



Scriptures and Doctrine :: Does Christ's Church Have Apostolic Succession?

Does Christ's Church Have Apostolic Succession?, on: 2009/12/31 3:09

Does Christ's Church Have Apostolic Succession?

By Kenneth J. Howell

OBJECTOR: Doesn't the Catholic Church believe in the idea of apostolic succession? I find no evidence in the Bible for such an idea.

CATHOLIC: Yes, the Catholic Church does believe that the New Testament teaches the concept of apostolic succession, and it is not the only church today that espouses such a doctrine. For example, the Orthodox churches believe in apostolic succession, as do some forms of Episcopalianism and Lutheranism. But tell me first what you understand by this term.

OBJECTOR: Apostolic succession, as I understand it, is the idea that bishops today are successors or descendants of the apostles whom Jesus appointed to go into all the world and preach the gospel. It supposes that the original apostles ordained men as bishops, who in turn ordained others, and that this process continues today.

CATHOLIC: You have the basic idea down correctly, although I would refrain from using the word descendants, because the bishops, who are successors of the apostles, are not physical descendants of the apostles. They are and were men chosen from among the members of the Church to lead the flock as shepherds. These bishops are the primary pastors of the Church.

Priests (presbyters), who are ordained by the bishops, are their assistants in ministry. They have valid orders because they are connected to the original apostles through their bishops' succession. In a secondary sense, they too have apostolic succession. This implies that the local Church is not the individual parish but the diocese of which the bishop is pastor.

Why is this idea objectionable?

OBJECTOR: The hierarchical structure that you outline is not in the Bible. Jesus gave us his teachings through the apostles. They handed on that teaching to the next generation, but they themselves died off toward the end of the first century. The only "apostolic succession" in the Bible is a handing on of the truth that Jesus taught. For example, Paul says, "I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you" (1 Cor. 11:23). And Jude speaks about "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" in Jude 3. These are the truths contained in the New Testament.

CATHOLIC: We agree that the apostolic ministry handed on the teachings of Christ. Paul as a faithful servant taught the truth of Jesus Christ, but we Catholics contend that what was passed on was not teaching only. He and the other apostles passed on the office of shepherd for the Church. The function of a bishop is to teach Christ's gospel and shepherd the Church of a local diocese. This was intended by Christ and faithfully transmitted by the original apostles.

OBJECTOR: Unwarranted additions like this crop up from time to time in the Catholic Church, but they are not in Scripture.

CATHOLIC: Let me see if I understand you. You believe that Jesus passed on his teachings to the apostles and then they passed them on to successive generations of Christians? If so, why couldn't Jesus also have passed on duties or office to the apostles?

OBJECTOR: He appointed the apostles as the foundation of the Church, as Paul says in Ephesians 2:20, but he did not mean for the office of apostle to continue after their deaths. There is simply no evidence in the New Testament to suggest that the office of the apostle was meant to be continued.

CATHOLIC: Apostolic succession means that the authority of the apostles was passed on to the early bishops of the Church.

urch. You say this is not biblical? I presume that you mean that the early Church had no bishops that were considered successors of the apostles.

OBJECTOR: That would be one consequence my position. There were pastors in the early Church, of course, but they were not bishops and definitely were not considered as authoritative as the apostles.

CATHOLIC: I have evidence that that isn't true. One witness to the structure of the early Church is St. Ignatius of Antioch, whose seven authentic letters are dated no later than A.D. 117 or 118, so he must have known some of the apostles themselves, as Antioch was a center of missionary activity frequented by Paul in Acts 11:26–30 and 13:1–3. Ignatius says, "It is fitting in every way . . . that you be knit together in a unified submission, subject to the bishop and presbytery that you may be completely sanctified" (Letter to Ephesians 2:2). Again he says of the Church, "Jesus Christ . . . is the will of the Father, just as the bishops, who are appointed in every land, are the will of Jesus Christ. So it is proper for you to be in harmony with the will of the bishop" (ibid., 3:2–4:1). He also wrote, "It is clear that one should see the bishop as the Lord himself" (ibid., 6:1). These quotes show first that Ignatius considered the bishops of the Church to be the "will of God" (i.e., their office was appointed by God) and second that obedience to the bishop was considered obedience to God himself. In some sense, the bishop represented God in the same way that the apostles did.

OBJECTOR: But Ignatius may be expressing only his own view, not one widely shared among the early leaders of the Church. And further, Ignatius is not Scripture.

CATHOLIC: The idea that Ignatius expressed only his own views is common among modern readers. Today, people tend to read these ancient views atomistically and individualistically. But that is not how ancient Church leaders functioned. They almost always sought to express the faith held in common rather than their own views. You see the importance of this continuity in St. Irenaeus of Lyons (second century): "We can enumerate those who were appointed by the apostles as bishops in the churches as their successors even to our time" (Against Heresies 3.1). And in the next section, Irenaeus begins to list the successors of Peter at Rome with these words: "But since it would be too long, in a work like this, to list the successions in all the churches, we shall take only one of them, the church that is greatest, most ancient, and known to all, founded and set up by the two most glorious apostles Peter and Paul at Rome while showing that the tradition and the faith it proclaims to men comes down through the successions of the bishops even to us" (ibid., 3.2).

OBJECTOR: These early leaders, while venerable, are not the same as Scripture.

CATHOLIC: But they are expressing a tradition that we see in Scripture. In Paul's teaching, we hear him saying, "what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). Paul envisions four generations of succession here: (1) Paul, (2) Timothy, (3) others taught by Timothy, and (4) others taught by Timothy's hearers.

OBJECTOR: But that verse just confirms my point. Paul is telling Timothy to teach what he heard, not to ordain others.

CATHOLIC: You're placing an either/or where there should be a both/and. Yes, Paul is telling Timothy to transmit the teaching he has given to him, but he also is saying that this teaching should be committed to faithful men. Both the teaching and the men are important. And it is clear from Titus 1:5 that Paul wanted Timothy and Titus to ordain other men as presbyters (priests) and bishops.

OBJECTOR: But this does not mean that these men were going to have the same authority as Paul the apostle.

CATHOLIC: In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul teaches that there is continuity between himself and successive generations. This was envisioned by Jesus himself when he told his original apostles, "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (John 20:21). That same authority is expressed in Matthew 10:1: "He called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every infirmity." These texts suggest that Jesus gave his authority to the apostles—the same authority that he had from the Father. What good would that authority be for the successive generations of the Church if it was not passed on, as 2 Timothy 2:2 seems to suggest?

OBJECTOR: We agree that Jesus gave his authority to the apostles, but we disagree that it was passed on to others. Or, maybe I should say that the authority lies in the teaching, not in the office.

CATHOLIC: I find that contradicts Acts 1:15–26. There we read about the election of Matthias as Judas's successor. If you read this passage carefully, you will see that it shows that there was an apostolic college that had to be passed on

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through ordination. The whole point of the election is that there was a position (or office) vacated by Judas. In verse 16, Peter considers Judas's betrayal as a fulfillment of Old Testament prediction. And he also quotes from the Greek Septuagint translation of Psalm 109:8 (Psalm 108:8 in the Septuagint numbering) to show that filling the office was foreseen in Scripture. Verse 20 reads, "His office let another take." The word translated "office" is episkope, which in New Testament language means "episcopal office" (see 1 Tim. 3:1).

OBJECTOR: This is all very interesting, but all it shows is that Judas's office had to be filled, not that the apostolic office was passed on after the original apostles died. If you look at Acts 1:21-22, you will see that the man to be chosen had to be an eyewitness to Jesus' Resurrection. That can't be said of "the successors of apostles."

CATHOLIC: Obviously! That requirement could not last forever, but the passage shows that the office of overseer had to be filled. If we didn't have other indicators in the New Testament about the office of bishop, your point would be valid. But when we put Acts 1:15-26 in conjunction with the instructions in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus about ordaining men to the office of bishop (i.e., episkope), we must conclude that the office of bishop was intended to continue after the apostles' deaths.

Re: Does Christ's Church Have Apostolic Succession? - posted by ccchhrrriiiss (), on: 2009/12/31 4:12

Hello...

The "Catholic" response here is ridiculously unscriptural! Sure, it contains a few verses (taken out of context and selectively interpreted) -- but talk about straining a gnat and swallowing a camel!!!!

I suggest that you lay aside your sectarian theology for a while (counting it as loss and dung...like Paul). Then, pick up your Bible and read it without prejudice or through the skewed lens of denominational distraction.

:-)

Re: Does Christ's Church Have Apostolic Succession? - posted by hmmhmm (), on: 2009/12/31 4:23

I ask you that you would stop promoting catholicism and refrain from posting any such material. Sermonindex is not the place for that and i am sure you can find numerous catholic forums to be a part that would appreciate your posts. Most users here would not consider the doctrines of catholicism to be in one accord with Gods word and thus rejects them. I will not enter into a debate i just gently ask you to stop. When you read the forum rules it stated:

Quote:

-----It is not a place to bring an agenda regardless of intentions.

and in almost every post you make or thread you start has a catholic sent to it.

I ask you to stop.

Re: Does Christ's Church Have Apostolic Succession? - posted by ginnyrose (), on: 2009/12/31 9:43

This doctrine of apostolic succession is among the most ridiculous doctrines believed and promoted, in my opinion. I always have to wonder why it is so strongly believed? Is it pride? Is it a way to validate your belief system, thus giving your church credibility? Catholics are not the only folks who believe in apostolic succession - there is one from Anabaptist descent who also believes thus (yes, this is an oxymoron).

1Timothy 1:4 and Titus 3:9 speak about the futility of genealogies. As I understand this context, only men who could by genealogy trace their heritage were qualified to serve as priests under the OT law. Nowhere do we find this principle promoted in the NT writings.

My understanding...

ginnyrose

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Re: Does Christ's Church Have Apostolic Succession?, on: 2009/12/31 10:59

25] Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:

But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

That no flesh should glory in his presence. 1Corinthians 1:25-29

Apostolic succession would have to follow the above guidelines, in that God is the one who chooses, not men waiting for black smoke to come out of an old chimney pipe and picking a name out of hat. God takes fishermen, plumbers, people that the world don't even know of, people that probably can't read or write. God is not interested in men's credentials. There is nothing in man that is of any use, ONLY WHAT HE MAKES HIM TO BE. The Catholic Church is void of that understanding when it chooses anyone to lead. They won't choose a Joe and say, "Okay, we want you to be the Pope". But that is exactly what God did with Peter. He chose an ignorant fisherman who said to Jesus one day while they were fishing, "Depart from me LORD, for I am a sinful man".

Peter didn't say, "Well, I went to Oxford. I served in the war. I've given thousands of \$\$\$ to the Catholic Church. I say my "Hail Mary's", and I kissed the Pope's ring.

Re: Does Christ's Church Have Apostolic Succession?, on: 2010/1/1 4:24

Quote:
-----CATHOLIC: I find that contradicts Acts 1:15-26. There we read about the election of Matthias as Judas's successor. If you read this passage carefully, you will see that it shows that there was an apostolic college that had to be passed on through ordination. The whole point of the election is that there was a position (or office) vacated by Judas. In verse 16, Peter considers Judas's betrayal as a fulfillment of Old Testament prediction. And he also quotes from the Greek Septuagint translation of Psalm 109:8 (Psalm 108:8 in the Septuagint numbering) to show that filling the office was foreseen in Scripture. Verse 20 reads, "His office let another take." The word translated "office" is episkope, which in New Testament language means "episcopal office" (see 1 Tim. 3:1).

Rock solid case for apostolic succession.

Re: - posted by hmmhmm (), on: 2010/1/1 4:38

i am locking this thread since you have multiple accounts and usernames. this is against the rules and you come off as a deceiver and a hypocrite. the word means someone who is acting.

christian