

RECONCILIATION OF MINISTRIES

1. Full ecclesial communion between our two churches requires not only substantial agreement about the understanding of ordained ministry, but also the recognition by each of our churches that the other in fact possesses the reality of the ordained ministry. While the Final Report of ARCIC I registers substantial agreement on the first issue, on the second issue the Roman Catholic church in 1896 judged Anglican Orders to be invalid ('absolutely null and utterly void'). Nevertheless, the Final Report claims that its agreed understanding of eucharist and ministry had put the question of validity in a new context - a point which Cardinal Willebrands recently reaffirmed in his correspondence with the Co-chairmen of ARCIC II.

2. In accordance with the documents of Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church acknowledges that 'elements of sanctification and truth' and many 'significant elements' of the Church exist in other churches, and that the Holy Spirit has used these churches as 'means of salvation' (LG 8, UR 3). This has implications for the Roman Catholic understanding of the ordained ministry of those churches. Is the existence of such elements in itself an indication of an authentic ministry validly ordained in the apostolic succession? This is a question which has particular relevance to Roman Catholic judgments concerning the Anglican Communion, for the latter professes to have maintained and continued the three historic orders of bishop, priest and deacon which have been found in the Church since apostolic times (Preface to Ordinal).

3. If the presence of such elements of sanctification and truth is not taken in itself to be a sign of such authentic ordained ministry, several other ways forward have been suggested. In all of them it should be remembered that consideration of ministry should never be detached from the wider context of the communities of faith in which the ministry is found. Nevertheless, one or the other, either the community as a whole or the structured ministry within it, can be given special emphasis in the proposed solutions.

4. One such proposal would be to recognize mutually the ecclesiality of the two churches; such mutual recognition would imply ipso facto recognition of validly ordained ministry, because without such ministry there can be no church. On the other hand, ecclesial recognition might be taken to imply, not that validly ordained ministry already existed, but that whatever was lacking in the ministries of the two churches was ipso facto supplied.

5. Another way would be to turn at once to an act of recognition of ministries as a step on the way to full ecclesial recognition. Perhaps this act could take the form of an acknowledgment of an authentic, validly ordained ministry already existing. This process would involve the examination of the ordinals currently in use to see how fully they reflect the theology of the eucharist and ministry agreed by ARCIC I, assuming that theology is endorsed by the two churches. It would also involve a procedure for ascertaining that apostolic succession has been preserved in each of the two churches.

6. Again, we could seek an act of reconciliation which would explicitly supply whatever was judged to be lacking in the ministry of either church. One might recall the offer of the 1920 Lambeth Conference in its "Appeal for Reunion": 'If the authorities of other Communion should so desire, we are persuaded that, terms of union having otherwise been satisfactorily adjusted, bishops and clergy of our Communion would willingly accept from these authorities a form of commission or recognition... It is our hope that the same motive would lead ministers who have not received it to accept a commission through episcopal ordination, as obtaining for them a ministry throughout the whole fellowship.' The procedure of the Church of North India provides a precedent here: there was a mutual laying on of hands accompanied by the prayer that God would give 'whatever fullness of Christ's grace, commission and authority each might need.'

7. There are thus four possible solutions:

(1) taking the presence of the elements of sanctification and truth as an indication of authentic, validly ordained ministry (para. 2);

(2) mutual recognition of the ecclesiality of each communion, from which the acknowledgement of authentic, validly ordained ministry would follow (para. 4a);

(3) recognition of ministry on the basis of adequate rites and ordination in the apostolic succession (para. 5);

(4) a mutually agreed act which would supply what was needed in the eyes of God (paras. 4b, 6).

8. The first suggested solution, sometimes described as 'charismatic validation', has something to be said for it, as a ministry can hardly be authentic if it is not fruitful; 'by their fruits you shall know them' (Mt. 7:16). But the suggestion fails to address the central problem for Roman Catholics and Anglicans, who both believe that ministry, however fruitful, needs to be duly constituted in the apostolic succession in order to be a visible sign and instrument of Christ's work through his Church.
  
9. The second line has the merit of placing the question of valid ministry within the wider context of the whole Church. Nevertheless, it does not give adequate recognition to the importance of the sacramental sign. The Church cannot be fully recognised apart from the visible presence of its constitutive elements, which include authentic, validly ordained ministry.
  
10. The third proposal has the advantage of directly facing the arguments of Apostolicae Curae. If the assessment of the ordinals resulted in a favourable judgment, it would show that Pope Leo XIII's criticisms based on defect of form and intention no longer applied. To prove that apostolic succession has been preserved, however, would involve complicated historical and theological arguments. It would therefore be preferable to combine the examination of ordinals currently used with the act of supplying whatever needed to be supplied in the apostolic succession, as described as the fourth solution in para. 6.