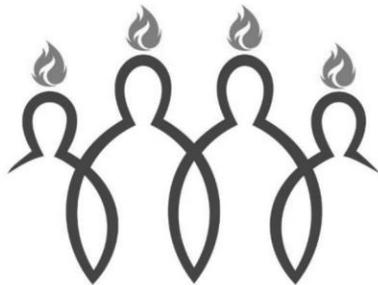


PASTORAL BISHOPS
and
APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION
as a
SUCCESSION OF
FAITH AND LIFE



Ken Jensen Presents
A Conversation with a Wise
Deacon

July 8, 1995

Holy Brethren,

Greetings in the name of the Most Holy Trinity! Christ is in our midst! May the love of God the Father and the blessed power of the Holy Spirit be poured out on your lives!

A while back, Fr. Randy shared a copy of some E-mail that he picked up from America Online that went back and forth between a priest of the traditional Anglican Church and the blessed deacon in charge of communications for the office of the archbishop of the Charismatic Episcopal Church, who is a close friend of his. I thought that it should be shared with each of you for your encouragement.

The question referred to Fr. Deacon Ken was: "Apostolic order? How can someone simply be consecrated a bishop? This confuses me. Who was the consecrator?"

What follows is the major part of his answer [the bold type is mine]...

"Since you seem to be working from the institutionalized framework of the Romans, many Orthodox and most Anglicans, let me quote a wise Episcopal priest who presents this idea better than I can:"

'When you read about the Celtic bishops such as Cuthbert of Lindisfarne, or Aidan or Chad, what you see is precisely the pastoral bishops of the early church, who understand that personal holiness and ascetic struggle are the only true source of Godly authority. There is no leaning on their 'pedigree' or status for power. Structurally, they are pre-rational. The rationalization of church structures (pretty well complete in the West today and frequently in the East as well) begin to speak about Apostolic Succession as though it were a formula.'

'The objectification' of the sacraments which receives stronger impetus in the West following the defeat of Donatism (which always seemed to be more of a Western issue) is a strong part of this rationalizing of structures. Today, when Episcopalians think that the church is coterminous with national headquarters of General Convention, or even the local bishop's office, it is the fruit of such misguided thought. To paraphrase Our Lord (if I may be so bold) 'God is able from these stones to raise up successors to the Apostles.'

'The Orthodox of today stress that in their ordination service, the propers of Pentecost are always used, because the making of a bishop or priest, occurs as it did at first, through an act of the Holy Spirit. The laying on of hands, and the historical succession are important. However, we must not say that the Holy Spirit is given through the historic succession. We must say that the historic succession is given by the Holy Spirit. The best thing to read here is John Zizioulas' Being as Communion. It is the finest stuff on the church that I know....'

"Given the history of the Church, the validity of orders should be judged (if we mortals should even try this) by the fruit of the entire life and ministry of a given bishop. I think it can easily be demonstrated by a rather simple test (from the history of the Church) that some bishops were truly called to the episcopal office/consecrated and some, clearly, were not. That is, they may have been consecrated, but by what spirit?"

"Think of the many RC bishops who later became heretics or scoundrels, does this nullify Roman orders? No. While I think it does say a lot about the individual persons, I think it's quite a stretch to then go and apply it backwards to all the faithful bishops of the Church or forward to the many faithful men that served after them. These are the kinds of odd twists of thinking that are required when we too narrowly apply a strict linear test of validity to succession. This sort of thinking works best in genetics, virology and forensics, not ecclesiology."

Some other dialogue and questions are proffered at this point in the E-mail transmission, but let me skip them and move on to the last question and the response...

The (declarative) question: "...Of course both Rome and Orthodoxy consider themselves to be the True Church. Perhaps Anglicanism once had a limited claim to be a branch of the True Church, but this was largely an accident due to history. I think this is the sticking point, isn't it. Once the CEC accepts the notion that either is the True Church, they will no longer be able in good conscience to maintain a separate existence, but will have to follow the examples of their Antiochene brethren, or some of the Roman converts."

The answer or response: "In short, such a conclusion (that either Rome or the East is the True Church) is not an inevitable one. I believe that the basis of all of this (whether it's converts who join Rome or Orthodoxy because they have a psychological or other emotional need to be a part of the 'True Church' or cradle Roman or Orthodox Christians who enjoy[?] putting this guilt trip on unsuspecting protestants) is an ecclesiological lie. This idea of inevitability is always expressed by them, 'once you finally get it, you'll be with us.'

Again, no thank you. For now, I'm content with the lowest seat (and whatever lower view of me and my church this creates in my brother's eyes). I'll look for certitude (as far as my membership in his Church) in my Risen Lord, not in any given cultural expression of the Church."

"To quote a friend: 'When these two grand ladies figure out between them who is the real Mrs. Jesus, you can be sure that there will be room in their agreement for orthodox Protestants, for it will have to involve their mutual surrender of exclusivist claims and recognition of an ESSENTIALLY spiritual basis for membership in the True Church--the only thing upon which Protestants as a whole, I believe, are right.'"

"Once again, having said that, I do not view Rome and Orthodoxy in the same way that I view the protestant churches. Rome and the East are my older sisters and are worthy of my love, respect and profound attention...."

There you have it, read and enjoy it for whatever it is worth. I found it refreshing, if not perfectly stated in every place.

God bless you and pour out His Holy Spirit upon you without measure to the building up of the maturity of the Body of Christ.

In Christ,

Kenneth Samuel