

## ANGLICAN-ROMAN CATHOLIC INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION

North American Sub-CommissionMinisterial Priesthood in Relation to Christ and the ChurchA SPECIAL MINISTRY

We are agreed that all members of the Church, both those who are in holy orders and those who are not, participate in the one priesthood of Christ. All the faithful "are by baptism made one body with Christ and are established among the People of God. They are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of Christ".<sup>(1)</sup>

Guided by the Holy Spirit the Church entrusts certain responsibilities in connection with these functions to special ministers. This special ministry is not by delegation from the community, although the community as the People among and with whom these special ministers will work has a part in their training, testing and election. It is rather the gift of God to the Church, instituted by Jesus Christ, and communicated through sacramental ordination. It is a special ministry of Word and Sacraments into which God calls some to be bishops and presbyters. Each in his own order is called to bear special responsibility to God and to the People: the bishop, as chief Pastor, exercising oversight throughout his diocese,<sup>(2)</sup> and the presbyters collaborating with him. Each, by ordination or consecration, receives authority to exercise this ministry among and with the community that it may be strengthened as the "royal priesthood" (I Pet. 2:9) through which Christ's reconciling work may continue in the world.

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(1) Lumen Gentium, 31.

(2) We assume that the document will speak elsewhere of the bishop as sacramentally representing the Church's unity and continuity.

THE FUNCTIONS OF THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD AND SACRAMENTS

The ministers of the Word and Sacraments, the bishops and presbyters, bear the chief responsibility for the continuity of the Church's life in loyalty to its Lord and for the purity of the Gospel which he has entrusted to it.

Their particular functions follow from their organic relationship with Christ and with the People. Jesus Christ is the veritable prophetic Word of God; as the offerer of the one true sacrifice of completely obedient self-offering he is the great High Priest; he is Lord and King of the world.<sup>(3)</sup>

The faithful baptized, for their part, are both hearers and doers of the prophetic word (James 1:22ff.), and they are a royal priesthood. In relation to Christ, the Head of the Church, and to the whole Body the minister of the Word and Sacraments has particular prophetic, priestly and kingly functions which he exercises with and for the community in the particular place within the Church in which he is to serve (diocese, parish, chaplaincy). This means that he has a pastoral rôle, and in this the servant character (diakonia) which is the mark of the total ministry of Christ and of all Christian ministry is especially prominent. The minister of Word and Sacraments is set by God among the People to minister to them by preaching of the Word, by leadership in worship and by pastoral care. With those among whom he serves (who, by virtue of their baptismal calling have their own prophetic and priestly ministry both to the community, its people and pastors, and towards the world) he will labour to "build up the body

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(3) With Lumen Gentium we use the traditional language of Christ's threefold office as prophet, priest and king. We note, however, that in popular usage each of these three words has lost much of its true meaning. Careful instruction is often needed in order to clarify the sense in which they are used in the theological context. We note also that the three titles do not exhaust the biblical teaching about the work of Christ. He is also the Servant, for instance. However, properly interpreted, Christ's prophethood, priesthood and kingship all imply diakonia.

of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12-13).

#### THE PRIEST AND THE EUCHARIST

The Minister of the Word and Sacrament finds his priestly rôle (sacerdotium) pre-eminently as the president of the Holy Eucharist.

Throughout their long history the purpose of the ancient priestly systems was to secure reconciliation between the people and their god or gods by sacrificial offerings. Jesus Christ fulfils what the ancient priestly sacrifice sought to do. He reveals that true sacrifice is obedient offering of self. In the completeness of his manhood Christ offered himself in humble, obedient service even to death. The all-sufficient sacrificial act is completed once for all on man's behalf by Jesus Christ the Son of God who entered into the totality of the human condition to reconcile man to God, and who by his resurrection and ascension brings his offering into the presence of God.

Mankind is called into a community of faith in Christ to offer to God the true worship of sacrificial self-offering, that is, to be a "royal priesthood". This is the offering of a "reasonable, holy and living sacrifice to God", a spiritual sacrifice which, precisely because it is spiritual and directed to God the creator of the world must also manifest itself in sacrificial stewardship of material things and service to God's world (diakonia). It must be in union with and according to the pattern of the one authentic sacrifice of Christ.

At his supper Christ gave to his disciples a sacrament as a means of embracing his People in his own sacrifice and the reconciling grace which flows from it. This sacrament is a proclamation of the word by which Jesus Christ gathers

together his People and invites them to his table; it is the memorial of Christ's one sufficient sacrifice; it is the Holy Eucharist by which thanksgiving is offered to God for the reconciliation won for man by Christ's sacrifice and for the freedom in grace which is its fruit; it is the Holy Communion in Christ's presence, a sharing of the one Bread and the one Cup by which he unites his People in a communion of sacrificial love with himself.

In the Eucharist the minister has a real, though sacramental, relation to what Christ did once for all on the cross, of which the Eucharist is the memorial (anamnesis). By sacramental action he does what Christ did on the cross and represents Christ to the community. In this lies his priestly office.

In the Eucharist the Priesthood of the People, which is their obedient self-offering in holiness of life and service, finds its true context. It is brought into union with Christ's self-offering and so offered to God.

The priesthood of the minister and the priesthood of the People are brought together in the eucharistic action which each perform in their different ways. And by their communion the sacred gifts priest and people are strengthened for the Christian life of loving and sacrificial service in the Church and the world.

The Christian community should celebrate the Eucharist frequently and regularly, and for this the priest as its president should make provision at such times as the parishioners may readily assist. (4)

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(4) This paragraph may be thought to be out of line with the rest of the section since it offers advice. It can easily be omitted. On the other hand it may say something which needs to be said to some.

THE PRIEST AND FORGIVENESS (5)

Reconciliation is God's gift, assured to the faithful believer by his baptism. Jesus Christ gave to his Church a continuing ministry of reconciliation by empowering its ministers of the Word and Sacraments to pronounce forgiveness of sins to those who are penitent and confess them. Such confession and absolution is closely related to baptism. It is the renewed recognition on the part of the penitent of his baptismal calling and responsibility, and the means by which he is re-assured by God of the restoration of the baptismal grace of forgiveness. This ministry of reconciliation is exercised by the priest by a declaration of absolution after confession during an act of common worship, or in a private encounter between the penitent and the minister. In either case careful preparation, sincere repentance, true and full confession and willingness to make reparation are called for. Absolution reconciles the penitent with God and with the body of the Church.

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(5) We believe that there is need for joint study and a theological statement on the concept of sin. In this section we have not thought that it belongs to our terms of reference to trace, even briefly, the complex history of penitential practice.