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FOAG on the Priesthood of the Ordained Ministry: A Critique

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Introduction

The Faith and Order Advisory Group (FOAG) of the Church of England produced its report on *The Priesthood of the Ordained Ministry* in 1986¹, in response to concern expressed in General Synod over the need for greater clarity on the issue: 'This report derives from the suggestion, frequently made in recent years, that some of the differences among Anglicans which have, in the past, hindered progress towards unity are based on opposing views about the doctrine of ministerial priesthood' (Preface, p v). Does the ordained ministry in the Church of England have a priestly function which is in some way defined by the sacramental eucharistic ritual performance? This question is answered affirmatively by this report. FOAG is also motivated ecumenically [2]: without intra-Anglican agreement on this central area of priesthood the Church of England's agreed texts in *The Final Report*² (with the Roman Catholics), *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*³, *God's Reign and Our Unity*⁴ (with the Reformed), and the *Dublin Agreed Statement*⁵ (with the Orthodox) may be in some danger of failing to be ratified by General Synod. We here will outline the argument set out in the report and offer some critical commentary.

Synopsis of the Report

Scripture and Tradition

The essence of the report's conclusions rests on its 'substantial historical and theological considerations' and its central bulk is a rehearsal of the history of the doctrines of ministry and sacraments in the Church of England with reference to different schools of thought on the question in

- 1 Board for Mission and Unity, London 1986. References in square brackets are to paragraph numbers in the report.
- 2 SPCK/CTS, London 1982.
- 3 Faith and Order Paper No 111, WCC, Geneva 1982.
- 4 Anglican-Reformed International Commission, *God's Reign and Our Unity*, SPCK/St Andrew Press, London and Edinburgh 1984.
- 5 Anglican-Orthodox Joint Doctrinal Commission, *Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue: The Dublin Agreed Statement*, SPCK, London 1985.

hand. 'We have above all taken account of the normative witness of Scripture as it has been understood in the life of the church' [129], the report tells us towards the close of its deliberations, and indeed one can see that this has been the overriding methodological concern: Scripture as interpreted by tradition, particularly patristic tradition.

The report raises key questions of handling Scripture in chapters I and II and puts differing opinions before us. Some will only accept a matter of Church order or doctrine if they find it clearly spelt out in Scripture; others are happy to let the Church rule on issues not clearly defined in the Bible, as long as the ruling does not conflict with clear teaching laid down in it [8-9]. As FOAG says, this accords with Article 20 of the 39 Articles [9].

The report then goes on to ask, 'How do we decide what Scripture affirms or allows, and what, in subsequent developments, it contradicts?' [10] The Church relies on the promised Holy Spirit's guidance to lead us into the truth as she seeks to interpret the faith: 'This truth is discerned in the interplay between our reading of the Bible, our understanding of the faith of the Church through the ages, and Christian experience' [10]. Difficulties therefore abound in discovering the teaching of the apostles and prophets. These difficulties are further compounded by the cultural relativity of certain aspects of New Testament teaching and practice and point us to the need to look for biblical principles which we can use despite the gap of culture across two thousand years, rather than for necessarily direct applications of practices which do not fit with the contemporary world.

A second compounding difficulty 'has to do with the way in which later tradition interprets apostolic doctrine and practice. On what grounds and in what circumstances can we say that the Church has been kept in the truth of the Gospel? And what do we mean by the Church in this context?' [11] The statement of this methodological problem seems to import considerable doubt on the clarity, and therefore the usefulness, of the New Testament witness as a normative guide to the Church, which therefore 'needs to discern criteria by which it may distinguish between teaching and living which is faithful to God's will and that which is not' [11]. The descent into an infinite epistemological regress ('But how can these discerned criteria be judged genuine or not?') is, fortunately, not followed beyond this point: this is appropriate in that the third notable difficulty is that of the fallen character of human reason!

Chapter II reaffirms the Church's doctrinal base in Scripture [26]. Scripture is the unique witness to God's dealing with his people supremely in Christ and 'the witness of Scripture is itself inspired by the Holy Spirit'. We are under obligation to ground our Christian faith on Scripture. But we need to discern what is central and what peripheral in its teaching and history. 'It is the task of the Church in each generation to understand what is the "core", the "burden" of biblical revelation' [26]. The report therefore has set itself the task of discerning the tenor of the New Testament as a whole, a welcome statement of intent which provides one internal criterion

by which the report's conclusions can be measured. FOAG goes on to endorse the World Council of Churches' Montreal statement [28], which envisages the Christian faith as Tradition whose content is God's revelation and self-giving in Christ, related to the diversity of expressions in the various traditions: the living Church embodies the Tradition in continuity with the Church of the apostles in an organic continuity.

The Vatican II theology of Scripture and tradition¹ which teaches two forms of apostolic revelation, the fixed inspired scriptural deposit alongside the living, Spirit-breathed strand of continuing episcopal interpretation, gains approval as does the rather different distinction between the normative apostolic period and the early centuries after the apostles, the building period' of the great councils and creeds. Another formative factor in this enterprise of struggling to interpret Scripture is the *sensus fidelium*, in line with the teaching of ARCIC I: 'Only when the broadest community, lay and ordained, women and men, bring their lived experience and insight into the interpretative process under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, will the authoritative word be most fully perceived' [30]. Reason too plays an irreplaceable part in this hermeneutical process.

To sum up, the report starts by stating its determination to be controlled by Scripture but doubts that Scripture is sufficiently clear on its own to serve as a norm without living tradition as interpreter, although the paragraph speaking of the general burden or tenor of Scripture may provide some methodological comfort to the upholder of Article 20, which presumes a central clarity on the meaning of the Bible as a whole.

The Argument for the Priesthood of the Ordained Ministry

FOAG begins its argument proper in chapter III, 'The Emergence of a Distinctive Ministry', with a sharply biblical focus, the Pauline 'body of Christ' and the Holy Spirit bestowing varieties of gifts including those of leadership, at first less well-defined and including the charismatic prophetic element. The one body from the first had differentiated functions, but, amid all the variety of function, authorised episcopal-presbyteral ministry emerges during the New Testament period and can probably be seen to develop in its pages. A distinctive ministry is plainly supposed in 1 Pet. 5:2-4 when leaders are warned against dominating the flock. All Christians enjoy the same status as the baptised people of God, but the flock is never portrayed as shepherdless, without due leadership.

The Church is apostolic because she is built on the foundation of the apostles, the normative witnesses to the risen Lord. But the succession of bishops, a reality which is seen very soon after the apostolic age, also 'became one of the ways, together with the transmission of the Gospel and the life of the community, in which the apostolic tradition was expressed' [37], and it became a means and symbol of the apostolic continuity.

1 W. M. Abbott and J. Gallagher, eds, *Documents of Vatican II*, Chapman, London 1966, p 117.

The New Testament Church has no rigid pattern of ministry, but 'there is a congruence between the development already discernible within the New Testament and that development which appears in the early writings outside the New Testament canon, for example in the Didache, 1 Clement, and the letters of Ignatius of Antioch' [38]. In Acts, Paul appointed elders in the churches he founded and the Pastorals instruct this to be done as a matter of course. By as early as 110 AD the threefold pattern of ministry, described as 'a bishop assisted by presbyters and deacons' [39], is general. This is a matter of history, but theologically is to be regarded as a gift of the Spirit for preserving the apostolic truth in the Church, fostering the unity and fellowship of the body, and directing mission. The distinctive ministry is both a means to these ends and a sign of the unity, truth and fellowship of the Church of God. The ministry comes to the Church both from within the whole Church as a gift of the Spirit, and also from the authoritative commission and succession of the apostles, although the latter point gets little focus.

Having established this basic position on the emergence and significance of the ministry, which would attract the agreement of a very broad range of Anglicans of all persuasions, FOAG then begins its examination of the New Testament evidence for priesthood and the ordained ministry in chapter IV. Fact and interpretation become rather less easy to follow from this point. The argumentation runs along the line of Christ's priesthood, the priesthood of the whole Church and the priesthood of the ministry. Put simply, the first two are found in the New Testament, the last is not: 'Nor is there any dispute that *hierous* is never used in the New Testament of an appointed Christian minister' [44].

Christ's priesthood is primary in the New Testament, most clearly expounded in Hebrews, which interprets Christ as our great high priest who has made atonement for us by offering himself as the victim and now sits at the right hand of the Father on our behalf. As well as saying that Christ's priesthood and sacrifice transcend those of the Old Covenant, making Christ a priest for ever, FOAG also reasons, 'therefore his heavenly session at the right hand of the Father is a perpetual celebration of the sacrifice which he has made once for all on behalf of all people' [47], making this link by way of the text 'he always lives to make intercession for them' (Heb. 7:25). This heavenly offering of the sacrifice corresponds with the idea, 'described in Rev. 5, in which the sacrifice of the Lamb is continually celebrated, and which in its turn corresponds with the liturgy of the faithful on earth' [47]. There is no question of a repetition of the once for all unique sacrifice of Christ, but its ongoing presentation is what FOAG envisages.

The priesthood of the ministry cannot be derived from Paul's description of his ministry as a *leitourgos* of Christ to the Gentiles, offering them as a priestly sacrifice consecrated by the Spirit (Rom. 15:16). But the report claims that the stark omission of priestly language from the New Testament to describe the ordained ministry has to be seen in the context of the

earliest Church existing side by side with the Temple cult until AD 70, and concludes that this fact renders it 'not surprising' that priesthood was not therefore attributed to the ministry [52], as if this omission was theologically not significant but an historical accident. The report has already made a similar interpretative move in saying that the development of the concept of the bishop as one who is appointed to offer gifts 'was hardly possible before the decisive separation between church and synagogue, and before the eucharist had come to be seen as a fulfilment of Malachi's prophecy of world-wide offering to the Lord' [44]. These two points are interesting examples of the FOAG technique which at times interprets Scripture with a heavy emphasis on what the Church later came to believe, or how she later came to interpret texts. The implication here is that the reason why the designation of the ministry as priestly came later than the New Testament was a matter of historical accident and timing, rather than a matter of crucial theological import.

The patristic development of the eucharistic sacrifice and the priesthood of the ministry accompanying that forms the content of the following chapter in which, after the manner of Ramsey's great exposition in his *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*¹, Augustine is regarded as the synthesis of patristic thought with his doctrine of the whole priestly people, represented by the ministerial bishop or priest, offering the sacrifice to God in the eucharist. This is a theology of *participation*: the Church offers herself on the altar, but only in so far as she participates in Christ's self offering. The bishop therefore has become priestly as the offerer of the sacrifice, and the presbyters have become assistants in this ministry. No suggestion of resacramenting Christ taints this early eucharistic theology which hinges on the Church's reoffering of the one sacrifice.

With this we have reached what turns out to be the heart of FOAG teaching on eucharist and priesthood. It is the doctrine of ministerial or instrumental priestly offering of the eucharistic sacrifice to God, an offering not infringing the once for all sacrificial death on the cross of Jesus. The whole Christ, that is Christ including his Church, offers the whole Christ. The priesthood of the ministry represents the whole Church in this special role and does not substitute for it. 'So the theologians interpreted the eucharist as a renewed apprehension and application of the past event of the sacrifice of the Passion in which the Risen Lord himself, as head of the Church, now pleads his self offering before the Father and brings his people with him into the holy of holies. The priest played an essential part in the eucharistic celebration at precisely this point. Here the priest represents Christ to the people and the people to God in union with Christ' [133]. The ordained priesthood acts as the instrument, the minister, of the priestly people, and this patristic doctrine became that of the Oxford Movement and the Anglo-Catholic tradition, for whom 'The eucharistic sacrifice was made by Christ not by man; the priesthood of the ordained

1 Longmans, London 1936. New edition: SPCK, London 1990.

ministry was symbolic, derivative and representative: in no way was it a derogation from the priesthood of Christ.¹ [135] Echoing the exposition of R. C. Moberly's *Ministerial Priesthood*¹, the inner spiritual humility and pastoral concern of the ordained ministry is said to reflect the outer eucharistic sacramental function.

The report's treatment of the development of the Reformed Anglican tradition notes strongly that Cranmer did not reject the ministry of reconciliation, the service for the visitation of the sick in the *Book of Common Prayer* having provision for private absolution, for example. Further he kept the term 'priest' for the minister alone allowed to absolve and preside at the eucharist. For Cranmer the only sense of eucharistic sacrifice is that of praise and thanksgiving to God in response to the work of grace, abolishing the idea of the Church offering the sacrifice made by Christ to God and therefore doing away with the idea of the ordained priesthood's offering of Christ.

It is noted that Whitgift and Hooker interpret 'priest' in its etymological sense as 'presbyter' [78]. The classic Anglican doctrine of the eucharist is said to steer between the Zwinglian bare sign idea and the Roman reiterated sacrifice to give the Augustinian view outlined above. The further development of Anglican thought in the seventeenth century criticises some Protestant over-concentration on the moment of Christ's actual death as the focus of atonement [96]; Cranmer distinguished between intercession as pleading the merits of the sacrifice and the once for all sacrifice itself [97]. But FOAG argues that much Reformed thought accepted the idea of the faithful pleading Christ's sacrifice in prayer and that the priesthood of Christ is an office continued in heaven [97], as if such ideas could feed into the notion of eucharistic offering. Whether Reformed thought envisaged an offering of the sacrifice rather than a pleading of the offered and accepted sacrifice as the basis for intercession is not a distinction put.

Liberal Anglicanism stressed the self offering of Christ in total love, disliking notions of divine wrath and justice [100-101]. The Oxford Movement strove not to innovate but to present the classical Anglican position of apostolic succession and order in a sacramental church going back to Christ [104]. The eucharistic sacrifice was really made by Christ and only secondarily, ministerially, representatively, by the priests in the Church [106]. This turns out in the concluding chapter of the report to be the notion deemed best to define the Anglican position on priesthood and eucharist, a representative derivative celebration of and participation in what Christ constantly pleads above.

Chapter IX reviews the papal Bull *Apostolicae Curae* in order to emphasise the Archbishops' riposte asserting an Anglican notion of priestly eucharistic offering. Cranmer's opinions are subtly marginalised by the acceptance of the argument put forward by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to counter the Roman condemnation of Anglican orders in 1896

1 John Murray, London 1897.

as absolutely null and utterly void: 'The Archbishops' Response and most Anglican books on the subject worked with the ordinary Anglican assumption that Cranmer's opinions were his own and should not be construed as binding the Church of England then or now' [113].

Chapter X concerns ecumenical advance and the common agreement on the unity and differentiation of ordained and lay and on eucharistic *anamnesis*, which in turn decisively colours the nature of the distinctive ordained ministry. In particular FOAG cites ARCIC teaching that the ordained priesthood does not derive from the common priesthood of the whole Church but involves a different realm of the gifts of the Spirit¹ [120]. The ordained priesthood relates to that of Christ differently to that of the common priesthood, but the common priesthood and the ministerial priesthood are nevertheless, we are told, related [120].

The motif of union and differentiation continues in this ecclesiological waltz of the three priesthoods into chapter XI, a discussion of the issue of the ordination of women. Here the relationship of the ordained priesthood to the common priesthood, having just been pushed to the very edge of the stage, is sharply pulled back into the floodlights, since the case for women's ordination rests on the full humanity of the whole priestly Church gaining representation in the ordained priest.

FOAG ends with chapters endorsing what is fundamentally R. C. Moberly's view of ministerial priesthood. 'Within this priestly people, with its variety of ministries, the risen Christ has appointed and maintains a specially ordained ministry . . . Through this ministry Christ . . . continues to care for and govern his people . . . as priest, he makes the fruits of his reconciling sacrifice present and effective in his Church' [141]. The priesthood of the ordained ministry 'is not a magnified form of the common priesthood; the difference is this, that their ministry is an appointed means through which Christ makes his priesthood present and effective to his people' [142].

The ministry of reconciliation, that is of absolution from sin, is the other ordinance marking out the ordained priesthood: 'It is in the particular relationship of the eucharist and the ministry of reconciliation to the sacrifice of Christ that the priestly character of the ordained ministry is most evident' [143].

FOAG concludes that although the New Testament does not know of a priestly ordained ministry, yet usage and tradition has developed this understanding in order to safeguard the apostolic tradition [148]. The absence of the priestly ministry is treated as a purely historical phenomenon which can be separated from theological significance.

Critique

Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Eternal Offering

A major concern with this theology of priesthood and eucharist is that exegetically it seems weak, and even strangely unconcerned with the tenor

1 *The Final Report*, p 36.

of the New Testament. In particular the appeal to the notion of an ongoing pleading of Christ's sacrifice in heaven, reflected in the eucharistic offering of the earthly Church, rests upon scanty New Testament support, only given shape and coherence by some interpretation of later patristic imagery. The appeal to the Epistle to the Hebrews in particular needs thorough investigation. Alan Richardson, an Anglican biblical scholar well disposed to the High Church scheme of interpretation, argues that the view that the author of Hebrews

teaches that Christ in heaven is continually offering himself (or his blood) to God is based on a falsely Platonizing interpretation which ignores the *kephelaion* – “the chief point” (Heb. 8:1) – which the writer himself wishes to make: because of the one, perfect, unrepeatable sacrifice of Calvary . . . Christ is seated in the seat of the Vizier, not standing in the posture and place of the suppliant. He intercedes for us, but with the effective power of the co-ruler seated on the right hand of the sovereign God. Because of what he has done in history there is no more offering for sin (Heb. 10:18).¹

Richardson, recalling us to the text as a whole, thinks that the ascension of Christ in Hebrews ‘is the moment of the completion of Christ's atoning work, the presenting of the blood in the heavenly tabernacle.’² Such is the weight placed on the notion of the ongoing offering or pleading of the once for all sacrifice by this school of theology that it must show plainly the centrality and clarity of the doctrine from the New Testament.

The high priesthood of Christ as intercessor from the throne of grace is clear, but notions of ongoing pleading in the eternal realms are not, and these concepts are not to be confused: ‘we may note that it is not implied that Jesus is continually or repeatedly presenting His offering; this is excluded by [Heb.] 7:27, which contrasts the daily sacrifices of the Aaronic high priests with the offering which the Christians' high priest has already presented once and for all. The tense and mood of the Greek verb “to offer” in this clause [sc. Heb. 8:3] also exclude the idea of a continual offering.’³ It seems, to say the least, exegetically doubtful whether the notion that an ongoing offering of the sacrifice can be sustained. This relates to the issue of the distinctive Anglo-Catholic method of theological interpretation which reads the New Testament only in the light of patristic history and doctrine, and never as a critical norm to correct distorting errors which the patristic Church might have made.

Both Hebrews and Revelation associate the slain and risen Christ with kingly rule and a priestly intercession rather than with any idea of eternal

1 Alan Richardson, *Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, SCM, London 1958, p 202.

2 *Ibid.*, p 203.

3 F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Marshall Morgan and Scott, London 1965, p 164.

pleading of his sacrifice. Christ has 'sat down' in the royal position, he is the lamb in the middle of the throne, interceding for his people from the position of having completed his work of making atonement, both as regards the act of dying and of offering that death. That is not to say that he has no further continuing ministry, rather that this ministry is not that of pleading his sacrifice but, on the basis of his accepted sacrifice, taking royal priestly intercessory interest in his people. The imagery of Hebrews is that of the Day of Atonement on which the victim was slain in the court of the sanctuary and its blood presented inside the sanctuary; Christ's death on the cross parallels the former, his appearance at God's right hand the latter, also a decisively completed event. Because of this completed atoning work as a whole the Church, seeing she has a great high priest who has passed into the heavens, can draw near with full assurance of faith to the throne of grace, enjoying the extraordinary privilege of access to God.

'We must not think', writes Bruce, 'that because our author speaks of Jesus as having "passed into the heavens" and having "sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" he thought of the heavenly sanctuary as being, in reverse, a glorified replica of the sanctuary on earth, established in perpetuity on some higher plane.'¹ This would be a platonising interpretation of a text whose true background is Jewish eschatological expectation, meaning that a new spiritual order now exists wherein true worship, the spiritual sacrifice of praise, is now possible. One of the great problems of the Anglo-Catholic and FOAG means of handling the New Testament is that it exempts those platonising aspects of the thought of patristic authors from the critical scrutiny of the Scriptures. The horizon of the apostolic age tends to merge too quickly into that of patristic theologising.

Richard Bauckham provides a useful summary of the teaching of Jesus' high priestly role in Hebrews when he affirms that Christ has offered the sacrifice once for all, a single sacrifice valid for all time in contrast with the repeated Old Testament sacrifices. But Jesus is high priest for ever: 'The continued effectiveness of his once for all sacrifice is not, as it were, automatic, but his own personal activity. He himself continuously applies to believers the benefits of his finished work. Hence Christians do not approach God simply on the basis of the sacrifice which Jesus made in the past, but actually "through him", because he lives forever to plead on their behalf. He intercedes for us, represents our interests before God, secures mercy and assistance for us.'² The true exegesis concerns the intercessory work of the high priest whose offering of the sacrifice of himself has been accepted. Perhaps Westcott puts the point best of all when, after dismissing 'modern' interpretations of Christ pleading his passion in heaven, he insists rather that 'His glorified humanity is the eternal pledge of the absolute

1 Op. cit., p lvii.

2 *Knowing God Incarnate* (Grove Pastoral no 6), Grove Books, Bramcote 1983, p 17.

efficacy of this accomplished work. He pleads, as older writers truly expressed the thought, by his presence on the Father's throne.¹

In the report, not only does the heavenly, supra-temporal interaction of Christ and the Father gain centrality, displacing the historic saving event of Calvary, but the idea of re-presenting the sacrifice, the *anamnesis*, becomes the dynamic connection bringing the eternal self-offering into the cultic presence of the Church in the present eucharist. This notion of representation or *anamnesis* has its roots in the platonic theory of knowledge and its teaching of eternal archetypes being palely represented in this historical world. It could be argued that this background of thought tends to control the FOAG view of eucharistic sacrifice and priesthood, in that the eucharistic celebration unites the Church with the heavenly self-offering in an earthly cultic reflection of the eternal. The heavenly is realised in and through the earthly cultic offering of the eucharist. Priesthood, attached as it is to this ritual event, cannot help becoming an increasingly cultic ministry, whatever the cautions entered in favour of pastoral ministry as well. Ordained priesthood uniquely reflects and mediates the priesthood of the heavenly, pleading Christ.

Powerful criticism of this theology is made by Aulén, who points out the risks of connecting the high priesthood of Christ in heaven with the eucharist on earth. This connection tends to divert attention from the radical change effected by the cross of Christ and to obscure the divine verdict, made once and for all, by the resurrection. The resurrection means that the sacrifice does not need to be pleaded because the verdict of the Father on the sacrifice has already been given decisively.² These are very telling points from the heartland of New Testament doctrine. Pannenberg emphasises that the resurrection of Jesus has the theological meaning of an eschatological vindication of Jesus and his claims by the Father, a decisive event for all as well as for Jesus himself.³ This theology of eucharistic sacrifice can seem to concentrate on the heavenly pleading and miss the essential theological point that the cross and resurrection must be focal and not displaced from the centre of the eucharistic stage in favour of marginal and speculative heavenly events whose scriptural warrant is ambiguous at best.

By contrast, Moberly, apparently FOAG's guiding doctrinal light, tells us that Calvary, while it is 'the indispensable preliminary, yet it is not Calvary taken apart, not Calvary quite so directly as the eternal self-presentation in heaven of the risen and ascended Lord, which is the true consummation of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.'⁴ But the great and mighty act of God incarnate in dying for us and rising vindicated, his offering

1 B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Macmillan, London 1914, p 232.

2 G. Aulén, *Eucharist and Sacrifice*, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh 1958, p 191.

3 W. Pannenberg, *Jesus God and Man*, SCM, London 1968, pp 55ff.

4 *Ministerial Priesthood*, p 246.

accepted, is the focal point of apostolic salvation teaching. There is a 'once-for-all'-ness about the acceptance of the sacrifice, cosmically delivered by the raising of the Son on the third day, 'the verdict of the Father'.¹

Aulén's criticism all the more tellingly comes from the Roman Catholic side also. Francis Clark regards the teaching of Gore and the Anglo-Catholic theological tradition endorsed by FOAG as rather a novelty in its insistence on the heavenly offering of the sacrifice.² 'It is not surprising', says Clark, 'that Mgr. Ruch, confronted with this teaching of "certains docteurs anglais"', should judge that by it "the expiatory value of the death of Christ is denied or diminished".³ Roman Catholic and evangelical at this point of soteriology side together against any theology which seems to dilute the unique saving power of the cross and resurrection and tends to make them into a preliminary for the eternal offering.

Clark tells us that whatever may be their marginal disagreements, Catholic theologians are agreed on essentials: 'In accordance with Scripture and all Christian tradition, they hold that the atoning passion of Christ is the one propitiatory sacrifice by which the world is saved: consequently, when they consider the relation of the Eucharist to Christ's saving work, they see it primarily and essentially related to the sacrifice of Calvary.'⁴ FOAG's criticism of Protestant over-concentration on Calvary [96] for soteriology seems not to be shared by orthodox Roman Catholic thought. The suspicion must be that in this doctrine of the eternal offering FOAG is out on a limb and misguided in making it so central.

Christ, inseparable from his finished work, is 'eternal' for all Christians. But his sacrifice has been not only *offered* once for all but *accepted* once for all: the ground of salvation has been assured by this Trinitarian act of love. The victory is finally and decisively won. Pleading the atoning sacrifice to the Father by Christ qualifies the verdict of the Father and splits the Son from the Father in the work of salvation. The eternal Christ exists now as the victorious royal high priest whose sacrifice of his own life was decisively accepted at the resurrection.

Eucharistic Offering

Aulén also rejects the idea that we 'offer Christ': this is an idea alien to the New Testament and a distortion of its teaching, even given the sophisticated qualifications and caveats stressing the priority of Christ's own self-offering. The very fact that such caveats need to be added shows that things have got out of balance. He comments that when Anglo-Catholic thought speaks of the whole Christ offering the whole Christ on the eucharistic altar it falls into quite serious confusion:

1 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4/1, T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1956, pp 305ff.

2 *Eucharistic Sacrifice and the Reformation*, Darton Longman and Todd, London 1960, ch. 13, 'The Eucharist and the Heavenly Sacrifice'.

3 *Ibid.*, p 274.

4 *Op. cit.*, p 285.

That the presence of Christ in the eucharist also makes his sacrifice present is not the same as saying that the church "offers" the body and blood of Christ. The latter statement would be true and verified only on the supposition that we completely identify Christ and the church. Now it is true that nothing more important can be said of the church than that it is the body of Christ, which implies that Christ identifies himself with his church. But the profound truth of this statement does not permit us to turn this statement around and say that the church is Christ . . . if the sacrifice made by Christ once for all is primary in relation to the church, this identification [sc. of the church's offering and Christ's own sacrifice] becomes impossible. The sacrifice of Christ is and remains his own sacrifice, eternally valid, present in the eucharist, but entirely his own, not the church's sacrifice.¹

Aulén's criticism challenges the mode of identification between the Church and Christ. Christ takes his people into union with himself and makes the Church his bride and his body. But this relationship is established on the basis of royal priestly grace, fully maintaining the distinction between the giver of grace and the recipients. The recipients are not in the position to offer the gift which was given on their behalf.

It is commonly argued in reply that this view merely rehearses visibly the truth of justification by faith. Ramsey² quotes the hymn 'Look Father look on his anointed face, and only look on us as found in him' to reinforce his claim that his theology of offering Christ eucharistically is utterly congruent with classic biblical notions of salvation in Christ. The Church spreads forth the perfect sacrifice before the Father as the beneficiaries of that sacrifice, just as Paul teaches the Church to rely not on her own merits and works but on the atoning work of Christ. The same hymn contains the lines 'And so between our sins and their reward, we set the passion of thy Son our Lord.' The once for all sacrifice coupled with the ongoing pleading is presented to the Father by the Church through the ministry of the priest. In essence the pleading by the Son and by the Church are united, and distinguishable in terms of the object of the sacrifice. The Son pleads, offers, his sacrifice only for his Church; the Church offers it for her own benefit. This is a major distinction, the difference once again between the benefactor and the beneficiary, between the giver of the sacrifice and the recipients of its pardoning grace.

In order to clarify the nature of the representation or commemoration, *anamnesis*, of the eucharist Bicknell notes that 'Who is reminded and of what he is reminded' in the accounts of the Lord's institution of the eucharist, 'depends solely upon the context.'³ Who is reminding whom of what in the eucharist? Is the eucharistic rite directed 'upwards' to the

1 Op. cit., pp 181-2.

2 A. M. Ramsey, *From Gore to Temple*, Longmans, London 1960, p 53.

3 E. J. Bicknell, *Introduction to the Thirty-Nine Articles*, Longmans Green, London 1925, p 516.

Father? FOAG clearly envisages this orientation of this sacrament, although not that of baptism nor other sacramental acts in Church life which flow from God to mankind. This notion of re-presenting the saving sacrifice in unison with Christ's pleading sees the movement directed to the Father in the Son. The Father is reminded of the sacrifice of the Son by the Church, which in turn is never outside Christ. The Father responds to this *anamnesis* by feeding the Church with the living bread and wine, now become the body and blood of the Lord.

The notion of the incorporation of our sacrifice with that of Christ's at the heart of the eucharistic offering also brings its theological problems. However much our minds and hearts, renewed in Christ, overflow with self sacrifice and costly love, that does not make our attitude sufficiently pure to be incorporated into Christ's saving work. Our renewal is the result of his atoning work and response to it. Our self-offering is patchy and frail, never sufficient to ground our salvation, not even when its motivation is that of God's love within us. Our good works are the fruit of our salvation. Therefore even to coordinate our sacrifice with Christ's sails close to semi-Pelagianism, the view that we are accepted by God because of our good works performed with God's help. Importing our own, albeit Christ-motivated, efforts into the theology of the eucharist detracts from the Church's total focus on the unique glory of the sacrifice of Christ. We are baptised into the death of Christ, not into his death including ours: the sacraments focus on Christ, crucified and risen, not on a mixture of ourselves, however refined by grace, with Christ.

C. F. D. Moule has questioned strongly on exegetical and theological grounds from the New Testament the use of language of our reminding God of Christ or of pleading his sacrifice to God: 'is it not almost impossible to rid the phrase of a suggestion of pleading with God to accept the price that Christ offers?'¹ Moule deplores interpretations of *anamnesis* which involve presenting Christ to God or reminding God of him. Rather, it is a matter of 'being presented to God in Christ, and a being "reminded" of God in him - and so an act of obedience.'²

Michael Green describes this coordination of the eucharistic offering of the Church offering her sacrifice in that of Christ's as confusing our 'dedicatory' sacrifice with Christ's 'expiatory' sacrifice, which is the unique creative origin of our dedication and response.³ Christ can be said to plead his sacrifice 'if by that is meant that his presence as the Lamb in the midst of the throne is the silent plea for our acceptance. He does not present his sacrifice, if by that is meant that he continues to offer to the Father his sacrifice on Calvary. But he may rightly be said to present it, and

1 C. F. D. Moule, *Essays in New Testament Interpretation*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1982, p 296.

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Freed to Serve*, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1983, p 78.

so may we, if that is meant to draw attention to and celebrate the sacrifice once offered.¹

The expiatory sacrifice of Christ has been made and accepted by God once for all. The great moral and spiritual hinge was decisively turned for humanity by a self-atoning act of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and Jesus applies to believers the benefits of his finished work. This is the orientation of the faith of the New Testament, including Hebrews; this is the orientation of the sacrament of the gospel. That is why eating and drinking form the termination and goal of the sacrament, acts of being nourished inwardly at the hands of the Lord, from God to mankind. Just as the gospel can only be received by dying into Christ, so sacramentally we all receive sacrificially, offering ourselves, our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice.

A Cultic Priesthood

FOAG argues from the eucharistic offering to a view of sacramental priesthood as central to the ordained ministry. The argument is not that the ordained ministry represents the priesthood of all believers – according to FOAG the ordained priesthood does not derive from the common priesthood but from that of Christ. This position is deemed the classical Anglican one, rather than the view that the ordained priest is the presbyter and pastor. It must be questioned, on historical as well as theological grounds, whether FOAG can sustain this argument from eucharistic offering to a new kind of cultic priesthood. Few Anglican evangelicals would argue that the ordained ministry is purely functional, a utilitarian way of servicing the congregation: this ministry is a gift to the Church bestowed by calling and by responsive recognition of the call; but is the office primarily priestly in a sense beyond the presbyteral?

Baillie argues ecumenically for a Presbyterian notion of eucharistic offering from the fact that intercession and worship is offered, that the sacrifice of praise is offered, that we offer ourselves and that all this is in Christ who alone makes our offering at all worthy. Gathering his points together he ventures ‘something like this: that in the sacrament, Christ Himself being truly present, He unites us by faith with His eternal sacrifice, that we may plead and receive its benefits and offer ourselves in prayer and praise to God? If we can say this, then surely we Protestants, we Presbyterians, have our doctrine of eucharistic sacrifice.’² These arguments partly parallel FOAG, but the move from this construction, which itself is open to much criticism (as has been shown), to the definition of the ministry as focused on eucharistic offering is not made. Baillie insists that ‘it is not really individual ministers who celebrate sacraments; it is the whole Church in its corporate capacity as a royal priesthood bringing its offering

1 Ibid.

2 D. M. Baillie, ‘The Eucharistic Offering’ in his *The Theology of the Sacraments and Other Papers*, Faber and Faber, London 1957, pp 108ff, 118.

through Christ to God.¹ He points to the method of distribution of the consecrated elements in his own tradition, passing among the congregation from one to the next, as underscoring the communal priestly character of the people of God.

FOAG, by insisting that the ordained priesthood does not derive from the common priesthood, seriously infringes the basic ecclesiological principle of the whole Church taking theological precedence over the ordained ministry in the sacraments. Even if we grant the contested theology of eucharistic sacrifice and offering, it does not follow that a special cultic priesthood should emerge, and especially a priesthood not deriving from the general priesthood of the whole Church. Dimock, the evangelical rather rashly cited by FOAG, can also accept carefully qualified talk of eucharistic offering which

is no *re-presenting* of any redemptive sacrifice (though it may include a representation of it), but may rather be compared . . . to the showing of the receipt of a ransom price already paid . . . But it is important to make clear the distinction between the two senses of *offering*. I think we safely say . . . that the *offering of the sacrifice to view* is no more a sacrificial offering than the displaying of the voucher of an account paid is the same thing as the settling of the account by payment. It is no *mnemosunon* to be placed on an altar, and requires the service of no *sacerdotium* save the royal priesthood of thankful believers.²

The New Testament remarkably omits any notion of ministerial priesthood because of the ministry of the Holy Spirit who brings Christ crucified and risen directly to the people of God, so consecrating them a holy people. 'The real presentation (*repraesentatio*) of the history of Jesus Christ is that which He Himself accomplishes in the work of His Holy Spirit when He makes Himself the object and origin of faith.'³ This theological point, so obvious and vital, seems to be of no account for the ecclesiology of FOAG. The apostolic gospel of free access to God in Christ without the ministrations of priests and sacrifices because they have been finally fulfilled in Christ, this is the reason for the startling lack of priestly ministry in the Church. This is a vital theological fact, not a quirk of history. Paul, according to Eduard Schweitzer, reflects on why the cross is the end of all Pharisaic legal righteousness and 'the Letter to the Hebrews on why it is the end of all priestly sacrificial offering.'⁴ Theology of the deepest nature excluded priestly ministration in the Church.

1 Op. cit., p 123.

2 N. Dimock, *Testimonies of English Divines*, Elliot Stock, London 1896, pp 235-6.

3 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4/1, T & T Clark, Edinburgh 1956, p 767.

4 *Church Order in the New Testament*, SCM, London 1961, p 33.

FOAG argues that the priesthood of the ordained ministry derives from Christ's priesthood and not merely from the priesthood of all believers. Here it goes beyond what Anglicans have been prepared to concede to the Anglo-Catholic wing as a stretching of language. Lightfoot, whose immensely significant debate with Moberly is not even mentioned in what purports to be an historical overview, comments of the early Fathers, 'so long as the priesthood of the ministry is regarded as springing from the priesthood of the whole body, the teaching of the Apostles has not been directly violated.'¹ For Lightfoot, as for Handley Moule, 'an exclusive sacerdotalism contradicts the general tenour of the Gospel' and New Testament faith regards 'the pastoral aspect of ministry . . . very far more conspicuous than the representative.'² The priesthood of the ordained ministry and that of the whole Church differs, for FOAG, in that the former 'is not a magnified form of the common priesthood; the difference is this, that their ministry is an appointed means through which Christ makes his priesthood present and effective to his people' [142]. This argument fails to convince, not only because it has no New Testament warrant, but because the whole burden of the New Testament is precisely that Christ already is fully present, in every dimension, with the Church. His priesthood cannot be made more fully present and effective by the cultic ministry of a redefined human priesthood. By advocating this FOAG has spun a sophisticated web which runs counter to the tenor of the New Testament gospel of direct access to God in the Spirit through the atoning work of Christ.

Conclusion

At this time of ongoing decline in membership the Church of England urgently needs to energise and mobilise the whole Church in her identity as the royal priesthood. Only by emphasising the place of all the faithful as set apart for worship and witness can the declining trend in Anglican numbers begin to be reversed. To advocate the FOAG line of a sophisticated Anglo-Catholic doctrine of the priesthood will continue the disastrous emasculation of the priesthood of the whole body by concentrating it in the cultic functionary. The common priesthood awaits the priesthood of Christ through the ordained priesthood: this is where FOAG terminates after starting from a commitment to the whole burden of the New Testament. The result appears to reverse this burden through an interpretation of tradition which gives priority to certain parts of the history of Anglican thought and very little to others.

No doubt the New Testament cannot provide a blueprint for a strict pattern of ministry now, but the New Testament contains clear primary principles, one of which is that the Church is the priestly people conse-

1 J. B. Lightfoot, *The Christian Ministry*, Macmillan, London 1892, p 225.

2 H. C. G. Moule, *Outlines of Christian Doctrine*, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1890, p 223.

crated by the Spirit of the great high priest who has passed into the heavens and therefore no longer in need of priestly ministrations. To argue now that the primary principle can be qualified, even inverted, by a form of priesthood required to make Christ's priesthood present, develops the apostolic tradition against itself.

The Anglican problems over ordination, ministry and the ordination of women will not be resolved by consolidating the view so ably stated by Moberly, and restated by FOAG, into the formal Anglican position. Even if the particular patristic era which this position isolates as normative can be regarded as a legitimate development for its day, which is debated, that does not mean it can legitimately be frozen for all time. The Reformation turned the old priest into the new Anglican presbyter: should this not be deemed the classic Anglican position? What justification is there for choosing Moberly rather than Lightfoot as the expression of Anglican ecclesiology, particularly if the criterion really is to be the whole tenor of the New Testament? FOAG has opted for a Tractarian view, trying to freeze the frame at some point in the early centuries of Church history and is not sufficiently concerned with ecclesiological principles at the heart of the New Testament.

Today the Church must look ahead rather than being frozen into some controverted historical position. The great need of the day, and of the future, is the priesthood of the whole Church, a priesthood already indwelt by the great high priest. Community and mission, certainly in the English context of declining membership and the constant effect of secularisation, have to be the two foci of the Church, both firmly orientated to Christ because deriving from Christ. The sacraments are utterly vital in this life of the Church, and they constantly feed the whole Church, lay and ordained. The ordained ministry exists to foster the total ministry of the Church and not to substitute itself for that. As duly authorised lay people may minister the Word, there is every case for such trusted people to minister the sacraments. This would change the shape of the current Anglican distress over the issue of ordination of women, since it would open the way to lay women presiding. It might even explode the ecumenical log-jam by bringing in the possibility of non-Anglicans presiding in the name of the whole of God's Church, thus breaking out of denominational parameters.

The current horizon, fusing with that of the apostolic Church, may also learn from the theology of liberation. This voice needs to be heard, surely, by the Church of England with its revealed failure to minister effectively to industrial areas. The theology of liberation indicates the need for community, for local pastoral ministry shared by the body, and the need to desacralise the presbyteral ministry.

Ecumenically too the need of the day is a biblically-rooted view of ministry. Schillebeeckx argues in his study of the ministry that the history of the Church altered the nature of the priesthood, emptying the early understanding of the priesthood of the whole people and concentrating it into the cultic functionary. 'In the solemn *eucharistia* (which to begin with,

of course, was improvised), the prayer of praise and thanksgiving, or *anaphora*, spoken by the president, he speaks primarily as the prophetic leader of the community with pastoral responsibility, who proclaims the history of salvation, and therefore praises, lauds and thanks God, and thus proclaims the presence of salvation for the assembled community in the eucharist. The active subject of the eucharist was the community.¹ The sacralising of the ministry into a new form of priesthood profoundly altered this original orientation and led to the priesthood as a thing in itself, distanced theologically from the priority of the community.

This heritage affects the Church of England and she needs to focus again on the whole people of God as the prior entity, served by the ordained ministry and producing the ministry. The conclusion of FOAG unfortunately takes us in the opposite direction by bolstering a special cultic priesthood. However many well-meaning pleas to the contrary are entered, as they were by Moberly, this will only have the effect of tacitly minimising the theological value of the royal priesthood of the whole body. From his Roman Catholic view Schillebeeckx poses what probably is the key issue of ministry for the future of the Church: 'Our age has rightly done away with the sub-diaconate and the so-called minor orders. However, we may well ask whether in the meantime we have not forgotten how to revive the ancient theological view which is implied by these orders: catechists in many countries, pastoral workers, who in many places lead a community, are not recognised as such theologically or in church order. From an ecclesiological point of view this is an abnormal situation which moreover leads to crazy consequences which even trivialise the eucharist² and make the priest a service type for cultic affairs. Theologically the truest description of the presbyter is the one who coordinates the multiplicity of gifts to build up the body of the Lord, and this should be the sense in which Anglicans regard the ministry as priestly.

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1 E. Schillebeeckx, *Ministry: A Case for Change*, SCM, London 1981, p 50.

2 Schillebeeckx, *op. cit.*, p 140.