

PRESENTATION OF "MINISTRY AND ORDINATION: A STATEMENT ON THE
DOCTRINE OF THE MINISTRY" BY THE CO-CHAIRMEN

The Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission, established in 1970, issued its first Agreed Statement (on the Doctrine of the Eucharist) in 1971. Though the existence of the Commission and the nature of its work had been known to specialists in the ecumenical field, very few people, even among those most interested in the cause of Christian Unity, were prepared for the assertion that the members of the Commission had reached a substantial agreement on a doctrine which was felt to divide rather than unite the Churches. In the light of the debate of the last two years, the public are better prepared for this second official document of the Commission concerning the doctrine of Ministry and Ordination as it is preserved and maintained in our respective traditions.

However, rather than risk misunderstanding and even at the cost of some repetition, the Co-Chairmen feel it is important to introduce this new document and thereby help the general reader grasp the kind of document it is and the method that lies behind its composition.

In the first place, it is worthwhile remembering what ARCIC is because one frequently encounters a feeling of disappointment that intercommunion does not follow agreed statements on eucharist and ministry. This is understandable, so we have to point out that such decisions are for the two Churches to make. ARCIC is an officially-appointed body, a servant of the Church, with a brief to seek for reconciliation and doctrinal consensus, and to present its findings to its authorities. Permission has been given to make these findings public, and one may fairly deduce from this a measure of our authorities' overall approval of the Commission's work.

Nevertheless, the document remains at this stage a consensus of the Commission.

It is relevant to recall that the Malta Report of the Anglican/Roman Catholic Joint Preparatory Commission saw this process of inter-Church reconciliation in terms of stages. It is a step-by-step process in which the achievement of this kind of consensus is an essential element.

As the Commission produces its agreed statements on eucharist and on ministry it is then for both Communions to decide if a situation is being created which fosters and promotes the reconciliation of our Churches and demands from them appropriate action.

Clearly, in the present instance, agreement on Ministry is an essential pre-requisite and preliminary to mutual recognition of our Churches and their ministries.

From this it should be clear in outline What the Statement is and also What the Statement is not.

To these three clarifying statements, one may add a couple of questions: What significance has the Statement? and What result does it have? The answers to both questions are at some points interlocking and the first thing to be said, and it is very important, is that the Commission asserts that in its consensus the members of both traditions will recognise their own faith. This is the basic significance of the statement. As such, it is offered to the members of the Churches as a point de départ for reconciliation. More than that, it invites them to examine and approve the way in which that consensus was reached in the document.

As with the Windsor Agreement, the method has been to achieve 'a deeper understanding of Ministry which is consonant with biblical teaching and with the traditions of our common inheritance' (para. 1.)

The method therefore is part of the significance, the

ecumenical and practical as well as the theological significance, of the statement. The methodology as well as the content of the agreed statement have therefore a direct bearing on the question as to what the Statement achieves or what result does it produce?

A reading of the document shows that the answer must be two-fold in that the statement

(1) has firmly placed the ordained ministry in the context of its origins within the ministry and apostolicity of the whole Church, the community of reconciliation

and

(2) by the very fact of its consensus it has helped to create a new situation in which to assess the position resulting, on the one hand, from the Roman Catholic Church's judgment on Anglican Orders and, on the other, from the complete absence of doubt about their Orders on the part of Anglicans. ARCIC's consensus is, as the statement points out (para. 17.) part of a general development of thinking in both Churches with regard to Church and Ministry.

The Theological and practical implications of the first point need no stressing. Indeed they are apparent throughout the statement as much in its structure and content as in its method.

As to the second point, para. 17 of the Statement reads, 'The development of the thinking in our two Communion's regarding the nature of the Church and of the Ordained ministry, as represented in our Statement, has, we consider, put these issues in a new context. Agreement on the nature of ministry is prior to the consideration of the mutual recognition of ministries.'

What the Commission is saying is that this development has produced a different situation from that of 1896. Not only

have the ecumenical movement and the second Vatican Council intervened; not only have the pastoral and inter-church situations changed, but the understanding of ministry and of priesthood has greatly developed so that a convergence is emerging, consonant with the biblical evidence and teaching and with the common traditions.

This consensus of the Commission, this agreement in faith and understanding, creates a new situation and presses urgently for reconciliation. So the Commission felt enabled to conclude its statement by claiming that 'our consensus, on questions where agreement is indispensable for unity, offers a positive contribution to the reconciliation of our Churches and of their ministries.'

That this may be a well-founded hope is the prayer of the members as they present their work to the public.

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