

The answer is: The Truth of God and the Lutheran Confessions Recognizes No Parochial Frontiers. The question is: Why is Bishop Obare Omwanza of Kenya set on consecrating Church of Sweden bishops?

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By the time this conference convenes, the final consecration of the Mission Province (MP) in Sweden probably will have taken place. This final act, to take place in early 2005, is the consecration of one to three already selected Lutheran Church of Sweden priests as bishops in the Mission Province by the presiding Lutheran Bishop of Kenya, Walter Obare Omwanza. Once installed, the MP bishop(s) will then ordain a number of priests to continue to service the current nine already functioning congregations of the MP. The MP, which has been functioning *within* the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sweden (CS) for a little over a year as an organized tendency or “inner-church movement” expressly wants to remain within the CS as a renewing (reactionary) “parallel structure.” However, as the Archbishop of the CS, KG Hammar has made clear, “the ordination of priests or consecration of bishops outside the recognized rules of the Church of Sweden will lead to the exclusion from the ministry for those involved.”

The founding of the MP as a slowly developing schism (primarily related to the issue of female ordination) within the CS is interesting for a number of reasons. The most spectacular, which is also in accord with the broader theme of this conference (frontiers), is that the MP, which is wholly Swedish and wishes to remain part of the CS, has chosen to go abroad, far a field, and in the opposite direction of traditional mission activity (North to South) in seeking consecration from the presiding bishop of the Lutheran Church in Kenya. While we do not see this as evidence of the “believing South re-Christianising the secularised North,” it is evidence of clever use of a global opportunity to solve a local/national problem (to achieve apostolic episcopal as opposed to presbyterial consecration). This being said, Rev. Obare Omwanza’s willingness to consecrate MP bishops stems from his theological agreement with the MP’s conservative theology, and opposition to what he and the MP see as the wayward and “lamentable” deviation from classic Christianity and the Lutheran Confessions that the CS currently stands for and enforces by its active exclusion of priests who oppose the ordination of women.

The second reason is that the theological rift over the ordination of women, and more recently, the ecclesiastical blessing of same sex unions/marriages, becomes a point of schism not as it becomes an accepted doctrine, but when it has exclusionary organizational consequences. We argue, broadly in accord with Sutton and Chaves (2004), that organizational actions, and a form of consolidation (a consistent policy and practice regime enforcing gender equality within the CS), are primary in producing the Mission Province. We also contend that organizational action is a result of theological development. Thus our explanation places theology, and two fundamentally different paradigms of theology, what can be called the literalist eternal truth paradigm versus the dynamic social relevance/contemporary revelation paradigms at the centre of our explanation (but as a remote

cause). The extent to which these two traditions can live side-by-side within a church or denomination is dependent upon how these theological positions are translated into organizational practice. In other words, theology has a strong bearing on the religious authority structure of a denomination. We find it useful in this context to distinguish between remote and proximate causes (Lieberson & Lynn 2002; Reskin 2000) of the schism. The remote causes are theological differences, while the proximate causes lie in organizational action. We contend that there is a direct connection, but not determined outcome between these two. The paper traces not only the development of the MP, but also the choices of individuals in the forerunning organizations to the MP who elected not to affiliate themselves with the MP when exclusion from the CS became evident as a consequence.