You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.

³⁰The men were sent off and went down to Antioch, where they gathered the church together and delivered the letter."

The Pope and the question of Infallibility

Infallibility is concerned with the interpretation and effective safeguarding of truths already revealed. Infallibility means more than exemption from actual error; it means exemption from the possibility of error.

For the correct understanding of this definition it is to be noted from **Vatican I (1869 – 1870), Pius IX**, that:

- what is claimed for the pope is infallibility merely, not impeccability or inspiration.
- the infallibility claimed for the pope is the same in its nature, scope, and extent as that which the Church as a whole possesses; his [ex cathedra](#) teaching does not have to be ratified by the Church's in order to be infallible.
- infallibility is not attributed to every doctrinal act of the pope, but only to his [ex cathedra](#) teaching; and the conditions required for [ex cathedra](#) teaching are mentioned in the Vatican decree:
 - The pontiff must teach in his public and official capacity as pastor and doctor of all Christians, not merely in his private capacity as a theologian, preacher or allocutionist, nor in his capacity as a temporal prince or as a mere ordinary of the Diocese of Rome. It must be clear that he speaks as spiritual head of the Church universal.
 - Then it is only when, in this capacity, he teaches some doctrine of faith or morals that he is infallible.
 - Further it must be sufficiently evident that he intends to teach with all the fullness and finality of his supreme Apostolic authority, in other words that he wishes to determine some point of doctrine in an absolutely final and irrevocable way, or to define it in the technical sense.
 - Finally for an [ex cathedra](#) decision it must be clear that the pope intends to bind the whole Church. To demand internal assent from all the faithful to his teaching under pain of incurring spiritual shipwreck (*nafragium fidei*) according to the expression used by [Pius IX](#) in defining the [Immaculate Conception](#) of the [Blessed Virgin](#).

In present day conditions, when it is so easy to communicate with the most distant parts of the earth and to secure a literally universal promulgation of papal acts, the presumption is that unless the pope formally addresses the whole Church in the recognized official way, he does not intend his doctrinal teaching to be held by all the faithful as [ex cathedra](#) and infallible.

It should be observed that papal infallibility is a personal and incommunicable [charisma](#), which is not shared by any pontifical tribunal. It was promised directly to [Peter](#), and to each of Peter's successors in the primacy, but not as a prerogative the exercise of which could be delegated to others.

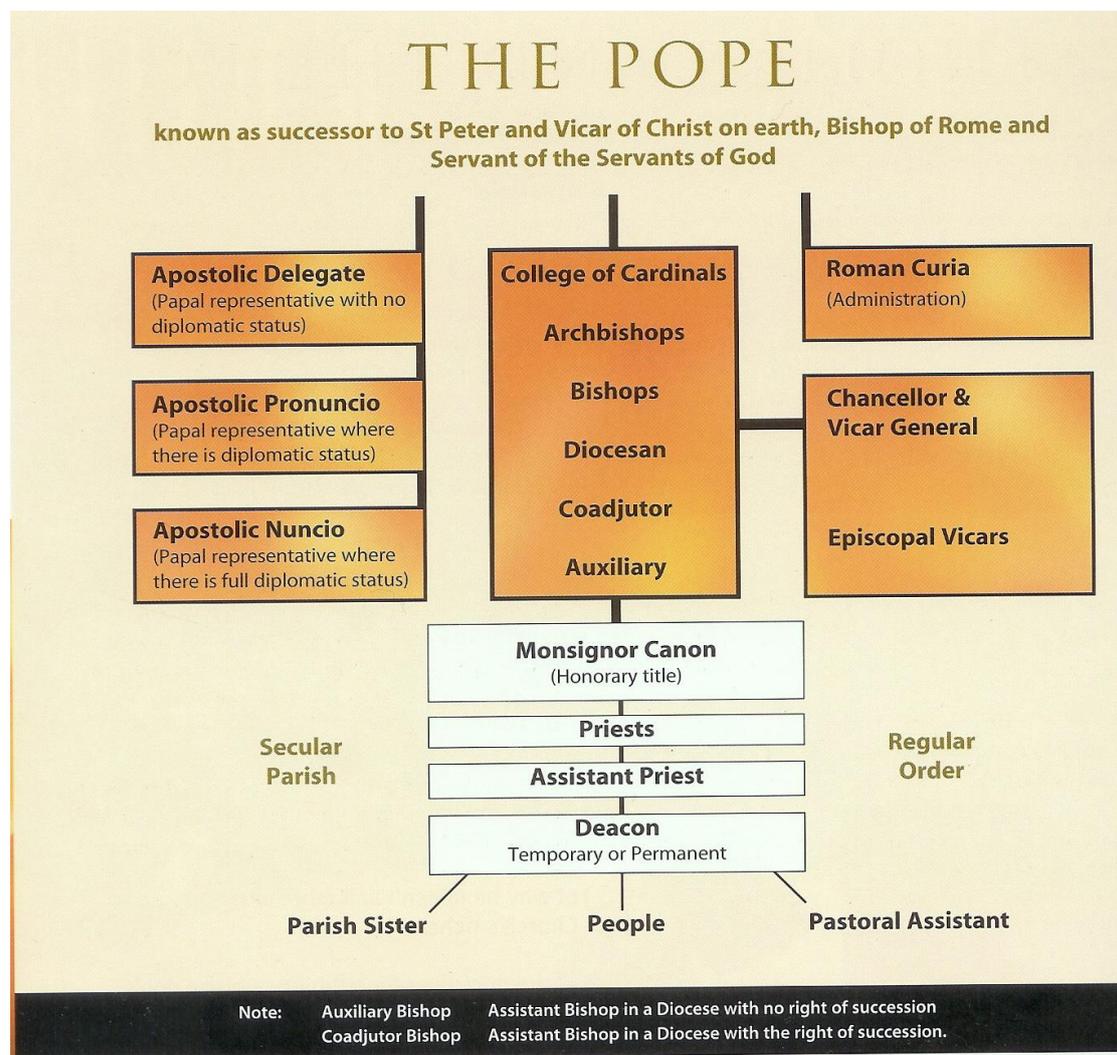
Vatican II (1962 – 1965), opened under Pope John XXIII + closed by Pope Paul VI, explained the doctrine of infallibility as follows: "Although the individual bishops do not enjoy the prerogative of infallibility, they can nevertheless proclaim Christ's doctrine infallibly. This is so, even when they are dispersed around the world, provided that while maintaining the bond of unity among themselves and with Peter's successor, and while teaching authentically on a matter of faith or morals, they concur in a single viewpoint as the one which must be held conclusively. This authority is even more clearly verified when, gathered together in an ecumenical council, they are teachers and judges of faith and morals for the universal Church. Their definitions must then be adhered to with the submission of faith" *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter 25

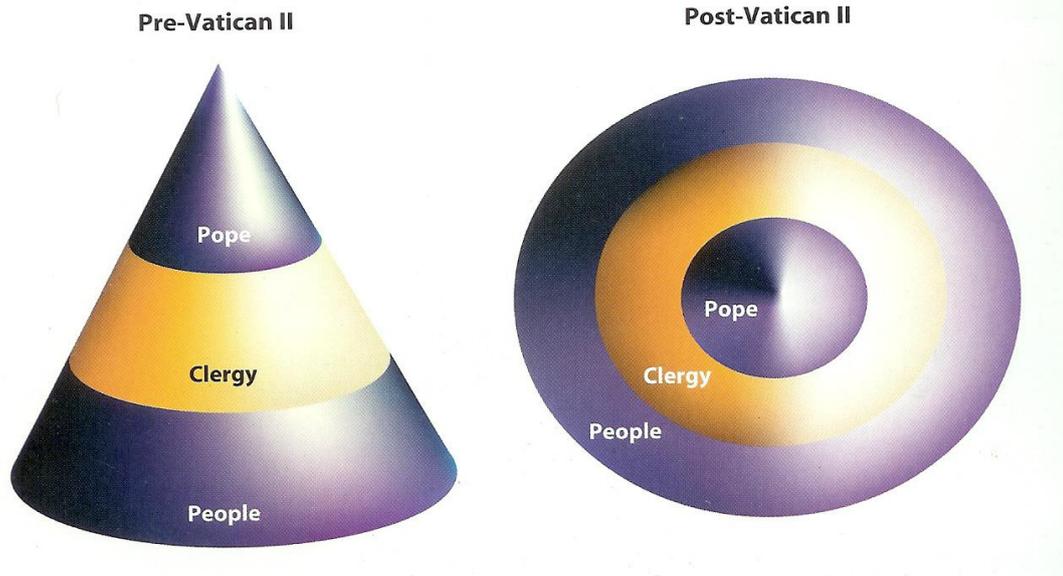
However, infallibility belongs in a special way to the pope as head of the bishops. As Vatican II remarked, it is a charism the pope "...enjoys in virtue of his office, when, as the supreme shepherd and teacher of all the faithful, who confirms his brethren in their faith (Luke 22:32), he proclaims by a definitive act some doctrine of faith or morals. Therefore his definitions, of themselves, and not from the consent of the Church, are justly held irreformable, for they are pronounced with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, an assistance promised to him in blessed Peter." *The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Chapter 25*

The last two (2) Papal statements which meet the infallible criteria are:

- Pope Pius IX's dogma on "The Immaculate Conception" in 1854. This refers to Mary's conception, in that she was conceived without the stain of original sin.
- Pope Pius XII's dogma on the "Assumption of the Virgin Mary into Heaven" in 1950. This pronouncement stated that upon her death the Virgin Mary was assumed body and soul into Heaven.

Hierarchical Structure of the Church





The Government of the Catholic Church is administered via the Curia in Rome. Vatican City is recognised as an independent state and has diplomatic status around the world, with embassies in many countries. Papal Ambassadors in these embassies are called Papal Nuncio's.

When he established His Church, Jesus placed the Apostles in charge of caring for the faithful, of teaching them the faith and caring for their souls. And He placed Peter at the head of the Apostles. Through Apostolic Succession, that same hierarchy willed by Jesus, exists today in the Church with the Pope (the successor of St Peter) at her head, leading the Bishops (the successors of the Apostles) who themselves lead the faithful in their local Churches.

Lumen Gentium states: "[T]he Roman Pontiff, by reason of his office as Vicar of Christ, and as pastor of the entire Church has full, supreme and universal power over the whole Church, a power which he can always exercise unhindered."