

ANGLICAN/ROMAN CATHOLIC INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION

Report of Oxford Sub-Commission on Ministry in the
New Testament

The dossier to be submitted to the New York drafting group and the full Commission are the following:-

Report: 'The New Testament teaching on Ministry' (enclosed)

(This is intended as working notes for New York).

Support documents:

1. * R. Murray, S.J.: Ministry and Order. A Catholic Position Paper.
2. B. Ahern, C.P. : Forms and Developments of Ministry in the First Century.
3. + Bp. A. Clark: Summary of Congar's article 'Quelques Problèmes Touchant Les Ministères'.
4. J.L. Houlden: Note on the Idea of Participation in the Priesthood of Christ.
5. * R. Pelly: 'The Spirit and Institution'
6. T. Corbishley: Bridging Statement from Eucharist to Ministry
7. * J. Charley: Apostolic Succession
8. * J. Halliburton: Ordination and Laying-On of Hands

The New Testament Teaching on Ministry

The following notes indicate the topics which the Sub-Commission thought should be treated in the New York draft. They are not intended themselves to form a draft agreement.

+ Already circulated

* To be circulated from Lambeth

A. The need to study the N.T. for enlightenment about the ministry

In the Venice working paper 'Church and Authority', paragraphs 15 and 16 stated, "The theology of both Churches today recognises the Primacy of Scripture ... The principle of the Primacy of Scripture can be the basis for a conception of the hierarchy of truths (Decree on Ecumenism), which will help our growing together." In terms of this conviction, it is both right and essential to reassess the New Testament teaching on Ministry as fundamental to a proper doctrinal consensus. It must, however, be admitted that there are difficulties involved in using the N.T. as a touchstone for judging the legitimacy of later developments; indeed the N.T. itself does not reveal a uniform structure or theology of ministry. This is scarcely surprising as the N.T. covers a span of several decades and different areas. This very diversity in the N.T. data is a fact of capital importance for our own times. The diversity, however, was held together by an unquestioned basic unity both in practice and theology: there is one body, one faith, collective action as well as total independence.

In assessing this diversity in unity, some wish to draw attention to Fr. Barnabas Ahern's warning concerning the dangers of arguments based on silence.

B. The following particular areas need to be touched upon.

(1) The Nature of the Church. "All the baptised are members of his Body, a royal priesthood consecrated to God's service" (Anglican-

Methodist Ordinal, Preface 2).

Is there any evidence to suggest a difference in essence between an ordained Ministry and the rest of the people of God? Vatican II gave an affirmative answer: 'Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchial priesthood are nevertheless inter-related. Each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ' (De Ecclesia, 10). Some R.C. theologians now prefer to speak of the difference between the ordained and the lay ministries as one of function (e.g. Congar, N.R.T. Oct. 1972, summarised by Bishop Clark). How far could the N.T. be decisive on this point?

How far should specialised ministries be seen as charismatic, in the sense that all spiritual life and spiritual gifts emanate from the Spirit of God? What, for instance, does the Anglican/Methodist Ordinal mean by speaking of "a special form of this participation" (that is, in the royal priesthood of the whole Church)? What N.T. evidence is there to justify our speaking of "the distinction which the Lord made between sacred ministers and the rest of the people of God". (De Ecclesia 32)? (What does it mean to speak of an essential difference?)

The various distinctions that are drawn should not be confused; each of the following disjunctions is different: ontological/functional;

essence/degree; institutional/charismatic; permanent/impermanent. Nor is each distinction necessarily disjunctive: e.g. in the N.T. charisms can be associated with offices.

(2) Doakonia. In the example of Christ and the life of the early Church, service (of God and the people of God) is the watchword of the N.T. The Apostles are models of Christ precisely in his service. How far are the ideas of 'office', 'institution' and 'authority' a blurring of the scriptural pattern? One can serve by leading.

(3) What do ministers do? We know what the apostles were to do; they were to exercise leadership in teaching, as shepherds, in the liturgy (because the Eucharist is the focus of the Church's life), as missionaries. But what is the distinctive role of those appointed as assistants or successors of the apostles?

(4) Priesthood. A very careful examination of 'priesthood' in the Epistle to the Hebrews is needed (e.g. Heb. 5:1). The N.T. studiously avoids any suggestion that specialised ministries are priestly - the O.T. priesthood terminated with the once-for-all offering of Christ. Consequently the entire language of 'hierarchy' needs to be questioned (cf. Dr. Pelly's reference to H. King, "The Church", p. 418: "The speculative linking of ecclesiastical office and 'sacrificium' (and therefore also priesthood) which follows can

therefore no longer invoke the New Testament in defining itself"). The N.T. pattern is the priesthood of all believers who offer up spiritual sacrifices. What then is the justification for describing ministers as 'priests'? This has most important bearing upon the conclusions of Apostolicae Curae, since they were based upon a particular interpretation of priesthood and the mass sacrifice.

However, some point out that cultic language is applied to the preaching and pastoral work of the apostles (Rom 15:16).

(5) Apostolic Succession. In what sense is the Church "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets" (Eph. 2:20)? Is there a succession of office here or of mission or both? In what sense can there be such a succession, since apostles are essentially witnesses to the resurrection? Are Timothy etc. the apostle's appointees only, or also his successors? What warrant is there for making the historic episcopate a criterion for unity? There can be unbroken transmission of authority without monepiscopism.

(6) What is ordination? Laying on of hands (samakh) in the appointment of a successor derives from the O.T. (e.g. Deut. 34:9). Is there a rite of ordination in the N.T.? Does the laying on of hands referred to in the Pastoral Epistles bear any relation to contemporary Rabbinic practice?

(7) The Threefold Ministry. The evidence for plurality, of structure in the N.T. must be examined (cf. paper by Barnabas Ahern) so as to avoid condemning any modern church-order unnecessarily. The confusion over diaconate in both our Churches should be borne in mind. The N.T. supplies no evidence (by itself) as to the nature of the deacon's office.

(8) Do we need to say anything about the ordination of women?

The subcommission consisted of the following:

Revv. J. Charley, T. Corbishley, J. Halliburton, J.L. Houlden, E.W. Kemp, R. Pelly, E.J. Yarnold. This report was compiled by the convenors J. Halliburton and E. Yarnold. It was based on a preliminary document by J. Charley, and attempts to incorporate the views of the whole sub-commission. There has not been time to submit it to the rest of the sub-commission for their final comments.