

INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS: CANTERBURY

INTRODUCTION

The theme of this meeting of the International Commission took shape at Venice in 1970 under the title of: CHURCH AND MINISTRY. The conclusions of three years ago are there in THE VENICE PAPERS for all to re-read, and this particular paper merits reacquaintance. Since then the title has become abbreviated - justifiably - and the theme is, quite simply, M i n i s t r y .

We are not, of course, alone in entering this particular field. The FAITH/ORDER Report, the limited agreement achieved by the DOMBES GROUP, as well as the closely reasoned volume issued by the participants in the ROMAN CATHOLIC/LUTHERAN DIALOGUE in the United States, all show the results of considerable and intensive study of the theme and clarify extensive areas of agreement - and this is not to exclude much varied work by other interested parties, and a host of monographs and articles touching the developing theology of ministry. Add to this - particularly from the Roman Catholic side - some important official documents. Even though we have our own methodology and, let me add, our own particular competence, we cannot - and must not - debate or discuss in vacuo. Though this is perhaps a salutary reminder of the need to be conscious of the present moment and of present needs, I do not feel that the Commission can really be charged with neglecting the "new bibliography" on ministry that ecumenists, of any description, must take cognisance of.

His dictis, it seems to me to be the right moment to introduce, without further preliminaries, the PORINGLAND DRAFT DOCUMENT which, in the judgment of your Co-Chairmen, should be the document on which the on-going work of the next few days should be based. You will recall - and it would be tedious to go into the details - the scheme of study and reporting back that was agreed upon last year at Gazzada. This was pursued with admirable generosity and application, and I hope the documents, over and above what we can now safely call the PORINGLAND DRAFT, will have reassured you that all the research and study of individuals and groups either in the Commission or associated with it received the fullest attention from the participants at Poringland in June of this year.

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1. PORINGLAND 1973

The purpose of this meeting was to provide a draft statement which would represent our understanding of the f a i t h of our respective churches regarding the Christian ministry. We both regard the ministry,

however it is specified, as an essential element in the life of the Church - because we believe it exists by the will and design of Christ. Whereas there has been what one might call an explosion of understanding of the vocation to ministry addressed to every member of the Church - the total Church is in ministry after the pattern of its living Head and Lord, Jesus Christ - the position of the ordained ministry is, in the minds of many, a divisive issue between us. It is clearly related to the Eucharist on which we have achieved a substantial agreement at the level of faith. Can we do this now with respect to "ministry"?

At G a z z a d a we - rightly - perceived that there are, at least, four elements or areas around which we would need to expound our respective understandings with a view to establishing substantial agreement:-

- (a) Ministry in the New Testament
- (b) Apostolic Succession
- (c) Ministerial Priesthood in relation to Christ and the Church
- (d) Ordination

The results of these studies were before the Poringlanders, as well as critical comment from the Commission. What we produced was a draft of the agreement we are now gathered to achieve. We regard the PORINGLAND DRAFT as a basis for discussion, conscious that our terms of reference were (as in the case of the Eucharist): "to seek a deeper understanding of the reality of the ministry which is consonant with biblical teaching and with the tradition of our common inheritance" (Agreed Statement on the Eucharist, Para.1). We were not - we are not - seeking to produce a history of ministry or a history of the doctrine of the ministry, but an historically informed document on the ministry (Minutes, Gazzada, p.13). What does this mean? It means what we believe to be the ministry, the ordained ministry, which we exercise in our respective churches in response to the design and command of Christ. It is because we believe that Christ instituted a particular kind of Church, the community of believers, that we believe that he guides his Church, through the Holy Spirit, to exercise a particular kind of special ministry within the Church. This issue is far from simple precisely because the Church is an historical community responding within history to the Revelation of God in Christ, and therefore subject to the conditionings of human history. Nevertheless, both our churches have, in a spirit of faith, sought to embody our belief in the particular structures which we regard as essential to the fulfilment of the will of Christ, the Head of the

Church. Our response has been a response of faith, and we are committed to the search for a common understanding of this faith. Can we achieve a common mind?

The PORINGLAND DRAFT illustrates what the Sub-Commission conceived to be their common understanding. It is clearly an unfinished document but it represents how eight members attempted to construct and shape an agreement in substance of what they regarded as the faith of the Church regarding the ordained ministry, with an over-all emphasis on what we mean by e p i s c o p e. I am very conscious that several of you are far from satisfied with the result. Hence, taking into account only those comments that I have received, I think it worthwhile to give, in summary form, the substance of this criticism. There is no point in identifying the critics, though some of you may recognise yourselves in what I have to say. (I have had no time to co-ordinate and conflate this criticism, and hence it will be untidily presented).

## 2. THE CRITICISMS

It so happens that all the criticisms come from the Roman Catholic side, so to speak, but this is not meant to imply that the document has satisfied Anglican requirements.

Doubt has been expressed as to whether we have really set out the status quaestionis, by which I understand the critic to mean that we have not grappled with the essential features of Christian belief in the ordained ministry in the context of our divisions. The sage critic remarks that, granted a different language (such as, for example, we adopted in the Eucharist Agreement), we still need to express "the problems and realities" contained in official R.C. teaching and in the traditional teaching of the Church. We cannot, after the manner of Hans Küng, jump the history of 2000 years, leaving out of consideration anything that happened after A.D. 100 and discussing what we believe in A.D. 1973 (I am far from clear why, in the light of the Poringland Draft, this criticism has been made).

More than one critic has bemoaned the omission of the N.T. evidence regarding ministry. Why has the work of Gazzada received such summary treatment? A further complaint is that it is not clear what we regard, from our study of the N.T., as the criterion for the discernment of authentic ministry. What do we mean by fidelity to the Gospel and should we not say that ministry is authentic in proportion as it manifests this fidelity? How far does N.T. evidence corroborate the position that authentic ministry requires official endorsement? The questions represent a doubt whether the Poringland Draft adequately answers these positions which would seem central to our common faith.

Strong reservations have been expressed about our treatment of episcopē. "Oversight", it is felt, reflects a much too limited view of what is the function of a bishop, specifically if the attempt is made to reduce it to a function of co-ordination. The word smacks of the purely administrative and neglects proedria. To be a centre of unity is to be more than a co-ordinator. The issue is further complicated, it is asserted, by our tendency to reduce episcopē to a function historically embodied in the three-fold ministry. After all, what oversight, in any real sense, has a deacon? Much more dangerous, it is claimed, is this position when we assert the appropriateness of the presidency of the Eucharist to those who exercise episcopē - this could mean that a deacon could preside! This same critic feels strongly that our real differences are centred on the priesthood of the presbyter.

Not all criticism is, if one may so use the word, critical. The key subject of Apostolic Succession, as treated in the DRAFT, receives considerable praise, in particular that episcopal succession was traditionally regarded as the succession to an apostolic see, not of one bishop to another; hence the episcopal local church, rather than the bishop, claimed apostolic succession. In the words of Fr. Coventry, "true apostolic succession is succession in the apostolic faith, life, mission, teaching, witness and service" of the Church. The question, of course, remains how far episcopacy is an effective sign of true apostolicity. The Poringland enunciation does, I feel, contribute substantially to the resolution of this divisive question.

Here I would like to interject what I consider to be an important observation. We are not here to decide the historical question of how the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church ceased to be in communion at the time of the Reform. This is far from being an unimportant and irrelevant question. We can, indeed, become obsessed with a desire to resolve the question whether, with the breaking of full communion, apostolic succession was broken. But this is not our direct brief which, put simply, it to say what we believe to constitute apostolic succession and to determine its essential features. There is no doubt that the mass media will seize on the question of "Anglican Orders" and make life difficult for us; but I am sure we must practise considerable restraint here, whatever our private judgments which, at the level of theology, may well disregard denominational divisions. You will recall that, when anyone of us spoke to the Eucharistic Agreement, we had to make it clear that we neither asserted nor denied that the Eucharist, in which we confess substantially the same belief, is actually celebrated on our respective altars. We abstained from any judgment of fact and limited ourselves to common doctrine and like understanding, knowing, in a spirit of growing faith, that the Spirit of God will direct and guide our Church authorities once we have

achieved the hard, demanding work of achieving and expounding a common faith. This, after all, is the mandate we have received from our own church authorities, and experience has - at least in my own view - strengthened my conviction that it is a right mandate. Here, may I add, we have the liberty of the children of God to disagree: a Chairman must necessarily hold fast to his mandate.

Another observation. The strength of our Commission is, without a shadow of doubt, its methodology. We are not - and never have been - content to line up position and counter-position, but rather to achieve consensus as to the central meaning of Christian faith. An early essay in this can be found in the Venice Paper where several converging lines were boldly drawn even on so seemingly divisive an issue as the Petrine Office. If we are to disagree, it must be clearly shown in our findings that our disagreement reflects a conscientiously held opposing view of what constitutes our faith.

This leads directly to a strong objection which has been voiced against the Poringland Draft. The document, the critic remarks, does not do what it intends to do i.e. to state a common faith. Instead it gets caught up in a whole series of theological problems. In fact, it does not seem to follow the announced plan but goes back and forth between the present situation and past periods of the Church's history. The same critic underlines the need to avoid language that is acceptable in only some theologies of ministry, and he finds the over-arching concept of episcopate expressed in terms of a co-ordinating ministry as unacceptable. He likewise feels that we should not avoid mentioning the thorniest problems, such as primacy in the Church and Anglican Orders. At the same time we should accept as our task to state our common understanding of what our ministers do and are.

It is worthwhile quoting here the observation of a contemporary American theologian, Avery Dulles:-

"Apart from the papacy, the most difficult questions about ministry centre about the episcopate. The consensus statements as yet fail to register any real meeting of minds on the crucial question whether the episcopal structure of the Church is necessary as a matter of 'divine law'."

He goes on to say, thought this does not necessarily touch our own status quaestionis:-

"Protestants will have to ask themselves whether they can accept bishops as at least a desirable sign and guarantee of the authority of the pastoral office, if the Church's continuity with its own past, and of the mutual unity among particular churches. Catholics on the other hand, must take

more seriously the fact that the episcopal office, as it concretely exists, reflects the influence of cultural and social forces since N.T. times. The whole question of 'necessity' and 'divine law' will have to be re-thought in the light of these various findings."

Perhaps more pertinent is the observation of one of our own Commission:-

"Those who grant that the Church is permanently endowed with some successor to the apostolic college, and with some successor to Peter in his unifying role as leader of that college, are day-dreaming if they seek to find these realities elsewhere than in the bishops as a group and in the bishop of Rome."

However, I am going outside my brief, and to restore it, I would strongly urge that we should read again the NOTE ON APOSTOLICITY produced at G a z z a d a .

There are two other criticisms of the Poringland Draft which merit our attention. The first is that the document is cryptic and very difficult to understand, and the query is expressed why the Poringlanders did not follow the outline drawn up at Gazzada. The same critic offers this very valuable piece of advice, namely, that we should not fear a lengthy document if this should prove necessary. He feels it is far from impossible to establish a consensus on the nature of the ordained ministry, to the extent that it would become clear that there are no essential differences in the faith of Anglicans and Roman Catholics on this matter. To quote his own words:-

"I find the Poringland draft too subtle and theological. If we both state what we believe we possess ... then, others, at a later date, can work out any inconsistencies or differing theologies."

Another critic, also from our own number, finds the draft unsatisfactory especially with regard to its logic - which is far from clear. He feels it does not respond to its terms of reference, and also finds the biblical teaching weak.

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This record of observations and criticisms may serve to portray where we stand as we devote ourselves to our specific task. More than one of you has generously set out in outline what form and shape the agreement we seek should take - in contrast to the Poringland Draft. There is no doubt in my mind that the end-product of this coming week's work will be new and not just a filling out of that draft. For the

strength of our work lies in working out together the content of our faith, and nothing can replace this. Everyone must go through, to be fully committed to, the process. In fact, the work done by the Sub-Commissions across the world has already irreversibly involved us in the process. The Poringland Draft, which attempted to profit by the partial findings of the Sub-Commissions, is one stage further in this elaboration of a common faith. It seems to the Chair that the dynamic of our work together requires that it is at this point we begin here at Canterbury. Because of some quite severe reservations about this draft, we are inevitably in for a stuttering start to our deliberations. But, if one may indulge a paradox, we are not here to formulate a common statement but to achieve a substantial agreement - and herein is our labour and our exhaustion! The koinonia of this Commission can stand the strain. By the certain criticism of the Poringland Draft, there will emerge the points of convergence and divergence. I can well envisage that it will be turned upside down and even inside out. But something substantial was achieved at Poringland, and we neglect it at our peril. The alternative is quite simply: to begin again. Or is it the alternative? To my mind, we begin where Poringland left off, supplying its omissions, revising its judgments, even arguing it out of existence - but the last thing we should do it replace it by another draft document.

Of one thing I am certain. We must not be unduly impressed by the clamour from the touchlines, or the jostling we may receive as we return, our work complete or incomplete, to our respective constituencies. We are already matured in a hard school even since the publication of the Windsor Agreement. We have no option but to pursue what we consider to be the right course; other considerations are irrelevant to our brief.