



CHRIST COMMUNION

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Apostolic Succession within Christ Communion

The cornerstone of Christ Communion lies in its confident affirmation of the validity of its apostolic succession, derived from the lineage of the Brazilian Catholic Apostolic Church and the Old Catholic Churches of the Netherlands. This stance is embedded in a rich historical backdrop, shaped by Church Tradition, the wisdom of ancient and modern theologians, Roman Catholic canon law, and the Roman Catholic Church's (RCC) evolving acknowledgement of such successions.

Apostolic succession refers to an unbroken line of consecrations originating from the apostles themselves and continuing to the current bishops, conferring upon them a unique authority. The early Church Fathers, such as Ignatius of Antioch and Irenaeus of Lyon, emphasized the pivotal role of the bishop in preserving the Church's integrity and safeguarding the apostolic teaching, underscoring the doctrine of apostolic succession.

Historically, the apostolic succession of the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands, which distanced itself from Rome following the First Vatican Council's declaration on papal infallibility, remains indisputable. The lineage of Dutch bishops traces back to the early Church via the Roman Catholic Church, a line that was sustained even after the schism. The RCC, through Pope Pius XI, acknowledged the validity of Old Catholic orders in 1925, implicitly affirming the apostolic succession of the Old Catholic Church.

The Brazilian Catholic Apostolic Church, founded by excommunicated Roman Catholic Bishop Carlos Duarte Costa in 1945, similarly maintains a valid apostolic succession. While Duarte Costa was excommunicated, Roman Catholic canon law – Canon 1331 §2 – specifies that excommunication does not invalidate the sacraments conferred by an excommunicated bishop. Despite the person's prohibition from ministerial functions, the validity of the sacraments they perform is not negated, suggesting the subsequent episcopal consecrations performed by Duarte Costa maintained their validity.

Therefore, Christ Communion, with bishops consecrated by those from the Old Catholic Church of the Netherlands and the Brazilian Catholic Apostolic Church, inherits an authentic apostolic succession. Consecrations performed by bishops in direct lineage to the apostles, following the proper ordination rites, provide Christ Communion with legitimate apostolic continuity.



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Francis A. Sullivan, a Roman Catholic theologian, in his work "From Apostles to Bishops," contends that apostolic succession retains validity in churches like the Old Catholic Church and Brazilian Catholic Apostolic Church, despite their separation from Rome. Orthodox theologian Nicolas Afanasiev proposes that apostolic succession is not simply about the transference of authority but emphasizes the organic continuity of apostolic faith and practice within the church, lending further support to the validity of apostolic succession in Christ Communion.

Crucially, the RCC's recognition of such orders is indicative of their validity. Pope Pius XII, in the encyclical "Ad Apostolorum Principis" (1958), condemned the unauthorized consecrations conducted by Duarte Costa, yet did not question their validity. More recently, the Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism (1993) indirectly acknowledges the validity of Old Catholic orders by permitting shared Eucharist under certain conditions with these churches' members.

Furthermore, the RCC has permitted its members to receive sacraments from churches like Christ Communion. Canon 844 §2 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law allows for Catholics, in circumstances where it's impossible to approach a Catholic minister, to receive the sacraments of Eucharist, Penance, and Anointing of the Sick from non-Roman Catholic ministers in whose churches these sacraments are valid. This provision extends to churches maintaining valid apostolic succession and proper sacramental rites, including those in lineages like Christ Communion's.

In conclusion, the validity of Christ Communion's apostolic succession, anchored in the lineage of the Brazilian Catholic Apostolic Church and the Old Catholic Churches of the Netherlands, is demonstrable. With roots in Church Tradition, supported by theologians across time, affirmed by Roman Catholic Canon Law, and implicitly recognized by the RCC, our claim to apostolic succession is robust and profound. Upholding our historical and spiritual continuity with the apostles, Christ Communion embodies Christ's grace, serving the world sacramentally and proclaiming the Good News as a part of this sacred apostolic lineage.

This position paper reflects the official stance of Christ Communion on the discussed subject matter. Nevertheless, it is understood and accepted that members of our faith community may hold differing viewpoints. We believe that these differences of opinion are not only inevitable but crucial. They serve to deepen our understanding, strengthen our shared beliefs, and contribute to the rich tapestry of our collective faith journey. We welcome and value this ongoing dialogue as it reflects the diverse perspectives within our church. Our faith is a living, evolving conversation, where every voice, including those in dissent, plays a critical role in shaping the contours of our shared spiritual experience.

Christ Communion is not a monolith, but a vibrant communion of unique individuals, united in our faith yet diverse in our thoughts. As we continue to engage in these complex and often challenging conversations, we grow together, enriching our Church and enhancing our faith. Each viewpoint is a vital piece of the puzzle that helps us to better understand the divine mystery we are all part of. May we keep discussing, keep questioning, keep disagreeing, in love and respect for each other, as we continue our journey toward the truth.
