

# The Pope

by Sebastian R. Fama

What Catholics believe about the papacy, was first expressed by Jesus Himself:

"But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, **you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church**, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and **whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven**" (Matthew 16:15-19).

When God gives someone a new name it signifies a new role. For example, He changed Abram to Abraham. Abraham means father of many nations, which is what Abraham became. Peter means rock, which is what Peter became. The standard argument against this is that Peter in Greek is petros (πέτρος), meaning pebble, and that rock is petra (πέτρα), meaning mass of rock. Since Peter is a pebble, he cannot be the rock. Those who support this argument fail to take into account John 1:42: "Jesus looked at him, and said, **'So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas.'**" The Apostle Paul refers to Peter as Cephas eight out of the ten times that he mentions him. Cephas is the transliteration of the Aramaic word Kepha. Aramaic is the language that Jesus and His apostles spoke. **KEPHA** means **ROCK** the same as **PETRA**.

So why then is Peter called petros rather than petra? Greek nouns are genderized. Petra is the feminine form of rock and it would have been improper to use it for a man's name. Consequently, the masculine form (petros) had to be used. Hence, the preservation of the original Aramaic by the apostles John and Paul. If Matthew wanted to refer to Peter as a small stone, he could have used the word Lithos (λίθος) which we find in Revelation 17:4.

Some say that the rock spoken of is Peter's profession of faith or Christ Himself. Karl Keating, in his book "*Catholicism and Fundamentalism*," points out that this is impossible because:

According to the rules of grammar, the phrase 'this rock' must relate to the closest noun. Peter's profession of faith (Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God) is two verses earlier, while his name, a proper noun, is in the immediately preceding clause. As an analogy, consider this artificial sentence: "I have a car and a truck, and it is blue." Which is blue? The truck, because that is the noun closest to the pronoun "it". This identification would be even clearer if the reference to the car were two sentences earlier, as the reference to Peter's profession is two sentences earlier than the term rock. The same kind of objection applies to the argument that the rock is Christ Himself, since He is mentioned within the profession of faith (page 208).

Jesus validates Peter's role as the rock when He says, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." The symbol of the keys always implied power and authority. For instance, in Isaiah 22:20-22 we read: "In that day I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, and I will clothe him with your robe, and will bind your girdle on him, and will commit your authority to his hand...**and I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open and none shall shut; he shall shut and none shall open.**"

Eliakim was given the keys of the house of David. Thus, he had the authority to rule on its behalf. Likewise, Peter was given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Thus, he had the authority to rule on its behalf.

It is critical to realize that Jesus' statement in Matthew 16 consists of all three verses, 17 through 19. To separate them, and attach unrelated meanings to them, is to misrepresent Scripture.

The night before He died Jesus said to Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail, and when you have turned again, **strengthen your brethren**" (Luke 22:31-32). Jesus prayed that Peter would strengthen the others. This

statement presupposes that Peter is first among the Apostles. Luke 22:26 also implies an apostolic leader. "Let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and **the leader** as one who serves." After the Resurrection Jesus bestowed upon Peter the role he was twice promised. He said to him:

"Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time He said to him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17).

In this passage, Jesus the Great Shepherd is entrusting the care of His lambs and sheep to Peter. Note that Jesus acknowledges the presence of the other disciples but speaks directly to Peter. This can hardly be construed as a directive for all Christians. The Greek word for tend in verse 16 is *poimaino* (ποιμαίνω), meaning to tend as a shepherd or to rule.

Whenever the pope rules on religious matters, his ruling is protected by "Papal Infallibility." Papal Infallibility is not a personality trait but a charism or gift. A pope speaks infallibly only when he speaks on faith or morals with the stated intention of requiring the compliance of the faithful. Even in the Old Testament, God used less than perfect men as the authorized interpreters of the law. Jesus shows us this in Matthew 23:1-3 when He says: "The Scribes and the Pharisees have taken the seat of Moses. Therefore, do and observe all things whatsoever they tell you, but do not follow their example. For they preach but they do not practice."

Even when he rules infallibly, a pope is doing no more than proclaiming what has always been taught. There is no special revelation involved. The pope's infallibility comes from the fact that the Holy Spirit prevents him from officially teaching error. Truth by its very nature does not allow for opposing views. Because the Church is the recipient and dispenser of truth, infallibility is necessary if it is to function as Christ intended: "Make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20).

In the year 95, Clement, the fourth bishop of Rome, wrote a response to the Corinthians instructing them to receive back the bishops who were expelled by a turbulent faction. After explaining that the hierarchy was of divine origin, he said in part, "But if there are any who refuse to heed the declaration, He [the Holy Spirit] has made through our lips, let them not doubt the gravity of the guilt and the peril in which they involve themselves" (*1 Clement 59:1*). So now we find that even before the last apostle had died, the bishop of Rome was directing the affairs of another church. A few years later in the year 110, Ignatius of Antioch acknowledged Rome's authority when he addressed the Roman church as "presiding over the brotherhood of love."

Around 189, there was a controversy between the churches of Asia and the rest of the Christian world. Eusebius tells us that Victor, the bishop of Rome, directed that they conform. Polycrates of Ephesus resisted him. Victor replied with an excommunication. When Irenaeus intervened and pleaded Polycrate's case, Victor withdrew the excommunication. Although there was disagreement, the resistance of the Asian bishops did not deny Rome's authority (*The History of the Church 5:23-25*).

Some contend that the Papacy is the result of the Church becoming corrupt in the year 312 during the reign of Constantine. Consequently, true Christianity was lost until the Protestant Reformation. If that is true, then Christianity did not exist for a period of 1205 years. Remember that Jesus said that the gates of Hell would not overcome His Church, and that He would be with us always, even until the end of the age (Matthew 16:18, 28:20). The anti-Papal theory makes Jesus a liar. Another problem arises from this view. The Old and New Testaments were settled at the councils of Hippo (393 AD) and Carthage (397 AD) by Catholic bishops who then submitted the list to Pope Boniface for official approval. "Thus, that the church beyond the sea [Rome] may be consulted regarding the confirmation of that canon" (Council of Carthage, *Canon 36*). Note that the councils took place well after the supposed corruption of the Church in 312. If this were the case, why would Protestants accept the product of a corrupt church as the Word of God and their sole rule of faith? If you reject the primacy of Peter and his successors, logic demands that you reject the Bible as well.