

The Myth of Roman Catholic Apostolic Succession



Introduction: This article is from a PDF file on LutheranLibrary.org. It was published by The Converted Catholic Magazine and edited by former Roman Catholic priest, Leo Herbert Lehmann.

There are two articles from the magazine in this post. The original title of the first article is

A Kingly Priesthood [Peter's Doctrine]

THOSE WHO INSIST that Peter was the first Pope (a Roman Catholic doctrine) entirely disregard the fact that he felt in writing, as part of the Bible, instructions as to how the Christian church should be ruled. They (Catholics) read intently the encyclical letters of Pope Plus XII, but either ignore or are unaware of the letters of the Apostle Peter, which no Pope today would dare to emphasize.

For Peter preached and put into writing the principles of the real New Order of the Christian dispensation. He would have been untrue to his Master had he taught that one man could be an autocrat over other men, either in spiritual or political matters. "Ye are a chosen generation," he told the early Christians, "a royal (kingly) priesthood." (I Peter 2:9). Peter's doctrine is that each one is his own king and his own priest. This is democracy with a vengeance! In civil government each one was to possess the highest governing power, and, as in our American democracy, merely delegate this power by election, for a limited time, to those he chooses to represent him in the work of governing.

Most important of all, Peter taught that in religious matters **each one is his own priest**, a member of "a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." (I Peter 2:5)

Peter furthermore expressly forbids the ministers of the Christian religion to lord it over the flock. "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." 1 Peter 5:3

He exhorts them as elders, as he himself is just an elder, not to use force in the ordering of things within the church. How then can the Pope of Rome, who claims to be Peter's successor, consider himself an autocratic king in temporal affairs and the sole mouthpiece of God on earth?

The history of the Popes is in direct contradiction to the teaching of Peter. Instead of following Peter, the Popes have imitated the Caesars of the Roman empire and the Pontifex Maximus of the pagan religion of Rome, whose title they appropriated. They have always supported tyrannical monarchy and brutal dictators who oppressed the people, who are true priests and kings in the Christian sense. They have killed this right of the people by condemning it as "socialism" and "communism." No doubt, if Peter were on earth today, the Pope would brand him too as a Communist— and a Jewish Communist at that.

The Myth Of Catholic Apostolic Succession

By Henry F. Brown

From The Converted Catholic Magazine, Oct. 1946

Unsuspecting Protestants are easily deceived by the bold but unsubstantiated claim of Roman Catholicism to an unbroken line of "apostolic succession" of its popes, bishops and priests. The claim is categorically stated as follows: Jesus ordained Peter, Peter his successor, who in turn ordained another, and so on down to the present pope. Thus "apostolicity" is exclusively claimed as certain for all popes, bishops and priests of the Roman Catholic church.

In the first place the entire claim rests on Peter's being in Rome as pontiff — which never has been proved. It is stated that there must be "continuity with the church founded by Jesus Christ," and that only the Roman Catholic church has maintained this "unbroken chain of successors." — (Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 3, p. 642).

If it is true that Peter was the first bishop of Rome, how then could Paul be a legitimate apostle? For it is certain that he was not called by Peter and that he was not consecrated by Peter laying hands on him. He was called directly by Jesus (Acts 9:15), independently of Peter. He was baptized by Ananias, a disciple (Acts 9:17, 18).

When Paul attempted to associate himself with Peter and the rest of the apostles they refused to believe that he was not a spy. After being sponsored by Barnabas, a layman, the apostles tolerated him (Acts 9:26, 28). He was not accepted as an apostle by Peter and the others, and disappears from our view for a number of years (Acts 9:30.)

The laymen from the scattered church in Jerusalem preached the Gospel in Antioch (Acts 8:1, 4:11, 19), and raised up a church without the intervention of Peter. Barnabas, the reconciling layman, was sent to investigate the non-

conformist church. He remembers Paul in Tarsus and goes to find him (Acts 11:25, 26), and these two laymen preached the Gospel of Christ with such success that they were the first to be called "Christians." Then the Holy Spirit instructed this unauthorized church – if to be authorized – they must have a permit from the pope – to consecrate Paul and Barnabas as apostles (Acts 13:1, 3).

Thus we see that Peter, if he were indeed the first Roman pope, refused to accept Paul, though Jesus himself had called him to a very definite task. This great apostle Paul was consecrated, not by the laying on of Peter's hands, or of any of Peter's agents, but was consecrated by unauthorized laymen in a non-conforming church!

Paul reviews the history of this experience. He says he received his Gospel from Christ and not from Peter (Gal. 1:11, 12). He denies that he communicated with the "hierarchy" (Gal. 1:17), but went instead to the desert to talk it over with God alone, and that his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion was three years after that memorable event (Gal. 1:18). He remained but two weeks, and nothing apparently happened to authorize him to preach with any legitimacy. There was no "continuity with the church founded by Christ," if the laying on of hands was required to obtain that.

Paul ignores completely his lack of apostolic ordination at the hands of Peter. He made thousands of converts to Christ, organized churches (Acts 14:23), consecrated elders or bishops (Acts 30:17), and sent men whom he had consecrated as bishops to consecrate others (Titus 1:5, 7). In other words, he built up a church that was entirely non-conforming, having no legitimate connection with Peter's church.

Fourteen years later Paul, the non-conformist apostle, went to Jerusalem, and there the apostles reluctantly gave him the right hand of fellowship (Gal. 2:9). But there was no submission to Peter, no reconsecration of Paul. On the contrary, this intrepid, fearless, un-compromising apostle "withstood Peter to the face" (Gal. 2:11), and they divided the field between them (Gal. 2:9).

The Roman Catholic hierarchy faces here the dilemma either of rejecting its vital and basic doctrine of apostolic succession – the chain of Peter and consecrated priests – or of rejecting a specifically chosen messenger of heaven, St. Paul. If Paul were rejected – which the Roman church must do to be logical in its doctrine – with him goes a large portion of the New Testament, most of the Christian doctrine of the church, because it is Pauline, and some of the greatest early churches, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and Thessalonica, because these are the fruitage of this "illegally" consecrated non-conformist.

But Paul never considered himself unconsecrated nor less-authorized than any of the other apostles, though the hands of Peter were never placed on him (2 Cor. 11:5): "I regard myself as no wise inferior to the great apostles," he says (New Revised Catholic New Testament).

The Roman Catholic church does not reject Paul, but by accepting him it rejects its own essential doctrine of apostolic succession. By accepting him

as an apostle it furthermore destroys its claim to be the exclusive mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit demonstrated in the choice of Paul that He alone is the Vicar of Christ and there is no need of a pope. By the same token John Wesley was the apostle of God to England, so was Whitfield, though these men were not in communion with Peter's successor. Dwight L. Moody was Christ's apostle, and so is every Christ-chosen minister of God.

Protestants reject absolutely the mechanical conception of apostolic succession through the long line of wicked popes of the Middle Ages. They follow, rather, the prophetic succession of the Hebrew prophets. When God wanted a messenger in the Old Testament He didn't request the high priests for one, but simply called the man: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" He asked Isaiah. That fine man of God responded, "Here am I, send me." (Isa. 6:8). These were Spirit-chosen men, endowed and ordained by the Holy Spirit. Elijah was sitting by his sheep in Gilead when "the word of the Lord came unto Him" (1 Kings 17:2). Amos was a shepherd when God took him (Amos 7:14, 15). Jeremiah was called before his birth (Jer. 1:5).

Of all the prophets of the Hebrew succession we can think of none who was consecrated by the high priest of his time, or even by the prophet who went before him. Each man was chosen directly by God. That is the Spiritgoverned prophetic succession versus the mechanical "apostolic succession" of Roman Catholicism. And that is the system of ministry that the Protestant church in its evangelical branches holds today.