



NEWS

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ANGLICAN, ROMAN CATHOLIC COMMISSION PUBLISHES AGREED STATEMENT ON DOCTRINE OF THE MINISTRY

WASHINGTON--An international commission of Anglican and Roman Catholic bishops and theologians has published a joint statement of consensus on the Doctrine of the Ministry.

The international commission was established in 1970 by Anglican Archbishop Michael Ramsey of Canterbury and Pope Paul VI. It released a statement of "substantial agreement" on the doctrine of the Eucharist two years ago.

The present statement was agreed to by the Commission members at a meeting held in Canterbury from August 28 to September 6 of this year. Like the statement on the Eucharist, the statement on the ministry carries the authority only of the Commission itself and is offered to leaders of the two churches for their study.

The statement on the ministry does not enter into issues raised by the "judgement" of the Roman Catholic Church on Anglican Orders. But "the development of the thinking in our two Communion regarding the nature of

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the Church and of the Ordained Ministry, as represented in our Statement, has...put these issues in a new context," the signers of the statement declared. They added: "Agreement on the nature of ministry is prior to the consideration of the mutual recognition of ministries."

Nor does the statement broach "wide-ranging problems of authority which may arise in any discussion of ministry, nor the question of primacy.

"We are aware that present understanding of such matters remains an obstacle to the reconciliation of our churches in the one Communion we desire, and the Commission is now turning to an examination of the issues involved," the statement said.

"Nevertheless," it concluded, "we consider 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."

Among the key points of agreement which the statement contains are that the ministry exercised by the Apostles in the early Church is of "fundamental significance" for the Church of all ages, that the ministerial office played an essential part in the life of the Church in the first century, and that provision of a ministry of this kind "is part of God's design for his people."

The statement asserts that two primary features of the original apostolate are clearly discernible in the

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New Testament: a special relationship with the historical Christ, and a commission from him to the Church and the world.

"All Christian apostolate originates in the sending of the Son by the Father," the statement says. "The Church is apostolic not only because its faith and life must reflect the witness to Jesus Christ given in the early Church by the apostles, but also because it is charged to continue in the apostles' commission to communicate to the world what it has received."

Discussing ministerial functions in New Testament times, the document notes that some such functions are not precisely defined in the New Testament while others are discernible in a more exact form. "Since the Church is built up by the Holy Spirit primarily but not exclusively through these ministerial functions, some form of recognition and authorization is already required in the New Testament period for those who exercise them in the name of Christ," it says. "Here we can see elements which will remain at the heart of what today we call ordination."

And, the statement adds, while the full emergence of the three-fold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon required a longer period than the apostolic age, "thereafter this threefold structure became universal in the Church."

Responsibility to insure fidelity to the apostolic faith, its embodiment in the life of the Church today,

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and its transmission to the Church of tomorrow, is an essential element in the ordained ministry, the document states.

"Presbyters are joined with the bishop in his oversight of the church and in the ministry of the word and the sacraments; they are given authority to preside at the Eucharist and to pronounce absolution. Deacons, although not so empowered, are associated with bishops and presbyters in the ministry of word and sacrament, and assist in oversight."

The part of ministers in the celebration of the sacraments is one with their responsibility for ministry of the word, the statement continues, adding that "the central act of worship, the Eucharist, is the memorial of that reconciliation and nourishes the Church's life for the fulfilment of its mission."

"Hence, it is right that he who has oversight in his church and is the focus of its unity should preside at the celebration of the Eucharist," the document says.

On the matter of vocation and ordination, the statement says that "every individual act of ordination is...an expression of the continuing apostolicity and catholicity of the whole church."

"In the ordination of a new bishop," the document continues, "other bishops lay hands on him, as they request the gift of the Spirit for his ministry and

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receive him into their ministerial fellowship."

"The communion of the churches in mission, faith and holiness, through time and space, is thus symbolized and maintained in the bishop," the document says. "Here are comprised the essential features of what is meant in our two traditions by ordination in the apostolic succession."

In a preface to the statement on the doctrine of the ministry, the two co-chairmen of the international commission, Catholic Bishop Alan C. Clark of Elmham, England, and Anglican Bishop H.R. McAdoo of Ossory in Ireland, noted that the "present document is the result of the work of this officially appointed Commission and is offered to our authorities for their consideration. At this stage it remains an agreed statement of the Commission and no more."

"Even though there may be differences of emphasis within our two traditions, yet we believe that in what we have said here both Anglican and Roman Catholic will recognize their own faith."

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