

Fr. Chad Arneson, ROCA: Why Protestants Cannot Claim a Mission from Christ to Preach the Gospel



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Why Protestants Cannot Claim a Mission from Christ

to Preach the Gospel

by Fr. Chad Arneson

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“And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” – Romans 10:15

It is a universal teaching of Protestants of many varied confessions that the Scriptures are the only authoritative and inerrant rule for faith and practice. However each sect chooses to define Luther’s dictum of Sola Scriptura, it does not change the fact that Protestants generally hold that the only thing that the apostles left us of their authoritative and infallible teachings are the New Testament Scriptures. Not only does this potentially put the First Century Christian at an advantage in interpreting the Scriptures to a Christian today (since those taught at the feet of St Paul could simply ask him what he meant in a given passage of Scripture), but more fundamentally, this betrays a defect in first principles in the Protestant conception of Christianity in its pristine and original institution and composition by Christ and His Holy Apostles. It likewise betrays the implicit Protestant denial of the need for *authenticity of messenger* in addition to *authenticity of message*.

During His earthly sojourn, our Lord did not write any of the Gospels with His Theanthropic Hand. The one record we have of His writing was in the dust of the earth, and the words written by Him on this occasion are not recorded in the Gospels. And so the question must turn to the matter of what the Lord actually did and how He founded His Church. The answer to this is crystal clear in the New Testament Scriptures themselves:

“Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God” – St. Mark 1:14

“And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach” – St. Mark 3:14

It is not a matter of serious or widespread dispute amongst Protestants that the Lord Himself was the fulfillment of the words of the Holy Spirit through the Holy Prophet Isaiah (61:1) as the one “anointed” and “sent” by God to “preach” and to “heal” and to “preach the acceptable year of the Lord” as He himself testified to at the synagogue in Nazareth. The earthly ministry of the Lord took on a primarily “in person” ministry, in which the physical mouth was used to speak, physical hands were used to heal, and physical ears were involved in hearing. We read that “he ordained twelve, that they should be with him.” Therefore we see that just as His own Divine mission was bodily and personal, so too were His “sent ones” or “apostles” also to be bodily and

personal messengers. These men were to be a foundation upon which the Church was built (Eph. 2:20) with the Lord Himself being the chief cornerstone.

But what is the foundation of the building of the Church without the “living stones” (1 Pet. 2:5) to be built upon it, thus making it a “holy temple in the Lord” (Eph. 2:21)? Thus we know from Holy Tradition, both oral and written (the New Testament Scriptures are an integral part of this Tradition) that men also were ordained to succeed the holy apostles as bishops in the Church:

“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” – 2 Timothy 2:2

“Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the priesthood.” – (the word for “priesthood” is used in the Greek: πρεσβυτερίου) 1 Timothy 4:14

“Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.” – Hebrews 13:17

And there are, of course, many other like passages that could be readily quoted from the New Testament. And not only this, but the entire Tradition of the early Church testifies to the succession of bishops. Against heretics, early fathers of the Church like St Irenaeus (died A.D. +202 – the disciple of St Polycarp, who was in turn the disciple of St John) would demonstrate the authenticity of their mission and teaching by simply listing, in each successive generation, the names of the bishops who came in succession from the Holy Apostles themselves. The following is just one instance in which St. Irenaeus cites the succession of bishops in the local Church of Rome against the heretics:

“The blessed apostles, then, having founded and built up the Church, committed into the hands of Linus the office of the episcopate. Of this Linus, Paul makes mention in the Epistles to Timothy. To him succeeded Anacletus; and after him, in the third place from the apostles, Clement was allotted the bishopric. This man, as he had seen the blessed apostles, and had been conversant with them, might be said to have the preaching of the apostles still echoing [in his ears], and their traditions before his eyes. Nor was he alone [in this], for there were many still remaining who had received instructions from the apostles. In the time of this Clement, no small dissension having occurred among the brethren at Corinth, the Church in Rome dispatched a most powerful letter to the Corinthians, exhorting them to peace, renewing their faith, and declaring the tradition which it had lately received from the apostles, proclaiming the one God, omnipotent, the Maker of heaven and earth, the Creator of man, who brought on the deluge, and called Abraham, who led the people from the land of Egypt, spoke with Moses, set forth the law, sent the prophets, and who has prepared fire for the devil and his angels. From this document, whosoever chooses to do so, may learn that He, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, was preached by the Churches, and may also understand the apostolic tradition of the Church, since

this Epistle is of older date than these men who are now propagating falsehood, and who conjure into existence another god beyond the Creator and the Maker of all existing things. To this Clement there succeeded Evaristus. Alexander followed Evaristus; then, sixth from the apostles, Sixtus was appointed; after him, Telephorus, who was gloriously martyred; then Hyginus; after him, Pius; then after him, Anicetus. Soter having succeeded Anicetus, Eleutherius does now, in the twelfth place from the apostles, hold the inheritance of the episcopate. In this order, and by this succession, the ecclesiastical tradition from the apostles, and the preaching of the truth, have come down to us. And this is most abundant proof that there is one and the same vivifying faith, which has been preserved in the Church from the apostles until now, and handed down in truth.” – Against Heresies (Book III, Chapter 3)

Against the papists who would claim that an apologetic such as this establishes the claim that the Roman See’s primacy includes a universal and immediate jurisdiction in which the pope is a ‘universal bishop’ over all, we have similar letters which exalt other apostolic Sees. Here is just one example in which St Avitus, Bishop of Vienne (in Gothia which had the Pope of Rome as a regional administrative head) writes to the Patriarch of Jerusalem:

“Your Apostleship exercises a primacy granted by God, and seeks to show not by your privileges alone, but also by your merits that you hold pride of place in the Universal Church of God. Your See adorns our law and your person your See.” – (emphasis mine) St. Avitus of Vienne to Pope Felix IV (ca. AD 515)

The great respect given to bishops of the Church of God who occupied a diocese founded by an apostle was often expressed in a literary style which sounds foreign to us today in our modern democratic societies which have seen the influence of egalitarian language in the common parlance. Even so, if we look to the substance of the argument of the early fathers of the Church, we see St. Irenaeus appealing to “what was preached by the Churches” (plural). And this is the point. It is that which the Church has preached universally and from ancient times (See St. Vincent of Lerins’ *Commonitorium*) in a continuous line that can be traced back to the holy apostles themselves, which all men can look to in order to discern where the true and saving *message* is. But not only can we identify the saving *message*, but also the authoritative *messenger*.

But why is this stress upon the *messenger* important? For the one taking Scripture seriously, it is the *messenger* to whom Christ spoke when he said:

“He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.” – St Luke 10:16

And also:

“Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.” – St John 20:23

It was not to the multitudes or to a general audience that these words were spoken, but they were spoken to the specially ordained apostles who were ‘sent’ by Christ as His authoritative emissaries. To these men were given the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. To these men authority was given to bind and loose the sins of men. To ‘hear’ these men in particular, was to ‘hear’ Christ. To ‘despise’ these men was to ‘despise’ Christ and the Father. It is to these men that the Lord said “this do in remembrance of Me.” And therefore we hear St Paul testifying:

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” – 1 Corinthians 10:16

This “we” that he speaks of which is doing the work of “blessing” is not the general community, but the ‘sent’ ones who had received the gift of the Holy Spirit first by the breathing of Christ upon the apostles (St. John 20:22) and successively passed on (‘traditioned’ – L. ‘tradere’ means ‘to pass on’) in every generation until today by the laying on of hands (1 Tim. 4:14). Just as St. Melchisedek offered unto God bread and wine, so the priesthood according to the New Covenant would ‘offer’ a sacrifice of praise which would result in the real bringing down of the Bread of Heaven, the true Body and Blood of Christ so that all of the faithful of Christ may be united with him in Spirit (1 Cor. 6:17) through ‘communion in the body of Christ’ (1 Cor. 10:16).

It must therefore be stressed that is not enough for there to be continuity of *written message*. There must be a continuity of *authoritative messenger*. The *messenger* must be *sent* in an unbroken line by the Church *through the laying on of hands*. And added to this, against the papist scholasticism which gives ‘material apostolic’ succession and ‘sacramental grace’ even to heretics who are outside the Church, it is essential that there must be a *continuity of message* for apostolic succession to be a true, grace-filled and authentic succession.

It is an absolute prerequisite for anyone claiming to come *in the name of Christ* that they produce an *authentic mission from Christ* in order to substantiate their own personal authenticity as a minister of Christ. They must claim both at the same time *continuity of message* and *continuity of messenger*. If they cannot produce one or the other, they are to be rejected as a ‘thief and a robber’ (St John 10:1). The true sheep of Christ’s flock will not hear another voice from someone climbing ‘up some other way’ (v.1).

The common, and necessary, narrative of Protestants to promote their ministers’ claim of being ‘sent’ is to claim some personal spiritual prompting or experience. It is one thing for a man to believe he has heard the voice of God speaking to him. It is quite another for him to expect the rest of the world to believe it. Certainly he must produce some unassailable proof. To see the reasonableness of this demand for proof, one only has to think about the enormity of the claim being made by Protestants. They are claiming that the Church which was founded by the God-Man (Theanthropos), born according to the Seed of David, announced by Scriptural prophecy of old, confirmed by miracles performed by the Lord, His apostles, and the saints and holy martyrs

for Christ, and which proceeded *from the apostles* in exactly the same manner established *by the apostles* (namely the laying on of hands giving the gift of the Holy Spirit for the ministry of oversight of Christ's flock) was entirely corrupted and this line broken and in need of reestablishment by them and their reforming forebears (this is beside the point that they generally did not and do not continue on any sort of line of succession from the time of the 'Reformation' until today)!

The burden of proof is upon them to show that they are 'sent.' They cannot do what we Orthodox can do: produce a line of succession back to the apostles and demonstrate that they preach the faith as believed always, everywhere, and by all true Christians of all times. Therefore let them show where it is written the 'gates of hell' would prevail against the Church to the extent that the 'grievous wolves' (Acts 20:29) which were prophesied would not only enter into the flock and devour some, but utterly destroy it altogether! Let them prove this blasphemy if they can. But it is clear that they cannot. God forbid that they should ever want to try. But if they were to dare such an attempt, let them show this not only from Scripture relying on their own interpretations and unstable opinions of what they claim that it means, but let them reestablish what they claim was destroyed in the same glory as the New Testament was first established. Let them do this so that we may believe them. Let them show themselves by miracles (and by this we do not ask for the 'lying wonders' of the antichrist). Let them show themselves by unambiguous prophecy.

What miracle did Martin Luther ever perform? What wonder did Calvin work before the eyes of his followers? Whose eyes did Zwingli ever open, blind from birth?

Or concerning prophecy, we know that the Lord conformed to the exact time prophesied by the holy prophet Daniel when he entered Jerusalem to the cries of Hosanna! What prophetic time frame for this universal apostasy that they assert has already taken place can we find? If such an event has been prophesied to take place soon after the death of the holy apostles, let them produce it so we may calculate the time and believe? And what prophetic time frame for a restoration of the truth, a "Reformation", can they produce? Surely these men do not think that they will be so easily believed since in the Scriptures we do not read of a falling away followed by a Reformation. We do, however, read of an apostasy (falling away) which will be followed by the man of sin, the antichrist, who in turn will be followed by the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. But nothing like a thousand year gap in which all has been corrupted followed by a Reformation appears anywhere in either the Scriptures or in any other part of the Christian Tradition received from the apostles.

These men may in turn claim that if we demand these things from them, that we are obligated to produce these signs and wonders ourselves. But they greatly err, since we introduce no innovation and admit no novelty but continue on in the faith as it has always been believed and practiced by the saints. And therefore, the miracles, while they continue until today in the lives of the saints and martyrs (more recently under the God-fighting Communists), have already been produced by the Lord, the apostles, martyrs, and God-bearing fathers in the face of the entire

pagan world. And since we can demonstrate that our message is the same as theirs, we are not under the same obligation since we produce no novelty but remain in the faith of all of the fathers from the first century until today (many Protestants are surprised to learn that much was written by the first bishops of the Church who followed the Holy Apostles and also the generation after them, since their leaders are either ignorant of these universally known and cherished writings, or worse, keep them from their followers).

Moreover the implicit claim of the Protestants is also a great blasphemy, since not only does it consider our Lord to have been a liar when he said that the enemies of the Church would never prevail (Matt. 16:18-20), but they also implicitly charge Him with the moral crime of abandoning His Bride, the Church, throughout history. Is this not a great blasphemy against the Holy Spirit whom He prayed the Father to send, and Who was sent and remains in the true Church?

Dear reader, I implore you to demand of those who would preach to you the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ that they first produce for you evidence giving your consciences peace regarding their claim to *authenticity of messenger* (and not only *authenticity of message*). If they cannot produce it, flee from them as from a wolf. For these are the “grievous wolves” who would “enter in among you, not sparing the flock.” And, indeed, there is only one flock and one Shepherd. The flock is the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church proclaimed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed: the Orthodox Church. And the Shepherd is the one Lord Jesus Christ who is the exclusive Head of the Church and from whom each bishop heading a diocese must receive his mission *in the way* in which the apostles of Christ established. This is the way to know whether one who presumes to preach to you can lay claim to being ‘sent.’

O Lord Jesus Christ, Head of the Church, may the light of Thy glorious gospel shine brightly through the ministers whom Thou has called and sent through the ministry of Thy Church, the eternal keeper of the grace of Thy Holy Mysteries. Unto Thee be glory with Thine Unoriginate Father, and Thine All-holy, and good, and life-giving Spirit, now, and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.