

WAS ST. PAUL SUCCESSOR TO ST. PETER?

IN other words, was St. Paul the first Pope after St. Peter?

The arguments for thinking that St. Paul succeeded St. Peter as Pope are manifold and cumulative. The arguments against are almost entirely the later lists of Roman Bishops, which do not mention St. Paul.

1. It is significant that every writer before the third century who mentions St. Peter as related to the Church of Rome invariably couples the two names 'Peter and Paul.'

2. According to competent critics, such as Professor C. H. Turner,¹ the tradition of coupling the names of St. Peter and St. Paul begins with St. John the Evangelist. The eleventh chapter of the Apocalypse contains a detailed description of the 'two witnesses' (*μάρτυρίν* = martyrs) and the 'two olive-branches and two candlesticks that stand before the Lord of the earth.' The allusion to the martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul under Nero is almost irrefutable.

3. In the first letter of Pope St. Clement to the Church of Corinth² the coupled names of St. Peter and St. Paul are used to hearten the somewhat cowed Corinthians.

4. St. Ignatius of Antioch, writing a little later to the Romans,³ speaks of St. Peter and St. Paul *laying commands* on them. The Church of Rome could be *commanded* only by a Bishop of Rome.

¹ *Theology*, Oct., 1926, p. 197.

² Clem. I ad Cor. v.

³ ad Rom. iv, 3.

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5. Dionysius of Corinth bears the same witness two generations after St. Ignatius. In writing to Pope Soter he couples the names of St. Peter and St. Paul.

6. Perhaps the strongest evidence is from St. Irenaeus's work *Against Heresies*, c. A.D. 180-190. In his arguing against the Marcionites who had corrupted the New Testament, he says that St. Matthew wrote his gospel in Hebrew 'when Peter and Paul were in Rome evangelising and founding the Church.'⁴

Again, he points out that 'the tradition of the Apostles is everywhere manifest in those who were instituted Bishops and their successors. But because these are too many to enumerate, it will be enough to see the succession in the highest and best known Church founded and organised in Rome by the two glorious apostles Peter and Paul . . . Having founded and organised the Church these Blessed apostles *they* entrusted to Simon the ministry of the episcopate.'⁵

It is very significant that Irenaeus speaks of Simon having received the episcopate from Peter and Paul—so that the Pope Simon is the successor of St. Paul.

7. If the list of bishops of Rome given by Epiphanius⁶ is in reality the list drawn up by Hegessippus, we have an even earlier and clearer witness than that of Irenaeus; since no less than three times does he give the coupled names of 'Peter and Paul' and never the name of Peter alone.

8. On this quite natural hypothesis we see the reason why St. Paul is given a position of supremacy in the Roman Missal. Although, as we have shown elsewhere,⁷ St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles never re-

⁴ Adv. Haer. III, 2, 1.

⁵ *Ibid.* III, 1-3.

⁶ Epiph. Haer. xxxii, 6-7.

⁷ Epiph. Haer. xxxii, 6.

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presents St. Paul as superior to the Twelve—or even to St. Barnabas, yet the Missal twice puts St. Paul immediately after St. Peter and before the other apostles. Thus in the Communicantes :—‘ Communicating with and venerating the memory, in the first place of the glorious ever-virgin Mary, Mother of God and our Lord Jesus Christ; and of the blessed Apostles and Martyrs Peter and Paul, Andrew, James, John, Thomas, James, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Simon and Thaddeus, Linus, Cletus, Clement, &c.’

Again in the very solemn prayer before the Agnus Dei the priest says, ‘ Deliver us, we beseech thee O Lord, from all evils past, present and future; and by the intercession of the blessed and glorious ever-virgin Mother of God Mary, together with the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul and Andrew and all the Saints,’ &c.

This precedence of St. Paul over such saints as James the greater, John the beloved disciple and Andrew the brother of Peter is hard to explain on any supposition except that St. Paul succeeded St. Peter as visible Head, or *ἐπίσκοπος* of the Church of Rome.

9. Another confirmation of this view is to be found in the second epistle of St. Peter.

(a) The present writer daily feels more and more that this Epistle has the character of an Encyclical letter. Its title is unique. All St. Paul’s epistles are directed to individual churches or to individual persons. St. James’s Epistle is directed to ‘ the twelve tribes of the Diaspora.’ Even St. Peter’s first epistle is directed to the Diaspora of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia’ (I Pet. I, 1). But the second epistle is directed to ‘ those that have obtained equal faith in the justice of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’ (II Pet. I, 1). In other words it is a letter ad-

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dressed to *all the faithful*. We might call it an epistle addressed 'Urbi et Orbi.'

(b) He speaks of his beginning 'to put them in remembrance of these things, though indeed you know them. . . . But I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle to stir you up by putting you in remembrance (II Pet. I, 12, 13). He has already written a first epistle (iii, 1). But it is his duty and intention as the head of the faithful to stir them up in remembrance.

(c) Moreover his death which may be near at hand will not leave them orphaned of remembrance. 'The laying aside of this my tabernacle is near at hand according as our Lord Jesus Christ also hath signified to me' (iii, 14), that is, when Jesus committed the whole Flock or Church to him and foretold him of his martyrdom.

(d) Even as Jesus prepared to leave the world by arranging that Peter should take His place, so 'I will endeavour that you frequently have after my death whereby you may keep a memory of these things' (iii, 15).

(e) St. Peter speaks significantly of the 'more firm prophetic word . . . understanding this first that no prophecy of scripture is made by private interpretation; for prophecy came not by the will of man at any time, but the holy men of God spoke inspired by the Holy Ghost (*ibid.* 19-21).

This is the authoritative outline of the doctrine of Biblical inspiration which has guided the definitions of Trent and Vatican.

(f) It is more especially significant that following this doctrine of the sacred scriptures, and after his statement that after his death there shall be [written] remembrances of their duty St. Peter should add:

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‘ Wherefore, dearly beloved, waiting for these things . . . account the long-suffering of our Lord, salvation; as also our most dear brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him hath written to you; as also in all his epistles . . . in which are certain things hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures to their own destruction ’ (iii, 14-16). These are practically the closing words of an epistle which seems to have been the first Pope’s Encyclical letter informing the faithful that he has provided for someone to take his place after his death, and that this one is Paul whose letters, like the other sacred scriptures, are inspired by God.

10. It must be borne in mind that this view of the fact is not fantastic but natural; perhaps, even, obvious. If St. Paul was in Rome at the time of St. Peter’s imprisonment and death it would be natural for St. Peter to appoint St. Paul; it would be fantastic to imagine that St. Paul would be passed over in favour of Linus, whom the earlier lists never place after St. Peter alone.

If St. Paul was not in Rome on St. Peter’s death his presence and martyrdom in Rome would suggest that he came to take the place of St. Peter. But the Roman Empire had made up its mind that the ‘ Christian superstition ’ was not to be given half-measures. With deadly precision they soon instituted the Tarquin policy of lopping off the head of the growing plant. Whereas St. Paul, the Roman citizen, had been once imprisoned and once set free from prison, Paul the *ἐπίσκοπος* of the Christians must follow his fellow bishop Peter. If there is truth in a tradition which has liturgical solemnity, the Roman power, with delicate or deliberate cruelty, kept the first anniversary of the crucifixion of St. Peter by the beheadal of St. Paul.

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11. Of the three successors in the See of Rome it is perhaps significant that two are mentioned in the later epistles of St. Paul. In the epistle to the Philippians (iv, 3) there is mention of ' *Clement* with the rest of my fellow-labourers whose names are in the book of life.' More significant is the mention of Linus in the second epistle to Timothy (iv, 21). In many ways this epistle recalls the second epistle of St. Peter; in nothing more than in its insistence on the writer's approaching death: ' For I am even now ready to be sacrificed, and the time of my dissolution is at hand.' It is in this epistle that we have the one mention of the man who was to succeed if not St. Paul, at least St. Peter, in the See of Rome.

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