

Robert Martineau, in his book The Office and Work of a Priest (Mowbrays, London, 1972), writes: "Priesthood is a gift of God to the Church and through the Church to the world. By looking at priesthoods and trying to find some pattern in what God enables them to do and in what kind of people, by the grace of God, they become, we can see what it is that God is giving to the Church through its ordained priesthood" (op. cit., p.viii).

This sentence provides a good starting-point for analysis and discussion of the Agreed Statement on Ministry, published in London on December 13 by S.P.C.K. This document represents the second major agreement of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, and is designed to be understood in relation with the Agreed Statement on the Eucharist of 1971.

The two churches, Anglican and Roman Catholic, are now in dialogue with each other in the persons of their accredited representatives. These representatives have made for the second time a unanimous decision. They have sought and received permission from their respective authorities to publish their reports, which are offered for wide and careful study. Ultimately, of course, when the work of the Commission is done, there will come a time of decision and commitment for the churches themselves, because dialogue is not envisaged (mercifully!) as a permanent state of Christian relationship. This dialogue, however, is designed to create a new context of thought within which divisive issues, handled very abrasively in the past, may be truthfully and charitably resolved.

By means of its painstaking work of research and elucidation the International Commission, we may believe, has the capacity of demonstrating that no insoluble theological differences need divide the Anglican and Roman Catholic communities, provided that the members of these two churches really wish to live together in one organic unity. The theological successes of the Commission highlight sharply this other and deeper source of trouble. Step by step the three major theological issues (Eucharist, Ministry, Authority) are being clarified, and recognitions of identity of faith within diversity of forms are being made; but the fundamental problem of inciting the will to unity remains. No international commission, however eminent its membership, can solve that, because it is, I believe, part of the problem of sin. All disunity (not only within the Church) is sin against love, and is all the more serious for the Christian because the Love whom he serves has a personal Name and has Himself made the mission of His Church depend for its effectiveness upon the unity in love of His People (S. John 17, 20-23). Nothing less than spiritual resurrection of the Christian People is called for. No mere re-integration, re-absorption, or recovery could be adequate, whilst the renewal provoked must be of such a kind that the priorities of the Gospel are given an evident and compelling place within all our other interests, activities, and relationships with one another.

The question of Ministry has a special importance in discussion between Anglicans and Roman Catholics because of the peculiar, even melodramatic, situation introduced by the absolute condemnation of the Holy Orders of the Anglican Church on the part of Pope Leo XIII. To this condemnation, but within the terms of argument proposed by the Pope, the Archbishops of England made a dignified and effective reply. Since that time much historical information on the background of the papal decision has come to light, and, to say the least, not all of this reflects creditably on some of the Roman Catholic personalities involved! On the Anglican side it is important to recognize that: "For our own part we are sure, and have always been sure, that the apostolical succession has never been broken in the Church of England, and that a valid formula of consecration has been continually maintained" (Letter to the Archbishop of Utrecht from the Archbishop of Canterbury, July 1925, published in G. K. Bell, Documents on Christian Unity 1920-1930, Second Edition, p.65).

In view of this absolute impasse it was important for the International Commission to go behind and beyond the situation of contradiction by evaluating the doctrine of ministry held in both Churches, by looking at its biblical origins and post-biblical developments, and by considering what the ministers of both Churches do to-day and what they believe about themselves. We both exemplify the same fundamental forms of ministry: bishop, priest and deacon. Do we share the same faith on this essential matter where the Commission considers that "doctrine admits no divergence" ? (Paragraph 17 of the Agreed Statement on Ministry). The encouraging and unanimous answer of the Commission is: "Yes, We do", and that an agreement indispensable for unity has been achieved.

The first papers on Ministry were prepared at Venice in 1970 and led to some discussion after their publication in 1971. The present document, however, states the issues in a more developed and complete form - not, be it noted, all the issues, because only some aspects of the doctrine of Ministry and Ordination have been in dispute between us. The four major themes treated are:- the rôle of the ordained ministry within the life of the christian community; the priestly nature of this rôle of ministry; ordination; and apostolic succession. These themes are studied and expounded in the context of the doctrine of the Church in its mission to the world. Basic agreement is claimed in areas of controversy which have previously obscured common convictions about the ministry.

When we speak of Ministry, Priesthood and Ordination within the Church, our discussion must take place within a context of christology and of ecclesiology, because we are really speaking of Christ-in-His-Church. This Presence is a mystery with many dimensions of reality.

The Preface of the Anglican Ordinal claims an august lineage for the three sacred Orders of our Church. Anglicans find these claims to antiquity sufficiently convincing. The Agreed Statement on Ministry, however, has been wise not to reduce the problems between us at this level to any question as to who possesses the more ancient pedigree! Presumably such an issue could be resolved by reference to the College of Heralds. The apostolicity of the Church is strongly affirmed, however. If our ministers are "anointed to preach good tidings unto the meek, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound" (Isaiah 61, 1), it does not help to say: "I am an old priest. You are a new presbyter. I have been here for a very long time" ! Apostolicity goes with catholicity and both are 'marks' primarily of the Church. The question as to who has the correct historical lineage of Orders, although not unimportant, is a secondary and historical question. It may be more relevant to ask: which community, Anglican or Roman Catholic, proclaims the Gospel with respect for its integrity and self-given priorities?

Certain things about Ministry and Priesthood within the Church are held within Anglican Tradition which are very precious and very important. These are all expressed and safeguarded in the new Agreement on Ministry.

First, in the Anglican Tradition of Ministry, whether as Bishop, Priest or Deacon, there is a tremendous, even awesome sense of vocation. He who serves thus, the Church affirms, may not do so unless he is called of God to this office and ministry. Bishop, Priest and Deacon, in Anglican Tradition, be it noted, are not 'ranks' or 'grades' of ministry, but Holy Orders. Between 'rank' and 'Holy Order' is the difference between divine calling and function and sacramental status and mere bureaucratic or social status. The fact of divine vocation to Holy Orders, the response to this by the minister himself, and the recognition of it by the Church in the person of both people and Bishop, are all essential ingredients in our understanding of our offices of ministry.

Secondly, in Anglican Faith and Order, there is a strong emphasis upon the apostolic character of our Orders. We mean by this that we believe ourselves to possess all that is essential in matters of historical descent, if we wish to pose that problem between ourselves and other Christians, or they with us. More importantly, we mean that there is a kind of 'sacramental identity of activity' between what we do in ministry and that which was proclaimed and done by the Lord and His Apostles: we believe not only that we are authorized to do these things, but that we do what they did, or, put more correctly, that He fulfils in us what He fulfilled in them. This is what the Agreement refers to when it speaks of the priestly rôle of Jesus being 'reflected in' His ministers (Paragraph 13).

Thirdly, Anglican Tradition stresses heavily the pastoral character of ministry. The episcopal charges and examinations of the candidates in the context of Ordination make this very plain. The Church, in its Servant-form, continues and fulfils the ministry of Christ. He Himself remains always the archetype of all patterns of ministry, and He established His lordship, as S. Paul teaches in the celebrated passage of Philippians 2, 5-11, in the shattered dignity of our humanity. This means for an Anglican, not that unity, catholicity, apostolicity, catholicity are unimportant, but that they are supremely important, and that above all else, above even these qualifications of Church and ministry, dominates that unique, man-centred value which we call love, so that, in a radical sense, without love, no ministry, however ancient its credentials, has moral value or authentically christian spiritual life.

We must now begin to teach together what we profess by these Agreements on Eucharist, Ministry and Ordination to believe in common.

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