

The Office Continues

2 Timothy 2:1-2; Titus 1:5; Acts 20:17-32

WHAT WE FOUND

Paul spent his last letters engineering a relay: four generations in one verse, "what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2), Titus left in Crete to "appoint elders in every town" (Titus 1:5), and the Ephesian elders made "overseers... to care for the church of God" precisely because wolves were coming after Paul's departure (Acts 20:28-29). Across Scripture, God's offices are the hand-me-down kind: Aaron's vestments, the steward's key, Joshua's commissioning, Matthias's enrollment. Again and again, these offices were designed to outlive their first holders; succession is the pattern, not the exception.

One generation out, St. Clement of Rome confirms it as the apostles' own design: they provided "that if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry" (1 Clement 44), and his letter *behaves* like the design working: Rome authoritatively settling another apostolic church's crisis, while the apostle John, closer to Corinth, still lived, and no one recorded surprise. By AD 180, St. Irenaeus's test for orthodoxy is the public succession list, and his chief exhibit is Rome, founded by Peter and Paul, bishops recited name by name, the church with which every church must agree.

Development is real and unembarrassing: St. John Henry Newman named the pattern, acorn and oak, one organism, continuity of type, and concluded that to be deep in history is to cease to be a Protestant. Two questions remain for our last two sessions: why did the succession run through Rome, of all cities? And what, exactly and narrowly, is protected as it travels?

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Clement of Rome *Letter to the Corinthians, 42 and 44*

Writing about AD 96, Clement testifies that the apostles, foreknowing contention over the bishop's office, appointed the men named above and afterward provided that when these should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed to their ministry. Succession, in the mouth of a man who knew the apostles, is not a later theory; it is their own recorded arrangement for the Church's continuance.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Irenaeus of Lyons *Against Heresies, Book III, 3*

Against teachers claiming secret apostolic traditions, Irenaeus answers with a public list: the church founded at Rome by Peter and Paul, whose bishops he names in order down to his own day, and with which, on account of its preeminent authority, every church must agree. For Irenaeus the succession is the argument: truth is where the handing-on can be shown, name by name, back to the apostles.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. John Henry Newman *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*

Newman, whose study of the Fathers carried him into the Catholic Church, argued that living ideas necessarily develop, and that a doctrine's later fullness can be the same organism as its scriptural seed, the oak of the acorn, provided the type is continuous. His famous verdict stands over tonight's evidence: to be deep in history is to cease to be a Protestant.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1.

Build your own succession list this week: name, on paper, the actual chain of people who carried the faith to you, as far back as you can trace, and thank God for each by name.

2.

Look up your diocese's line of bishops (most diocesan websites list it) and pray for your current bishop by name each day this week: he is Acts 20:28 in your zip code.

3.

Keep the daily Our Father for the pope, adding this week: "Lord of the relay, let the deposit pass through our generation undiminished."

MEMORY VERSE

"And what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." (2 Timothy 2:2, RSV2CE)

BEFORE NEXT SESSION

Read **1 Peter 5:13** and ask yourself where "Babylon" is, then read **Revelation 17:5, 9, 18** for a clue about the code. Reread **John 21:18-19**. Next session follows Peter to the end of his road.

Catechism Connection: CCC 861-862; 77; 1590; 1594