

A REPORT ON SOME REACTIONS TO THE CANTERBURY STATEMENT

by the Revd. Colin Davey

This paper is designed as a supplement to ARCIC 97/1-5 (comments by the Revd. Dr. Peter Staples, a British Council of Churches Consultation, the Church of England Evangelical Council, the Revd. Fr. Edward P. Echlin, and "Portal Mercier"), ARCIC 114 (Report and Summary of Comments received at the Secretariat by Mgr. W.A. Purdy), and ARCIC 120 (Report on Anglican/Roman Catholic Relations and National Anglican/Roman Catholic Dialogues) with its references to some comments on and reactions to the Canterbury Statement in different countries.

1. THE RESPONSE FROM CHURCHES IN THE REFORMED TRADITION

A new feature in the situation in Great Britain has been a considerable, and considered, response from the Churches in the Reformed Tradition to the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission's Statement on Ministry and Ordination.

This began with a letter to The Times on December 19th from the Revd. Dr. Kenneth Greet, Secretary of the Methodist Conference, and the Revd. Dr. John Huxtable and the Revd. Arthur Macarthur, General Secretaries of the United Reformed Church. They wrote "to express a warm welcome for the Statement", and to record their "substantial agreement with the understanding of the doctrine of the ministry there expressed." They especially welcomed "the return to the New Testament as the source from which all understanding begins" and they felt that the Statement "marks a stage from which the processes of reunion can go forward with renewed hopefulness."

At a meeting of the Department of Mission and Unity of the British Council of Churches on January 3rd 1974 it was decided that a response should be made to the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission's invitation that "observations and criticisms made in a constructive and fraternal spirit" should be sent to its Secretaries. Accordingly a Consultation was held in Bristol April 1-2 of theologians representing the Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, and United Reformed Churches of the British Isles.

In their Report (ARCIC 97/2) the members of this Consultation welcomed the Canterbury Statement's "respect for other traditions" and its "positive statements without drawing negative conclusions about the teaching and practice of other Churches." They appreciated the integrity and restraint with which the Commission treated the New Testament evidence, yet as representatives of Churches "which neither have the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon nor regard it as normative", they (i) questioned the ambiguity of paragraph 5's statement that "some form of recognition and authorisation is already required in the New Testament period." (This was later underlined by the Methodist Church of Great Britain.) (ii) They also questioned the analogy in para. 6 of the emergence of the Canon of the New Testament with that of the three-fold ministry. As I recall, the stress at Canterbury was on the process of development. The objection is here made, however, that it suggests that both developments are equally normative. The Church of Scotland later also found this unacceptable, and added that the Reformation challenge to the "three-fold structure in diocesan terms" was made "in the interests principally of restoring an earlier and truer doctrine of the

ministry." The Methodist Church of Great Britain was to comment further that "description is, as it were, elevated into theology....There seems to be a concealed major premise that what has in fact "universally" happened is right".

The B.C.C. Consultation commented that "The ministries presented in paras. 8,9, and 10 for the most part do not belong exclusively to the ordained ministry." The Presbyterian Church of Ireland later agreed, and asked for reference to the responsibility of all Christians "for maintaining the faith and life of the Church."

Difficulties were felt here, as elsewhere, over para 13's statement that "their ministry is not an extension of the common Christian priesthood but belongs to another realm of the gifts of the Spirit." The Church of Scotland and the Methodist Church of Great Britain afterwards echoed this comment, and asked for further clarification and development. Yet the Consultation asserted: "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."

Finally, the Consultation was "not persuaded that 'priest' is a proper word to use of the ordained minister" and found difficulties with para. 13's phrases "stand in a sacramental relation to what Christ himself did", and "Christ, who through the minister presides at the Lord's Supper."

As indicated already, the Consultation's Report was sent to the member churches of the B.C.C. to encourage their individual responses to the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission. Four of these have already been received.

1. In May 1974 the Committee on Doctrine of the General Board of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland expressed its substantial agreement with the B.C.C. Report and made the following additional points:

1. It would be helpful to have an indication of continuing points of difference between Anglicans and Roman Catholics.
2. It would be helpful to have a clarification of the relation of the priesthood of Christ to that of the whole people of God.
3. In para. 11 it would be better to reverse the order of the first two sentences.
4. In para. 6 the description of the threefold structure as "thereafter...universal in the church" "appears to overlook the fact that the Reformation is also part of Church history" so that "as a pattern it was universal only for a long period, and even within this period the three titles represented varying conceptions."

2. The Inter-Church Relations Committee of the Church of Scotland appointed a group which approved the B.C.C. Report, and in addition

- (i) it welcomed the first part of para. 7 which recognised "the function of the ordained ministry as serving that of the whole people of God", but felt that the remainder of the paragraph and of the Statement was not wholly consistent with this.

- (ii) It asserted that para. 13's observation that "Christians came to see the priestly role of Christ reflected in these ministers" "carries no conviction."
- (iii) In paras. 14-16 it would have liked to see a greater stress on "that collegiality which is maintained in the Reformed Churches," and it felt that the last sentence of para. 16 may refer to "episcopal succession" but is quite inadequate as a description of "apostolic succession."

3. The Faith and Order Committee and the Ecumenical Committee of the Methodist Church of Great Britain appointed a Subcommittee which made the following additional observations.

1. On para. 4, Paul's special relationship was with the risen rather than with the historical Christ.
2. There is ambiguity over whether "communion...is symbolized and maintained in the bishop" is a theological or an empirical statement. The bishop is a symbol of unity but not the only one. Further, "the existence of episcopal churches which lack full ecclesial communion with each other shows that it is simply not possible historically to say that bishops have maintained the communion of the churches."
3. Dialogue would be impossible if para 17's "doctrine admits no divergence" means a closing of questions, many of which we should want to re-open.

4. The Methodist Church in Ireland's Faith and Order Committee gave a general warm approval to the Statement, and especially to its "clear indication of the "servant" character of the ministry." However on para. 13 it felt that "to speak of a ministerial priesthood different in kind from that of the whole body is to detract from that universal and corporate priesthood which flows from Christ the great High Priest and Head of the Church."

The March 1974 issue of the Clergy Review contained "A Methodist Comment" on the Canterbury Statement by the Revd. Dr. Geoffrey Wainwright, which made the following additional points.

1. The Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission asserts that the three-fold ministry "which is not "fully" apostolic or Scriptural... is of the esse of the Church". This raises the serious question of doctrinal development, and, despite the Co-Chairmen's preface, the result is that "Churches without 'the threefold ministry' thereby find themselves unchurched."
2. Methodist churches associate laymen with Ministers in "oversight" at every level of church life.

3. On para. 13: Have the "two traditions" of Rome and Canterbury been right to use priestly terms in speaking about the ordained ministry? It is interesting that it is said they "commonly" do this, since "the same word is used by Article XXV.. in order to make a (n originally clearly deprecatory) distinction between the "five"... and "the two sacraments."
4. On para. 13: "In any case "priests" are never listed in the New Testament among the spiritual gifts of the ascended Lord to his Church!"
5. On para. 16: there is a tendency to confuse the planes of the "is" and the "should be", the real and the ideal.

2. SOME ANGLICAN REACTIONS

In an article in The Guardian for December 13th 1973 the Archbishop of Canterbury declared that to-day's document brings the day of reconciliation nearer." In addition to a similar general welcome given by groups and individuals to the Statement, the following comments and criticisms can be mentioned.

Professor Lampe, writing in the Church of England Newspaper for December 14th remarked that Apostolic Succession "seems to be regarded as being essentially the Church's continuity in apostolic mission, life, and teaching, guarded and symbolized by the bishop, rather than an episcopal succession on which the Church's continuity itself depends." Then, in striking contrast to the Revd. Dr. Geoffrey Wainwright's first point noted above, he adds: "At no point does it suggest that the historic episcopate is itself essential to the maintenance of apostolic mission, life, and teaching, or that a church which lacks it must be reckoned to stand outside the Catholic body until that defect is remedied." He concludes that this "may presage the removal from the shoulders of modern Anglicanism of that heavy burden, the Tractarian doctrine of apostolic succession."

In The Times for January 26th 1974 Professor F.W.Dillistone claimed that the Canterbury Statement illustrated "the gulf between social ethics and Christian theology." He added that it has "virtually nothing to say about modern society, its structures, and its needs...and is couched almost entirely in ecclesiastical terms...I cannot avoid the impression that it is concerned almost exclusively with ministry to the Church rather than with ministry to the world." However, the Revd. Derek Allen, writing in the April 1974 issue of Faith and Unity pointed out that the Statement "should not be criticised for what it is not. Some have found it rather narrowly ecclesiastical and even 'churchy', but then the members of the Commission are engaged in an extremely delicate and highly technical exercise in ecclesiastical relationships".

In February 1974 two commentators raised sharply the question how far the Canterbury Statement was a true consensus, in the light of the apparently divergent interpretations in the commentaries by Bishop Clark and Julian Charley. In the Church of England Newspaper for February 15th the Revd. Peter Toon wrote of their sections on ordination as a sacrament, on bishops as essential, and on ministerial priesthood, and commented: "When two members of the same commission have such different and fundamental notions of what this highly praised

document means, then I get worried." And in an editorial in Theology that month Professor G.R. Dunstan questioned whether the Commission's claim that "in what we have said here both Anglican and Roman Catholic will recognise their own faith" meant that the Statement contained a faith held in common, two faiths set down together, or one form of words capable of being interpreted as an expression of different faiths. He illustrated this by referring to the two commentaries' sections on para. 13 and added: It looks as though Bishop Clark denies development from below but leaves us with a priesthood from above, whereas Julian Charley interprets denial of 'extension' as a denial of priesthood. Continuing the football metaphor he had used throughout Professor Dunstan concluded: "From the touchline Mr. Charley looks off-side."

This Editorial gave rise to considerable discussion and correspondence, and the Editor of the Ampleforth Journal is planning to collate replies he has received to his questions on this point and publish them in the autumn. It can be argued that Professor Dunstan was unfair to Julian Charley, and omitted to quote his assertion (p.23) that "insofar as he helps the Church fulfil that priestly vocation, the term 'priest' may be justified" for the minister. But the discussion continues on the extent to which the Canterbury Statement "represents a consensus not only in the Commission but also in the Churches which its members represent."

A final point is made by the Revd. Derek Allen in the article quoted above. "If the agreement in this statement is taken with the earlier substantial agreement on the Eucharist in the Windsor Statement, it seems to me that the materials are available for a new judgement on the validity of Anglican orders."

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