

Elucidation on Ministry (1979)

Anglican - Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission

Comments and Criticisms

1. After the publication of the Statement Ministry and Ordination, the Commission received comments and criticisms, among which it judged the following to be of special concern.

It has been suggested that in the discussion of ministry insufficient attention was given to the priesthood of the whole people of God, so that the document seemed to have too clerical an emphasis. In this connection it has also been said that the distinction between this priesthood of all the faithful and the priesthood of the ordained ministry was not clearly enough explained. Questions have also been raised about the Commission's treatment of the origins and historical development of the ordained ministry and its threefold form, about its comparison of that development with the emergence of the canon of Scripture; and about its views on the place of episcopacy within episcopate as it is outlined in the Statement (para. 9).

Some have wondered whether the Statement adequately expressed the sacramental nature of the rite of ordination, others whether this aspect has been overemphasized. The Commission has been asked to consider the implications of the Statement for the question of the ordination of women. There have also been inquiries about the bearing of the Statement upon the problem of recognizing the validity of Anglican Orders.

Priesthood

2. In common Christian usage the term priesthood is employed in three distinct ways: the priesthood of Christ, the priesthood of the people of God, the priesthood of the ordained ministry.

The priesthood of Christ is unique. He is our High Priest who has reconciled mankind with the Father. All other priesthood derives from his and is wholly dependent upon it.

The Priesthood of the whole people of God (1 Peter 2:5) is the consequence of incorporation by baptism into Christ. This priesthood of all the faithful (para. 7) is not a matter of disagreement between us. In a document primarily concerned with the ordained ministry, the Commission did not consider it necessary to develop the subject further than it has already done in the Statement. Here the ordained ministry is firmly placed in the context of the ministry of the whole Church and exists for the service of all the faithful.

The Statement (para. 13) explains that the ordained ministry is called priestly principally because it has a particular sacramental relationship with Christ as High Priest. At the eucharist Christ's people do what he commanded in memory of himself and Christ unites them sacramentally with himself in his self-offering. But in this action it is only the ordained minister who presides at the eucharist, in which, in the name of Christ and on behalf of his Church, he recites the narrative of the institution of the Last Supper, and invokes the Holy Spirit upon the gifts.

The word priesthood is used by way of analogy when it is applied to the people of God and to the ordained ministry. These are two distinct realities which relate, each in its own way, to the high priesthood of Christ, the unique priesthood of the new covenant, which is their source and model. These considerations should be borne in mind throughout para. 13, and in particular they indicate the significance of the statement that the ordained ministry 'is not an extension of the common Christian priesthood but belongs to another realm of the gifts of the Spirit'.

In this as in other cases the early Church found it necessary for its understanding and exposition of the faith to employ terminology in ways in which it was not used in the New Testament. Today in seeking to give an account of our faith both our communions, in the interpretation of the Scriptures, take cognisance of the Church's growing understanding of Christian truth (cf. Authority 1, paras. 2, 3, and 15).

Sacramentality of Ordination

3. The phrase 'in this sacramental act' in para. 15 has caused anxiety on two different counts: that this phrase seems to give the sacrament of ordination the same status as the two 'sacraments of the Gospel'; and that it does not adequately express the full sacramentality of ordination.

Both traditions agree that a sacramental rite is a visible sign through which the grace of God is given by the Holy Spirit in the Church. The rite of ordination is one of these sacramental rites. Those who are ordained by prayer and the laying on of hands receive their ministry from Christ through those designated in the Church to hand it on; together with the office they are given the grace needed for its fulfilment (cf. para. 14). Since New Testament times the Church has required such recognition and authorization for those who are to exercise the principal functions of episcopate in the name of Christ. This is what both traditions mean by the sacramental rite of ordination.

Both traditions affirm the pre-eminence of baptism and the eucharist as sacraments 'necessary to salvation'. This does not diminish their understanding of the sacramental nature of ordination, as to which there is no significant disagreement between them.

Origins and Development of the Ordained Ministry

4. Our treatment of the origins of the ordained ministry has been criticized. While the evidence leaves ground for differences of interpretation, it is enough for our purpose to recall that, from the beginning of the Christian Church, there existed episcopate in the community, however its various responsibilities were distributed and described, and whatever the names given to those who exercise it (cf. paras. 8, 9, and especially 6). It is generally agreed that, within the first century, evidence of ordination such as we have described above is provided by the First Epistle of Clement, chapters 40-44, commonly dated 95 A.D. Some New Testament passages appear to imply the same conclusion, e.g. Acts 14:23. Early in the second century, the pattern of a threefold ministry centered on episcopacy was a ready discernible, and probably widely found (cf. the Epistles of Ignatius to the Ephesians, 4; Magnesians, 13; Trallians, 2; Philadelphians, 2; Smyrnaeans, 8). It was recognized that such ministry must be in continuity not only with the apostolic faith but also with the commission given to the apostles (cf. the First Epistle of Clement, 42),

Our intention in drawing a parallel between this emergence of the threefold ministry and the formation of the New Testament canon was to point to comparable processes of gradual development without determining whether the comparison could be carried further (cf. para. 6). The threefold ministry remained universal until the divisions of Western Christianity in the sixteenth century. However, both our communions have retained it.

We both maintain that episcopate must be exercised by ministers ordained in the apostolic succession (cf. para. 16). Both our communions have retained and remained faithful to the threefold ministry centered on episcopacy as the form in which this episcopate is to be exercised. Because our task was limited to examining relations between our two communions, we did not enter into the question whether there is any other form in which this episcopate can be realized.

Ordination of Women

5. Since the publication of the Statement there have been rapid developments with regard to the ordination of women. In those churches of the Anglican Communion where canonical ordinations of women have taken place, the bishops concerned believe that their action implies no departure from the traditional doctrine of the ordained ministry (as expounded, for instance, in the Statement). While the Commission realizes that the ordination of women has created for the Roman Catholic Church a new and grave obstacle to the reconciliation of our communions (cf. Letter of Pope Paul VI to Archbishop Donald Coggan, 23 March 1976, AAS 68), it believes that the principles upon which its doctrinal agreement rests are not affected by such ordinations; for it was concerned with the origin and nature of the ordained ministry and not with the question who can or cannot be ordained. Objections, however substantial, to the ordination of women are of a different kind from objections raised in the past against the validity of Anglican Orders in general.

Anglican Orders

6. In answer to the questions concerning the significance of the Agreed Statements for the mutual recognition of ministry, the Commission has affirmed that a consensus has been reached that places the questions in a new context (cf. para. 17). It believes that our agreement on the essentials of eucharistic faith with regard to the sacramental presence of Christ and the sacrificial dimension of the eucharist, and on the nature and purpose of priesthood, ordination, and apostolic succession, is the new context in which the questions should now be discussed. This calls for a reappraisal of the verdict on Anglican Orders in *Apostolicae Curae* (1896).

Mutual recognition presupposes acceptance of the apostolicity of each other's ministry. The Commission believes that its agreements have demonstrated a consensus in faith on eucharist and ministry which has brought closer the possibility of such acceptance. It hopes that its own conviction will be shared by members of both our communions; but mutual recognition can only be achieved by the decision of our authorities. It has been our mandate to offer to them the basis upon which they may make this decision.