ANGLICAN ORDERS – A WAY FORWARD?

by
EDWARD YARNOLD, S.J.

LONDON
CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY
PUBLISHERS TO THE HOLY SEE

The illustration on the front cover shows part of the Rite of Ordination of 1552 mentioned in this booklet. The Catholic Truth Society gratefully acknowledges the permission of His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury and of the Trustees of the Lambeth Palace Library for its reproduction.

Nihil obstat R. J. CUMING, D.D., *Censor*

Imprimatur RALPH BROWN, V.G.

Westminster, 5th March, 1977.

The Nihil obstat *and* Imprimatur *are a declaration that a book or pamphlet is considered to be free from doctrinal or moral error. It is not implied that those who have granted the* Nihil obstat *and* Imprimatur *agree with the contents, opinions or statements expressed.*

Published by the Incorporated Catholic Truth Society, London
Printed by Pell (Brighton) Ltd., Hove, Sussex BN3 5JE
RJC

ANGLICAN ORDERS – A WAY FORWARD?

by Edward Yarnold, S.J.

In 1896 Pope Leo XIII in a Bull entitled *Apostolicae Curae* (CTS H311) declared that 'ordinations performed according to the Anglican rite have been and are completely null and void'. (n. 36). This uncompromising condemnation contrasts sadly with the 'new atmosphere of Christian fellowship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Churches of the Anglican Communion' to which the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury referred in their Common Declaration of 24 March 1966.[1] Is it possible that Pope Leo was mistaken, so that a later Pope could revoke the Bull? Or that the situation has changed so much over the last eighty years that the verdict, though correct in 1896, is no longer correct today? If on the other hand the condemnation must still stand, what hope is there for the future relations between the two Churches? This pamphlet is one man's attempt not only to explain the past but to explore the future. If the reader wishes to consider other points of view, he will find guidance in the Bibliography.

Not a new decision

1896 was by no means the first occasion on which Rome concluded against the validity of Anglican orders, though the reasons given for the verdict have not always been the same. As early as the reign of Mary Tudor (1553–8) Catholics had decided that ministers ordained in the Church of England needed to be reordained if they became Catholics and sought priesthood within the Catholic Church. Since ordination (like baptism and confirmation) can only be conferred once, this attitude implied the belief that the earlier Anglican ordination was no ordination at all. By contrast, the ordinations of the Orthodox Churches have

always been regarded by Catholics as true ordinations, so that reordination is not needed.

The origins of Anglican orders

Henry VIII, even after rejecting the authority of the Pope, continued to resist attempts to turn the Church of England into a Protestant Church after the continental model. It was not until the nine-year-old Edward VI came to the throne in 1547 that the Protestant party in England gained the upper hand. Under the direction of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, and with the advice of German Lutheran theologians, Parliament instituted a series of liturgical reforms. A Prayer Book was issued in English in 1549 and revised in 1552, removing from the Eucharist anything that reflected the Catholic doctrine of the sacrifice of the Mass; thus in the second Prayer Book the word 'table' or 'God's board' was substituted for 'altar'. As early as 1548 the widespread destruction of stone altars, and their replacement by wooden tables, had begun, so as to leave no symbolism which might suggest that the Eucharist was a sacrifice. In 1553 all clergy were required to give their assent to the Forty Two Articles, which included the denial of transubstantiation and the sacrificial nature of the Mass.

New rites of ordination were introduced in 1550 and 1552 which were compatible with this Protestant interpretation of the Eucharist. An important ceremony of the Catholic rite had been the handing to the new priest of the instruments of his calling, the chalice and the bread; in the 1552 rite he is handed only the Bible.

When Edward died in 1553, his half-sister Mary set about restoring Catholicism in England. By the end of her reign in 1558 the hierarchy was in communion with Rome once more, the Catholic Mass and ordination rites had been restored, and all the bishops had been consecrated according to the Catholic rites. Under her successor Elizabeth I, however, the tide turned again, and a moderate reformed religion was established, despite the opposition of both Catholics and extreme Protestants. In 1559 Parliament passed Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity, constituting the Queen Supreme Governor in both spiritual and temporal matters and reimposing the Prayer Book of 1552. With one probable exception the diocesan bishops all refused to comply and were deprived of their sees. Consequently the Church of England urgently needed new bishops. There remained however four bishops who had been deposed by Mary: of these, two had been consecrated under Henry VIII, and the validity of their orders cannot be seriously questioned, although the episcopal orders of the other two had been conferred according to the first rite of Edward VI, and were therefore not recognised by Catholics. In December 1559 at Lambeth these four men consecrated Elizabeth's nominee, Matthew Parker, as Archbishop of Canterbury, reverting to the rite of the 1552 Ordinal.[2]

The next generations of bishops and priests of the Church of England derived their orders through Parker; if his orders were invalid, so were theirs. The same is true of Scotland and the U.S.A. Some Irish bishops, however, though consecrated according to the Edwardine Ordinal, traced their descent through Curwen of Dublin, who had been consecrated, with unquestioned validity, under Mary in 1555; and William Laud, who became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1633, derived his orders from Curwen as well as Parker. More recently, too, other bishops whose orders were not in doubt (such as bishops of the Old Catholic Church) have taken part in many Anglican ordinations and have established new strands in the line of apostolic succession.

The remaining stages to the story can be told in summary. In 1662 the rite was slightly modified in a more Catholic sense, as will be seen later. James II (1685–8) made a brief attempt to restore Catholicism, but did not set up a Catholic hierarchy to replace the Anglican bishops. Between 1892 and 1896 discussions took place on the continent and in England between Catholics and Anglo-Catholic members of the Church of England. Among the leading participants were Abbé Portal on the Catholic side, and Lord Halifax on the Anglican. Pope Leo XIII was asked to set up a new investigation into the question of Anglican orders. His verdict was contained in the Bull *Apostolicae Curae*, and was totally unfavourable.

Leo XIII's judgement

Leo begins by showing in considerable detail that as early as 1554, and several times afterwards, Rome had studied Edward VI's Ordinal, and on every occasion had found that ordinations performed according to it were invalid. Two reasons for this judgement are given: (a) lack of due form; (b) lack of due intention.

Defect of form

A sacrament is a sign of grace, by which Christ produces in the members of his Church the grace denoted by the sign. This sign consists of words as well as actions: by the form is meant the spoken element in the sign.

Apostolicae Curae argued that

> the words which until recent times have been generally held by Anglicans to be the proper form of presbyteral ordination – 'Receive the Holy Ghost' – certainly do not signify definitely the order of the priesthood or its grace and power, which is pre-eminently the power 'to consecrate and offer the true body and blood of the Lord' in that sacrifice which is no 'mere commemoration of the sacrifice performed on the Cross'.[3] (n. 25)

Even if, the Bull continues, this defect in the form was repaired in 1662 by the addition of the words 'for the office and work of a priest ['bishop' in episcopal ordination] in the Church of God', 'Anglican Orders would still be invalid, because the change was made too late when a century had already elapsed since the adoption of the Edwardine Ordinal and when, consequently, with the hierarchy now extinct, the power of ordaining no longer existed.' (n. 26).

In fact, however, Leo maintained, even this revised form cannot be sufficient, because, since priesthood had been rejected in 1552, the words have not 'any longer their validity, being now mere names voided of the reality which Christ instituted'. (n. 31). Thus the Bull seems to imply that even if the 1662 form were used today by a validly ordained bishop in the Anglican communion, it would still not be valid. If this is so, the participation of Old Catholic bishops would not restore validity to Anglican ordinations.

Defect of intention

Although the document is not totally clear, it is most probable that the intention that Leo found lacking was that of the sixteenth-century bishops who used the Edwardine ordinal; the Pope was not generalising about the intention of all subsequent ordaining bishops. The argument is that:

> if . . . the rite is changed with the manifest purpose of introducing another rite which is not accepted by the Church, and of repudiating that which the Church does and which is something that by Christ's institution belongs to the nature of the sacrament, then it is evident, not merely that the intention necessary for a sacrament is lacking, but rather that an intention is present which is adverse to and incompatible with the sacrament. (n. 33)

For these reasons, both historical and theological, Leo concluded:

> Therefore adhering entirely to the decrees of the Pontiffs Our Predecessors on this subject, and fully ratifying and renewing them by Our authority, on Our own initiative and with certain knowledge, We pronounce and declare that ordinations performed according to the Anglican rite have been and are completely null and void. (no. 36)

Of course these words are not intended as a denial that the Holy Spirit uses Anglican clergy as instruments of grace, even though their orders be invalid.

The underlying reasons

This condemnation is not simply a quibble over the niceties of Church law. Behind the Bull is the insistence on two vital matters of faith:

(1) Holy orders are not a human invention; bishops and priests exercise a commission which derives from the commission which Christ himself gave to his apostles;

(2) The Eucharist is not only a source of grace and unity for Christ's followers; it is a sacramental action by which the Church is associated with Christ's unique sacrifice on Calvary.

In fact both of these points are contained in official Anglican teaching: the first in the Prayer Books of Edward VI, the second in the *Response* of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to *Apostolicae Curae* in 1897[4]; both doctrines are found in the Agreed Statements of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission on the Eucharist and the Ministry.[5]

Forward through reordination?

There are various ways in which this obstacle to reunion could conceivably be removed. One possibility which must be considered is that Anglican clergy, though themselves entertaining no doubts about the validity of their orders, might submit to some form of reordination out of regard for Catholic misgivings. Perhaps it would not be necessary for each Anglican bishop, priest and deacon to be ordained individually, but some corporate sacramental sign might be given. Nevertheless, to require this of Anglicans is not only to demand outstanding humility and generosity; to some, convinced as they are of the validity of their orders, the procedure seems dishonest.

A new assessment?

Is it possible however that *Apostolicae Curae* is not so immovable an obstacle as it appears? The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission claimed in 1973 that, in view of the agreement it had reached on essential matters concerning the doctrine of ordained ministry, the judgement of 1896 on Anglican Orders was 'put . . . in a new context'.[6] Can it therefore be said that the situation has changed to such an extent that Leo's condemnation, though correct in 1896, is no longer correct today, and that consequently Anglican Orders, though invalid then, are valid now?

One argument along these lines has already been touched upon: namely that since the time of Cranmer, and increasingly since 1896, a more sacramental view of ministry has become common

in the Anglican Communion. Granted that the aim of the 1552 Ordinal was to reject the notion of eucharistic sacrifice and to put the emphasis on the preaching functions of a minister, the Eucharist has since returned to the centre of Anglican worship in most parts of the world, and the Windsor Statement indicates that the common Anglican understanding of the Eucharist is in harmony with that of the Catholic Church.[7] Consequently, even if the words of the ordination service, taken out of context, do not with sufficient precision denote the priesthood, within the context of the Anglican Church today, their eucharistic meaning is plain and adequate.

However, even if the form is no longer defective, Anglican Orders would still be invalid if it remained true that, since the hierarchy became extinct under Elizabeth I, there is no one in the Anglican Communion with the power to ordain.[8] But there are today many Anglican clergy whose ordinations have benefitted from the participation of bishops whose orders are of indisputable validity, e.g. those of the Old Catholic Church. However, although the number of such clergy must by now be quite high, it is still well short of 100%. Consequently a solution cannot be found along these lines without dividing the Anglican Communion. Moreover, it is probable that many Anglicans could not in conscience accept reunion with Rome on the understanding that their orders were valid only because of the intervention of bishops of other churches, and not because of the authenticity of the Anglican Communion itself.

The meaning of 'validity'

It might be suggested, therefore, that there is no way round *Apostolicae Curae:* it must simply be revoked. The Bull does not claim infallible status; it represents a view which was by no means unanimously held by Catholics at the time. Recent research, indeed, has indicated that the theologians who argued in favour of the condemnation were not influenced solely by historical and theological considerations. It was felt in Rome, for example, that to concede the validity of Anglican Orders would discourage the reconciliation of Anglicans with the Catholic Church.[9]

But to admit the influence of missionary motives is not in itself to maintain that the Bull is mistaken. Some Catholic theologians, however, argue that the condemnation of Anglican Orders depends upon a false assumption concerning the meaning of the term 'validity'.

It is the supposition of the Bull that invalidity of orders is a fact which the Church cannot alter except by conferring new orders. It is now, however, sometimes suggested that invalidity is not a fact independent of the Church's judgement, but simply the absence of the Church's approval. Orders would accordingly be valid simply if, and because, the Church says they are.[10] If this is so, the investigation which preceded the publication of the Bull was misconceived, as it was conducted with the purpose of discovering *whether* Anglican Orders were valid; the question should have been whether the Church would have been wise to exercise her freedom to grant those orders the title of validity.

This attempt to undercut *Apostolicae Curae* rests on the assumption that validity is not an objective fact independent of the Church's judgement. Unfortunately it is not difficult to show that this assumption is false. There are some ordinations which the Church *could* not (not only would be unwise to) regard as valid: of babies or madmen (because consent is required), of the unbaptized (because membership of the Church is required), of horses – remember Caligula's attempt to make his horse consul – (because humanity is required). So too the debate about the ordination of women is not only about the prudence of taking such a step; the more fundamental question is whether, if the ordination ceremony were performed for women, they would be priests at all. Consequently Leo was not committing a logical solecism in asking whether Anglican Orders were valid. This attempt to escape from *Apostolicae Curae* fails.

Apostolic succession

The bull of 1896 made another presupposition: if it is granted that the ordinations under Elizabeth I were invalid, through the defect of form and intention discussed below, subsequent ordinations are also invalid because 'the hierarchy' is 'now extinct'

(n. 26). In other words, Leo XIII assumed that the only way in which valid orders can be conferred is through ordination by a bishop who can trace his orders through an unbroken chain of episcopal succession back to our Lord's commission to his apostles. This assumption is sometimes questioned today, for two reasons. The first is that it evidently cannot be proved from history that this principle has always been followed; indeed it is known that in the middle ages ordinations were occasionally performed by priests, not bishops.[11] The second is that it seems that apostolic succession has more than one strand. One of these strands is ordination by a bishop in the apostolic succession, which is a sign that the order and the authority conferred come from Christ and are not matters of human convention, and also a sign that the new priest or bishop is in communion with other ordained ministers throughout the world and throughout time.[12] But there is a second strand, namely a call coming from a community which seeks to be faithful to the teaching and commission of Christ handed down through the apostles to the whole Church. The first strand runs unbroken through time; the second strand does not necessarily consist of an unbroken succession in history, but of a conformity of mind and heart and life to Christ, a conformity which is the work of the Holy Spirit whom Christ bequeathed to his Church. If the first strand is broken it needs to be repaired by ordination conferred by bishops in valid orders; if the second is broken it is repaired by a change of heart, mind and life towards Christ. Catholic teaching is that the first strand is necessary. But is it possible that its absence, though a grave defect, is not sufficient to invalidate orders if the second strand holds?[13]

There are two elements in the ordination of a bishop: ordination by bishops of *other sees* as a link with the commission Christ gave the apostles, and the call coming from the new bishop's *own church* as a link with the origins of his own see.[14] Both elements should be present; but in the absence of the first can the second suffice to keep episcopacy and priesthood alive? If so, what would be required of Anglican clergy is not that they should come as laymen seeking ordination for the first time, but that they should

come as valid priests and bishops to receive the fulness of the sacramental sign. (These considerations must be borne in mind when considering the orders of non-episcopal churches, like the Methodist and Baptist churches.)

The concept of ministry

However the fundamental stage of the argument of *Apostolicae Curae* calls for still deeper consideration, namely the presupposition that the power to offer the sacrifice of the Mass is so essential to priesthood that, if the intention of conferring this power is excluded, no intention of conferring priesthood remains.[15]

The argument is very subtle. It is a principle of Catholic theology that, if the minister misunderstands the nature of a sacrament he is trying to confer, the sacrament is not thereby invalidated provided he intends to do what the Church does.[16] For example in 1872 the Holy Office ruled in favour of the validity of baptisms performed by Protestant missionaries who believed that the sacrament was only an initiation-ceremony and not a means of the forgiveness of sins; the misunderstanding concerning what the Church does did not nullify the intention of doing what the Church does.[17]

The reasoning of *Apostolicae Curae*, therefore, is not that the reformation *errors* concerning the Mass and the priesthood *ipso facto* invalidated Anglican ordinations. The argument is rather that the errors (and the actions, like the breaking of altars, which they inspired): (1) make the vague form incapable of bearing a sufficient meaning; (2) prove that Parker's consecrators did not have the intention of doing what the Church does. The two points need to be examined separately.

(1) Is it certain that the form is deprived of a sufficiently determined meaning? The Bull quotes from the 1552 Ordinal only the words 'Receive the Holy Ghost', and it is true that this phrase does not specify the nature of the grace to be conferred. But in fact the formula as a whole is much more explicit: the words spoken at the imposition of hands for the ordination to the priesthood run (in modernised spelling):

> 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.

Even the most Protestant Anglican in 1559 would have understood 'the holy sacraments' to include the Eucharist. Therefore the form includes a reference to eucharistic ministry, even though the sacrificial interpretation of that ministry was excluded.

(2) The intention of the consecrators of Parker was to secure the ordination of eucharistic ministers who would not be sacrificing priests. Is it certain that this shows that they did not have the intention of doing what the Church does? It should be remembered that a false understanding of what the Church does does not by itself prove the absence of that intention. Indeed the Preface to the 1552 Ordinal seems to express exactly such an intention:

> . . . from the Apostles' time there hath been these orders of ministers in Christ's Church: Bishops, Priests, and Deacons . . . these orders should be continued, and reverently used, and esteemed, in this Church of England.

Conclusion

Apostolicae Curae was undoubtedly right in its *doctrinal* teaching concerning the apostolic succession and the fact that priesthood is 'pre-eminently the power to consecrate and offer the true body and blood of the Lord'. It was also, to all appearances, right in its *historical* judgement that Parker's consecrators were not intending to consecrate a bishop who would ordain sacrificing priests. But is it possible that, in the light of such considerations as the above, the Church might revise the conclusion that Anglican orders 'have been and are completely null and void'? To say that they are of doubtful validity is already to amend the decision of 1896. Dare we go further and conclude that, since the case for invalidity is not proved, validity should be presumed?

It is true that Canon Law requires certainty where sacraments are concerned, but this is a practical and moral certainty. The situation in which we do not know with *absolute* certainty that a

sacrament is valid, is normal. For example, I do not know for certain that the priest who baptized me did not get the words wrong. It is customary, if there are no good reasons to the contrary, to presume validity and trust God. Is it possible that the Catholic Church could take the same attitude to present Anglican Orders, while trying to ensure Catholic, as well as Orthodox or Old Catholic, participation in future ordinations? In 1896, when Rome decided to seek unity through individual conversions, this solution would not have been acceptable. But it might be the right solution for today, when it seems that the best hope for reunion lies in the corporate reconciliation of separated Churches.[18]

The *Decree on Ecumenism* of the Second Vatican Council, published in 1964, marked a major advance in our understanding of our relationships with other Christian Churches and communities. It recognised the communion, even though incomplete, that already exists – based on our common baptism – between all who profess the Christian faith and seek their salvation in Christ. But it also recognised that Churches, separated from the Roman Catholic Church, were bearers of the grace of salvation. At the same time it acknowledged that there were serious omissions and deficiencies in these Churches which the pursuit of Christian Unity required common effort to confront and, where possible, reconcile.

The Anglican Communion is singled out (n. 13) as having a special place among the separated communions stemming from the Reformation which has preserved, in part, Catholic traditions and *structure*. This is a very different approach from the admittedly canonical strictures of 'absolutely null and void' of 1896 with respect to Anglican orders. It is in the light of the developments of Catholic understanding of the doctrine of sacred order that it is possible to explore ways of reconciliation not envisaged in the Decree *Apostolicae Curae*. It is not too much to assert that the Roman Catholic Church has a duty to do this because of its solemn commitment to work for the unity for which Christ prayed.

CAMPION HALL, OXFORD

References

1. The Declaration is contained, for example, in A. C. Clark and C. Davey (edd.), *Anglican/Roman Catholic Dialogue*, Oxford University Press 1974.
2. Controversialists seized upon a false rumour that the ceremony was performed in the Nag's Head Tavern and consisted of the placing of the Bible on Parker's head with the words: 'Take the authority to preach the word of God sincerely'.
3. The Bull is quoting the Council of Trent (Denzinger-Schönmetzer 1771 and 1753).
4. *Responsio*, n. 11, contained in H. Bettenson (ed.), *Documents of the Christian Church* (2nd edn,. Oxford University Press 1967), p. 323.
5. The first point is stated in the *Agreed Statement on Ministry and Ordination* (the Canterbury Statement) (SPCK 1973), esp. nn. 14, 4; the second in the *Agreed Statement on Eucharistic Doctrine* (the Windsor Statement) (SPCK 1972), nn. 4, 5.
6. Canterbury Statement, n. 17.
7. Windsor Statement, esp. n. 12.
8. Cf. *Apostolicae Curae*, n. 26, quoted above.
9. See J. J. Hughes, *Absolutely Null and Utterly Void* (Sheed & Ward 1968), pp. 180–3. This feeling is reflected in the Bull's closing exhortation to the Anglican clergy: 'Hitherto perhaps, while striving after the perfection of Christian virtue, while devoutly searching the Scriptures, while redoubling their fervent prayers, they have yet listened in doubt and perplexity to the promptings of Christ who has long been speaking within their hearts. Now they see clearly whither He is graciously calling and bidding them come. Let them return to His one fold. . . .' (n. 38).
10. See J. Coventry, 'Note on the Mutual Recognition of Ministry', in *Church Membership and Intercommunion*, ed. J. Kent and R. Murray (Darton, Longman & Todd 1973), esp. pp. 80–81.
11. Cf. A. Baer, 'Abbot, Ordination by', in *A Catholic Dictionary of Theology*, vol. 1 (Nelson 1962), pp. 3–4.
12. Cf. the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission's *Statement on Ministry and Ordination*, n. 16.
13. Cf. H. Küng, *Structures of the Church* (Burns Oates 1965), pp. 172–85, on 'an extraordinary route to ecclesiastical office'.
14. 'There are thus *two* distinct things . . . necessary to make a man truly the organ of the whole Body of Christ in the exercise of the episcopate: (a) In the temporal order, the acceptance of him in the life of the Church, i.e. a rightful succession to predecessors, conveyed to him by the free

choice of those predecessors' own flock; (b) In the supernatural order, our Lord's own action in adding him to the one ever-growing college of Apostles, conveyed to him by the sacramental action of those whom one Lord has already commissioned to act in his Person, i.e. by ordination at the hands of other bishops.' (Dom G. Dix, *Holy Order*, Church Literature Association 1976, p. 16).

15. '. . . when once a new rite has been introduced denying or corrupting the sacrament of Order and repudiating any notion whatsoever of consecration and sacrifice, then the formula, "*Receive the Holy Ghost*" . . . is deprived of its force; nor have the words, "*for the office and work of a priest*" or "*bishop*", etc., any longer their validity, being now mere names voided of the reality which Christ instituted.' (n. 31).

16. Cf. Council of Trent, Denzinger-Schönmetzer 1611.

17. Denzinger-Schönmetzer 3100 ff.

18. The recent decision taken by some Churches in the Anglican Communion to ordain women complicates the issue. Could the Catholic Church recognise or validate the orders of Anglican men but not those of women?

Bibliography

Apostolicae Curae, CTS H311. It should be observed that the editorial footnotes to the CTS edition provide an assessment of the Bull which differs in several places from that of the present pamphlet.

E. Echlin, *The Story of Anglican Ministry*, St Paul Publications 1974.

A less favourable view of Anglican Orders is taken by F. Clark, *Anglican Orders and Defect of Intention*, Longmans Green 1956, and *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation*, 2nd edn, B. Blackwell 1967.

For an Anglican statement of the case for validity, see G. Dix, *The Question of Anglican Orders*, Dacre Press 1944.

Authority in the Church – the Venice agreed statement of the Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission, CTS and SPCK, 1977.

Truth and Authority – a commentary on the Agreed Statement of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, E. J. Yarnold, S.J. and Henry Chadwick, SPCK and CTS, 1977.

Eucharistic Doctrine – the Windsor agreed statement, SPCK 1972.

Ministry and Ordination – the Canterbury agreed statement, SPCK 1973.