

BCC

THE BRITISH COUNCIL OF CHURCHESDIVISION OF ECUMENICAL AFFAIRS

DEA/2/74

MINISTRY AND ORDINATION

Report of a consultation held at Wesley College, Bristol

1st-2nd April 1974

At its meeting in January 1974, the B.C.C. Department of Mission and Unity gave attention to "Ministry and Ordination: A Statement on the Doctrine of the Ministry by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission."

It was agreed that member Churches of the B.C.C., other than those directly involved in the Commission's work, should be encouraged to send comments to the Commission. It was also agreed that a small group of theologians, representing those Churches, should be invited to meet and comment on the Statement.

As a result a consultation was held at Wesley College, Bristol, from 1st to 2nd April 1974 under the chairmanship of the Revd. A. Raymond George. Other members of the consultation were the Revd. N. Clark, the Revd. M. H. Cressey, the Revd. O. E. Evans, the Very Revd. Principal J. M. Haire, Dr. Morna Hooker, the Revd. Dr. W. Stewart and the Revd. D. Blatherwick (Secretary)

The members of the consultation submit the following report to the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission as a response to its request for "observations and criticisms made in a constructive and fraternal spirit", and wish to express their thanks to the Revd. Fr. E. J. Yarnold, S. J. and the Revd. Colin Davey for sharing in the discussion and helping them to understand the background of the Statement.

General Comments

1. We welcome the invitation to comment on "Ministry and Ordination" and admire the lucidity and brevity of the Statement.

We welcome the Statement first as an indication of the desire of the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches to reach agreement or understanding on subjects that have tended to divide them.

We welcome the respect for other traditions expressed in the Preface and illustrated by the fact that the Commission made positive statements, without drawing negative conclusions about the teachings and practices of other Churches.

We particularly welcome in the Statement,

- the integrity with which the Commission treated the New Testament evidence;
- the emphasis on the close relationship between Word and Sacraments;
- the exposition of reconciliation as central to Christ's ministry and that of the Church; and
- the relating of all ministry and priesthood to that of Christ.

Ministry in the Life of the Church

2. Representing Churches which neither have the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon nor regard it as normative, we appreciate the restraint with which the Commission has stated its case in paragraphs 3 - 6 without speculating on matters for which the New Testament provides no evidence. Nevertheless we sense a tendency to establish a norm which leads the Commission to make statements which we question.

For example:

- We find the statement ambiguous that "some form of recognition and authorisation is already required in the New Testament period" (para 5 lines 15-16). While we recognise that some form of recognition and authorisation was sometimes given in the New Testament period, the statement might be taken to imply that this requirement was universally made during the whole of that period.
- We find "ministerial function" more apt than "ministerial office" (para 6, line 1).
- We find a danger in the analogy drawn between the emergence of the Canon of the New Testament and that of the threefold ministry because it could be taken as suggesting that both developments are equally normative.
- The final sentence of para. 6 is unduly brief. The phrase "three-fold structure" does not sufficiently indicate the variety of practice within the use of a common nomenclature, nor the difficulty of relating later uses of the words "bishop", "presbyter" and "deacon" to the New Testament uses described earlier in para 6. Furthermore the universality of the structure has been disturbed by subsequent developments and there now exist Churches with other structures which believe themselves to be within the universal Church.

We agree that there are certain normative principles of a general kind in the New Testament documents and would be prepared to add to the suggestions in para 6, line 7 (e.g. to draw attention to the place of prophecy) but we seriously question how far what developed later in the Church can be presented as normative.

The Ordained Ministry

3. We are glad that the Commission placed its exposition of the nature of the ordained ministry within the context of the ministry of the whole Christian community and that the total ministry of the Church is conceived in such comprehensive terms.

We are reluctant to criticise at this point because of the unresolved debates within our own traditions as to the precise relationship between the ordained minister and the rest of the Church. We feel however that the ministries presented in paragraphs 8, 9 and 10 for the most part do not belong exclusively to the ordained ministry.

This is true with regard to episkope (and here we use the language of the Statement although the word itself is not common in the New Testament) for while we welcome the emphasis of para. 9 on collegiality our Churches include in this those other than ordained ministers. Similarly with regard to para 11 we would emphasise the role of all Christians in assuring others of God's forgiveness of sin.

4. With reference to para. 13, we agree that the ordained minister shares in the common "priesthood of the people of God" and also that he is " - particularly in presiding at the Eucharist - representative of the whole Church in the fulfilment of its priestly vocation of self-offering to God as a living sacrifice."

We recognise that the following sentence ("Nevertheless their ministry is not an extension of the common Christian priesthood but belongs to another realm of the gifts of the Spirit.") has been found generally difficult by commentators on the Statement. We ourselves find the word "extension" difficult and the phrase "another realm" ambiguous. But we do believe that ordained ministers are not merely the elected or delegated representatives of the people and that they are called by God to the fulfilment of a distinctive ministry and are endowed by the Spirit with the gifts necessary for its exercise.

While we see how priestly language came to be used of the ordained minister, we find the expressions "to stand in the sacramental relation to what Christ himself did" and "Christ, who through the minister presides at the Lord's Supper" difficult, and are not persuaded by the argument of the paragraph that "priest" is a proper word to use of the ordained minister.

Conclusion

5. We recognise that the Statement has concentrated on the relationship of the ordained ministry to the Church and that we have also done this in our discussions. We therefore feel that it is important to stress, in conclusion, that we see the further discussion of this issue being illuminated by a more detailed examination of the theme introduced in paragraph 7, namely the total responsibility of the people of God:

"The Christian community exists to give glory to God through the fulfilment of the Father's purpose. All Christians are called to serve this purpose by their life of prayer and surrender to divine grace, and by their careful attention to the needs of all human beings. They should witness to God's compassion for all mankind and his concern for justice in the affairs of men. They should offer themselves to God in praise and worship, and devote their energies to bringing men into the fellowship of Christ's people, and so under his rule of love".