

ARE ANGLICAN ORDERS VALID?

The following chapter is a research paper that was done as part of my seminary studies in a course on Orthodox Anglican Principles. I felt it fit nicely with this story of my journey. The complete bibliography is not included, however the endnotes are included within the chapter.

When an individual comes to the Anglican Church, particularly from the sacramental and liturgical background of the Roman Catholic Church, two main questions often arise. First, are the sacraments of the Anglican Church valid, and second, are the priestly orders of the Anglican Church valid? The same questions may arise for an individual who comes from a traditional Protestant or evangelical background and now wishes to become connected to the Ancient and Undivided Church but feels he cannot cross the Tiber River to Rome for one reason or another. This paper will attempt to answer the second of these two questions: Are the Anglican holy orders of Priest and Bishop valid?

When we speak of orders being valid, what do we mean? Valid or *validity* is not a theological term. It is a canonical term having to do with something being officially or legally recognized pertaining to authority and effectiveness. Thus, when we speak of Anglican Orders being valid, we are referring to whether or not an Anglican Priest or Bishop has been granted true authority in the succession of the Apostles to carry out the duties of his office. The issue at hand, which shall be examined in this short paper, is whether or not the Apostolic Succession was ever broken in the Anglican Church.

To answer the question, we shall first examine the background leading up to the question of whether or not Anglican orders are valid. Then, we shall examine both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox perspectives on the question.

Background

When the Reformation took place, many of the Continental Churches that broke with the Roman Church broke all ties, including the ties of Apostolic Succession. However, most of the English Churches retained the ties of Apostolic Succession and the sacraments.¹

In 1549, during the reign of Edward VI, Archbishop Cranmer put in place the Book of Common Prayer. In the 1550 edition, the rite of ordination for the priesthood was changed. In 1552 a slight revision of the words were made so that during the rite the following words were said:

Receive the Holy Ghost, whose sins thou dost forgive they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain they are retained. And be thou a faithful dispenser of the word of God, and of His holy sacraments: in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.²

The alleged problem with the Edwardian Ordinal is one of *intention* and *form*. Notice that the word *Priest* does not occur in the formula. Second, there is no mention of an intention to make the person being ordained part of a *sacrificial priesthood*.

The basis of the condemnation of the orders of the Anglican Church was that there was an apparent insufficiency of proper intention expressed in the forms of the Ordinal of King Edward VI; and that, because of this insufficiency Anglican orders were invalid.³

If the argument that the Edwardian Ordinal was improper were seen as valid, it would naturally follow that all who were ordained using the ordinal were not properly ordained at all, and therefore Apostolic Succession was lost. It can be argued that this problem was remedied in the 1662 edition of the prayer book when the words “for the office and work of a Priest (or Bishop)” were added. However, the Roman Church’s argument would be that because a hundred years had elapsed since the error had been promulgated, there were no more valid Catholic Bishops left within the Anglican Church to confer valid orders.⁴

The Roman Catholic Perspective

One can most accurately see The Roman Catholic perspective in an examination of the Papal Bull set down by Pope Leo XIII on September 18, 1896. This apostolic letter, entitled, "On the Nullity of Anglican Orders, *Apostolicae Curae*," is a forty-one section document in which Leo determined to set forth once and for all that Anglican Orders were not considered to be valid sacramental orders by the Roman Catholic Church. He was dealing with the issue of Anglican priests who wished to come into the Roman Church. The question arose as to whether or not these priests needed to be ordained again to the Priesthood. In the letter, Leo sets forth that "those who have been promoted to ecclesiastical Orders...by any one but a Bishop validly and lawfully ordained are bound to receive those Orders again."⁵

In other words, if a priest from the Anglican Church wanted to come into the Roman Catholic Church, unless he had received his original Holy Orders from the hands of a Roman Catholic Bishop, he would have to be ordained again. And again, to make clear that only Roman Orders were valid, Leo stated, "it is only those bishops and archbishops who were not ordained and consecrated in the form of the [Roman] Church that can not be said to be duly and rightly ordained."⁶

For the Roman Pontiff, the whole matter behind the nullity of Anglican Orders is the issue of *intention* and *form*. What did the consecrators intend to do to the person being ordained (the idea of ordaining to a sacrificial priesthood) and what form was used when they did it? Intention and form cannot be separated. Form shows the intention.

According to the Roman Catholic perspective, as evidenced in Leo's bull, the greatest intent of the making of a priest is to confer the power "of consecrating and of offering the true Body and Blood of the Lord" (Council of Trent, Sess. XXIII, *de Sacr. Ord.*, Canon 1) in that sacrifice which is no "bare commemoration of the sacrifice offered on the Cross" (*Ibid*, Sess XXII., *de Sacrif. Missae*, Canon 3).⁷

Therefore, since the Edwardian Ordinal had no such wording about the sacrificial nature of the priesthood, the ordination was null and void. It is important to note that it does not matter what the consecrator *had in mind* to do. Pope Leo makes it clear in his letter that we cannot judge what is in the

mind. We can only judge the intentions that are expressed in the outward forms. In other words, since the intention of the Church is expressed in its forms, that is, in the words that go along with the outward signs of the sacraments, “it is necessary that the forms used in the conferring of a Sacrament express a sufficiency of intention for its validity to be ensured.”⁸

To sum up the Roman Church’s perspective, Pope Leo states in section 36 of the bull:

Wherefore, strictly adhering, in this matter, to the decrees of the pontiffs, our predecessors, and confirming them most fully, and, as it were, renewing them by our authority, of our own initiative and certain knowledge, we pronounce and declare that ordinations carried out according to the Anglican rite have been, and are, absolutely null and utterly void.⁹

An Anglican Response to Pope Leo

The Anglican Church did not take Pope Leo’s apostolic letter sitting down. Writing for the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of York, Bishop John Wordsworth of Salisbury wrote a lengthy rebuttal entitled “Answer of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to the Bull *Apostolicae Curae* of H. H. Leo XIII: Answer to the Apostolic Letter of Pope Leo XIII on English Ordinations.”

In section IX of the Anglican letter, the writers set down three points as important regarding the issue of orders or any other sacrament:

- Matter
- Form
- Intention

In this case, the matter is the issue of ordination to Holy Orders. The form is the prayer or blessing that is used. The intention is what the Church desires to do during the ceremony.¹⁰

The Roman perspective states that we cannot know intent unless the specific form in use at the moment states the intent. The Anglican perspective argues that we can know the intention of the Church apart from the specific

form used at the specific moment. Intent can be ascertained from the prayers, formulae, practices, and liturgy of the Church.

In section XI of the Anglican letter, we can see how the Anglican intention of the priesthood can be derived apart from the form used at ordination. We read:

...we make provision with the greatest reverence for the consecration of the holy Eucharist and commit it only to properly ordained Priests and to no other ministers of the Church. Further we truly teach the doctrine of Eucharistic sacrifice and do not believe it to be a "nude commemoration of the Sacrifice of the Cross," an opinion which seems to be attributed to us by the quotation made at that Council. But we think it sufficient in the Liturgy which we use in celebrating the holy Eucharist, -- while lifting up our hearts to the Lord, and when now consecrating the gifts already offered that they may become to us the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, -- to signify the sacrifice which is offered at that point of the service in such terms as these. We continue a perpetual memory of the precious death of Christ, who is our Advocate with the Father, and the propitiation for our sins, according to His precept, until His coming again. For first we offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; then next we plead and represent before the Father the sacrifice of the cross, and by it we confidently entreat remission of sins and all other benefits of the Lord's Passion for all the whole Church; and lastly we offer the sacrifice of ourselves to the Creator of all things which we have already signified by the oblation of His creatures. This whole action, in which the people has necessarily to take its part with the Priest, we are accustomed to call the Eucharistic sacrifice.¹¹

The Anglican response then goes on at length to show that a variety of practices, forms, and words have been added or removed from liturgical practices and ceremonies over the centuries. These would include such things as the anointing of the candidates for holy orders, the holding of the Gospel book over the head of the one who is receiving the laying on of hands, and other similar practices. In fact, even the words that Pope Leo insisted must be included were not in earlier ordination rites. Amazingly, if

the Pope's edict was to be followed, then no Catholic bishop of the early Church ever had valid orders!

The intent of the Anglican response was to show that it was perfectly acceptable to make such changes as the Church deemed fit. The Church had done so many times over the centuries. So to make the changes in the Edwardian Ordinal or subsequent Ordinals was perfectly acceptable and in no way diminished the sacredness or validity of the rites performed.

In section XIX of the Anglican response, the writers make continual reference to the patterns of simplicity recorded in the New Testament. There were no elaborate rites and ceremonies recorded in the pages of the New Testament. It is their contention that the Lord and the Apostles focused upon the teaching and pastoral aspects of the ministry rather than upon the sacrificial aspects of the ministry.¹²

Using such passages as 1 Peter 5:1-4, Acts 20:18-35, Ephesians 4:11-13, and others, the writers show that in the exercise of the pastoral office, the priest encompasses all of the sacramental aspects of his position without exalting one aspect above another. In other words, there is much more to being a priest than offering up the Body and Blood of our Lord during the Eucharist.

The Anglican response was that the form of ordination in the Anglican Prayer Book was a simple form, just as many of the forms in the Ancient and Undivided Church were simple. In concluding the Anglican letter, the writers commented on the form of the ordination rite that Pope Leo would require stating, "Pope Leo demands a form unknown to previous Bishops of Rome, and an intention which is defective in the catechisms of the Oriental Church."¹³

The Eastern Orthodox Perspective

The Eastern Orthodox Church has not had the same bias against Anglican Holy Orders as has the Roman Church. There were four issues that the Orthodox Church looked at when deciding as to whether or not Anglican Orders should be accepted as valid:¹⁴

- Was the consecration of Matthew Parker as the Archbishop of Canterbury a valid consecration? The Orthodox council agreed that four validly consecrated bishops in the Apostolic Succession had consecrated Parker and it was a known historical fact that this took place on December 17, 1559 at Lambeth.
- Were the instruments of a valid Episcopal ordination present, that is, (a) the laying on of hands by an episcopate in the Apostolic Succession, (b) the calling down (Epiclesis) of the Holy Spirit upon the candidate, and (c) was there the intent of the consecrators and the Church to transmit the gift of the ministry? Again, the answer was that these elements were in fact present in the rites, forms, prayers, and liturgies of the Anglican Church.
- Had Orthodox theologians examined the above question and were they in agreement that those instruments were present? Yes, the Orthodox theologians had studied the previous issue as well as the issue of the consecration of Matthew Parker and had found them to be true.
- Had the Orthodox Church ever treated Anglican Orders as being invalid? Although some autocephalous bodies within the Orthodox Church had at times exercised caution on the matter, the Orthodox Church as a whole had never treated Anglican Orders as being invalid.

Therefore, on the basis of these four points, any Anglican priest coming over to the Orthodox Church did not have to be ordained again.

Looking at these points brings up an interesting situation. Recalling the Roman Church's perspective for a moment, it would appear that the basis for unity with the Roman Church would be intent and form followed by unity of the faith. However, the Orthodox Church seems to reverse the process. The

emphasis is upon unity in faith as opposed to form and intent. This can be seen in the example of the Alexandrian Church.

At one point in time, the Patriarch of Alexandria had cautioned his Church regarding the acceptance of Anglican Orders until the Anglican Church could affirm two critical issues of Orthodox faith. These two issues centered on the idea of ordination as a mystery and upon the reception of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In the Lambeth Conference Report of 1930, the Anglican Church had affirmed that ordination to Holy Orders was indeed a mystery, and that the Eucharist was a real reception of the Lord's Body and Blood.¹⁵

The ideas of mystery and real presence were crucial Orthodox points of faith. Once these two items of Orthodoxy were clarified, the Alexandrian Church stood ready to recognize the validity of Anglican Orders. It is important to note however, that at no time did the Alexandrian Church ever completely deny the validity of Anglican Orders. It only exercised caution on a case-by-case basis until the points of faith could be clarified.

In a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1930, the Ecumenical Patriarch, Meletios of Alexandria wrote:

...the Church of Alexandria withdraws its precautionary negative to the acceptance of the validity of Anglican Ordinations, and, adhering to the decision of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, of July 28, 1922, pronounces that if priests, ordained by Anglican Bishops, accede to Orthodoxy, they should not be re-ordained...¹⁶

Similar statements of acceptance can be found from the Orthodox Churches in Cyprus and Romania.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we see that Apostolic Succession was not broken in the Anglican Church simply by a change of words in the ordination rite or form. All of the necessary elements were and are still in place. Even in the Edwardian Ordinal there was still the laying on of hands by the Episcopate and the impartation of the Holy Spirit with Apostolic blessing. There was

the also the intent of the consecrators and the Church to set apart the candidate for the office of Priest or Bishop with all the responsibilities and duties of that office.

It is important to remember, that while the intent may not have been expressed at the specific moment of consecration in words preferred by the Roman Church, the intent was nevertheless expressed elsewhere in the Prayer Book, in the liturgies, and in the prayers of the Church. No one needs to fear that the Holy Orders of a duly consecrated Anglican Priest or Bishop are invalid.

End Notes

¹ Shank, The Rt. Revd. Thomas M. *Apostolic Succession: The Continuing Ministry of Christ Among Us*. Episcopal Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of America, 2001, CD-ROM. p. 28.

² Clifton, Michael. "Anglican Orders," [article on-line]; *The Angelus*, Vol. II, Nbr. 6, June 1979; available from http://www.sspcx.ca/Angelus/1979_June/Anglican_Orders.htm; Internet; accessed on August 7, 2003.

³ The Christian Episcopal Church of Canada. "Christian Episcopal Orders," [article on-line]; 2003, available at <http://www.christianepiscopal.org/orders.html>; Internet; accessed on August 7, 2003.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ "Pope Leo XIII, "On the Nullity of Anglican Orders, *Apostolicae Curae*, 1896," [article on-line]; Internet Modern History Sourcebook; created 1997; available from <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1896leo13-apost.html>; Internet; accessed on August 7, 2003. Section 11.

⁶ Ibid. Section 12.

⁷ Ibid. Section 25.

⁸ The Christian Episcopal Church of Canada. "Christian Episcopal Orders."

⁹ "Pope Leo XIII, "On the Nullity of Anglican Orders, *Apostolicae Curae*, 1896." Section 8.

¹⁰ "Archbishops of England: Reply to Leo XIII. Answer to the Apostolic Letter of Pope Leo XIII on English Ordinations," [article on-line]; Internet Modern History Sourcebook;

created 1997; available from <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1897archbishops.html>; Internet; accessed on August 7, 2003. Anglican letter. Section 9.

¹¹ Ibid. Section 11.

¹² Ibid. Section 19.

¹³ Ibid. Section 20.

¹⁴ “Encyclical on Anglican Orders from the Oecumenical Patriarch to the Presidents of the Particular Eastern Orthodox Churches, 1922,” [article on-line]; available at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/~ucgbmxd/patriarc.htm>; Internet; accessed August 7, 2003.

¹⁵ “Orthodox Statements on Anglican Orders: Alexandria, 1930,” [article on-line]; available at <http://orthodoxanglican.net/downloads/alexandria.PDF>; Internet, accessed on September 23, 2003.

¹⁶ Ibid.