

## THE POPE OF ROME

### As Head of the Church—How did the Idea of the Papacy Develop?

*Translated from the Kikongo Language*



### WHAT IS THE IDEA OF THE PAPACY?

When we think of the term “The Pope,” we are thinking of the idea held by many that one person in Rome has authority to rule the whole church. We are speaking of the idea many have that Jesus gave the Apostle Peter authority to rule the entire church or to be the head of the entire church. According to this idea, the person that people called the Pope today is a successor of the Apostle Peter and has therefore received the authority that they believe Jesus gave to Peter. We are speaking of the idea that the Pope in Rome is the mouthpiece of God, the one that has received from God the right to lead the entire church. We are speaking of the idea that when he speaks “ex cathedra” or in his official capacity as Pope, he cannot err, but speaks only truth from God that all Christians are obligated to obey and follow. Many people today believe this teaching about the Pope. Although not all Catholics might agree, this is in fact the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church today.

### IS THE IDEA OF THE PAPACY FOUND IN THE BIBLE?

Many people believe the teaching I have described because of the way they interpret the words of Jesus in Matthew 16:16-19.

*“Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall 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 whatsoever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.’ ” (Matthew 16:16-19 NKJV)*

Some believe that Jesus gave the Apostle Peter authority over the other apostles. It is true that Jesus gave the Apostle Peter authority which is recorded in these verses. However, look closely & consider carefully. The words that Jesus spoke to Peter in these verses are very much like the words He spoke to all the disciples in Matthew 18:18-20.

*“Assuredly, I say to you, ‘whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in*

*the midst of them.” (Matthew 28:18-20 NKJV)*

These verses show that all Christians have the authority to call on or use the authority of Jesus Christ Himself! Jesus showed this authority FIRST to Peter, but He did not show it ONLY to Peter. Just as He spoke to Peter, at another time shortly later, He spoke in almost the same way to all the disciples.

The idea of the papacy is not found in the Bible at all. The book of the Acts of the Apostles is the God-inspired history of the first church. When we read Acts, we can see what the early church was like and what its beliefs and practices were. The problem is, we do not see a scrap of evidence for either the idea or the practice of the papacy at all in the book of Acts. Jesus did not institute the idea of the papacy. The apostles did not practice any such thing as the papacy. The Apostle Peter himself did not recognize any such idea, even though much later, some people said that Peter was the first Pope. However, in the Bible we see nothing like Peter ruling over the other apostles or the church.

The book of the Acts of the Apostles is a book that shows us how the first church practiced its faith. If Peter was indeed the first Pope, the ruler of the church, we should see that in practice in the book of Acts. However, what do we see in Acts? Chapter 15 shows how the leaders of the church got together to decide about a troublesome issue. Peter was just one of several church leaders who spoke at this meeting. The Apostles made the decision about the issue together (vs. 22). Peter was not the one who made the decision. If he had been the pope in the modern understanding of the word, we would have expected him to be the one to make the

decision. But he did not do so because he was not the pope. There was no pope. The papacy is an idea that is foreign to the Bible.

If Peter was the Pope, all Christians, even all the Apostles, would have been obliged to obey him. But in Galatians 2:11-14, we see the Apostle Paul scold the Apostle Peter. Paul would not have done so if Peter had been the Pope. Peter would not have received or “stood still for” such scolding from Paul if he had authority like that of the modern idea of the Pope. The Apostle Paul felt free to scold Peter because he knew nothing about any idea like that of the papacy. The Apostle Peter knew nothing about any such idea. None of the Apostles knew anything about any such idea as the Pope ruling the entire church.

If Peter had been the first pope, would not his teachings or writings indicate something to that effect? Would not he have set forth the claim that Jesus had given him authority to rule the church? But what did the Apostle Peter write in his epistles? He called himself only an Apostle of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:1), and one of the elders of the church (1 Peter 5:1).

The idea of the papacy is not found anywhere in the Scriptures. It was not known or practiced by the Apostles. It was not known by the early church.

### **DID THE IDEA OF THE PAPACY DEVELOP SOON AFTER THE TIME OF THE APOSTLES?**

If we consider the years immediately following the time of the Apostles, we still do not find any evidence of anything like a papacy in the church. Many church leaders wrote during this time period, men like Ignatius (30-107 A.D.), Polycarp (65-155

A.D.), Barnabas (ca. 100 A.D.), AND Matias (ca. 130 A.D.). Ignatius wrote that Christians must obey their pastors<sup>i</sup>, but not one writer wrote anything that would support the idea that a papacy existed. For one hundred years after Jesus, Christians knew nothing about the idea of a papacy.

### **DID THE CHRISTIANS OF THE SECOND CENTURY, THEN, ACKNOWLEDGE THE IDEA OF THE PAPACY?**

In the second century (100-200 A.D.), an issue arose in the church that clearly shows us how Christians of the time viewed the authority of the Bishop of Rome. The Bishop or the leader responsible for Christians in Rome was Eleutherius. He began to follow false teachings of a man named Montanus. Montanus taught that the Spirit of God had come again to show him (Montanus) new teachings that God was revealing in his day. Eleutherius was the bishop or leader over Christians in the city of Rome. He was a leader or well known elder in the church at Rome, but he began to follow the false teachings of Montanus.<sup>ii</sup>

### **Irenaeus, Assistant Pastor of Lyons, Publicly Opposed Eleutherius, Bishop of Rome**

Irenaeus was only an assistant pastor. His work was to assist Pastor Potinus, who worked in Lyons, Gaul (modern-day France). But Irenaeus was a strong teacher, so Potinus sent him to Rome to fight against the false teaching that had taken root there. On arriving, he was dumbfounded to find that The Bishop of Rome himself had been caught up in these heresies. Irenaeus wrote his book, “Against Heresies” as a result of this struggle.

What do you think? If Eleutherius, the Bishop of Rome, was considered the Pope, the supreme head of the church, the infallible mouthpiece of God, do you think an assistant pastor like Irenaeus would be authorized to oppose his teaching? Wouldn't Irenaeus rather be bound to obey his teaching rather than trying to change it or speaking out against it?

There's no way Irenaeus could have done such a thing if Eleutherius had been Pope or had been considered Pope by church leaders. We must conclude that neither Potinus nor Irenaeus could have considered the Eleutherius to be the Pope. The truth is, no one in the entire church knew anything about any idea like the papacy in either the first or the second centuries. They followed a system of pastoral leadership in which pastors were seen as shepherds the way Jesus taught them. They did not have any centralized authority like the Pope.

However, it is ironical that Irenaeus wrote some words that afterwards were used to lend support to the idea of the papacy. It is always important to understand the CONTEXT in which a writing was produced. The context is the situation the writer was addressing, his reason for writing, and the writing as a whole—the words and ideas that come before and those that come after the words in question.

### **Irenaeus' Misquoted Words: “The church speaks with one mouth”**

One reason Irenaeus wrote his book, “Against Heresies” was to show that the teaching that Eleutherius Bishop of Rome was advancing was really following the thoughts of pagan philosophers, but that the teaching of Christianity was not in harmony with it.<sup>iii</sup> Irenaeus wrote that Christians must refuse this teaching (the teaching of

Montanus, the teaching that Eleutherius was following) WITH ONE MOUTH.<sup>iv</sup> Irenaeus wrote that from the time of the Apostles until his time, the church of Jesus Christ had followed one teaching, but that then false teachers had introduced a new and false teaching into the church. He claimed that all true Christians refused this false teaching WITH ONE MOUTH.

We must understand very clearly that according to Irenaeus, the person who was following this false teaching was Eleutherius, the Bishop of Rome. Irenaeus simply claimed that not only he, but Christians everywhere refused this false teaching.

Much later, some people took Irenaeus' phrase WITH ONE MOUTH and twisted it around to use it in a different way and to give a different meaning. They began to say that the whole church must accept the Pope's teaching, for the church speaks with one mouth, and that one mouth is the mouth of the Pope. Do you see how this is nearly the opposite meaning that Irenaeus gave those words, when considered in context? Irenaeus wrote this phrase WITH ONE MOUTH against accepting the teaching of the man who was the Bishop of Rome in his day. He wrote it to say that the church must fight heresy with one mouth and not that the Bishop of Rome was that one mouth.

### **Apostolic Succession (How the Successors of the Apostles Got Their Authority)**

Irenaeus wrote that there had been eleven bishops who had led the church at Rome before Eleutherius, and they all had spoken WITH ONE MOUTH concerning the faith of Jesus Christ. He therefore called on Eleutherius to follow their true teaching and to leave the false teaching he had been

following. He listed all the bishops who had shepherded the church of Rome up to that time. (Rome was a large city, therefore the pastor responsible for the Christians in that city was called a bishop.) Irenaeus claimed that the first bishops of Rome had been Paul and Peter, then Linus, Anacetus, Clement, Evaristus, Alexandre, Sixtus, Telephorus, Hyginus, Pius, and Anacetus.<sup>v</sup> The argument of Irenaeus was that the teaching of Jesus Christ in the city of Rome had begun with the Apostles, and that up to the time of Eleutherius, every bishop had followed in that teaching, that is, spoken with one mouth.

Even though Irenaeus wrote that Paul and Peter had been the first shepherds of the flock at the city of Rome, he did not say that Peter was the first Pope or the first head of the church universal. Paul and Peter are listed only as the first leaders of the Christian church in the city of Rome. They are listed equally, and they are listed as Apostles, not as the Pope.

Neither does Irenaeus claim that the successors of Paul and Peter to the bishopric of Rome were Popes who had responsibility or authority over the whole church. Although he does list their successors, they are listed only as bishops of Rome, with no more authority than others who shepherded the flock of Jesus in other cities.<sup>vi</sup>

Yes, Irenaeus did talk about the idea of apostolic succession, that is, the idea that the apostles were succeeded or followed by others. He was the first to talk about this idea, or to list the successors of one of the apostles. But what did Irenaeus mean by this? What was his purpose in writing about this? What point was he trying to make? What was the context in which he wrote about apostolic succession? He was

not writing this to show that the bishop of Rome was the Pope or that the Bishop of Rome had any special authority over the church in other places. He was not writing to show that all Christians should follow the Bishop of Rome. Far from that! Rather, it was almost the contrary. He was writing to show that the Bishop of Rome was in error and that he should change his teaching. The reason Irenaeus had been sent to Rome was to try to convince the Bishop of Rome that he was in the wrong.

Again, much later some people seized the idea of Apostolic Succession, and tearing it from its context, put it in another setting entirely different and totally contrary to that of the original. They later began to say that the Bishop of Rome had special authority from God over all the church, because Jesus gave His own authority to the Apostles, who in turn passed it on to their successors, who passed it on to their successors, and so forth until the present day.

However, in the original context, Irenaeus was using the idea of apostolic succession to show that every church leader, including the one in question, the Bishop of Rome, had a responsibility to follow the teaching that the Apostles had given and that their successors up to that point had also followed. His reason for mentioning apostolic succession was not to prove any idea like the papacy, but to give the Bishop of Rome reasons for abandoning the false teaching into which he had fallen, to convince him to return to the faith of the Apostles.

### **Irenaeus the First to Use the Term, “Catholic Church”**

Irenaeus was the first to use the term “catholic” in connection with the church.<sup>vii</sup> He used “catholic” in the sense of

“universal” or “one”. He was not using it in the sense of distinguishing between Catholic and Protestant, for in fact, neither of those ideas were yet a reality. He was not speaking of the modern Roman Catholic or the Greek Catholic church, but simply of the whole or universal church following the teaching Jesus gave to His apostles. His argument was that the whole church was against Eleutherius’s heresy, so he said the “catholic” (universal, whole) church was against the teaching of Montanus, which Eleutherius was following. The modern idea of Roman Catholicism developed gradually much later, and is in fact a contradiction in terms, since it specifies a specific place or a specific brand in the same breath as claiming that the church is universal. Irenaeus claimed only that it was universal, and universally united against the Montanus heresy.

### **Irenaeus Fought Against Victor, Another Bishop of Rome**

The Bishop of Rome who followed Eleutherius was named Victor. Victor began to try to force Christians in other places to follow his leadership. One of the questions Christians disagreed about in the church of the second century divided Christians in the East and in the West. This question was about which day the Christians should celebrate Jesus’ death and resurrection. Victor pushed hard to try to force all Christians to follow his decision in the matter, but Christians in the East refused.<sup>viii</sup>

What does this tell us? Did the Christians in the East recognize him as the Pope, the representative of God on earth over the whole church? The mouthpiece of God? No. Up until that time, Christians had not yet developed any idea that one person was supposed to be over the whole church or

that one person had such authority that all Christians should follow him.

Irenaeus wrote to Victor in Rome, trying to get him to seek peace in the matter. Irenaeus told Victor that if he tried to force the issue, it could divide the church. Again, he followed the argument of naming the bishops who had held Victor's position before him, arguing that these bishops sought peace in the church, giving Christians in every place the choice of celebrating the Easter season at the time they chose. Irenaeus was trying to convince Victor to act in a manner that would promote peace within the church. In doing so, he had some very strong and critical words for Victor. He said that Victor did not know the love of Jesus Christ.<sup>ix</sup> Strange words for an assistant pastor, if Victor had been recognized as the supreme leader of the whole church!

### **Where was the idea of the papacy in the second century?**

If Irenaeus had recognized either Eleutherius or Victor as being the Pope, the supreme leader of the whole church, he would not have dared to give them counsel or to criticize them in the way he did. If Christians had recognized Victor as having authority over the whole church, there is no way they could have argued with his decisions. But the way the Christians in the East responded to Victor's attempts to force them to do things his way, as well as Irenaeus' dealings with him, show clearly that up to 190 years after Jesus, there was no leader over the entire church. Furthermore, there was no idea amongst Christians that there should be such an office.

We can see that the desire to rule had begun to capture the heart of the Bishop of Rome,

but the authority to do so was not recognized by others in the church.

### **Other witnesses who did not recognize any idea like the papacy**

There were many others in the church who wrote in the second century. Other second century church writers were: The Shepherd of Hermas, ca. 160 A.D., Tatien, 110-172 A.D., Justin Martyr, 100-165 A.D., Clement of Alexandria, 153-217 A.D., Athenagorus of Athens ca. 100-165 A.D., and Theophilus, d. 181 A.D. Not even one of them wrote anything that could remotely be construed as showing that there was any such idea as that of the papacy. Therefore, we see for the first 200 years after Jesus, Christians did not know of any such idea, nor did they have any such practice.

### **DID CHRISTIANS OF THE THIRD CENTURY KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THE PAPACY?**

#### **Hippolytus opposed two Bishops of Rome—Zephyrine and Calixtus**

Hippolytus (170-236 A.D.) was the pastor of Porte, which was a province of Rome. He was a member of the presbytery or pastoral council of the city of Rome. He wrote a book, "Against False Teaching, Book 9", which opposed two Roman Bishops—Zephyrine and his successor, Calixtus. These men were the fifteenth and sixteenth bishops of Rome. Some modern historians who extend the history of the papacy back that far call them the fifteenth and sixteenth popes.<sup>x</sup> Pastor Hippolytus wrote that these bishops of Rome were teaching false doctrine and living evil, hypocritical lives.<sup>xi</sup>

Listen to Hippolytus as he writes about them: “Zephyrine and Calixtus were strong in false teaching, men of falsehood.”<sup>xii</sup>

Hippolytus complains that Calixtus was very wise in every evil practice, that he forgave evil teachers, and that he was confused about the Trinity.<sup>xiii</sup> He said Zephyrine was a fool and an evil man who knew no shame.<sup>xiv</sup> It can hardly be said that Hippolytus recognized either of these men as anything like the pope! Neither did the other pastors in the city of Rome acknowledge the Bishop of Rome as the mouthpiece of God! If they had, they would have been obliged to follow the bishop’s teachings.

### **Cyprian—All bishops are equal.**

Cyprian (200-258 A.D.) was a pastor at Carthage, a city in North Africa. Cyprian wrote that all the bishops spoke with one voice (the WITH ONE MOUTH idea again), and that they were all equally representatives of Jesus. He did not agree that the Bishop of Rome was special or had any authority over other bishops. He did not write that the church was founded on the pope or on the Roman Bishop alone, but on all the bishops.<sup>xv</sup>

### **Cyprian & The African Christians conflict with Rome**

Two matters arose in the time of Cyprian that threatened to divide the church. The first was the question of what discipline or punishment the church should give those who had fallen away or compromised their faith in time of persecution but wished to return to the church afterwards. This was a very difficult issue, because so many Christians had suffered and even died for their faith during those times. Stephen, the 23<sup>rd</sup> bishop of Rome, felt that those

Christians should only confess their wrongdoing and be received back into the church. Cyprian and most of the Christians in Africa wanted such people to go through a time of testing before receiving them back into the church. Those who had fallen away included church leaders, and the African Christians were afraid to put them back into positions of leadership without testing them first.

The second matter was how the church would receive those who had received their baptism in a church that taught false doctrine, such as the sects that believed that Jesus was not really God. Stephen, the Bishop of Rome, wanted just to lay hands on them to show that they had returned to correct doctrine. By doing so, he was giving implicit approval of the baptism of those sects. Cyprian and the African Christians held that if such persons had truly repented, they should afterwards receive baptism from the church. They did not approve of the baptism of the sects as being genuine baptism.

Stephen and Cyprian discussed these matters at great length in an exchange of letters between them. Each of them presented many arguments trying to convince the other that his point of view was correct. However, neither was able to convince the other, so in the end, both retained their own positions. Cyprian and the African Christians refused the position of Stephen Bishop of Rome on these issues. If the Christians in the African Church had regarded Stephen as the Pope (being the Bishop of Rome), would they not have felt themselves obligated to submit to his ideas? Their actions show clearly that they regard him as simply another bishop equal to themselves, with whom they have a differing point of view.

### **Who is sitting on the chair of Peter?**

In their discussion, Stephen wrote, “Listen to me. I am here on the chair of the Apostle Peter.” This was the first time a bishop of Rome had used this argument, treating the “chair of the Apostle Peter” as if it were some special position in the church.

That was his claim, but the Christians in North Africa did not accept his argument. Their leader Cyprian responded, “How can he say that he is somebody special? All of us bishops are equal.” The Christians in North Africa got together to discuss this issue. They agreed with the idea of Cyprian that all bishops were equal and refused the idea of Stephen that the Bishop of Rome had special authority because he sat on the seat of Peter.

### **Cyprian: One True Church, The Catholic Church**

The letters that Cyprian wrote to Stephen began in a very polite manner. He did not begin by speaking of Stephen as an enemy outside of the church but called him “My beloved brother.” However, Cyprian never called Stephen by any title like the pope, nor recognized him as having any position of authority. He refused to follow Stephen’s ideas as if he were the leader of the whole church.

However, when Stephen refused to listen to Cyprian and to acknowledge him as the leader of the African churches, Cyprian began to write to him in a different manner. Cyprian accused Stephen of shattering the peace and unity of the church, of making a grave mistake, of being blind, a fool, an audacious and proud person, even a person who is like Judas who sold Jesus!<sup>xvi</sup>

As Irenaeus had done, Cyprian argued frequently that the church is one and that it has authority. He wrote frequently about the idea of “ONE TRUE CHURCH.” He wanted to influence Christians to obey the church. He also used the phrase “CATHOLIC CHURCH” a lot. Like Irenaeus, he used this term to show that the church was not one of the sects that denied the deity of Jesus. The one true church was the one that believed that Jesus was the Son of God and very God. Like with Irenaeus, many years later people read into these phrases that he used other teaching that Cyprian never intended. Much later, some used these phrases to support the views of the developing Roman Catholic Church. However, Cyprian used these terms AGAINST the Bishop of Rome!

Therefore, up until the end of the third century we can say that although the desire to rule was being manifested in the Bishops of Rome, other Christians were not recognizing them as having such authority. Amongst those who did not recognize such authority were the Christians in North Africa. From the beginning, they did not agree that a church leader from a European city had the authority to rule over them, and they were deciding their own affairs without following the Bishop of Rome.

### **AND WHAT ABOUT THE FOURTH CENTURY?**

#### **Constantine— Unite the Church with the State of Rome**

Constantine was an Emperor of Rome who at first followed the traditional gods of Rome. However, in the year 313, he claimed to become a Christian. He then ended the persecution of Christians so that Christians no longer suffered at the hands of the Roman state. From his time onward,



the church began to be tied closely to the Roman state. From that time on, the Bishops of Rome began to push harder and harder for the authority to rule the whole church. The Bishops of Rome spoke, wrote, and acted in ways designed to push their authority. But even then, the church did not yet agree to recognize the Bishop of Rome's authority over them.

The Emperor Constantine divided the church into four major prefectures or districts, and he divided each prefecture into dioceses. This gave greater authority to the pastors who were over the prefectures. But not all Christians followed this system, as we will see later.<sup>xvii</sup> Many people believe that Constantine accepted Christianity because he saw in it a way to unite people from many tribes within his empire. For ease of control, they believe, he wanted the church to be one, and its control to be in the hands of a few.<sup>xviii</sup>

### **The Council of Nicea— Pastors of Big Towns More Authoritative Than Those over Small Towns**

In the year 325 A.D., a large and important gathering of pastors took place at Nicea. The Roman Emperor Constantine called them together. For purposes of our study, we might note that it was not the Bishop of Rome who convened them. The first person to speak in the conference was Bishop Eusebius, not the Bishop of Rome.<sup>xix</sup>

If Christians had recognized the Bishop of Rome as the pope or the leader of the church, would it not have been him who convened the gathering? Would he not have been the first person to speak?

Two hundred fifty bishops attended the gathering. At this conference, they decided that bishops in large towns should have

more authority than those in smaller towns, possibly because they represented more people. This was the beginning of the consolidation of official authority within the church, but in the system of having bishops it seems that their practice was already moving in this direction.<sup>xx</sup>

### **Eusebius pushed the idea of Apostolic Succession**

Eusebius (ca 263-339), Bishop of Cesarea, was the first to attempt to write a history of the church from the time of the Apostles up to his own day. He wanted to show that all the churches in the major metropolitan centers were started by the Apostles. He placed much emphasis on the idea of Apostolic Succession, not to argue that the Bishop of Rome was the Pope (that idea had not yet been set forth), but to show that the church of his time was truly apostolic because the Apostles themselves had begun all its major centers.<sup>xxi</sup> Eusebius said that Paul and Peter had been in Rome, but he did not claim that Peter was anything like pope. He wrote that three centers—Rome, Alexandria, and Jerusalem, were equal because all three were major centers where the Apostles themselves had started the church. People like Irenaeus and Eusebius used this idea that big centers had authority in the church because the Apostles started those churches. However, afterwards, when Constantinople became a large and powerful city, they agreed that the bishop there also had authority simply because it was a powerful city, even though the Apostles did not start the church in that place.

Therefore, it seems that these church fathers may have used arguments that seemed to support their case without believing wholeheartedly in those arguments without exception. This might have been a

weakness that later enabled others to use their arguments in ways they never intended. Of course, as the saying goes, “Hindsight is always better than foresight.”

### **The Council of Sardis & after—The Bishop of Rome was seen as a judge over other pastors.**

A church council convened at Sardis in the year 347 and decided that the church would no longer place bishops in small towns, but only in large cities.<sup>xxii</sup> This practice helped even more for power to become centralized in large cities, and thus to become more allied to politics.

This council gave Julius, the Bishop of Rome, authority to place judges to decide matters for other pastors who had fallen into problems.<sup>xxiii</sup> The bishops of Rome of that period had a huge hunger to rule over church matters. They seized the power given at this council with all their might and extended its implications even further.

Afterwards, the Roman Emperor Valentinian gave the Bishop of Rome the authority of the State to decide matters of other pastors. This had the effect of ultimately bringing every problem to Rome, where the Bishop of Rome was able to control it.<sup>xxiv</sup>

### **The Council of Constantinople—Rome & Constantinople recognized as major centers**

A church council met at Constantinople in the year 381. It decided that in one sense every diocese was independent, and that bishops were not to interfere in the affairs of other districts. For instance, they were not to go to other districts to give ordination to new pastors unless that district had invited them to do so. This seems like a

throwback to the earlier practices & policies of the church during the times of the Apostles and the first three centuries afterwards.

However, the council also gave special recognition to Rome, Alexandria, Constantinople, Antioch, and Jerusalem as big and important cities. Further, it stated that chief amongst these were Rome and Constantinople, which it dubbed “New Rome.”<sup>xxv</sup> We see in this council the church struggling with the two ideas— independence of church districts and the primacy of Rome, trying in its own way to recognize both. Of course, the two are contradictory, but those attending the Council at Constantinople did not yet know where these tendencies were going to lead the church. Their compromise seemed to bring peace for the time being.

### **WHAT WAS THE SITUATION IN THE FIFTH CENTURY?**

#### **Augustine— What is the rock on which the church is built?**

In the beginning of the fifth century, a great writer wrote to explain the meaning of the rock on which Jesus said He would build his church (Matthew 16:16-19, see page 1 of this treatise). Augustine was the Bishop of Hippo in North Africa. He did not believe that Peter was that rock, but he wrote rather that the rock was Peter’s confession that Jesus was the Son of God. Augustine wrote that Jesus said He would build His church on the rock of Himself.<sup>xxvi</sup>

#### **African Christians refused to allow Rome to rule them.**

In the fifth century, Christians from North Africa refused the decision of the Council

of Sardica, saying that they must allow the Bishop of Rome to settle their disputes and affairs. They saw no reason to go to a far-away country for such a purpose.

There arose an issue involving Pastor Colestius from North Africa, who was giving false teaching. The Church in Africa refused to ordain him. Seeking someone to support him, Colestius appealed his case to Bishop Zosimus in Rome, who returned him to his pastorate. However, the other pastors of North Africa refused the decision of the Bishop of Rome. They claimed that the Church in Africa was independent of Rome and that the Bishop of Rome had no right to rule over them.<sup>xxvii</sup>

### **The Council of Chalcedon— Rome and Constantinople are equal.**

The church council that convened at Chalcedon in 451 A.D. decided that in their eyes, the big centers Rome and Constantinople were equal or alike in their authority within the church.<sup>xxviii</sup>

### **The Anger of the Roman Bishop Leo and His Hunger for Power**

Leo, who was the Bishop of Rome, was very angry at the decision of the Council of Chalcedon. He did not like the idea that Constantinople should have power equal to that of Rome. He desired to rule over the whole church. He claimed that all Christians must follow him because he was the successor of the Apostle Peter through the process of Apostolic Succession. So, he began to look for occasions on which he might press forward and expand his power.

Many in the church did not like the idea of his power grab, but many succumbed because although Leo was a very evil man, the Bishop of Constantinople was even

worse. Some who lived close to Rome liked Leo because when enemies came to attack the city, he defended them. Thus, power in and around the city of Rome was consolidated more and more in the hands of Leo, the Bishop of Rome. However, not all Christians accepted Leo as their leader. Hilary, the Bishop of Gaul (in what is today France) refused the advice and leadership of Leo.<sup>xxix</sup>

Because Leo had such great hunger for power, many people do consider him to be the first pope. It was exactly this that Leo sought, in truth. Although the title of Pope was not yet known, the idea of being the universal ruler of the church was what he sought. In this desire, Leo experienced much success, but he still was unable to lead the entire church as he wanted to do.

### **Emperor Valentinian III— The Bishop of Rome is the Head of the Western Church**

The Roman Emperor Valentinian III wanted all church power to be centered in Rome alone. This would make it easier for him to control the Christians. In the year 445 A.D., he proclaimed that the Bishop of Rome was the head of all the western churches.<sup>xxx</sup> He gave these reasons for his proclamation: That Peter was the foremost of the Apostles, and that Rome was the capital of the empire and an important city. He said that to refuse to follow the Bishop of Rome was the same as refusing the authority of the Empire of Rome (and that, of course, was a very dangerous thing to do.) He ordered that the bishops of Gaul, like Hilary, for example, could not do anything without the approval of the “papa of the eternal city” (the Bishop of Rome).

“Papa” was a common term of respect, just as in Africa today we may call an older man

“papa” as a term of respect. However, Emperor Valentinian began to use it in a new way to refer only to the Bishop of Rome, as a way of conferring special honor on him. Since he was doing so, its use for other pastors began to die out. People have called the Bishop of Rome “Papa” or “The Pope” to this day.

### **DEVELOPMENT OF THE IDEA OF THE PAPACY IN THE SIXTH CENTURY**

Even though the efforts of the Bishops of Rome to extend their powers so that all Christians must follow them began in its infant form way back in the second century, they did not come right out and say that they had power to rule the whole church. The first church leader, however, to make such a claim overtly lived very near to the sixth century. Strangely enough, he was not the Bishop of Rome as one might expect, but rather the Bishop of Constantinople. The hunger for power was great there, too!

#### **Authority to Rule the Whole Church— from Constantinople!**

Jean the Faster (in the sense of fasting from food), the Bishop of Constantinople, said in 588 A.D., “I have power to rule over the whole church.” How did the Bishop of Rome react to this claim from his competitor in the “other” big city? Gregory, the Bishop of Rome, was very angry. He wrote that this idea that one bishop could be the head of the church was “anti-Christian, blasphemous, new, the pride of the antichrist, and a thought coming from Satan”! Gregory said, “No Christian can say such a thing, if he is truly a Christian.”<sup>xxxii</sup>

The interesting thing is that Gregory did not say, “No, it’s not you who has such authority, but it’s me instead.” No, he rather claimed that the very thought of such an authority was anti-Christian, blasphemous, new, the pride of antichrist, coming from Satan. He said that Christians can’t talk that way.

Even though Gregory spoke this way, it appears that he was just jealous of Jean for making such a claim before he could do so. There was a lot of politics tied up in the church in those days. Leaders tended to say whatever they thought would bring them the power they sought. We know that Gregory, too, sought such power, because he asked the Emperor Maurice to give him the title of “Universal Bishop,” which would have implied the very powers he so detested in Jean. However, Maurice refused.<sup>xxxii</sup>

### **DEVELOPMENT OF THE IDEA OF THE PAPACY IN THE SEVENTH CENTURY**

#### **The Emperor Named Boniface III as the Universal Pope**

In the year 607 A.D., The Roman Emperor Phocas ruled that the Bishop of Rome alone was to be considered the Universal Pope. Boniface III was bishop at that time. The emperor acknowledged him and said specifically that the Universal Pope was not at Constantinople, but at Rome. Therefore, the power of the State of Rome helped to impose the authority of the Roman Bishop on Christians. But even though Boniface spoke as if he were the Pope, and even though the state also said so, still all Christians did not agree at that time.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF THE IDEA OF THE PAPACY IN THE EIGHTH CENTURY**

### **Emperor Charlemagne acted as the head of the church**

When Charlemagne was the Emperor of the Roman Empire beginning in 768 A.D., he was a very strong ruler. He acted as if he himself, the Emperor, were in fact the ruler of the church. He meddled constantly in church affairs, and even reversed decisions that the Bishop of Rome had made.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF THE IDEA OF THE PAPACY GAINS SPEED IN THE NINTH CENTURY**

### **Nicolas I pushed the power of the Pope**

However, after the time of Charlemagne, his children were not strong rulers like he was. Therefore, the Bishop of Rome, Nicolas I (858-867 A.D.) seized back control of the church. During his time, letters came out that gave the Pope great powers. These letters were “The Donation of Constantine” and the “Decretals of Isidore”. They were widely believed at the time, but many years later, these documents were proven to be forgeries. They had simply been created to bolster up the powers of the developing papacy. Nicolas seized true papal powers. While some of his predecessors might have been considered popes, in him the power of the papacy had truly grown so that we can know say for sure that he was Pope in the modern Roman Catholic sense of the word.

The teaching of the church and the practices of the church, although they had been problematic for some time, now left the way of truth significantly. Especially in doctrines considered church leadership, the

doctrine and practice of the church was now totally contradictory to the teaching and practice of the Scriptures and the Apostles.

The church left God’s way because it had become so tied to politics and the desire to rule in an earthly sense. For centuries the church had refused the ambitions of the Bishops of Rome to rule them, but now the entire western church was under heavy pressure to bow to the authority of Rome, and most did. Christians who bowed to the authority of the Roman Bishop now called Universal Pope became the ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church was not the church that Jesus left on earth. It was not the church that was led by the Apostles. It was a church that developed over time as churches became more and more allied with politics and less and less concerned with the true teaching of Jesus as given in the Scriptures and as attested to by the early fathers of the church.

## **GROWTH OF THE PAPACY AFTER THE NINTH CENTURY**

Even though the power and authority of the Roman Pope had become very strong, even though he was by and large ruling the entire western church, even though people were now calling him by the title “Universal Pope”, the idea of the papacy was still growing and had not yet reached its ultimatum state. Many years later, the Roman Catholic church added these ideas to the growth idea of the papacy:

**Innocent III (1198-1216)** This Pope claimed that Jesus had given him the authority to rule over the entire earth. He also claimed that the Pope had the authority to decide issues for everyone, but no one could decide issues for him.

**Boniface VIII (1294)** This Pope ordered that all people everywhere must obey him. If they did not do so, they could not be saved.

**Pius IX (1846)** This Pope had the audacity to take songs of praise that were formerly sung to God, and put his own name in the place of God's! He made a law that all Christians must believe that he was infallible, never making a mistake when he spoke "ex cathedra", or making an official pronouncement from his chair of authority as head of the church. This Pope made many changes and added many new doctrines such as the doctrine of the immaculate conception. This doctrine holds that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was conceived without sin and never sinned. She was "immaculate." He also published a "Syllabus of Errors" which aimed at total control of all aspects of people's lives. For example, the Syllabus declared that:

- No one can hold any other religion than Roman Catholic. Those who try to do so will not be permitted to live in peace.
- Marriages outside the Roman Catholic Church are not legitimate.
- All education must be under the control of the Roman Catholic Church.
- It is a sin for lay people (those who are not pastors) to read the Bible.

### **The First Vatican Council (1870)**

This church council officially declared what Pius IX had personally claimed, that the Pope is infallible when speaking from his seat of authority. At this conference, there was much discussion and controversy over this issue, much pressure was placed on

delegates, and at the very end, the doctrine was approved. Many former Roman Catholics disagreed with the doctrine and left the Roman Church at that time over the issue. They formed a new group called "The Old Catholic Church."

**Leo XIII (1878)** This Pope claimed that he as Pope stood in the place of God Almighty.

So, as late as the 1800's, the idea of the papacy was still expanding and developing. More recent leaders have been more moderate in their claims and pronouncements, but none have ever refuted the claims of previous popes.

### **SUMMARY OF THE MAIN PRINCIPLES WE HAVE LEARNED:**

1. The teachings of the Bible and the Apostles did not know anything even remotely resembling the modern idea of the papacy. The teaches of the church got messed up little by little, slowly, teacher by teacher and idea by idea, until the tremendous false teaching of the papacy was finally accepted. This process took hundreds of years.
2. The idea of the papacy began with a hunger for power and for fame.
3. The idea of the papacy was finally accepted because the church began heavily aligned with politics, and especially, with the politics of Rome. Gradually spiritual considerations became less important and political considerations became more important.
4. Church writers who wanted to support the growing idea of the papacy used old words and powerful phrases that had

been written centuries before in entirely different contexts (pope, catholic, apostolic succession, with one mouth, one true church, etc.) They gave these terms new meanings, often the exact opposite of the way in which the word was originally used. The new meanings became widely accepted.

5. Some bishops struggled amongst themselves for power. In the end, the Bishop of Rome won out, with the help of the Emperor of Rome
6. Some bishops even lied and forged false documents to bolster up their power. . The idea of the papacy grew quickly based on faith in these false documents.
7. Even though the Roman Bishop (and some others) sought power from an early date, they could not rule Christians until Christians agreed to be ruled by them. This held back the growth of the papacy for a long time.

### **SO WHAT?**

We Protestants do not accept the Pope of Rome as our leader. We accept the Bible as our only authority, which is binding on us in all matters. The Bible also tells us to obey those who have spiritual oversight over us in the church and to esteem them very highly for their work's sake. Therefore, we seek to obey and honor our pastors and church leaders in obedience to Jesus' command, but always recognizing God's Word the Bible as our final authority.

When leaders seek their own advancement, when they seek to lord it over others under their care, these practices are very destructive to the work of God. Pastors should serve God in a spirit of humility and

care for the spiritual sheep that Jesus has put in their care.

The African Church refused for many years to be controlled by an outsider. Africa was for a long time one of the prime holdouts against the growing tendency to center power in Rome.

Many years later, the Catholic Church of the colonizing powers of Europe sent missionaries to Africa. Many people accepted their teaching, including the idea of the papacy, because they did not know the truth of the Bible or the facts of history.

Some, hearing about Jesus for the first time in the teaching of Roman Catholic missionaries, may have genuinely received Christ as Roman Catholics, even though their teaching left them confused about many things.

However, today the Bible is entering strongly into Africa once again. Africans are welcoming it, as they did when it first reached Africa in the first century. I believe that African Christians today are once again going to follow the example of their fathers who long ago welcomed Christianity and practiced it independently of Rome. They refused the rule of the Pope, but they welcomed the rule of Jesus Christ. May the African church today follow their example!

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### **SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What is the idea of the pope as understood by the Roman Catholic church today?
2. How is the idea of the papacy different from the ideas of pastoral oversight that we see in the New Testament?
3. Who were some of the church fathers who did NOT believe that Peter was the rock on which the church was founded?
4. What shows us that the idea of the papacy actually began with the hunger for power?
5. What are some ways other early bishops showed their refusal to let the bishop of Rome rule over them?
6. With so much early opposition to the idea, what are some of the reasons that the idea of the papacy eventually won out?
7. Early Christian writers frequently used arguments suggesting that something should be done or believed because the apostles and their successors had done it or believed it. The argument goes that since the church has spoken in the past “with one mouth” about an issue, we should not now deviate from it. It is obvious now that their arguments led in directions they never intended or dreamed. What was wrong with their arguments? What would have been a stronger line of argument that would not later have led the church into problems?
8. Does God desire Christians today to submit to the Pope in Rome? Why or why not?
9. What do you think God wants you to do with this new knowledge you have learned about the papacy?
10. What church near to your home follows the Bible teaching in this matter? Are you willing to join with this church?
11. We Protestants do not see the Pope in Rome as the head of the church. But what dangers do you see even for us?

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12. Do you agree that the Apostle Peter was the first Pope? Why or why not?
  13. Can we legitimately call the Roman bishops of the first few centuries popes? Why or why not?
  14. Who might we consider as the first pope? At what date?
  15. How has this study changed your ideas about the papacy?

