

New Ordinations – I

May 10, 2014

Should priests ordained with the new rite of Ordination of 1972 be conditionally re-ordained with the old and certainly valid rite of Ordination? Catholic doctrine on the validity of sacraments is clear, but the sacramental rites of the Newchurch seem to have been designed to lead gradually to invalidity (see EC 121 of Oct 31, 2009). The « gradually » is the problem. How far along was that gradual process in any given case? Perhaps God alone knows for sure. But let us begin with the clear doctrine.

One can say a Catholic sacrament involves five elements: Minister, Intention, Matter and Form are essential for validity, the Rite surrounding the Form can be important for validity by its sudden or gradual bearing on the Minister's Intention. For priestly Orders, the Minister has to be a validly consecrated bishop; the Intention is his sacramental (not moral) intention, in ordaining, to do what the Church does; the Matter is his laying of both hands on the head of the man to be ordained (women cannot be validly ordained to the priesthood of Christ); the Form is the crucial formula or series of words in the rite which express the conferring of the priesthood; the Rite is all the other words surrounding that Form, and prescribed in the ceremonial rite of Ordination.

In a new rite Ordination, if both hands are laid on the head, the Matter is no problem. The new Form in Latin is, if anything, stronger for validity than the old Form in Latin (by the « et » instead of an « ut »), but vernacular translations need to be checked to make sure that they clearly express the grace of the priesthood to be conferred. Most of them surely do. Where real problems of validity arise is with the Minister and the Intention, because of the gradual erosion of Catholic Intention by the uncatholic new Rites.

For, as to the Intention, any bishop today ordaining a priest surely intends to do what today's Church does, well and good, but what is that in his mind? What is a priest in the Newchurch? Is not yesteryear's renewer of the Sacrifice of Calvary by the Real Presence being slowly but steadily replaced by today's co-ordinator of eucharistic picnics? How far along is this process in any given diocese of the world? Did this or that bishop have in mind a sacrificer or a picnicker as being what the Church does? The ordaining bishop's outward behaviour will indicate his Intention, but God alone may know for sure. Certainly many new Rites of Mass incline towards the picnicker, and the new Rite of Ordination surrounding the Form can only help by its severely diminished catholic content to undermine gradually the sacramental Intention of an ordaining bishop.

And as to the Minister, if the ordaining bishop was himself consecrated bishop with the new rite of consecration, let us assume that the ambiguity of the new Form of consecration is lifted by the words immediately following, nevertheless doubts like those above as to the Intention of the bishop consecrating must arise: did he consider, and therefore have as his Intention, that today's Church consecrates makers of the Sacrifice, or of picnics? Such questions can often lack clear answers.

In brief, were I Pope, I think I might require that all priests or bishops ordained or consecrated with the « renewed » rites should be conditionally re-ordained or re-consecrated, not because I would believe that none of them were true priests or bishops, on the contrary, but because when it comes to the sacraments all serious doubts must be removed, and that would be the simplest way of removing all possible doubts. Newchurch rot of the sacraments could not be left hanging around.

Kyrie eleison.