

Apostolic Succession In The Polish National Catholic Church

In the Old Testament, when God established His Covenant with the nation of Israel, He provided for a living, continuing authority in the Mosaic priesthood (cf. 2 Chronicles 19:11; Malachi 2:7). This authority did not end when the Old Testament Scripture was written, rather it continued as the safeguard and authentic interpreter of the Sacred Scripture.

When our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ established His Church, He fulfilled this living, continuing authority to teach (Matthew 28:19-20), govern (John 21:17) and sanctify (Luke 19; Matthew 28:19; John 20:23), in His name. This living authority is called "apostolic" because it has its origin in the twelve apostles and continues with their successors. It is this apostolic authority that preserves and authentically interprets the Revelation of Jesus Christ. It is this same apostolic authority that determined the canon of the Bible, and will continue to preserve the teachings of Jesus Christ.

The apostles and, therefore, their legitimate successors are the persons to whom Christ entrusted the duty of forming in His name, among all nations and for all ages, the Holy Catholic Church. The Polish National Catholic Church was organized within this historic continuity, descended from the Holy Catholic Church that our Lord Jesus Christ established after His Resurrection in Jerusalem.

The Polish National Catholic Church mirrors the same organizational principles that Christ gave to the apostles. It possesses and safeguards the same faith that He deposited with them; it believes in the doctrine, governance and worship of the primitive Apostolic Church.

Bishop Francis Hodur

Historically speaking, the beginning of the Polish National Catholic Church in the United States of America took place in 1897 in Scranton, Pennsylvania. At that time a group of Polish Americans, consisting of about 300 families, called Rev. Francis Hodur for guidance and leadership. Together they organized the first Polish

National Catholic Parish of St. Stanislaus, Bishop and Martyr in Scranton. Rev. Francis Hodur was then a priest of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Scranton, Pennsylvania and pastor of Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Parish in Nanticoke, Pennsylvania.

The Polish National Catholic Church was organized within the context of the emerging movement of nationalism. Established on the basis of democratic catholicity, the Polish National Catholic Church spread to several sections of the United States of America and Canada.

The First Synod of the Polish National Catholic Church was held in September 1904 in Scranton. This first synod represented some 20,000 adherents and interested individuals and organizations from five states. It was during this gathering that Rev. Francis Hodur was elected as the first bishop by the representatives of the Synod. Bishop Francis Hodur was consecrated in 1907 in Utrecht, Holland. Consecrating him were Archbishop Gerard Gul of Utrecht, Bishop John Van Thiel of Haarlem, and Bishop Peter Spit of Deventer. The consecration of the Most Rev. Francis Hodur gave the Polish National Catholic Church a share in the Western line of Apostolic Succession. The doctrine of Apostolic Succession means that according to the institution of Christ, the bishops succeed one another in an unbroken chain from Christ Himself through the apostles and their lawful successors to the present time. This doctrine of Apostolic Succession continues to be upheld by the Polish National Catholic Church.

The Apostolic Line

A Vicar Apostolic, Peter Codde, consecrated as Bishop at Brussels, Belgium in 1689, supported the Jansenist movement and organized a Jansenist Church. He was elected Archbishop by the Chapter of Utrecht. During this episcopate he refused to sign the formulary of Pope Alexander VII and died without recantation in 1710. The Church at Utrecht joined with the French "Appelants" in their resistance to the Bull, "Unigenitus" (The Only Begotten), issued in 1713 by Pope Clement XI.

The Church of Utrecht kept up a supply of priests by sending their candidates with dimissorials to French Appellant Catholic bishops for ordination to the Holy Priesthood.

In 1723 the Chapter of Utrecht chose Cornelius Van Steenhoven, formerly Vicar General to the Archbihop of Utrecht, as bishop. He was consecrated by Dominique Marie Varlet, French Appellant Catholic Bishop of Babylon. The legitimacy and canonicity of this consecration was defended by Zeger van Espen, the famed canonist of Louvain University.

Bishop Varlet consecrated four Archbishops of Utrecht. After Varlet's death Bishop Meinhardt (the last consecrated by him) established the Bishopric of Haarlem in 1742 and the Bishopric of Deventer in 1752. Meinhardt's successor was consecrated by the Bishop of Haarlem, who maintained the line of succession that continues to our day.

The apostolic line of the Archbishops of Utrecht in communion with the Roman Catholic Church to the point of Bishop Francis Hodur is as follows:

Frederick Schenck, 1560-1580

Sasbold Vosmeer, 1602-1614

Philip Rovenius, 1620-1651

Jam del al Torre, 1651-1661

J. van Neerchasel, 1661-1686

Peter Codde, 1688-1710

After the break from Roman jurisdiction:

C. van Steenhoven, 1724-1725

Cor. J. Barchman Wuytiers, 1725-1733

T. van der Croon, 1734 - 1739

P.J. Meinhardt, 1739-1767

Walter van Neuenhuisen, 1768-1797

J.J. van Rhyn, 1797-1808

W. van Os, 1814-1825

J. van Santen, 1825-1858

Henry Loos, 1858-1873

John Heykamp, 1875-1892

Gerard Gul, 1892-1920

Francis Hodur, 1907

How Did The Early Church View Apostolic Succession?

The first Christians had no doubt about how to determine which claimant, among the many competing new sects, was a true Church. The test was simple: Just trace the apostolic succession of the claimants. Did the teaching AND the teachers come down in a line from the apostles?

"Through countryside and city the apostles preached, and they appointed their earliest converts, testing them by the Spirit to be bishops and deacons of future believers. Nor was this a novelty, for bishops and deacons had been written about a long time earlier. The apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife for the office of bishop. For this reason, therefore, having received perfect foreknowledge, they appointed those who have already been mentioned and afterwards added further provision that, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry." (St. Clement of Rome, [A.D. 80] Epistle to the Corinthians, 42:4-5, 44:1-3).

"When I was in Rome, I visited Anicetus, whose deacon was Eleutherus. And after Anicetus died, Soter succeeded, and after him, Eleutherus. In each succession and in each city there is a continuance of what is proclaimed by Law, the Prophets, and the Lord." (Hegesippus, circa A.D. 180, Memoirs, 4:22:1)

:It is possible then for everyone in every church who may wish to know the truth, to contemplate the tradition of the apostles which had been made known to us throughout the whole world. And we are in a position to enumerate those who were instituted bishops by the apostles and their successors down to our time, men who neither knew nor taught anything like which the heretics rave about...Surely they wished all those and their successors, to whom they handed on their authority, to be perfect and without reproach." (Irenaeus, circa A.D. 180-199, "Against Heresies, 3:3:1).