

The Validity of Orders

in the

Liberal Catholic Church

Examined by a Member of

The Theosophical Society

Sydney. 1921

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The Theosophical Society is an international body which was founded in New York in 1875. It is now represented by over 800 active Lodges, established in all parts of the world, and has become a common meeting-ground for people of every known religious belief, and of all shades of thought. Its objects are:—

1. To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or colour.
2. To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science.
3. To investigate unexplained laws of Nature, and the powers latent in man.

Of these, the first object is the only one to which all members are asked to subscribe.

The platform of the Society therefore is perhaps the most tolerant of any Organisation in the world.

During its forty-six years of existence its members have interested themselves in many other movements along similar lines, and, indeed, many such movements have owed their inception and life to the help received from members of the Society.

Members have always been encouraged to work in any movement of whose aims they approved, but always with this proviso:

“You may do as you please as a private member, but you must not associate the Society with your actions.”

This is obviously necessary because, for example, a number of members may elect to work for Prohibition—and they are perfectly at liberty to do so; but in case there are members who do not believe in Prohibition the Society cannot become officially connected with either Prohibition or Non-Prohibition.

And in the past this condition has been faithfully observed.

During the War, the attention of members was directed to a new organisation, called the Old Catholic Church, which, it was claimed, was going to revive the Ancient Christian Mysteries and restore to Christendom the inner teachings of the Christ.

Mrs. Besant mentioned this movement in *The Theosophist*, and commended it to the attention of members interested in ceremonial, and later it was announced that Mr. Leadbeater had become a Bishop of this Church.

On this endorsement, many members rushed to join without waiting for anything more, and flung their energies into this movement as they had done in other instances in the past, many of them taking Orders in it.

It was not long before the misguided enthusiasm of members of the new “Church” caused them to associate the Society and the “Church” in the minds of the general public, and the position has grown so intolerable that a public repudiation of any connection with this “Church” by the Theosophical Society became necessary.

The Sydney Lodge of the Theosophical Society justly regards itself as the premier Lodge throughout the world. With a membership roll of over 700, it has done most valuable work in the community, and naturally declines to have its independent usefulness impaired by emphasised association with any Church. The following is an extract from its syllabus :—

IMPORTANT.

The Theosophical Society cannot identify itself with any particular Religion nor with any Sect which is part of any Religion. *It has, therefore, no connection, officially or unofficially, with any Church or Sect of Christendom.* In Australia, as elsewhere, some of its members ally themselves with various Churches, *but there is no Theosophical Society Church.*

Quite recently a visitor from America (Mr. Irving S. Cooper) lectured from the Theosophical platform on “Theosophy.” While in Sydney Mr. Cooper became a “Bishop” of this Church, and requested to be allowed

to appear in canonical dress and to be billed as “Rt. Rev.” if he lectured again. This suggestion was declined by the Executive Committee of the Sydney Lodge, as likely to be injurious to the Society.

Meanwhile, the “Bishops and Priests” of this organisation loudly proclaim the validity of their “Orders,” insist on the recognition of their clerical titles in the Theosophical Society, and go so far in misrepresentation as to print in their “Statement of Principles” (page 4):—

“The Liberal Catholic Church recognises seven fundamental Sacraments, which it enumerates as follows:—Baptism, Confirmation, the Holy Eucharist, Absolution, Holy Unction, Holy Matrimony, Holy Orders. To ensure their efficacy to the worshipper, it guards with the most jealous care the administration of all Sacramental rites, and has preserved an Episcopal Succession which is “negotiable—*i.e., acknowledged as valid throughout the whole of those Churches of Christendom which maintain the Apostolic Succession of Orders as a tenet of their faith.*”—(italics ours).

This article is written for the purpose of showing members of the Society and the general public, as well as any adherents of this “Church” who may have the courage to read it, how little reliance may be placed on their “Statement of Principles” and the manner in which the Churches of Christendom “acknowledge as valid” their claims to be considered a properly constituted Church.

Let us first consider

THE LAMBETH CONFERENCE.

This Conference of Anglican Bishops, held in July and August, 1920, issued a Report in which Resolution 27 reads as follows.—

This Resolution is also important because it quotes the repudiation of the Liberal Catholic Church by the Old Catholic Church at their Conference at Utrecht on April 28th and 29th, 1920.

“(1) Resolution 27 reads as follows:—‘We regret that on a review of all the facts, we are unable to regard the so-called Old Catholic Church in Great Britain (under the late Bishop Mathew and his successors)¹, and its extension overseas as a properly constituted Church, or to recognise the Orders of its ministers.’”

“(2) The Report of the sub-committee relating to this subject refers to a formal pronouncement by the Old Catholic Bishops, assembled at Utrecht² on April 28th and 29th, 1920, in which they state, categorically, that the episcopal consecration of the Rev. A. H. Matthew ‘was surreptitiously secured by the production of false testimony, and would never have taken place had the consecrator known that the conditions stated in the questionable documents, and required by our Episcopate, were non-existent.’ They also state that on the discovery of the facts they ‘broke off intercourse with him,’ and ‘without entering on the question whether an ordination obtained by sacrilegious fraud can be valid’ declare that they ‘have no ecclesiastical relations’ with those persons who claim to have received ordination or consecration from the aforesaid person. On a review of all the facts, the Committee is driven to the conclusion that it is not possible to regard the so-called ‘Old Catholic Church of Great Britain,’ disclaimed as it is by the Old Catholics on the Continent, as a properly constituted branch of the Church or to recognise the Orders of its ministers.’”

This is quite clear, and is unmistakable evidence to show that the Anglican Church does not recognise the “validity” of any “Orders” in the Liberal Catholic Church (which is this “Old Catholic Church” of Great

¹ - Arnold Samuel Mathew was consecrated as Bishop in 1908 and he in turn consecrated Bishop Fredrick Samuel Willoughby in 1914.

² - Utrecht is has been the religious center of the Netherlands since the 8th century. Currently it is the see of the Archbishop of Utrecht, the Dutch Roman Catholic leader and also the see of the archbishop of the Old Catholic church.

Britain under a new name).

Commenting on the above Report of the Lambeth Conference, the monthly paper issued by the Christ Church, S. Laurence, Sydney³, says, in the issue of October, 1920:—

“We conclude by emphasising the bearing of all this upon the so-called ‘Liberal Catholic Church,’ in Australia.

“The A. H. Mathew alluded to above, who obtained consecration through ‘sacreligious fraud’ ‘consecrated’ Frederick Samuel Willoughby [1862-1928] (the discreditable circumstances which caused his expulsion from the Church of England need not detain us at the moment). The ceremony took place in the banqueting hall of the Bull Inn, Bromley, Kent, the Church furniture being hired for the occasion from a prominent London firm.

“This so-called ‘Bishop’ Willoughby was obliging enough to ‘consecrate’ James Install Wedgwood⁴ after he had been refused consecration by Bishop Mathew, because (probably among other reasons) of his being an out-and-out Theosophist.

“While ‘Bishop’ Wedgwood was in Sydney, he ‘consecrated’ the Buddhist and Theosophist, Charles Webster Leadbeater, of Indian fame, as ‘Bishop of Australia,’ and assisted him to ‘consecrate,’ as ‘auxiliary for Australia,’ the Jongheer Julian Adrian Mazel. These two latter persons are still in Sydney, busily engaged at the ‘Liberal Catholic Church.’

“We print the above in order that people may have the facts in black and white before them, and know that it is not for nothing that we have taken up the attitude we have towards the scandal.”

But the affair becomes serious when we learn that this Priest Willoughby had been unfrocked by the Old Catholic Church (as he had previously been unfrocked by the Anglican Church) because of gross immorality in his life, *and was actually unfrocked when he “consecrated” J. I. Wedgwood.*

We will discuss this matter in detail later on.

Long before the Lambeth Conference, the Rector of Christ Church, Sydney, had written to the Bishop of London about this matter, and the following is an extract from Dr. Ingram’s reply, dated August 23rd, 1918:—

“We have only admitted as valid *one* of Bishop Matthew’s ordinations, that was the man (Lambert) he ordained when in full connection with the Old Catholic Church in Holland. People like Willoughby and others we do not recognise at all, and in our country there is no sort of collaboration between the Theosophists and Old Catholics.”

Let us now turn to the Roman Catholic Church and see how far they recognise the “Liberal” Catholic Church.

We find the whole matter ventilated in *The Month*, an official organ of the Roman Catholic Church.

In the issue of July, 1918, there appeared an article entitled “The Scandal of the Theosophist Bishops,” and the September number of the same year contained an article on “The Origins of the Theosophist Priesthood.” These articles are both long ones, and I only quote from the latter:—

“Bishop Matthew’s consecrations, both from his own and every other point of view, were a fiasco.”

³- Christ Church St Laurence is an Anglican church in the Diocese of Sydney, Australia.

⁴- Former Anglican and member of the Theosophical Society. Born in London March 24, 1883 and died March 13, 1951. In the years before his death he suffered from dementia and tertiary syphilis. Because he would disrobe himself in public, he was confined to the grounds at Tekels Park, near Camberly, Surry, in England, so he could parade himself in the nude where few people could see him.

Again:—

“What I wish most to lay stress upon is the evil consequences which must inevitably follow from the irresponsible and reckless use of the power of ordination. Seriousness and true reverence are impossible without a certain element of stability. Bishop Mathew in private life may be the most amiable and virtuous of men; of that I know nothing. But his public career, I submit, has been such as cannot inspire respect. At one time Anglican student; at another Catholic priest attached to five different dioceses in turn, as well as to a religious order; at another freethinker, or Unitarian minister in embryo; at another curate—at least to all seeming—in a London parish of the Established Church; then a married layman reconciled, or apparently reconciled, with Rome; then a suitor for preferment to the Archbishop of Canterbury; then a Bishop dependent upon the Jansenist Old Catholics of Holland; then an organiser of autonomous Churches whose names and places of worship seem to change almost from month to month; then the spiritual vassal of the Patriarch of Antioch; then an ordainer of (crypto—?) Theosophists; then a forsaken man, professing for the third or fourth time submission to Rome; finally an independent prelate once more, starting a new bishop-factory with unimpaired energy. How can such a man expect to find steadfastness in those whom he consecrates? It would be nothing short of a miracle, if some at least of those on whom he lays his hands did not out-herod Herod in extravagance and irresponsibility, profaning to base uses the powers they have received, and treating the whole sacramental system as magic and masquerade.”

And now, before we leave the question of the recognition (or otherwise!) of the “Liberal Catholic Church” by the more responsible Churches, let us see what the genuine Old Catholic Church has to say about its unlovely offspring.

To avoid confusion, it is necessary to remember that the Old Catholic Church is divided into two branches, one branch of which derives its succession from the Latin Church at Rome, the other from the Oriental Church at Antioch.⁵

A letter to the Editor of *Divine Life* magazine from the Secretary to Bishop Mathew, dated July 2nd, 1918, contains the following corrections and statements:—

“(1) Mr. J. I. Wedgwood and his associates are in no sense either Old Catholics or Roman Catholics.

“(2) They received such ‘consecration’ as they have, not from the Old Catholics, but from one, formerly an Old Catholic, who had been suspended for the gross immorality of his life, both by the Anglican and Old Catholic authorities.

“(3) This person (*i.e.*, Mr. Wedgwood’s ‘consecrator’) obtained Old Catholic Orders by concealment and misrepresentation.

“(4) Owing to certain providential omissions at this person’s consecration, together with the ‘intention’ and faith which the Catholic Church considers necessary for the giving and receiving of valid Orders, which ‘intention’ and faith no true Theosophist could possibly have or hold, the ‘Orders’ received and given by Mr. Wedgwood and his friends are of such a doubtful character that no one, not even the Old Catholics themselves, can acknowledge them.

“(5) Mr. Wedgwood did not accept ‘consecration’ from the suspended cleric in question until all the Old Catholic Bishops to whom he applied for consecration—both in Holland, America and England had refused his preposterous request.

“(6) Mr. Wedgwood and some of his friends in England were, for a short time, in communion with the English Old Catholics. *BUT NEVER AS BISHOPS*. As soon as the Old Catholics became aware of the extent of the claims made by Theosophy, a fact that had been minimised and glossed over by Mr. Wedgwood, they understood, *as all honest Theosophists understand, that no one man*

⁵- See: [http://orthodoxwiki.org/Church_of_Antioch]

can at one and the same time be a Catholic and a Theosophist. Mr. Wedgwood, in common with his friends, was therefore asked to withdraw either from the Old Catholic Church or the Theosophical Society. They all, without exception, elected to withdraw absolutely from the Old Catholic Church and remain Theosophists. Every one of them made a written and signed statement to this effect, the originals of which are carefully preserved by the Old Catholics.”

The following is a reprint of a letter from Bishop Mathew himself to the Editor of an American Journal, *The O.E. Library Critic*, which appeared in the issue of February 2nd, 1919 :—

“Dear Sir,—As you truly say, no matter how these Krotona people may choose and label their ridiculous hotchpotch of pseudo-Catholicism and pseudo-Theosophy, they can never rid themselves of the taint they contracted by applying to Willoughby for ‘consecration’ and passing it on to Leadbeater. In my opinion the corruption of lads and youths by unnatural men is about the worst and lowest form of vicious degradation to which a man can descend, and I am very glad that you have expressed yourself so candidly on the subject.

“Believe me, yours faithfully,

“(Signed) ARNOLD H. MATTHEW.”

The American Catholic Church is the second branch of the Old Catholic Church, deriving their succession from Antioch.

They, however, are at one with the English Old Catholics in repudiating the “Liberal Catholic Church,” as witness the following extract of a letter to the same journal (*The O.E. Library Critic*) from Archbishop J. R. Vilotte⁶, Primate of the American Catholic Church, and dated September 16th, 1918:—

“We will never recognise the principles and actions of Messrs. Wedgwood and Leadbeater, as it is impossible to serve two masters; and, like the Old Catholic Church of Europe, we protest and repudiate any connection with the duplicity and masquerading of those so-called Theosophists or Old Catholics at Krotona, California, or elsewhere.

“When Mr. Wedgwood came to the United States to ordain ‘priests,’ some of the Theosophists here in Chicago came and invited Bishop Lloyd and myself to meet him, but Mr. Wedgwood, under some pretense or other, feared to meet us, knowing very well that he was not a genuine Old Catholic Bishop, being unable to produce documents to substantiate his claims from either the Latin or Oriental Churches, *which profess Christ as the only means of salvation.*”

The comments of Dr. Stokes, in *The O.E. Library Critic* for August 7, 1918, may be of interest as giving the viewpoint of an American Editor, especially as many of our members in Australia and elsewhere cannot believe that Christ is dependent upon unclean channels to transmit His Grace:—

“I am not prone to squeamishness, but the Old Catholic Church openly teaches through Bishops Wedgwood and Leadbeater that ordination is a more essential qualification than moral cleanliness in its spiritual teachers, and I shall continue to protest when it lays its claws on the T.S. The Church which would refuse the priesthood to a woman like Mrs. Besant, while its leading Bishop received his ordination through a notorious rake, has no proper place in our civilisation, let alone among Theosophists. Considering the fact that all of our American Old Catholic Theosophists who have been ordained to the priesthood have as a spiritual grandfather a man who was thrown out of the priesthood of the Church of England for being a sexual pervert and a corrupter of boys. I wonder they do not organise an excursion to the River Jordan to be purged of possible spiritual leprosy.”

On February 5th, 1919, this paper returns to the subject:—

“Mr. Wedgwood is an ardent advocate of the dogma of ‘Apostolic Succession,’ which means that

⁶- The Letter, dated from Chicago, was signed by Joseph Rene Vilatte , Archbishop, Metropolitan and Primate of The American Catholic Church.Church. He claims that without this succession he would have no spiritual authority whatever.

“What are the facts?”

a priest can have no real spiritual power and authority unless he has received them from another priest, and so back to the Apostles and to Christ Himself. He claims to have received the succession from the Old Catholic Church of Great Britain and to be a Bishop of that Church. He claims that without this succession he would have no spiritual authority whatever.

“What are the facts?”

“. . . They are to the effect that Wedgwood’s Apostolic Succession is fraudulent, having been secured through an unfrocked prelate, one Willoughby, who had been expelled from the Old Catholic Church, as he was before from the Anglican Church, because of the gross immorality of his life which, in brief, consisted in immoral relations with boys entrusted to his care. It is from this unfrocked sex pervert that Mr. Wedgwood secured his right to be regarded as in the direct line of the Apostles, and of Christ Himself, and the right to pass it on to others, including Mr. Leadbeater and the various Priests in America. Every Priest of the Liberal Catholic Church must trace his spiritual ancestry back to a moral cesspools.”

Let us now turn to some other varieties of journalism to avoid the implication of favouritism towards one particular brand!

London *Truth*, of June 9th, 1920, contains a vivid article entitled “Bastard Bishop,” in which the following gem is found:—

“Recent references to episcopal developments in connection with the invasion of the Old Catholic Church by the Theosophical fraternity have brought me a good deal of information concerning some of the parties to this attempt to pantheise Christianity or Christianise Theosophy. Much of it is too unsavoury to print, and is chiefly interesting to the psychologist as providing examples of the curiously intimate relationship occasionally found between sacerdotalism and perversion of the ordinary moral instincts. The remainder reveals an equally queer phase of mentality, supplying evidence of the continued existence of a belief that some peculiar sanctity can be transmitted by one person to another, altogether apart from the vehicle of transmission; in other words, that the Apostolic Succession can be acquired by means of hypocrisy, if not legally fraudulent means, and can be handed on by the hypocrite to any person upon whom he chooses to bestow it. What view Theologians take to-day of such claims I do not know. To my mind there is nothing more calculated to throw discredit upon the validity of ‘Holy Orders’ in any of the Churches, and for this reason the manner in which the Apostolic Succession has been acquired by followers of Madame Blavatsky and Mrs. Besant are of some public interest. What is of still more importance from the public point of view is the possibility of persons of doubtful reputations thus acquiring a quasi-ecclesiastical standing which they may use to further their own ends.”

The article concludes as follows :—

“In view of the means by which these ‘Holy’ Orders have been attained, the following passage from a ‘Statement of Principles’ of the Liberal Catholic Church is peculiarly edifying:

“ ‘To ensure the efficacy to the worshipper of these means of grace (the seven sacraments) the Liberal Catholic Church guards with the most zealous care the administration of all sacramental rites, and has preserved an episcopal succession which is ‘negotiable’—*i. e.*, acknowledged as valid, throughout the whole of those Churches of Christendom which maintain the Apostolic Succession of Orders as a tenet of their faith.’

“It is difficult to imagine anyone seriously putting forward a claim to special spiritual grace founded on an Apostolic or Episcopal Succession obtained in such a way and through such an agency as I have described. The whole thing stems to be nothing more than a particularly obnoxious piece of blasphemous humbug, resulting in the foundation of a bastard church by a bevy of illegitimate bishops. What is the end in view one can only guess, but that any good end is possible when a man with the reputation of Leadbeater is endowed with the episcopal robes, and another (King) is engaged in picking up half-guineas from credulous persons by exercising his ‘psychic’ powers for their amusement, seems much too incredible to be believed.”

We now come to the Sydney Press, and see how far it “recognises as valid” the titles of this preposterous “priesthood.”

The Sydney Conservatories of Music recently advertised “The Rt. Rev. C. W. Leadbeater” to lecture for them in April last (1921).

The *Sydney Morning Herald* made a brief reference to the lecture, and referred in its first paragraph to “Rev.” Mr. Leadbeater, but in the second paragraph only called the lecturer “Mr.” Leadbeater.

The *Daily Telegraph* reported “a Mr. Leadbeater.”

The evening *Sun* also reported “Mr.” Leadbeater, and on the following Sunday made further reference to the lecture as having been given

“by a gentleman belonging to a small select philosophy, most of the adherents of which appeared, judging from their dress, to be Bishops. Gilbert, gazing round upon the audience, might have obtained the inspiration for his lines:

“ ‘Bishops in their shovel-hats
Were plentiful as tabby-cats.’”

This paper is not given to ridicule of the clergy, so evidently it does not take these “Bishops” seriously.

No! The evidence is overwhelming. The validity of the Liberal Catholic “Orders” *is not* recognised anywhere outside one of their Churches. And small wonder.

Looked at coldly and in the light of facts, one has to regret that the law which prosecutes bogus Doctors does not regard religion of sufficient importance to prosecute an over-credulous public from “the grossest ecclesiastical fraud of the century.”

With regard to the support given to this Church by members of the Theosophical Society we have an example of the dangers of blind faith that should be a lesson to the Society for all time, and a warning to follow principles rather than persons. And if the Society swallows its present nasty dose of Medicine and admits its mistake, then, perhaps, some good may come out of the scandal.

That quite a number of Theosophists should have accepted a man who claimed to be “Presiding Bishop” in a Church of which he was not even a member is undoubtedly due to his endorsement by Mrs. Besant and Mr. Leadbeater.

And what was this endorsement?

From Mrs. Besant merely a statement, clothed in very calm language, to the effects that members could work for this movement if they chose to do so.

Speaking at Letchworth (England) on September 24th, 1919, she put the position as follows :—

“To some the great truths of their religion are bound up in the form in which that religion is clothed, and the truth to them cannot be separated from the form. That is so in Hinduism very often, as well as in other religions, and the people believe through the form which is familiar to them.

“It is the duty of Theosophists to stimulate the faith of those they are working with.

“That has a very important bearing on the question of the Old Catholic Church which disturbs the Society just now. You have there not Christianity as a whole, but one form of it. The Society should not be identified with that particular form because some Theosophists help it any more than it should be identified with any other division, such as Baptist or Methodist. There is a certain danger with members in Christian countries that they may think they ought to attach themselves to that particular form because a Great One in the Great Hierarchy is reported to have spoken of it approvingly. As a matter of fact, the same Great One is also the Head of all great Faiths. He inspires them all. He does not want a number of people to suddenly rush into one particular form. I have been

astonished to find that in some of our Lodges people are looked upon askance because they have not joined the Old Catholic Church. That is absurd, and you might as well insist that all should become Hindus as that they should become Old—or is it Liberal—Catholics?

“This movement, as are so many others in which some of our members as individuals are taking interest, is entirely apart and separate from our Society. Our members are entirely free either to aid it or to leave it alone, yet for some reason people have got into the way of associating this particular movement with the Theosophical Society, so that there is even a danger that some may think the Society is identified with the Old Catholic Church. So I ask you very earnestly not to encourage that particular work for yourself if it is not in your line. I do not belong to it myself, and do not intend to, I have no inclination to take up Christian symbology, and its ceremonial does not interest me.

“I put all that quite frankly because I know that some have similar feelings to myself and yet think they ought to become Old Catholics,”

But principally the acceptance of the “Liberal Catholic Church” was because of the whole-hearted recommendation by a gentleman who claims to be an infallible clairvoyant, but who has never, *until* now, been subjected to any sort of a test.

Mr. Leadbeater has frequently claimed that by clairvoyant means he can distinguish between a genuine priest in the line of Apostolic Succession and a dissenter. Only the former, so it is said, can make the Host luminous during the celebration of Mass.

And here, in the first public test on record, he has allowed himself to be “consecrated” by a false priest, and didn’t know it!

And on the basis of such “clairvoyance,” which cannot protect its possessor from deception, the members of the Society have blindly swallowed all sorts of statements about the invisible world, the divine origin of the Liberal Catholic Church, the power of its priests, and so on.

To sum up, the claims of the Liberal Catholic Church, to be considered as a Properly constituted body, are apparently not recognised by any regular Church in Christendom; its teachings are no more Theosophical than they are Christian, and when the deluded adherents of this body get back to the true Theosophical and Christian ideals of Service and Brotherhood they will find they are nearer salvation (whatever that term may mean) than they are in seeking it along the paths of psychism and magic.

To conclude with a restatement of the principal theme, there is no connection whatever between the Theosophical Society and the “Liberal Catholic” or any other Church.