

Provisional Document No. 1

MINISTRY

1. The Church is called and sent to serve both God and man.

These two aspects of service, united in the design of God, were perfectly fulfilled in the life and sacrifice of Christ. The ministry of the whole Church is to continue this service, in dependence upon Christ the Lord: that is to say, by participating in the benefits of Christ's saving work, the baptised community becomes the 'hierateuma' that radiates the glory of God and proclaims Christ's saving deeds (I Peter 2:5, 9-10). Inasmuch as the Church is the reconciled community, though itself still imperfect, it is called to be in Christ agent of the reconciliation. As the Son of God became man to save us, so God continues to work largely through human agents.

2. By his Holy Spirit Christ calls some who are to exercise particular ministries in order to enable the Church to fulfil this 'hierateuma'. All ministers are the Holy Spirit's instruments (cf. Acts 9:15; 26: 16-18) for the building up of the Church as the sanctified community for the glory of God and salvation of men. Within the Church, and in many cases through commissioning by the Church, these ministers are called and sent by Christ himself with the Holy Spirit's empowering. The authenticity of their ministries is judged by their fidelity to the witness of the Apostles. In the light of the purpose of God for his Church, such ministries are necessary; but they exist for the community - a living organism - and retain (as evident in the New Testament) a measure of flexibility.

3. Within the New Testament ministerial actions are varied and functions not precisely defined. Of primary importance are the proclamation of the Word and the preservation of apostolic doctrine, the care of the flock, and the example of Christian living. Even if there is no explicit mention of a regular liturgical role, it is a fair presumption that this was in some way included. At least by the time of the Pastoral Epistles and I Peter, some ministerial functions are discernible in a more exact form. The evidence suggests that, with the growth of the Church, the importance of these functions led to their being gradually located in specific officers of the community. The Ignatian pattern of bishop, deacons, and college of presbyters was a result of this process of development. Since the Church is built up by the Holy Spirit primarily but not exclusively through these ministerial functions, some form of recognition and authorisation is already required in this New Testament period for their legitimate exercise in the name of Christ. Here we can see elements which will remain at the heart of what today we call ordination.

4. According to the New Testament, Christ alone is our High Priest.

By his offering, foreshadowed in the sacrificial system of the Old Testament, the Levitical priesthood has been superseded by him, the one High Priest of a new order (Heb. 7: 23-24). Though a sacrificial vocabulary is occasionally used (cf. Romans 15:16), sacerdotal language in the Levitical sense is not used in the New Testament to describe Christian ministry. Ministers are never described as priests, nor is there any evidence that only 'episcopoi' or 'presbyteroi' could preside at the eucharist. A priestly ministry, the fruit of the sacrifice of Christ, is, however, exercised by the whole people of God. The office and function of ministers are not simply a development out of 'the priesthood of all believers' but spring from the express purpose of Christ for his Church. This ministry exists to promote the holiness of the whole Church and to further its mission.

Though no inference for our future discussion is being drawn at this stage, it is evident that the focussing of the Christian ministry upon the word priest cannot be found in the writings of the New Testament.