

OBSERVATIONS ON "A STATEMENT ON THE DOCTRINE OF THE MINISTRY" AGREED BY THE
ANGLICAN/ROMAN CATHOLIC INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION

INTRODUCTION

In Canada there were twenty-three responses to the document from bishops or from individuals or from groups to whom bishops had given the text for study. Eight registered a placet in terms ranging from enthusiasm to simple acceptance. One and possibly two indicated a non placet. The rest were placet juxta modum.

The general mood of the responses was that the document marked a step forward in the dialogue but it was less significant than the work done on the Eucharist. It was received as a good beginning with an optimism that the stage had been set for notable progress.

Yet, although the majority of respondents were congratulatory concerning the fact of the document and much of its content, there were also reservations and suggestions for improvement. A broad sampling of the merits discerned, of the reservations entertained and of the suggestions made follows in three separate parts. Some practical recommendations will be contained in a conclusion.

PART ONE: THE MERITS OF THE STATEMENT

A. GENERAL:

1. It is a gratifying statement. E.g. (1) Il contient de bons renseignements et peut-être nous dit-il vivez dans l'harmonie. (2) What comes across to me was that it was a welcome achievement and surprisingly complete, considering the different traditions involved.
2. It is a solid statement. E.g. (1) Je la trouve conforme à la doctrine des ministères qui se dégage d'une étude de ceux-ci dans le Nouveau Testament. Je la trouve également en accord, sur des points fondamentaux, avec la conception traditionnelle dans l'Eglise catholique. (2) It presents a good biblical, historical and dogmatic approach to the doctrine of the ministry...(it) certainly seems acceptable in terms of Catholic theology.
3. It is a good beginning. E.g. (1) Un texte qui marque un accord sur des points importants et qui constitue un excellent point de départ pour un dialogue à poursuivre plus en profondeur encore. (2) This statement is one of clarity and prudence and in my humble opinion constitutes a solid basis for a more detailed and searching study.

B. SPECIFIC:

1. Para. 2: There was approval of situating the ordained ministry in the context of the various ministries which are the work of the one Spirit.

2. Para. 5 and 6: Some commended these paragraphs in their presentation of the development of the tripartite office.
3. Para 10: One asserted that the declaration that ministers must lead their communities in the service of humanity is timely. It is needed to correct the idea that "ministry is to souls".
4. Para 13: There were 'Amens' for the assertion that the ministry is not an extension of the common priesthood but belongs to another realm of the gifts of the Spirit.
5. Para 16: One discovered here "a good theology of the local Church".

PART TWO: RESERVATIONS

A. GENERAL:

There are complaints of vagueness, lack of precision, insufficient account of tradition and regrettable lacunae. In respect to the last mentioned, one respondent, while not wishing to seem unecumenical, wonders about the value of a paper on the ministry which does not at once face up to the intimate connection between ministry and magisterium. Many of the paragraphs raise questions for him because of this failure.

B. SPECIFIC:

1. Para. 2: No serious theological foundation here or elsewhere in the document for the diversity of ecclesiastical ministries with or without official mandate.
2. Para. 3 and 4: There is a flavour of "extra ecclesiam nulla salus". No mention of other communities of reconciliation.
3. Para. 6: Why does not the rest of the document draw an inference from diversity which is capable of serving eventually for the mutual recognition of Anglican and Catholic ministries?
4. Para. 7: The ministry does not find its *raison d'être* solely in the satisfaction of need. Christ the Head from whom the sacerdotal ministry flows also accomplishes other works than those satisfying the need of the Body. In this paragraph and in the following, the biblico-theological dimension of Christ the Head is not made explicit.

The kingly dimension of the common priesthood is too weakly expressed.

The best way of justifying theologically the ministry, implying ordination, is surely not by having recourse to an administrative terminology such as "the Church requires a focus of leadership and unity."

5. Para. 9: In what sacraments are deacons associated with priests and bishops?

6. Para. 11: "Authority to pronounce God's forgiveness of sin." This is ambiguous. Does God's forgiveness take place through the minister or does he simply declare what has already taken place?
7. Para. 13: There is no explicit recognition of the sacrificial character of the Eucharist. Nor is there any mention of petition, adoration or atonement.

On the ordained ministry belonging to another realm of the gifts of the Spirit: The following sentence seeks to explain this by speaking simply of "helping the Church". This seems to avoid the problem of a representation of Jesus in another manner than that of the common priesthood.

8. Para. 14: Is the ordination done by the bishop or by the community of the faithful? If by the bishop, as is stated, in virtue of what authority?

Concerning "every individual act of ordination...": Is this not what the whole debate is all about; i.e. the debate about the validity of certain individual acts of ordination?

9. Para. 15: Can we come to a real consensus on the essence of the sacrament of ordination without knowing on the one hand the nature of the "two sacraments of the Gospel" and on the other the nature of the "five commonly called sacraments"?

Rather than expressing the theology of character in juridical terms of non-repeatibility, one might better have insisted on the eschatological foundation of the permanence of the sacerdotal state. Furthermore, the eschatological dimension is practically absent from the whole document and this seems like a serious omission in view of a renewed theology.

PART THREE: SUGGESTIONS

A. GENERAL:

The following suggestions were intermingled with the reservations and merits. This note is introduced to temper any excessive joy over the latter or any unwarranted sadness over the former. In other words, the respondents while generally favourable, would like to see some re-writing. To this end, several specific suggestions were made.

B. SPECIFIC:

1. Para. 3: Rather than speak of the Church in general, would it not be better to speak of men and women who follow Christ and wish to serve Him?
2. Para. 5: "Since the Church is built up by the Holy Spirit primarily but not exclusively through these ministerial functions..." This does not seem coherent. It could be omitted and the sentence could start from "Some form..."

3. Para. 6: It does not seem opportune to say that the tripartite office "required a longer period than the apostolic age". This period is very obscure from the point of view of ecclesiastical structure and we can have only hypotheses. Here is one of the areas which "supports different theological interpretations" (Letter of Cardinal Willebrands).

Is the adoption of the tripartite office irreversible? Could this not be left open?

4. Para. 7 and 8: Is not, in Paul, discernment a special gift not necessarily available to all? In view of Para. 8 which does not include discernment in the six functions mentioned, could not this sentence in Para 7 be omitted?
5. Para. 10: Re: "the source and ground of their preaching authority". This is only partially true. It would be better to say the first or the primary foundation and ground.
6. Para. 13: Would sacramental re-presentation be acceptable?

Concerning the sacerdotal vocabulary: The problem will arise when the Anglican/Roman Catholic bloc might enter into dialogue with the Protestant bloc. Would it not be better right now to approach as closely as possible the ministerial vocabulary of the New Testament?

7. Para. 15: The permanence of the character of Orders is not affirmed explicitly and clearly. Might it not be better to say: Just as the vocation to holiness is life-long, so also is the vocation to the ministry. So it is not proper to have re-ordination.

It seems better to say the seal of the Spirit is permanent rather than to say God's call is irrevocable.

8. Para. 16: For Catholics the episcopal college is not sufficient to assure the communion of the Churches if it is not in relation to the Pope. Would it not be better to say: Thus the bishop has an essential role in the maintenance of and signification in the communion of the Churches in mission, faith, etc.

CONCLUSION

The following recommendations are not concerned with the content of the text but with what one does after a text has been agreed upon.

1. Though this is a short document and might seem to some to have all the headings it can bear, others would like to have sub-headings within the three divisions.
2. A few would recommend greater care with translation from English into French.
3. To dispel misunderstandings, the limits of this exploration on the doctrine of the ministry should be well publicized. They should be situated in the context of the on-going dialogue.

4. Those responsible for promoting ecumenism should be encouraged to familiarize the clergy and the laity with this text and with the one on the Eucharist.
5. It is desirable that Catholic and Anglican priests meet to discuss some of the implications of both this statement and the one on the Eucharist.
6. The final recommendation is placed here, though it doesn't exactly fit with the others. It looks to a final statement beyond this one and pleads that, in the preparation of such a further statement, there be sufficient input from the Reformed tradition so that an Anglican/Roman Catholic position might not close the door on Churches of this tradition.

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