

ANGLICAN-ROMAN CATHOLIC INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION

Southern Africa Sub-Commission

ORDINATION

(A preliminary draft working paper)

1. The purpose of Ordination

Christ, through the visible and historic community of his members, commissions and empowers those called by God, to discharge particular functions which are indispensable to the Church's life and organization.

The basic purpose of ordaining a ministry is to help the Church to realise itself and to fulfil its total ministry. (Ephesians 4:12). The Church does not delegate this ministry to them inasmuch as they take it over completely for the Church. They serve the Church, the covenant community: they do not impose their ministry on it, but express its ministry in theirs.

Ministers are ordained to represent Christ's own teaching and sanctifying ministry, which itself belongs to the whole church.

Ministers are ordained to secure the continuity and the orderly transmission of authority and the life and faith of the Church as a whole.

Both our communions accept the primitive threefold ordained ministry of Bishop, Priest and Deacon. We recognise that the Church may evolve other patterns of ministry in response to changing conditions, provided that these patterns are not inconsistent with Scripture and Tradition.

2. How can we be assured that this purpose is effected?

If this question means: How can we be sure that such a thing as sacramental validity exists at all?, our answer would be that our assurance lies in the faith that the prayer of the Church would not be unanswered; that God is faithful and will fulfil his promises that the laying on of hands with prayer was effective in the New Testament situation; and that the Spirit's endowment will not be lacking to

those who are thus commissioned by the Church which has been given authority by Christ. (Matthew 18: 18-20, 28:18-20, Acts 6:5-6, 1 Tim. 4:1 2 Tim. 1:6).

If the question means: How can we be sure that a particular sacrament has been validly conferred?, we would answer that although the use of certain external signs such as prayer and the laying on of hands is necessary, the decisive and determining factor is the Church's desire and intention to conform to the mind of Christ.

3. What part is played by the community and the continuity of faith, action on behalf of a church, tactile succession and sufficient form?

Ministers are ordained on behalf of the Christian community. Because of this the bishop is the natural ordainer for three clear reasons:-

- (a) He is, or should be, the local centre of unity and the natural representative of the community.
- (b) He is the local representative of the ecumenical church.
- (c) He is the present representative of the historic ministry of the Church. This historic succession has traditionally expressed itself by tactile means, which should be retained but not treated as the only valid criterion.

The form of ordination, related to the needs of the community, gives rise to the questions:-

- (a) Does the form serve the purpose of the local Christian community concerned?
- (b) Is the form acceptable to the ecumenical, world-wide church?
- (c) Is the form congruent to ordinations in the tradition of the biblical and historical Church?

Within the context of the traditional threefold ministry of bishop, priest and deacon, provided that the ceremony itself makes clear which order is being conferred, it is not necessary that this order be explicitly mentioned in the form, for it to be sufficient.

However, we are left with a dilemma. Yet while we would wish to approach these questions in terms of ecclesial community, our history, both Anglican and Roman Catholic, makes it extremely difficult to do this.

On the one hand, ordination which is the concern of the community of those who continue in the apostolic faith, must take place within the life of the community. Where there is such community and continuity of faith that we must speak of the existence of church there, too, we must recognise an authentic ministry. On the other hand, the validity of orders has traditionally been seen to depend upon the orders of the ordaining bishop, provided that a sufficient form was used.

4. What light is thrown on the functions of bishops, priests and deacons by our pontificals and ordinals?

This should be considered under three aspects:-

- (a) What do the pontificals and ordinals appear to say?
- (b) How does this compare with the biblical and traditional evidence on ordination?
- (c) How could they be further adapted to contemporary needs?

A quick reading of our present practice reveals the following:-

In both our communions the ordination rites for bishops describe the episcopal functions as the ordaining of persons to the mission of the church, the maintenance and propagation of the faith of the Church, the exercise of discipline, the setting forth of peace and love, and the ministry of compassion towards the destitute and oppressed.

In both our communions a priest is ordained to share and assist all the functions of a bishop, to whom he promises obedience; even in the case of ordination to the priesthood, priests are associated with the bishop in the laying on of hands.

In both our communions, rites of ordination to the diaconate emphasise the aspect of ministry as service; the particular functions of a deacon are to assist the priest in his pastoral, sacramental and liturgical responsibilities.

In both our communions the ordination rite of bishops, priests and deacons are set in the context of the Eucharist and a candidate is ordained bishop, priest or deacon not to any particular part of the Church but to the whole Church of God.