

Apostolic Succession: Catholic Claim vs LDS Restoration

A fair steelman of the Catholic case, then the LDS critique of why succession alone is not enough

WHAT CATHOLICS CLAIM

Core claim: bishops are successors of the apostles by divine institution, preserving apostolic authority through history.

Sources: CCC 857, 861-862; Vatican II *Lumen Gentium* 20; Canon 375.

Why It Persuades People

1 Clement 44: apostles appointed leaders and arranged future succession.

Irenaeus 3.3: succession lists used to rebut heresy.

Visible continuity: one institution survives while sects fracture.

LDS RESPONSE: CORE DISTINCTION

Key LDS distinction: succession of office is NOT identical to succession of priesthood keys, revelation, and apostolic-prophetic authority.

Question	Catholic	LDS
Did bishops continue?	Yes	Yes
Is continuity of office enough?	Yes	No
Were apostolic keys retained?	Yes	No
Need restoration?	No	Yes

BIBLICAL PRESSURE POINTS

Ephesians 4:11-14: apostles + prophets given "till" unity of faith.

Acts 1: apostolic office replaced by revelation-driven process.

Amos 3:7 pattern: God governs through prophets.

CATHOLIC PROOF-TEXTS: LDS REPLIES

Text	Catholic use	LDS reply
Matt 16:18-19	Peter's office endures	Keys require revelation to transmit
2 Tim 2:2	Ordain onward	Training chain != perpetual keys
Titus 1:5	Structured order	Order alone doesn't settle key-loss question

IGNATIUS QUOTE (KEY)

Ignatius, Romans 4:

"I do not, as Peter and Paul, issue commandments unto you."

LDS use of this quote: an early bishop explicitly distinguishes his authority from Peter and Paul (apostles).

WHY SUCCESSION ALONE FAILS (LDS VIEW)

1) Category error: historical chain != heavenly authorization.

2) Revelation gap: bishops can preserve order without open canonical revelation.

3) Keys gap: local episcopal authority != universal apostolic keys.

4) Doctrinal drift test: continuity did not prevent major doctrinal and structural disputes.

HISTORICAL STRESS TESTS

Western Schism (1378-1417): multiple papal claimants at once.
Honorius I case: later conciliar condemnation tied to Christological controversy.

LDS inference: institutional succession did not guarantee clarity or purity of authority claims.

STEELMAN VS LDS CRITIQUE

Catholic Steelman	LDS Critique
Clement/Irenaeus show succession idea	Yes, but not proof of unbroken keys
Visible continuity implies legitimacy	Continuity can persist after authority loss
Bishops safeguard apostolic faith	Need apostles + prophets + revelation

WHAT SUCCESSION CAN/CANNOT PROVE

Can prove: institutional memory, ordination habits, visible continuity.

Cannot prove by itself: living revelation, retained keys, or divine ratification of later doctrinal developments.

LDS ALTERNATIVE MODEL

Claim: Great Apostasy occurred after apostolic deaths; priesthood keys were lost from the earth.

Restoration: authority restored by angelic ministrations, not by institutional self-perpetuation.

May 15, 1829: John the Baptist restores Aaronic Priesthood.

Then: Peter, James, and John restore Melchizedek Priesthood keys (D&C 27:12-13; D&C 128:20).

DEBATE FRAME (USEFUL ORDER)

- Start with shared belief: Christ gave real authority.
- Grant Catholic evidence where strong.
- Press the distinction: office succession vs priesthood keys.
- Use Ignatius as an early internal distinction.
- Ask: where are apostles/prophets with binding revelation today?

THE BOTTOM LINE

Catholic succession best explains institutional continuity.

LDS restoration claims are about divine reauthorization after authority loss.

Model	Strength	LDS Objection
Catholic succession	Historical continuity	Doesn't prove unbroken keys
Protestant reform	Doctrinal correction attempt	No new authority received
LDS restoration	Direct heavenly restoration claim	Accepted/rejected on prophetic truth-claims

EARLY FATHER SNAPSHOT

Source	What it shows	LDS read
1 Clement 44	Succession concern	Order preserved; keys not demonstrated
Ignatius, Romans 4	Bishop != apostle authority	Early distinction remains
Irenaeus 3.3	Public lineage appeal	Anti-heresy tool, not proof of unbroken keys

FAST OBJECTIONS / REPLIES

- **"No succession = chaos."** Structure can remain while keys are lost.
- **"LDS rejects history."** LDS accepts history but denies history can create priesthood authority.
- **"Restoration unnecessary."** If keys were lost, restoration becomes necessary.

Sources: Vatican Catechism; Lumen Gentium; Canon Law; 1 Clement 44; Irenaeus 3.3; Ignatius Romans 4; Britannica (Western Schism, Honorius I); LDS Gospel Topics; FAIR Latter-day Saints (Apostasy; Priesthood Restoration).