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THE SACRED CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH
OBSERVATIONS ON THE JOINT STATEMENT (ARCIC, CANTERBURY 1973)
ON MINISTRY AND ORDINATION

1 "Ministry and Ordination", a key subject in the dialogue between the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church, has been treated in the joint statement of Canterbury. The international commission which drew it up published it with the idea of obtaining other theological reactions (1).

2 In view of the importance of the discussion, the following observations are offered in a constructive spirit.

3 Dealing with ordained ministries, the statement underlines from the outset several doctrinal themes which were prominent in the Second Vatican Council, bringing out that christian apostolate has its origin in the sending of the Son by the Father (para.4) and that the ministry of the apostles, fundamental in the first century, remains constitutive of the church in all ages (ibid). It emphasises also the essential role of the episcopate in ordained ministries (para.9) and that the bishop is the minister of ordination (para.14). It takes care to define the principal functions of priest and deacon (para.9). In a felicitous phrase it declares that the ordained ministry "is not an extension of the common Christian priesthood" (para.13). The ordination which confers this ministry -- in a rite which comprises prayer and the imposition of hands -- (para.14) confers also a "seal" (para.15) and certain gifts, especially that of the Holy Spirit (para.14).

4 These points of agreement cannot fail to please Catholic readers. Yet their number and their value have been limited, to our way of thinking, by the method of work adopted. This is clearly defined at the start (para.1) and is intended to be based on "the traditions of our common inheritance" as well as on "biblical teaching". In fact, it is above all a biblical consensus which is at the root of the statement. Common traditions enter in only rather tardily and indirectly, when current doctrine about ministries is presented: they do not form a link between New Testament data and today's teaching. It may well be asked whether this procedure, followed perhaps in the interests of brevity rather than imposed by method, does not explain some of the silences and ambiguities of the statement.

5 Confining itself exclusively to the New Testament, the statement does not succeed in explaining precisely the difference between bishops and priests, the sacerdotal quality of the two ministries, the nature and function of apostolic succession, nor does it acknowledge the institution of the sacrament of order by Christ. The literary data of the apostolic age, where the new priesthood takes the place of the Aaronic, are sometimes susceptible of divergent interpretations, but in the three following centuries they were soon clarified by a common tradition.

6 It is evident from the New Testament alone that it was Christ who, choosing the Twelve to be his apostles, instituted the ministry in its fulness. The witness of the gospels is of capital importance: in the person of the apostles the primordial link was forged: the ministry proceeds historically from Christ. This fact deserves to be brought out better. In the same way even after the resurrection (cf. para.5), Eph. IV, 11-13 asserts that it is still Christ the Lord who, obviously by the

sending of the Spirit, "gives" to the Church apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, already partly signalled in I Cor. XII, 28, more succinctly in Acts XIII, 1-2, announced perhaps in Mtt. XXIII, 34 and Luke XI, 49. Hence it is well before the pastoral epistles that the New Testament allows us to discern qualified ministries among charismatic manifestations and services, and underlines particularly their divine origin and their relation to the Church. To be sure the institution of the threefold ministry of bishops, priests and deacons is not to be attributed immediately to the historic Christ (2); account must be taken of the intervention of the apostles. The mission they had received from the Lord Jesus was to endure till the end of time. Hence it was to ensure permanence that "they bequeathed to their immediate fellow-workers as a legacy the task of completing and consolidating the work which they had begun. They charged them to give their attention to the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit had set them to lead the Church of God. They appointed such men and then gave them the order that, on their decease, other approved men should take up their ministry in succession". This is the doctrine that Lumen Gentium, n.20 derives from Acts XX, 28 and from the first letter of St. Clement of Rome to the Corinthians (para. XLIV, 2). So it is that the ministry goes back to Christ from the apostles and descends to their successors, pastors like Timothy (2 Tim. II, 2) and Titus, and from them to other pastors, among whom we find St. Ignatius of Antioch, the first categorical witness to our present hierarchy of bishop, priests and deacons.

7 As for the sacerdotal nature of the ministry exercised by bishop and priest, we can agree that it is not made explicit in the New Testament. But it is really implied in several statements and institutional practices, of which the express meaning comes out in the third century in the patrimony of the apostolic Churches (3). It is to be regretted that the statement shows an irritating reserve towards this tradition and, while recognising that ordained ministry is spoken of in both our traditions in priestly terms and admitting that it is not an extension of the common priesthood, fails to specify that it belongs not only "to another realm of the gifts of the Spirit" but also, by that very fact, to a proper priesthood. However it is expressed theologically, the nature of this priesthood is essentially different from that of the priesthood of the faithful, as Lumen Gentium taught (Para. 10) and Mysterium Ecclesiae recalled to mind (Para. 6). The Catholic reader would have wished to find this precision at the point where the Canterbury Statement speaks of "the essential nature" of the ordained ministry which, it notes, is revealed in the Eucharist (Para. 13).

5 It is a mark of the statement that it underlines the impact of this great sacrament on the ministry, pointing out very properly that it is in the eucharistic celebration, the centre of the Christian life, that the nature of Christian ministry appears most clearly. It even goes so far as to declare that the action of the presiding minister is a sacramental relationship with Christ's own act of self-offering (Para. 13). These two remarks would seem to us to offer occasion for giving greater precision to the doctrine of the Windsor Statement on the sacrificial value of the mass. Here too the Canterbury Statement itself might see an invitation to clear up the ambiguity in its own notion of a sacrament (Para. 15 n. 4) and to secure the expressly sacramental quality of ordination. For this doctrinal point, supported by many New Testament data, belongs to the ancient tradition. All the apostolic churches number ordination among their "mysteries" or "sacraments". As early as the first third of the third century, the liturgical-canonical compilation, the Traditio Apostolica gives it the first place (4). It is not conceivable that, being placed before eucharistic celebration and baptism, orders should be less sacramental than they.

9 It is ordination which, by making a baptised person a priest, qualifies him to consecrate the Eucharist, as baptism makes the layman able to participate in it. Orders cannot be less entitled to be called a sacrament than the Eucharist and Baptism. This is why it is not merely "right" (Para.12) but necessary that presiding at and consecrating the Eucharist should be reserved to a duly ordained priest: this was proclaimed in 1215 in the profession of faith of the 4th Lateran Council, at which the bishops of England, Scotland and Ireland were strongly represented (5).

10 As for the gifts conferred by ordination, certainly they consist essentially in the communication of the Holy Spirit, as the Council of Trent maintained (6). But from the time of the Traditio Apostolica, though mention of the Spirit did not disappear, these gifts were also expressed in terms of "power" (7) and even where bishops were concerned, of "grace", gratia perfecta (8) -- a development which is preserved in the Catholic tradition. The Canterbury Statement recognises that consecrated ministers are marked with the "seal" of the Spirit, and that on this ground their "calling" is irrevocable, their ordination unrepeatable (Para.15). In these terms the document seems to admit equivalently our doctrine of priestly character "the mark of Christ which cannot be defaced" (9): a doctrine which cannot be emptied of content.

Going beyond the mere question of the sacramental effects and the conditions for validity of priestly and episcopal ordination, the statement shows a wise pastoral sense in emphasising their ecclesial significance (Para.16). The presence of the presbyterium and, for bishops, the participation of three co-consecrators manifest the collegiality of ministry, ecclesial communion and apostolic succession. But for this ecclesial communion to be manifested and achieved the co-consecrators must clearly be in perfect communion with the Church and notably with the pope, the successor of Peter and the head of the episcopal college. Moreover, the laying on of hands of the consecrating bishops only expresses full ecclesial communion and ensures apostolic succession insofar as it has priestly value (as pointed out earlier) and insofar as it has sacramental efficacy, conferring the powers and the graces of Christ. Hence it must be said that the conclusion of Para.16 is too optimistic in claiming that "here are comprised the essential features of what is meant in our two traditions by ordination in the apostolic succession": because those features, if they are to correspond exactly to the triple function of the apostles' mandate, must underline the magisterial and pastoral dimensions of apostolic succession as well as the requirement of priesthood and ordination. The elucidation is not then complete; but it can, and we earnestly hope will, be brought to a successful issue by the Joint Commission before the latter's mandate expires.

12 Indeed, the text of the agreed statement will very likely have occasion to be perfected and completed soon by the documents on authority and primacy in the Church, which are in prospect. In any case, it already offers a positive contribution to greater doctrinal convergence.

NOTES

- (1) "These authorities have allowed the Statement to be published so that it may be discussed by other theologians ... The Commission will be glad to receive observations and criticisms made in a constructive and fraternal spirit" (Ministry and Ordination, S.P.C.K., Canterbury 1973, p.24).
- (2) The matter is put thus so as to give due regard both to the New Testament data and to the nuances of the teaching of Trent ("hierarchiam, divina ordinatione institutam ...": (DS 1776) and Vatican II ("ministerium ecclesiasticum divinitus institutum": Lumen Gentium n.28).
- (3) What amounts to an essential difference between the baptismal and priestly ordination and the ministerial finds a first pre-conceptual expression in the surprising awe which a St. Gregory Nazianzen or a St. John Chrysostom felt before their ordination. This kind of mystical apprehension had a doctrinal significance. Like that which the eucharist inspired in them (cf. Johannes Quasten, Mysterium tremendum, Eucharistische Frömmigkeitsauffassungen des vierten Jahrhunderts, in: Vom christlichen Mysterium (Memorial Odo Casel), Düsseldorf 1951, pp.66-75); this awe was traceable to the same quite specific source. It prompted them naturally to those two first theological works on "priesthood" which have since become part of the Church's patrimony (Orationes apologeticae de fuga, P.G. 35, 407-514; De Sacerdotio, P.G. 48, 623-692).
- (4) The same remark holds for the last book of the Apostolic Constitutions which represent an enlargement of the Traditio Apostolica in 4th century Antiochean discipline. The famous liturgy of Book VIII is no other than that of ordination (F.X. Funk, Didascalia et Constitutiones Apostolicae, VIII, iv-xv, tome I, pp. 470-522) as was already the case in chap. 4 of the Traditio Apostolica (Gregory Dix, The Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome, 2nd ed. SPCK, London 1968, pp. 6-9; also ed. Dom Bernard Botte, O.S.B., Münster-Westph. 1962, pp. 10-17).
- (5) DS 802 (cf. 794). Six archbishops from the British Isles were at the Council including Canterbury, York, Armagh and Dublin, as well as 26 bishops.
- (6) DS 1774.
- (7) Dix, l.c. : iii, 5, pp. 4 and 5; Botte, l.c. : n.3, pp. 8 and 10.
- (8) Dix, l.c. : i, 5, p.2; Botte, l.c. : n.1, p.2.
- (9) The Declaration Mysterium Ecclesiae, Para.6; and, before that, the Council of Trent: DS 1774.