

A Handbook of the Christian Religion for the Use of Advanced Students and the Educated Laity

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Part I, Section II, Chapter III

III. Not from the Church, but *directly from Christ*, whose vicar he is, does the pope receive the power which is contained in the primacy. For he is the true successor of the prince of the apostles; and the latter received the power necessary for the government of the Church, not from the apostles, nor the faithful, but directly from Christ Himself (44). It is one thing to nominate or elect one as the successor of the prince of the apostles, and another thing to confer power on him. The former proceeds from man, the latter from God. Therefore it was defined by the Council of Florence that full power to feed, rule, and govern the whole Church was given to the pope in the person of St. Peter by Our Lord Jesus Christ. The definition of the Vatican Council above quoted (44), that this power was conferred on St. Peter immediately and directly by Christ Himself, applies likewise to the pope, his successor in the primacy.

The *temporal power*, which the popes in the course of centuries justly acquired, is decidedly to the advantage of the Church. In a state of political independence the pope, as the common father of Christendom, is enabled to hold free intercourse with all nations; he is less subject to outside influence, and less liable to be suspected of connivance to the wishes of temporal sovereigns. As a temporal sovereign he has easier communication with other sovereigns, being their equal in rank; while his temporal power likewise furnishes him with the material means which the administration of the Church requires.

The difficulty is sometimes raised that it is impossible at times to know *whether a pope is lawfully elected* or not, and, consequently, whether he has the power to rule the Church or not. The answer is simple. If the whole Church once acknowledges any one as its lawful head, though the election may have been for some cause invalid, he thereby receives the sanction of the Church, which is equivalent to a second and valid election; whereupon he succeeds to all that power vested in the head of the Church. Hence no secret flaw can practically invalidate a papal election, and every defect in the election is removed by the

ratification of the Church, so that any pope, universally acknowledged by the Church, is necessarily the true successor of St. Peter.