

January 9, 1974

ARC RESPONSE TO ARCIC CANTERBURY STATEMENT

The Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation in the U.S.A. at its fourteenth meeting, January 6-10, 1974, in Vicksburg, Mississippi, has read carefully and discussed extensively the "Canterbury Statement" on Ministry and Ordination released by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission on December 13, 1973. We wish to express our enthusiastic reception of this Statement. We are unanimous in our substantial agreement with it. We are convinced that in this statement we see our own faith and the faith of our respective churches, and we find no major points of disagreement with it.

Since the Commission has published the statement "so that it may be discussed by other theologians" and has called for "observations and criticism made in a constructive and fraternal spirit" and has promised to "give responsible attention to every serious comment which is likely to help in improving or completing the result so far achieved," we now proceed to record our observations and criticisms, which, we emphasize, are minor.

1. Ministry in the Life of the Church

In paragraph one, we see that different published editions of the document have different editorial styles regarding capitalization of the word "ministry" as well as some other words, and we note that members of the International Commission who are members of our Consultation assure us that these differences are accidental and that no theological distinction is intended between "Ministry" and "ministry." Nevertheless, since this distinction is employed in some other significant ecumenical statements, such as those of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue in the U.S.A., we call this to the Commission's attention.

2. The Ordained Ministry

In the section entitled "The Ordained Ministry" (paragraphs 7-13), there is one sentence with which we are in substantial agreement but which we feel needs further clarification. It is the next to the last sentence in paragraph 13: "their ministry is not an extension of the common Christian priesthood but belongs to another realm of the gifts of the Spirit." Here we understand the "common Christian priesthood" to mean the hierateuma of Exodus 19 which is fulfilled and completed in Christ, to which all Christians are born by their baptism, and the phrase "another realm of the gifts of the Spirit" to be applied specifically to the ordained ministry. However, in our discussion of this sentence, we see a generic relationship among the various special ministries, both ordained and unordained (such as those enumerated in I Corinthians 12:4-11 and Ephesians 4:11-13), which exist within the common Christian priesthood and serve to build it up. A clarification such as this would, we believe, help to remove a vagueness which many of us thought the sentence contained.

Our Consultation would have preferred at this point to read some more adequate expression of the vital relationship that does exist between the ordained ministry and the common Christian priesthood of all the faithful.

In further discussion over the meaning of this sentence, one Anglican member welcomed its description of the ordained ministry in preference to the statement of Vatican Council II that the ordained priesthood differs from that of the laity "in essence and not only in degree" (Lumen gentium #10), whereas another Anglican member explicitly preferred the Council's own terminology.

3. Vocation and Ordination

In the section entitled "Vocation and Ordination," we found ambiguities in the second and last sentences of paragraph 16. The phrase in the second sentence, "signifying the shared nature of the commission entrusted to them" could, we believe, more clearly affirm that the commission the prebyters share is not co-extensive with the commission of the bishop.

Our difficulty with the final sentence of this paragraph was our inability, at first reading, to locate the "essential features" of apostolic succession which the sentence describes simply as "here". This location, we are assured by members of the International Commission, is to be found in the totality of paragraphs 14-16, and not just in paragraph 16 or even in its latter portion. We believe that this might have been more clearly indicated in the document.

4. Conclusion

In the final paragraph (no. 17), some of us believe that the fourth sentence, regarding "essential matters where it considers that doctrine admits of no divergence," requires considerable interpretation. Does the International Commission mean that it believes it has now covered all essential doctrinal matters concerning ministry and ordination, or does it mean that it believes no divergence from its own statement about these essentials should be admitted within our two churches from now on? Members of the International Commission have assured us that the former meaning is intended, but this is not obvious.

Finally, we note that the International Commission, in writing these seventeen paragraphs to describe "essential matters where it considers that doctrine admits no divergence", did not specify the tradition in both our churches that the presbyterate and episcopate can be conferred upon men only. This topic is the subject of considerable discussion, both pro and con, within our two churches in this country today.

In conclusion we take this opportunity to thank the members of the International Commission for this significant advance in progress towards the mutual recognition of our ministries. We are convinced this Statement merits careful study by the membership of both churches.