



**I have always heard that our Bishops, Priests, and Deacons are in the “Apostolic Succession.” What exactly does that mean?**

“Apostolic Succession” is the teaching of the Catholic Churches—Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Old Catholic, and Oriental—that validly consecrated Bishops are the fully empowered successors of the twelve Apostles chosen by Jesus Christ and ordained by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. It is the teaching of the Catholic Churches that validly consecrated Bishops are both physically and sacramentally in an unbroken line going directly back to the Apostles and Jesus Christ Himself. To ensure always the authentic continuity of this succession Canon Law requires that at least three Bishops consecrate every new Bishop.

The mission Jesus Christ gave the Apostles—and their successors, the Bishops—was to sanctify all persons with the Sacraments and to teach them to observe all that He had commanded His disciples (St Matthew 28.19-20). The Apostolic Succession is conferred upon Bishops, Priests, and Deacons by means of the Sacrament of Holy Orders. The fullness of the Sacrament is the Episcopate (the office of Bishop); Priests and Deacons share in different degrees in this Sacrament.

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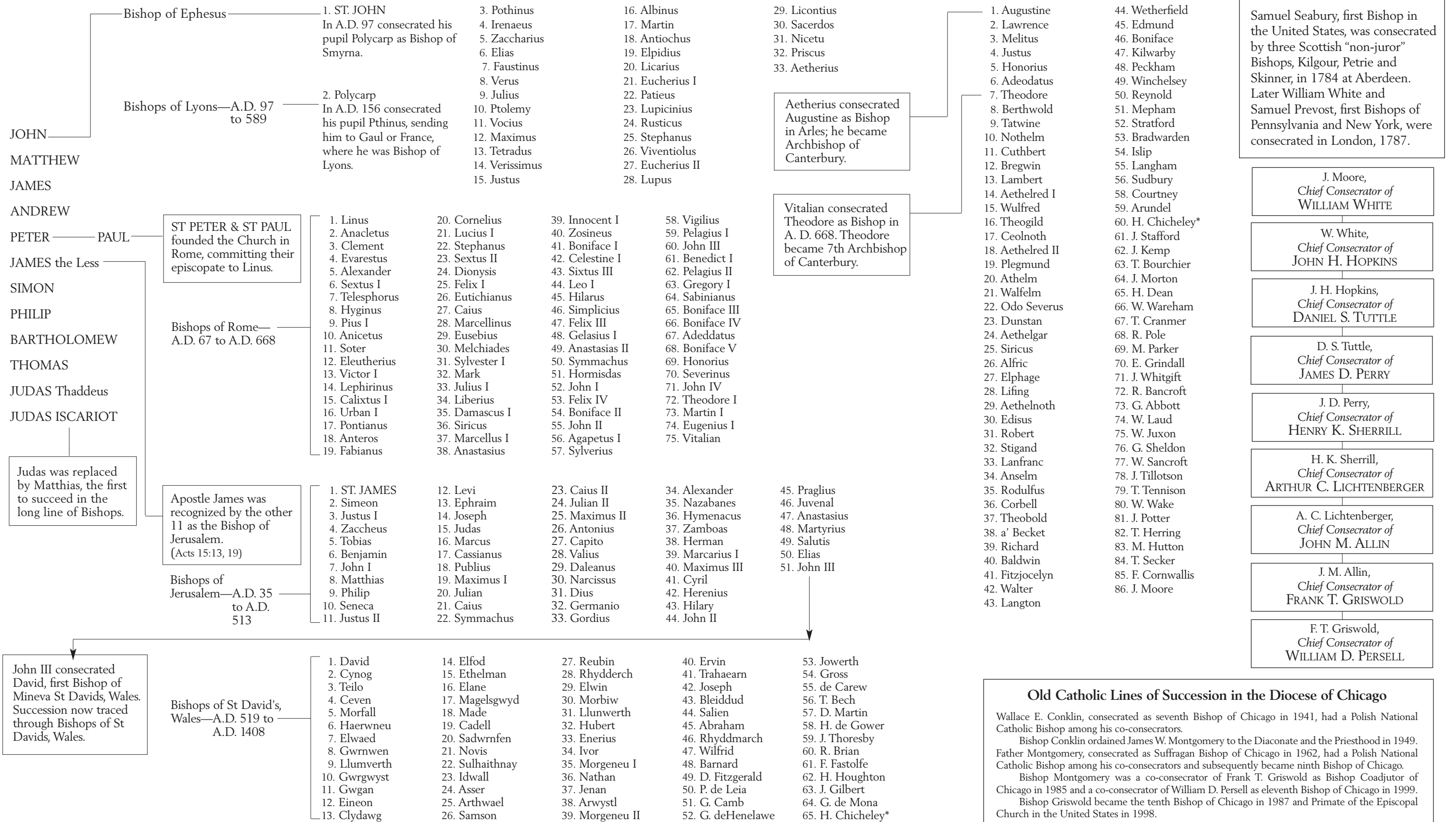
Like the Early Christian Church, the Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Anglican Churches, the Old Catholic Churches, and the Oriental Churches teach that Christ gave the power to “bind and loose”—i.e., the power to interpret authoritatively His once-for-all revelation and apply it to new situations—only to the Bishops in the Apostolic Succession gathered *as a body*. (Classical Protestantism teaches that this can be done only by each individual Christian for him/herself. The Roman Catholic Church since 1870 has dogmatically taught that this can be done only by the Bishop of Rome.)

The Catholic Churches teach that an ecclesial body must have Bishops consecrated in the Apostolic Succession in order to be an authentic part of the one Church established by Jesus Christ (see the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, *Book of Common Prayer* page 877). Since 1870 the Roman Catholic Church has dogmatically taught that in order to be a true part of Christ’s one Church an ecclesial body must also be in full communion with and accept the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Rome as the dominically-instituted, absolute Universal Primate who is infallible when he speaks *ex cathedra* on matters of faith and morals. The Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, Old Catholic, and Oriental Churches do not accept that dogma. This is the principal doctrinal difference between the Roman Catholic Church and the other Catholic Churches.

The Catholic Churches also teach that as this is the only form of ordained ministry established by Jesus Christ, thus it is the only sacramentally valid form of ordained Christian ministry (see the Preface to the Ordination Rites, *Book of Common Prayer* page 510). Except for Holy Baptism and Holy Matrimony, an ecclesial body must have this form of ordained ministry in order to celebrate valid Sacraments (i.e. Eucharist, Confirmation, Reconciliation, Unction, and Holy Orders).

# THE APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION

## IN THE DIOCESE OF CHICAGO



## The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, 1886

...we [the Bishops of the Church] do hereby affirm that the Christian unity...can be restored only by the return of all Christian communions to the principles of unity exemplified by the undivided Catholic Church during the first ages of its existence; which principles we believe to be the substantial deposit of Christian Faith and Order committed by Christ and his Apostles to the Church unto the end of the world, and therefore incapable of compromise or surrender by those who have been ordained to be its stewards and trustees for the common and equal benefit of all men.

As inherent parts of this sacred deposit, and therefore as essential to the restoration of unity among the divided branches of Christendom, we account...the Historic Episcopate [Bishops validly consecrated in the Apostolic Succession]....

*Book of Common Prayer 1979, page 877*

## Preface to the Ordination Rites

The Holy Scriptures and ancient Christian writers make it clear that from the apostles' time, there have been different ministries within the Church. In particular, since the time of the New Testament, three distinct orders of ordained ministers have been characteristic of Christ's holy Catholic Church. First, there is the order of bishops who carry on the apostolic work of leading, supervising, and uniting the Church. Secondly, associated with them are the presbyters, in subsequent times generally known as priests. Together with the bishops, they take part in the governance of the Church, in the carrying out of its missionary and pastoral work, and in the preaching of the Word of God and administering his holy Sacraments. Thirdly, there are deacons who assist bishops and priests in all of this work. It is also a special responsibility of deacons to minister in Christ's name to the poor, the sick, the suffering, and the helpless.

The persons who are chosen and recognized by the Church as being called by God to the ordained ministry are admitted to these sacred orders by solemn prayer and the laying on of episcopal [bishop's] hands. It has been, and is, the intention and purpose of this Church to maintain and continue these three orders; and for this purpose these services of ordination and consecration are appointed. No persons are allowed to exercise the offices of bishop, priest, or deacon in this Church unless they are so ordained, or have already received such ordination with the laying on of hands by bishops who are themselves duly qualified to confer Holy Orders.

It is also recognized and affirmed that the threefold ministry not the exclusive property of this portion of Christ's Catholic Church, but is a gift from God for the nurture of his people and the proclamation of his Gospel everywhere. Accordingly, the manner of ordaining in this Church is to be such as has been, and is, most generally recognized by Christian people as suitable for conferring of the sacred orders of bishop, priest, and deacon.

*Book of Common Prayer 1979, page 510*