

COMMENT ON THE IBC-DECLARATION

on the participation of Old Catholic Bishops in the laying on of hands at consecrations of Anglican Bishops where Bishops of Churches, which are not in communion with the Old Catholic Churches, take part and also lay on hands.

1. The laying on of hands

1.1 Laying on of hands in conjunction with prayer is practised in diverse contexts within the Church. Its meaning only becomes clear through the specific context and the accompanying words. It is always understood that the persons who are laying on hands are themselves transmitter of something received. What is transmitted and passed on in the act of laying on of hands is a gift of God, something divine. Therefore the prayer to God as the giver is part of laying on of hands. The laying on of hands at the ordination (practised with reference to Acts 6,1-6; 1 Tim 4,14; 2 Tim 1,6; cf. also Acts 14,23; 1 Tim 5,22) is understood as a sacramental act of expression of the Holy Spirit, in which it is prayed that the Holy Spirit may come upon a person. With regards to its ecclesial significance, there is an analogy with the laying on of hands at the reception of a person into the Church (practised with reference to Acts 8,14-18; 19,3-7; cf. also Hebr 6,2) – an event which in the West came to be known in time as so called confirmation, and came to be separated from the point of baptism as an event in its own right.

1.2 This expression of the Holy Spirit is in the case of ordination not to be understood as an accumulation of grace, rather as a new focusing of the grace already received at baptism. This new focus is the newly taken on service of a person within and for the Church. This is the meaning of the expression of the so called grace of holy orders.

1.3 At the act of ordination, the historic and horizontal dimension of the Church is intersected with the epiclesial and vertical dimension. The laying on of hands is conducted by bishops who stand in the apostolic succession of the Church, who in the prayer of the Church call to God for the sending down of the Holy Spirit upon the person to be ordained.

2. The ordination of a bishop

The ordination of a bishop through prayer and the laying on of hands is an act of Church communion. The bishop to be ordained is chosen to lead a local Church. This is, however, an expression of the presence of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church in communion with other local Churches, made visible through this symbol of faith. This is expressed through the fact that bishops of other local Churches conduct the ordination, and what is more, this is in the context of an Eucharist, in which the communion of Churches is constituted and represented in the most significant way (cf Canon 4, first ecumenical council of Nicea; Hippolytus- [?], *Traditio apostolica* 2; Cyprian, Ep 55,8; 67,5). The participation of bishops at the consecration of a bishop is the consequence and the proof of the full communion which exists between the local Churches, which is represented by the bishops at the consecration. (cf also the Statutes of the IBC of 2000, Preamble)

3. The participation at the laying on of hands

That is how the International Old Catholic Bishops Conference has understood the participation of an Old Catholic bishop at an Anglican Bishop's Consecration, (first time in 1932) and also the participation of an Anglican bishop at a consecration of an Old Catholic bishop (first time in 1937). This is the expression of the existing Church communion between the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht and the Church provinces of the Anglican Communion based on the Bonn agreement of 1931. This communion, which was first termed 'Intercommunion', later 'full Church communion' led to special agreements in North America, 1934-1958, between the Churches concerned.

4. The context of the Anglican-Old-Catholic Church Communion

4.1 A new situation within the relationship of the Churches of the Union of Utrecht and the Anglican Communion arose through the termination of the Church communion with the Anglican Communion (as well as the Old Catholic Churches) by the Polish National Catholic Church of the USA and Canada in 1978 on the grounds that these Churches have ordained baptised women to priestly ministry. This painful problem cannot be solved at the present time.

4.2 Again a new situation has arisen in that the British and Irish Anglican Churches are in full communion with the Nordic and Baltic Lutheran Churches as they have accepted and ratified the Common Statement of Porvoo in 1992. This agreement foresees the participation of bishops of the respective Churches in the laying on of hands at consecrations.

Consequently, the Old Catholic bishops of the Union of Utrecht, whose Churches are in full communion with the British and Irish Anglican Churches, find themselves in a dilemma, when they are invited to participate in the laying on of hands at the consecration of an Anglican bishop, where bishops of the so called Porvoo Churches are also participating, as there is no Church communion at present between the Porvoo Churches and the Old Catholic Churches.

If under these conditions, Old Catholic bishops were in the future no longer to participate in the laying on of hands at the consecration of an Anglican bishop; this would not fit in with the full communion which exists with the Anglican bishops. If they were to lay on hands nevertheless, the sign of laying on of hands would become ambivalent and overshadowed in its constituting significance to manifest Church communion.

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