

O Felix Culpa!

Should Old Catholic Bishops Participate in the Laying-on-of-Hands at Anglican Consecrations when Lutheran Bishops are Co-Consecrators?

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1. Broadening the Question

This question has been raised in the context of the approaching consecration of a new Anglican suffragan for Gibraltar in Europe, in which Lutheran Bishops of the Porvoo churches will also participate, but it may also be raised at some point in the future in the United States, for example, at the consecration of any new Bishop in the Episcopal Church, since under the terms of the full communion established by *Called to Common Mission* (para. 12) there will from henceforth always be at least one Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America participating in the laying on of hands at the consecration of every new Bishop in the Episcopal Church. The question must also be raised as to whether an American Episcopalian Bishop should participate in the laying on of hands of any new English Anglican Bishop, whether in England or in Europe, if a Lutheran Bishop of the Porvoo churches is also to participate, since the Episcopal Church USA is not in communion with the Porvoo churches.

Conversely, the question must also be raised as to whether in the future any Bishop of the Church of England (or any Old Catholic Bishop, as above) should ever again participate in the laying on of hands at the consecration of any new Bishop for the Episcopal Church in the USA, since neither the Church of England (nor the Old Catholic Churches) are in communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

There is a further question about the full communion of the American Lutherans with the Reformed, which will be taken up at the end of point (3) below.

2. O Felix Culpa!

If there be a fault in all this, it is a happy one! The perplexities that occur once full communion has been established and the initial question has been raised, and even more after the questions multiply, should not be

occasions of discouragement but should be viewed as occasions for hope and opportunity, because they arise in the context of movements *towards* the greater unity of Christ's Church, not away from it. They are the results of *agreements* of communion, not the results of *breaks* in communion.

3. An American Anglican Perspective

It may be helpful next to explain how the question that occasions this brief paper would be answered from the perspective of the *Called to Common Mission* agreement for full communion between the Episcopal Church USA and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. By the terms of that agreement "each church promises to include regularly one or more bishops of the other church to participate in the laying-on-of-hands at the ordinations/installations of their own bishops as a sign, though not a guarantee, of the unity and apostolic continuity of the whole church" (para. 12), even though "The creation of a common and fully interchangeable ministry of bishops in full communion will occur with the incorporation of all active bishops in the historic episcopal succession and the continuing process of collegial consultation in matters of Christian faith and life" (para. 14). Thus, Lutheran Bishops now participate regularly, even invariably, in the consecrations of our own new bishops (as do ours in theirs) even though most of them are not yet fully interchangeable and are therefore not recorded by us as being among the three canonical co-consecrators required by Nicaea canon 4 and stipulated in CCM para. 19. Even though most of them are not yet in the historic succession, we accept them in this way because their church as a whole has already now pledged itself ecclesiologically to enter the historic succession, and therefore when they join our Bishops in the laying on of hands they represent the sacramental intentionality that has been solemnly voted by their church (CCM, para. 18). They are episcopal representatives of a church that IS now in the historic succession, and whose Bishops are in the process of entering it.

Therefore I think we would say that this is the situation that would be acknowledged by any Bishop of the Old Catholic Church, or of the Church of England, both of which churches are already in full communion with us, when they participate in the laying on of hands at the consecration of a new Bishop in our own church. In so doing, the Old Catholics would acknowledge that the participation of the Lutheran Bishop, whether yet in the historic succession or not, represents the participation of an entire

church that has now already entered that succession on the basis of full communion with us, and all of whose bishops will in time stand individually in that same succession. This is all that would be signified by such Old Catholic participation, beyond of course the intention to remain in full communion with us and the confidence of their churches that the consecration could be affirmed even if full communion had not (yet) been reached.

A parallel comment can be made as to what we think is happening when an Episcopal Bishop under the terms of CCM para. 12 participates by the laying on of hands in the ordination/installation of a new ELCA Lutheran Bishop when there is also participation by laying on of hands from a jurisdictional leader of the Reformed (with which the ELCA has also entered full communion, without our enthusiasm). Does this mean that we are in full communion with the Reformed? Not at all! I think we would say that the Episcopalian participation is the process by which the historic episcopate is extended into the ELCA, and thus our full communion with them is thereby sacramentally signified and sealed (a process known in catholic theology as *ecclesia supplet*), but that under CCM para. 25 the participation of the Reformed leader in that way is specifically denied “to imply or inaugurate any automatic communion” of the Episcopal Church with the Reformed, with whom we are not in full communion with the Reformed because we have not (yet) reached agreement in faith.

4. A Point to be Distinguished

In the sort of sacramental action here under consideration, in which a number of Bishops join to consecrate a new Bishop by means of prayer and the laying on of hands, the basic qualification is not so much whether each Bishop “possesses” individually the historic succession, like a magic trick that can guarantee sacramental validation, but rather what counts is the doctrinal content that each Bishop represents in their own church and what kind of ecclesiological relationship exists between the churches involved. The relationship of full communion can only be established as the result of long and careful, even painstaking dialogue leading to agreement on fundamental doctrine, and careful consideration of that process is a necessary prelude to any examination of the pedigree of any particular Bishop. What evaluation do the Old Catholics give to the substance of Porvoo and to CCM? This question is more important than

what evaluation they give to the credentials of particular Lutheran Bishops.

5. So what should the Old Catholics do about the Impending Anglican Consecration for Europe?

The original question that was asked pertained to the Old Catholics! Our churches are now faced with a first-time scenario, but one that is bound to be repeated many times over in the future for all of them, as the broadening of the question in point 1 above has suggested. The IBC in June 2002 has already made a particular decision for the case at hand, but I would suggest that for the longer future all of the churches involved—Old Catholics in Europe, Anglicans in England, and Anglicans in America, and perhaps others—need to examine the doctrinal and ecclesiological presuppositions of Porvoo and of CCM (which are very different documents) and to ask whether there is enough fundamental agreement about catholicity, apostolic succession, and historic episcopacy in each of them for the Old Catholics to continue to affirm the Anglican consecrations that will continue to take place, now with Lutheran participation, under each of these agreements.

Can the Church of England enter “full communion” with the ELCA Lutherans on the basis of CCM? Can the Episcopal Church endorse Porvoo, where the term “full communion” is not used? And can the Old Catholic Union of Utrecht endorse both of these agreements, or either of them? And does Porvoo’s avoidance of the term “full communion” make it easier for Old Catholic Bishops to participate in a consecration with Bishops from the Church of England and the Porvoo churches? Or does CCM’s preference for “full communion” terminology make it easier for Old Catholic Bishops to participate in a consecration with Bishops from the Episcopal Church and the ELCA? Is the significance of joint episcopal consecration of the sort under consideration uniquely related to “full communion” terminology, and does it disappear if the term is avoided? The reconciliation and resolution of such perplexities, not to mention the situation of the Waterloo Agreement between Anglicans and Lutherans in Canada, pose a task that faces all of us in the years ahead, but it is a happy chore because it pushes us into God’s future and makes us ask what more God will require of us for communion and unity and mission in this 21st century. *O felix culpa!*