

THE ANGLICAN/ROMAN CATHOLIC STATEMENT ON MINISTRY AND ORDINATION

REACTION IN THE PRESS

- BRITIAN: A. Spokesmen for the Methodist Conference and for the United Reformed Church wrote a joint letter to the Times of London (December 19/73\*) in which they warmly welcome the statement and indicate their substantial agreement with the understanding of the doctrine of ministry expressed in it.

They describe as "helpful" the return to the N.T. as the source from which all understanding begins. This approach takes us beyond the polemical position into which the divisive controversy has led us.

This statement will enable all confessions to converse about the nature of ministry. It marks a stage from which the processes of reunion can go forward with renewed hopefulness.

\*Kenneth Greet, Secretary of the Methodist Conference; John Huxtable and Arthur MacArthur, Joint General Secretaries of the United Reformed Church.

- B. The same article in the London Times indicates that the statement has been attacked by the Conservative Catholic Priests' Association, an unofficial English R.C. body, as a surrender to Anglican and Protestant doctrines of ministry.
- C. The Manchester Guardian, December 22, 1973 carries comments by Dr. Michael Ramsey. He recalls the attempts at conversations in the 1890's and notes that the ground of the discussion had to shift if dialogue were to proceed. He refers to the present dialogue as an immense step forward; he qualifies that by pointing out that the document examines what is the essence of priesthood in relation to the unique priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of all Christians within the Church. He notes too that the document's authority rests on the authority of its authors but its influence might be gauged in other terms, that is, by the likelihood of its encouraging and extending the trend in both churches, to go beyond the later controversies and to recover the primitive concepts. The process before too long will affect the influence of Leo XIII's Bull, which then will seem more irrelevant than right or wrong.

- U.S.A.: A. The Catholic Transcript, Hartford Connecticut, referred to the statement as a solid step forward in ecumenical dialogue and a strong beginning of the dialogue on ministry.
- B. The Catholic Times, Columbus, Ohio, commented that the order that the Commission has adopted is a logical one, i.e. first they admit and express what they believe together. Then they are in a good position to distinguish the essential elements of their belief from incidentals of practice and expression.
- C. In an interview with Religious News Service, Father Herbert Ryan (ARCIC) emphasized reception as the current phase of the document's existence. He describes this phase as one in which the Bishops take the document to their people and ask them "Is this your faith?" This is the basis for consensus among the people of both Christian traditions.

- D. The Catholic Standard And Times, Philadelphia, rejoiced in the articulation provided by the statement but was distressed at the silence over the validity of Anglican Orders. It commented that the silence seems to imply that those concerns are solved and they are not. Publication of only the areas of agreement gives rise to false hopes that all obstacles to reunion are removed, which is far from the case.

The same editorial concludes: Perhaps what is most disconcerting in the Canterbury statement is an apparently unpublished premise that what matters in sacred orders is not their historic transmission but their present conception. If that is indeed an unspoken premise in the preparation of this document, the scholars' approach to sacramental validity and apostolic succession differs from the approach with which most Catholics would feel comfortable.

- CANADA: A. The Prairie Messenger, Muenster, Sask. featured an article by Richard McBrien. The same article appeared in the January 17 issue of the Catholic Messenger, Davenport, La. McBrien seems just a little negative about what he implies is an elitist statement, though he does not use that word.

I have taken just a few excerpts from his article:

...what happens to such consensus statements once the journalistic dust settles?

Those who actively participated in the international discussions did, indeed, attain a remarkable degree of consensus ...

But what the scholars can agree to among themselves is one thing; what the respective Churches can accept is quite another.

...This recent statement of agreement is only a beginning. The leadership and rank and file have yet to digest it. Only then will we be on the way to eventual reunion.

The many ecumenical consultations which have been held in the U.S. since the Council have already advanced several concrete proposals designed to re-establish unity among various Christian churches. What is clear thus far is that nothing of a substantial nature has been done, on any side, to comply with the recommendations of the dialogue participants.

Based on the record alone, it is clear - and I am speaking now from the Roman Catholic side - that the majority of our decision-makers are not at all prepared to reconsider their own textbook understanding of the apostolic succession. In the absence of such reconsideration, the proposal for mutual recognition of ministries is simply beyond the range of possibility. Only an abjuration of heresy and a full and complete acceptance of the primacy of the Pope would satisfy the majority of the present leadership. Given the present theological disposition of our Roman Catholic leadership, statements such as the recent Anglican/Roman Catholic agreement on the ordained ministry have no realistic chance of being implemented.

- B. The Canadian Churchman January issue gave a full two-page presentation of the text of the statement and a few comments reproduced from Julian Charley's commentary. The February issue had a newsbrief from New York which reported Bishop John Hine's\* comment referring to the statement on ministry as a second major milestone in the long journey toward reconciliation between our two churches.

\* Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church USA.

ADDITIONAL ARTICLES BROUGHT IN BY PROFESSOR JOCZ

From: Christianity Today, January 4, 1974

ROME-WARD BOUND?

Anglicans and Roman Catholics may have moved a step closer to eventual reunion with the publication last month of a "basic agreement" on the nature of ministry and ordination in both their churches. The 3,200-word statement was made by a joint commission of the churches and sent for study to Archbishop of Canterbury, A. Michael Ramsey, and Pope Paul VI, who approved its publication.

The new agreement, which in effect ends a 400 year old dispute, now seems to provide a theological rationale for recognition of Anglican priests by Catholics (in 1896 Pope Leo XIII declared Anglican Orders "null and void"), a point which the commission said was "a source of controversy between us".

The commission, composed of twenty-one bishops and theologians from both churches, put off until later consideration of a more thorny issue--the authority and primacy in the ministry, especially the controversy over papal infallibility (the main reason for the Church of England's split from Rome in 1532). "Agreement on the nature of ministry is prior to the consideration of mutual recognition of ministries," the commission explained.

The group was set up after Ramsey and the Pope met in 1966 and agreed to initiate "serious dialogue" between their churches. Its task was to "find a way" of overcoming doctrinal differences and move toward "the unity we seek." After its first meeting in 1970, the commission published a statement of "substantial agreement" on the Eucharist in 1971. The ministry agreement comes after the commission's fifth meeting, held at Canterbury, England, last summer.

Subjects covered in the statement included mission and the ministry in the New Testament and early church; the priesthood of Christ, the faithful, and ministers; the sacrament of ordination; and the apostolic succession of bishops and the churches. It opens with the assertion that ministry is a privilege and obligation belonging to all Christians, clerical and lay, and that "all ministries are used by the Holy Spirit for the building up of the church."

From: Christian Century, January 23, 1974

HO-HUM -- ANOTHER ECUMENICAL BREAKTHROUGH

Recent front-page coverage in major secular newspapers of a "historic" agreement by the Roman Catholics and the Anglicans on the doctrine of ministry clearly demonstrates that the secular world still regards ecumenical statements issued by hierarchies to be more significant than grass-roots realities. Just as the writing of history once consisted of narrating the sagas of rulers and their wars, so now many believe that ecumenical history is being made when Pope Paul VI and Anglican Archbishop Michael Ramsey of Canterbury grant permission to have a joint doctrinal statement made public.

Drawn up by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, the statement is no more than a statement. It is not an official declaration by either communica, nor does it alter any existing ecclesiastical discipline. Hailed by some, nonetheless, as "very important," the statement contains a consensus of what ministry and mission mean for both Anglicans and Catholics. The three main areas of the statement describe the biblical and historical basis of ministry in the life of the church, the ordained ministry, and vocation and ordination. According to some church officials, it "has helped to create a new situation" in which the acceptability of Anglican orders can be looked at afresh. (In 1896 Anglican orders were declared null and void by Pope Leo XIII.) However, the statement ducks the most important issues that impede ecumenicity -- the sources of authority and papal primacy.

When we read of a consensus on those two issues and its enactment into the canon of both churches, then we will have cause for celebration. Until that time, we will continue to rejoice over the small victories of grass-roots ecumenism.