

Apostolic Succession



This is chapter V of a book written in 1941 entitled, "[Our Priceless Heritage Christian Doctrine In Contrast With Romanism](#)" by Henry M. Woods, D.D, LL.D.

What is the meaning of apostle in Scripture?

The Greek word ἀπόστολος, *apostolos*, means "one sent forth," that is, one sent forth by Christ to preach the everlasting Gospel of the grace of God. The apostles were special ministers ordained by Christ to proclaim the Gospel and to plant the Christian Church. They had special qualifications to do this. They had seen the Lord, and been able from personal knowledge to bear witness to His death and resurrection, They had the gift of inspiration of the Holy Spirit; and were endued with special power to work miracles.

What Scriptures prove these statements?

Those which record Christ's Great Commission. Matt. 28: 18-20, Luke 24:48, John 20:22, 23, Mark 16:15. His command to preach the Gospel. "Preach the Word." Matt. 10:7, II Tim. 4:2. "Preach the Gospel to every creature." Mark 16:15. "Ordain presbyters in every city." Titus 1:5. "They ordained presbyters in every city." Acts 14:23. St. Paul's words: "Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen the Lord?" I Cor. 9:1. St. Peter's words, when Matthias was chosen to take the place of Judas, "Wherefore of these men that have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection." Acts 1:21, 22. "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus." Acts 4:31, 33.

What Scriptures show that the apostles were specially inspired by God the Holy Spirit to write the Epistles?

"For this cause also thank we God without ceasing because when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you

that believe." II Thess. 2:13. 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." II Tim. 3:16, 17. "We have also a more sure word of prophecy,—for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." I Peter 1:19, 21.

Many Scriptures also show that the apostles had special power to work miracles; as, Matt. 10:18, Luke 10:17-19, Acts 3:6, 9:40, 41, 20:9, 10, etc.

Did St. Paul know Christ personally when He was on earth?

No. He was qualified to be an apostle by a special revelation of the Lord. He did not derive his authority from the other apostles. Gal. 1:1, 16, 2:6.

Does not the Church of Rome now claim that its ministers; pope, bishops and priests—are essentially the same as the apostles, and have the same power and authority?

This claim is made, but it entirely lacks the support of Holy Scripture.

Has any Church leader since the days of the apostles had power to work miracles, as raising the dead to life?

While God has been graciously pleased to give His people many wonderful answers to prayer, yet there is no trustworthy evidence that anyone in the Christian Church since the days of the apostles has had the power of working miracles! Some in the Papal Church have claimed to possess this power, but their claims are not supported by adequate evidence.

It is reported that on one occasion as the pope was showing visitors the treasures of the Vatican, he remarked, "Certainly St. Peter's successors cannot now say as he once said, 'Silver and gold have I none.'" Acts 3:6. "No," was the ready response, "nor can they now say as he said, 'Rise up and walk!'"

What are some of the miracles the Church of Rome claims to have wrought?

Madonnas winking their eyes; images moving without human aid. The Virgin Mary's cottage in Nazareth flying (or carried by angels) from Palestine to Loretto, Italy, on December 10, 1294. Fire brought down from heaven in Jerusalem at Easter, visible to bystanders, etc., etc.

Do not Romanists also claim that miraculous cures are wrought at certain shrines, as Loretto, Lourdes, and at Malden, Mass.?

Yes, but those who report these cures were mostly ignorant people who labored under great excitement; and their claims are similar to those of hypnotists, of psychiatrists, of Christian Scientists so-called, and of devotees of idolatrous cults in the Orient.

What proof is there from Romanist sources that most of what are claimed to be miracles, never took place?

The testimony of many intelligent members of the Church of Rome who declare that the reputed miracles were never wrought, but were 'pious frauds'; also the bitter protests of Romanists in Palestine, who insist that Mary's cottage has never been moved, but is *still in Nazareth!*

About the year 1932 newspapers reported wild excitement at Malden, Mass., where marvelous miracles of healing were alleged to have taken place at the grave of a priest. Vast crowds gathered at the cemetery; large gifts of money were made by those who sought healing; and a shocking lack of reverence and decorum were manifested, so that Church authorities deemed an investigation necessary. An official report was later published under the authority of Cardinal O'Connell, that there was no evidence of any miracle, but that what was considered miraculous could all be *explained on natural grounds.*

A dispatch in the public press of September 30, 1939 reported in substance that pope Pius XII regretted the destruction of images in Poland, by which, he alleged, "many miracles had been performed." It is sad to see a religious leader allowing himself thus to be misled by vague rumors of miracles, as if there were no commandment in the Decalogue strictly forbidding the use of images by believers. The pope evidently differs from St. Paul who warned against "dumb idols," saying, "we know that an idol is nothing in the world." I Cor. 8:4. He also differs from the Psalmist, who spoke of images as blocks of wood or metal, that "neither see nor hear nor speak nor move." "They that make them are like unto them: so is everyone that trusteth in them." Psalm 115: 5-8.

Have not such alleged miracles done great harm to Christianity?

They have done immense harm, by leading intelligent people, who perceived the imposture, to mock at religion, and to reject the genuine miracles of our Lord and His Apostles.

The Apostles Had No Real Successors

Did Christ's apostles have any real successors? That is, did Christ's ministers who succeeded the apostles and carried on the work of the Christian Church, have the gifts and power that the apostles had, viz.: the gifts of inspiration and of working miracles?

No. After the death of the apostles, the apostolic office ceased. The special gifts of the apostles were bestowed to do a special work. When that work had been accomplished, the Church well established, and the Holy Scriptures of the New Testament completed, the special gifts ceased. Inasmuch as one of the great functions of the apostolic office was to bear personal witness to our Lord's death and resurrection, it was impossible for those who succeeded the apostles to bear such witness, having never personally known our Lord. And after St. John completed the Book of Revelation, the Canon of Scripture was closed, and the special gift of Inspiration ceased. But though the special gifts of the apostleship ceased, the greatest gift of all, still remained in the Church, viz.: *the Holy Spirit, with His life-giving power.* John 14:16, 15:26, 16:7-13.

After the Apostleship ceased, what permanent offices still remained in the Church?

After the Apostleship ceased, the permanent offices of presbyter, viz.: the minister of the Word; the ruling elder, and the deacon, remained. The minister, who was both teaching and ruling presbyter, served as pastor, evangelist and teacher; proclaimed the Gospel, established congregations, and administered the sacraments. I Cor. 12:28, Eph. 4:11, 12.

Beside the pastor or minister, there was in each congregation a bench of ruling presbyters. Titus 1:5, I Tim. 5:17. These were spiritual officers. In addition, there were deacons, whose business it was to administer the charitable and business affairs of the Church; though they also took part in spiritual duties, as preaching the Word, etc. Acts 6: 1-4, 8:5, 12.

No Priest But Christ In The True Church Of God

Does the Word of God anywhere teach that the Christian minister is a priest?

The New Testament *nowhere teaches that the Christian minister is a priest*. In the Old Testament dispensation under Moses there were priests, who offered animal sacrifices in the Tabernacle and in the Temple; but Scripture teaches that they were only temporary and symbolic: "for it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." Heb. 10:4. The ancient sacrifices pointed to Christ, the one great Divine Priest to come, who on Calvary should offer the one atoning Sacrifice for sin, viz.: Himself. After Christ had come, the priesthood and sacrifices of the Old Dispensation, being but types and shadows which were fulfilled in Him, forever passed away. Search the New Testament from beginning to end, and we find but one Priest, the Son of God, and but *one Sacrifice*, Christ's precious body, which He offered for the sins of the world "*once for all*."

Is there clear proof of this in Holy Scripture?

There is abundant proof; for nearly the whole Epistle to the Hebrews was written to make this plain. It is stated beyond the shadow of a doubt, that all human priests and all animal sacrifices have passed away; that Christ the one Divine priest alone remains, and His one atoning sacrifice of Himself on Calvary, offered once for all. Heb. 7:11, 12, 18-24, 8: 5-8, 13, 9:8, 9, 11-28, Col. 2: 17-23.

A careful examination of these and other passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews indicate a contrast between the many priests of the Old Dispensation and the one great Divine priest of the New Dispensation. The former are spoken of in the plural, the latter always in the singular. The Levitical priests had sin, and must offer sacrifice for their own sins; but the one Divine priest of the New Dispensation had no sin, and therefore offered no sacrifice for Himself. The Levitical priests were temporary, and soon passed away, but the one Divine priest was eternal: "Thou (Christ) art a priest forever"; "Made after the power of an endless life." So also of the sacrifices. Those offered by the Levitical priests were imperfect, and must be repeated; they were animals, "the blood of goats and of calves"; were

symbolical and must soon pass away; "they could not take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). But the sacrifice of the one Divine priest of the New Dispensation was His own precious body and blood, a perfect and eternal sacrifice made on Calvary once for all, and *atones for the sins of the whole world*.

The Church of Rome's Deadly Error

Does the Church of Rome teach that its ministers are priests, and that they offer a real atoning sacrifice for sins?

Yes, sad to say, the Church of Rome teaches this deadly error, which strikes at the very heart of the Gospel. For if the Roman clergy are real priests, and offer a genuine atoning sacrifice for sin, then the Word of God is not true, and Christ's atoning death is *not the only way of salvation*, as the Bible says it is. Acts 4:12, John 14:6.

Liguori, in his book entitled, "The Dignity and Duty of a Priest," declares that in giving or refusing absolution, God Himself is obliged to abide by the judgment of His priests! In other words, the sovereign, holy Lord of heaven and earth must bow to the *decisions of a weak, sinful human being!* Is not this *horrible blasphemy?*

An authorized Roman Catholic booklet, "The Priest," by Curé d'Ars, pages 22, 23, asks, "What is a Priest?" Answer. "A man who holds the place of God, a man clothed with all the power of God. When the priest forgives our sins, he does not say, "God forgives you," he says "I absolve thee." Again it says, "Without the priest, the death of our Lord would be of no avail." "If you had no priest here, you would say, "What is the use of coming to the Church? Our Lord is no longer here. Where there is no priest, there is no sacrifice, and where there is no sacrifice, there is no religion." How foolish and false this is! and how blasphemous the boast made on page 26; "See the power of the priest! By one word he changes a piece of bread into a God!" How different is the statement of Holy Scripture! "For by one offering He (the Son of God) hath perfected forever them that are sanctified." Heb. 10:14. No less than 10 times in Hebrews does the apostle emphasize the one perfect atoning sacrifice which Christ offered for us on Calvary, a Divine sacrifice which is eternally efficacious, and can never be repeated.

The Pope Is Blasphemously Called Christ

The plain statement is made by L. Lucantonio in his book *La Supernazionalita del Papato* that "*the Pope here on earth is Christ*" (*Il papa qutin terra é Cristo*.) This is "a very recent work, dedicated to Cardinal Gasparri, the Papal Secretary of State" under Pius XI.

But does not the Word of God speak of a "royal priesthood?"

Yes, but note carefully that this is said not of ministers only, but of *all believers*. I Peter 2:5-9. St. Peter was addressing all Christians. Note also that he used the words "priesthood" and "sacrifice" figuratively. The sacrifice they offer is declared to be a spiritual sacrifice; not a slain animal, but praise and thanksgiving. Exhorting believers generally, the

apostle says, "by Him (Christ) therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name." Heb. 13:15. Addressing all Christians, he also says: "Ye are a *spiritual house, a holy priesthood*, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." I Peter 2:5. The "royal priesthood," also called "a holy nation, a peculiar people," was the whole body of believers, whose privilege it was to show forth the praises of Him "who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." Thus all who are called out of darkness into Christ's marvelous light, and who praise Him for salvation, are *New Testament priests*, and there are no others.

Bishop And Presbyter Are One

What is the meaning of "bishop" in Holy Scripture?

The Scriptures teach that the office of bishop and presbyter are one and the same. The Greek word for bishop) ἐπίσκοπος episcopos, means "overseer" or "supervisor." It indicates the function of the presbyter or minister, viz.: supervising or overseeing the congregation. The bishop did not belong to a higher order than the presbyter, for in the Apostolic Church there was *only one order* of ministers.

What clear proof does Scripture give that in the Apostolic Church presbyter and bishop were one and the same office?

St. Paul, addressing the Ephesian presbyters (elders), *reminds them that they are bishops*, appointed by the Holy Ghost, to oversee the congregation. Acts 20:28. Also after directing that "presbyters be ordained in every city," he goes on to state in the same connection what the bishop ought to be, showing that he used presbyter and bishop as *convertible terms*. I Tim. 3:1, 2, Titus 1:5.

What was the teaching of the Fathers of the early Church concerning the ministry of the apostolic age?

The Fathers of the early Church, following Holy Scripture, taught that Christian ministers were presbyters, and that bishop and presbyter were only different names for the same office. 'Thus Polycarp, Irenaeus, Clement of Rome, and Tertullian testified. So also Firmilian, leader at Caesarea, who declared: "In Presbyters is vested the power of baptizing and imposition of hands, i.e., ordination. Hilary, bishop of Poitiers, died 368, says: "Presbyters were at first called bishops." Jerome, of the 5th century, states: "Among the ancients presbyters and bishops were the same." Again, "A presbyter is the same as a bishop, and originally the Churches were governed by the *joint Council of presbyters*." (i.e., the Presbytery.)

What was the doctrine of the Churches at the time of, and following, the Reformation?

The same doctrine concerning the identity of presbyter and bishop, and of government by presbytery, was taught not only by leaders of the Church of England, as Archbishop Cranmer, Bishops Jewell, Willet, and Stillingfleet,

but also by all the Reformed Churches of Switzerland, Savoy, France, Germany, Hungary, Poland, and the Netherlands.

In "The Institution of a Christian Man," a work approved by the above Archbishop and Bishops, as well as by King and Parliament of England, it is declared; "In the New Testament there is *no mention of any other degrees*, but of Deacons or Ministers and of Presbyters or Bishops."

What was the teaching of the University of Oxford on this subject?

The teaching at Oxford was identical with that already mentioned. Dr. Reynolds, Professor of Divinity in Oxford, declared that "for 500 years before his time the University taught that all pastors, whether called bishops or priests, have equal power and authority by the Word of God." Dr. Holland, King's professor of Divinity at Oxford, says, that "to affirm the office of bishop to be different from that of presbyter and superior to it, is most false, contrary to Scripture, to the Fathers, to the doctrine of the Church of England, yea, to the very School men themselves." Bishop Burnet, of the 18th century, declares, "I acknowledge bishop and presbyter to be one and the same office." Dr. Whitby, died 1726, who was zealous for Episcopacy, states concerning the allegation of some that Timothy and Titus were diocesan bishops, says: "I can find nothing in any writer of the first 3 centuries concerning an episcopate of Timothy and Titus, nor any intimation that they bore that name." President Timothy Dwight of Yale wrote: "It is certain that Timothy was an evangelist, and therefore, not a diocesan bishop; because Paul directs him in II Timothy 4:5 to "do the work of an evangelist." An evangelist was an itinerant minister, and could not be a diocesan bishop whose business it is to rule and abide in his own diocese."

These facts show that diocesan bishops are not of Scriptural, but of human origin. *Theology, Explained and Defended*, by Rev. Timothy Dwight, vol. IV, pages 241, 242, 1828.

Is this apostolic doctrine that bishop and presbyter are the same office still held by the Church?

This apostolic doctrine is still held by the Presbyterian and other branches of the Reformed Church. We have already seen that eminent scholars of all Communion, like Dean Stanley, Bishop Lightfoot, Professor Schaff, and others, agree that in Scripture and apostolic practice bishop and presbyter are the same office.

Apostolic Succession

What is meant by Apostolic Succession?

In common language it means that the power and grace which Christ bestowed on the apostles to fit them for the ministry, when He breathed on them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (John 20:22, 23), they transmitted by the touch of their hands to the ministers whom they ordained. These ministers in turn, by the laying on of hands, passed on divine power and grace to those whom they ordained; and so on down the centuries, it is held that what the bishop

confers in ordination by the touch of his hands is essentially the same divine power and grace as that originally bestowed by Christ on His apostles. In other words, the power and grace which Christ and His apostles communicated to the ministers who succeeded them, has been passed on by an unbroken line of bishops, through the touch of their hands, down to the present time, and may be obtained in no other way.

Is this doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?

No, there is nothing like it taught in the Word of God, but just the opposite. This exclusive and magical conception of divine grace, mechanically transmitted through the touch of human hands, is entirely without support in Holy Scripture, and is opposed to the whole tenor of divine teaching. The Word of God teaches that all power and grace are bestowed directly by the Holy Spirit, and are not dependent on the touch of human hands. Moreover God's gracious gifts are not dependent on, or confined to, any special line or succession of men for transmission. He is sovereign Lord, and bestows His gifts whenever and wherever He wills; and while He is often graciously pleased to use human instruments, yet they are not necessary to impart His gifts. I Cor. 12:11, Acts 11:17, Acts 15:8, 9. The mistake which Peter and the early Jewish Christians made regarding admitting Gentiles to the Church, and insisting that Gentiles must submit to circumcision, is the mistake the Church of Rome now makes in claiming exclusive power and privileges for her priests as the sole depositories of God's saving grace.

An eminent historian wrote: "The corruptions of the Church had all grown out of one root, viz.: the notion that the Christian minister was a priest, who possessed mystical power conferred through episcopal ordination. But religion, as Luther conceived it, and (as the Word of God teaches), did not consist in certain things done to and for a man by a so-called priest. Religion was the devotion of each individual soul to the service of God. Masses were nothing, absolution was nothing. A clergyman differed from a layman only in being set apart for the special duties of teaching and preaching. In getting rid of episcopal ordination, the Reformers dried up the fountain from which the mechanical and idolatrous conceptions of religion had sprung." Times of Erasmus and Luther. J. A. Fronde.

What is meant in Scripture by the imposition, or laying on, of hands?

According to Scripture, the laying on of hands for ordination had a two-fold reference, one to God, the other to the Church. On the one hand, it signified that the Church trusted God, in answer to prayer, to fulfill His promise, and grant to the candidate all divine power and grace needful for the ministry. On the other hand, the Church thereby officially recognized the candidate as suitable for the office, and conferred on him the Church's authority to serve as a minister.

What do the Scriptures indicate as all-important in ordination?

What the Scriptures stress as all-important in ordination is not the human element, but the divine; not the laying on of hands, but BELIEVING PRAYER. God, not man, bestows the grace and power. He bestows it directly in answer

to prayer, and the blessing, like all other divine blessings, is received by faith alone. The Apostolic Church realized its absolute dependence upon God; it looked to Him in faith to bestow all needed grace; and believing prayer is never made in vain. Acts 1:24, 8:15, 13:3, 4, etc.

Apostolic ordination was administered by the Presbytery

According to Scripture, how was apostolic ordination usually administered?

Scripture indicates that apostolic ordination was administered by the Presbytery,¹ that is, by several ministers acting conjointly. St. Paul reminded Timothy that he was set apart for his work "by the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery." I Tim. 4:14. The apostles acted together in ordaining deacons. Acts 6:6. No apostle seems to have been present in sending forth Barnabas and Paul.² Acts 13:3.

¹ Jerome wrote that in the early Church, bishops were consecrated by the body of Presbyters from which they were taken, that is, by the Presbytery. Jerome died in the 2nd decade of the 5th century.

² Only ordinary ministers, as Simeon called Niger, Lucius and Manaen, spoken of as "prophets and teachers." Acts 13:1.

"They laid their hands upon them." So, too, the Samaritan Christians thus received the Holy Ghost. Acts 8:17.

But does not St. Paul also speak of the "laying on of my hands?" II Tim. 1:6.

Yes, but there need be no contradiction in this, for St. Paul took part as a member of the Presbytery. Compare St. Peter's speaking of himself as your "fellow-presbyter." I Peter 5:1.

Does the Word of God anywhere give ground for the belief that Roman bishops or any minister, have power to bestow the Holy Spirit or His gifts by the touch of their hands?

No. No Roman bishop, nor any man, has this power. The dogma was a medieval invention to exalt the pope and the Roman hierarchy. The Holy Spirit now as of old, Himself bestows all grace and power in answer to the prayer of faith; His gifts have never been mechanically conveyed by human hands.

There Is No Unbroken Line of Papal Succession

As a matter of historic fact, has there ever been, from the days of the apostles down to the present time, as Rome alleges, an unbroken line of popes and bishops?

History shows that there has been no continuous, unbroken line of popes and bishops. The supposed line has been often broken, and that for long periods. The gaps between popes create vast gulfs which cannot be bridged, and *destroy all possibility* of anything like a continuous succession.

Is this merely the opinion of writers unfriendly to the papacy, or is there

clear historic evidence that there has been no unbroken line, no real continuity?

There is abundant evidence from eminent Roman Catholic historians that there has been no continuous line of popes, and therefore no real succession. Cardinal Baronius, an outstanding papal historian, wrote that IN A LIST OF 50 POPES, THERE WAS NOT ONE PIOUS OR VIRTUOUS MAN AMONG THEM; THAT FOR LONG PERIODS OF YEARS THERE WAS NO POPE AT ALL, AND AT OTHER TIMES TWO OR THREE POPES AT ONCE; ALSO THAT THERE WERE MORE THAN 20 SCHISMS, ONE OF WHICH CONTINUED FOR 50 YEARS, THE POPES OF ROME AND THOSE OF AVIGNON EXCOMMUNICATING EACH OTHER, AND YET CONFERRING ORDERS ON THEIR SEVERAL CLERGY! ANN. ECCLES. AN. 912.

Do not these facts, and the undoubted history of the papacy for centuries, conclusively prove that there is no such thing as Apostolic Succession?

They do prove that Apostolic Succession, as held by the Church of Rome and its imitators, has had no real existence in fact; it is only the child of a fertile imagination. Both Scripture and history show that it is neither apostolic nor a succession; it is not a succession, because there is no unbroken line; it is not apostolic, because, as Baronius declared, there have been many popes, who were "neither pious nor virtuous." John Wesley was right, when in 1784 he wrote to his brother Charles: "I firmly believe that I am a Scriptural *episcopos*, as much as any man in England, or Europe. For the uninterrupted 'succession' I know to be a fable which no man ever did, or can, prove."

The Impossibility of Any Real Apostolic Succession¹

A careful student of Church History writes: "The condition of the Church of Rome about the 10th century destroys the last shred of possibility that the Roman Church of today inherits the line of succession of the apostles. No pope for nearly a thousand years has had canonical election to the Roman See, and the claim of Apostolicity and infallibility is thus completely voided. A second gap of 34 years from 1012 to 1046 is caused by unworthy and simoniacal popes. Again a complete break occurs in the 70 years' 'captivity' at Avignon. Next, at the Council of Constance in 1414 there were 3 rival popes, Gregory XII, John XXIII and Benedict XIII, all of whom were set aside by the Council as illegitimate, and thereby invalidated all quasi-papal acts, including the creation of cardinals which was done between 1378 and 1414. There has been no possibility of a legitimate election and succession since 1492, when the electoral body was *vitiating at its very source*." *Littledale*, pages 219, 223.

¹ The testimony of the High Churchman, Archbishop Laud, is significant. He said: "I do not find one of the ancient Fathers that makes continued succession a necessary mark of the true Church. The succession is not tied to place or person, but to the verity of doctrine. This was the uniform opinion of High Churchmen at the time of, and after, the Reformation. They did not hold the doctrine of succession imposed by the Council of Trent, but fully recognized the valid orders of other Reformed Churches.

So corrupt had the Roman See become that a period of this century was called

the "*Rule of the Harlots or Prostitutes*," for licentious women, Theodora, and her two daughters, practically controlled the selection of popes. This name was given to the period not by enemies of the papacy, but by Roman Catholic historians themselves. *How Peter Became Pope*, by Dallman, page 44.

The Council of Pisa in 1409 deposed the rival popes, Gregory XII and Benedict XIII, declaring that "there was no soundness in the Church from the sole of the foot to the crown of the head." These popes refusing to yield, they were again deposed, together with pope John XXIII, by the Council of Constance in 1415. All three were condemned for a long list of crimes. Concerning John XXIII, John Huss said: "You preachers who affirm that the pope is a god on earth, that he could not sin nor commit simony, that he is the sun of the holy Church, answer me. Behold, this terrestrial god has been declared guilty of so many sins, that he has fled! Ah, if Christ had said to the Council, 'let him among you who feels himself free from the sin of simony, condemn the pope,' all of you would, I believe, have fled away! Why then did they kneel down before him and kiss his feet and call him 'most holy father,' knowing that he was a *heretic and a murderer, as has since been proved*?" Mussolini's *John Huss*, page 89.

If the dogma of Apostolic Succession has no real basis in Scripture or history, how did it come to be accepted in the Church?

Because it is a plausible theory which appeals to the imagination; it invests the papacy with an *air of antiquity and dignity*. It appeals to *pride and love of power*; it became rooted in an age of ignorance and superstition; it spread through the incessant propaganda of those who profited by it, that is, the whole hierarchy; and finally, *because the entire mechanical system of the Roman Church depended on it*.

How does the dogma of Apostolic Succession enhance the power and prestige of pope and hierarchy?

The dogma practically gives absolute power to the Roman hierarchy by making it a close corporation which supposedly holds a monopoly of divine grace and salvation. The laity are made dependent on the parish priest, the priest on the bishop, and the bishop on the pope. Access to God and salvation for the laity can be had, practically, only through the priest, on whom they are dependent for sacramental grace, and the bishops and clergy are dependent absolutely on the pope. Only those on whom a recognized bishop of the Church has laid his hands can perform the duties of priest; and only those can be bishops on whom the pope, either directly or through his representative, has laid his hands. No one outside of the supposed line of succession, *no matter what his spiritual qualifications may be*, can have any authority or perform the rites of the Church.

Is not this system which makes of the Christian ministry a close corporation, alone controlling and dispensing God's grace and salvation, wholly contrary to the doctrine and spirit of the true Gospel?

This system, which gives practically autocratic power to pope and clergy, who are supposed to hold a monopoly of the free grace of God, and shuts the door

of salvation against all who do not bow to their claims, is wholly alien to the Gospel of Christ. There is absolutely no warrant for it in Holy Scripture nor in apostolic practice. It was not inspired by the Holy Spirit, but was devised by ambitious, selfish men, who saw the power and wealth of secular rulers, and wished to secure the same for themselves in the Church of Christ. How different is the spirit of pride, self-sufficiency and love of wealth and power of the Papacy, as contrasted with the meekness, humility and self-sacrifice of the apostles, who sought no preeminence or glory for themselves, but ascribed all grace, power and glory to the Holy Trinity!

The Laity Shared In The Management Of The Apostolic Church

Did not the Christian laity have a share in the management of the Apostolic Church?

Not only does the Bible show there was no pope in the Apostolic Church, but it shows also that the laity *undoubtedly shared in the management* of the Apostolic Church. The people elected their officers. They voted in the selection of deacons. In Acts 6:1-6 we read, "the whole multitude of believers" chose them. In the General Council at Jerusalem the laity took part through representatives chosen by the congregation. Acts 15:6. In verse 22 it is said: "It pleased the apostles and the presbyters with the whole church (i.e., the laity) to send chosen men of their own company," that is, representatives chosen by and from the people. Again, the official letter to Antioch was sent not only in the name of the clergy, but also in the name of the laity; "the apostles, presbyters and brethren" (laity), verse 23. Thus it is clear that in the Apostolic Church the laymen had a part in the administration of Church affairs, not only temporal, but spiritual; for all the matters cited above relate to spiritual or doctrinal matters. Not only did laymen share in the management of the Church in apostolic times, but they continued to do so for centuries thereafter. History shows plainly that clergy and laymen elected their own bishops until the 11th century, the time of Hildebrand. In 1059 pope Nicholas II changed the election of pope from clergy and people to a bench of cardinals. Since that time the choice of bishops has belonged exclusively to the pope. Dr. Luchaire rightly declares that the papacy absorbed all the living forces of the religious world, and suppressed all the liberties which the Church of old had enjoyed! Note that the pope by increasing the number of bishops was able to control Church Councils. Pope John XXIII appointed 50 bishops in order to control the vote of the council of Constance! Creighton, *History of the Papacy*, vol. I, page 317.

Where there were no dioceses to be filled, there were imaginary or fictitious ones ready to hand, and titular bishops can always be appointed. Lord Acton referred to such, as appearing in the Vatican Council of 1870. Formerly there was no law or prohibition preventing any cleric or laymen from being elected pope. But later the choice was narrowed down to the bench of cardinals and since 1378, a cardinal has always been elected pope. The cardinals thus gradually formed an electoral oligarchy superseding election by clergy and the people. Note how far from the practice of Holy Scripture the Church of Rome has departed! Popes have gradually usurped all power and authority and both clergy and people have been deprived of their God-given right of Church

administration, just as the people have been deprived of their right to partake of the wine in the Lord's supper!

What is the doctrine and practice of the Reformed Church?

The Reformed or Protestant Church of all denominations, following Scripture, has restored the apostolic practice, and gladly accords to all church members the right to participate in the management of Church affairs.

Does the Word of God anywhere teach that salvation or the reception of divine grace is dependent on any human being?

The Word of God nowhere teaches that salvation is dependent on pope, bishop, priest, or any human being. Salvation depends on God alone; and all who truly obey His Word, forsake their sins, and trust only in the Lord Jesus Christ as Redeemer, are saved forever. Jonah 2:9, Mark 1:15, Acts 4:12, 16, 31.

Judging by the only right Standard, the Holy Scriptures, what Church should be considered the true Church of God?

Judging by the Scriptures, the Church which worships God alone, which trusts Him only for salvation, which loyally obeys the Word of God as its sole rule of faith, and which ascribes all glory to Him, should be considered the true Church; and we believe that the Reformed or Protestant Church is this true Church. For with all the sins and faults of its members, which we freely confess with deep sorrow, it most nearly conforms in doctrine and practice to the true Church of Christ in the Scriptures.

Is the Roman Catholic Church a part of the true Church of God?

Judging by Scripture, our only God-given standard, one is bound to hold that the Roman Church is not a part of the true Church of God; for on almost every vital doctrine, as we have seen, it has *departed far from the teachings of God's Word*, has put sinful human beings in the place of God, and therefore must be considered apostate.

Does this statement imply that there are no true Christians in the Church of Rome?

Not at all. Thank God there are true Christians in the Church of Rome. But they are good Christians, *not* because of papal teachings, but *in spite of those teachings*. Romanism rightly understood is a totally different thing from the true faith of Holy Scripture. It is what St. Paul calls "another Gospel," that is, a counterfeit Gospel. Gal. 1:6-9. The papal system is like a thick, iron crust, which has formed over the true Gospel, and shuts the soul off from Christ and salvation. By God's mercy some have been *enabled to break through this iron crust of false dogma and reach the living Christ*. But many seem to trust merely to pope and priest and dead rites, and lack that vital faith in Christ and His Truth, which *alone can save*.

To rely on a priest or any minister for absolution or forgiveness, and to trust to the *counterfeit atonement for sin* which is offered in the Mass, is indeed a false hope which will *utterly fail the sinner in the Day of*

Judgment. I Cor. 3:11-13, II Peter 2:1.