

Holiness and Spirituality of the Ordained Ministry

United Methodist/Roman Catholic Dialogue

January 1976

I. National bilateral conversations sponsored by committees of The United Methodist Church¹ and The National Conference of Catholic Bishops² have been in progress since 1966. Over the years these have dealt with a wide variety of subjects of mutual interest and concern. In 1971, the decision was reached to focus the dialogue for a time on an issue of special interest to both churches, namely, "Spirituality in the Ministry". The findings of our sustained study of this subject are the concern of this report.

Several reasons dictated the choice of this particular theme for this dialogue. Both our communions emphasize the importance of a life style which authentically derives from relationship with the Spirit of Christ. This emphasis is not in contradiction to others, such as a confessional emphasis on the faith, but can be perceived as a dimension of Christianity, the importance of which is distinctively underscored in our respective traditions. The subject seemed all the more fruitful as it touches our common emphasis on holiness and spirituality as well as our noticeably different ways of expressing this in life and conduct. It has been experienced by Catholics and United Methodists as a source of sympathetic contact and, at times, of puzzlement or uncertainty with respect to one another. Questions have been raised as to whether distorting pietism, individualism, clericalism, cultic ritualism or triumphalism might lurk in our traditions under the guise of holiness. These questions needed to be explored and, we hope, resolved in order to set aside one barrier, real even when only subliminally perceived, to further Roman Catholic-United Methodist understanding and the quest for a more profound reconciliation between us.

Another key reason for our emphasis was the supposition that it would open the way to wider reflections on the life of our churches, and so indeed it has. By focusing on the theme of holiness and spirituality with reference to the ministry, and especially to the ordained ministry, the dialogue did not seek to bypass the even more fundamental question of holiness as lived by the whole church. While our churches may have given more concentrated attention to the holiness and spirituality expected of those ordained in the service of the people, we could see that what has been said and encouraged in regard to ordained persons is illustrative of the holiness to which all members of the church are called.

At the same time, the theme is pertinent to an area in which both of our churches have evidenced the need to achieve new perceptions in our time. The concurrent concerns in both churches³ suggested that the subject was more than merely timely. It indicated as well a vigorous search for ways of life which are in accord with the values of our traditions and in keeping with the shape of society and the needs of changing cultures.

Finally, we observed that our concerns in this dialogue are equally felt in the larger framework of the ecumenical movement as a whole. By concentrating on the complexities of spirituality in relationship to the ministry, we hoped to contribute a new element to the very rich discussion in other ecumenical forums of other aspects of the ministry.

Among the specific questions our consultation has had to face and has sought to answer in the following report are these:

- Is the holiness and spirituality to which the ordained ministers are called different in either kind or degree from that to which all Christians are called?
- What is the source of the efficacy of the ordained ministry as it is exercised in our communions?
- Are new spiritual disciplines, in some ways different from those followed by priests and ministers in the past, needed today to express and support more clearly the holiness and spirituality of the ministers of the church?

As Roman Catholics and United Methodists, we face together the changing needs of people to whom the ministry seeks to respond. We recognize that just as there is no genuine ecumenism, so there can be no effective ministry, without a willingness for changes of heart. Our report comes out of some experience of warmth and insight into such changes.

II. The vocation of the Christian community as a whole and of each person is to accept the gift of holiness and to employ it as God intends. The requirement of Christian spirituality is conformity of the church and its members to the holiness of God. Each person is to celebrate the coming of the new age in the dying and rising Christ, and to receive his Spirit. Becoming a new creation, they are selected by God to be holy before him. Ministers, therefore, stand among the people of God as men and women who serve and who thereby exemplify the call of all to servanthood. Whether we refer to God as Father, Son, or Spirit, we are speaking equally of the One Whose divine holiness is communicated to our human condition. The holiness of the triune God is known and conceived by us through His gracious revelation.

First, God is the eternal Creator and Sustainer of all that is. Thus our most appropriate attitude toward Him is one of reverence, awe and love.

Second, God makes himself known as the Holy One of Israel (Isaiah 6:9; 54:5; 55:5), the Maker and Redeemer of all people and all creation (Isaiah 40:25-26; 41:20; Acts 17:24-26). He chose the People Israel to be a holy community, priestly and prophetic, and bound to himself by a lasting covenant (Exodus 19:5-6). Through the incarnation, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God constituted the universal church as the first fruit of the new creation which he is still bringing to reality (II Cor. 5:17).

Third, God communicates to us that mystery of his holiness and makes us heirs of Israel's faith and joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). Three dimensions of God's holiness bear upon our own holiness:

a. **Separateness**

The Holy God is one; he alone is God (Deuteronomy 5:7 and 6:4). He is not to be confused with any divinities, ideologies or value systems of human devising. The church, too, is to avoid those destructive temptations of the world which distract it from the vocation of holiness; not for fear of pollution of a holy life but of dilution of a holy mission (II Cor. 6:16-18). That is to say, the derived holiness of the Church is not to be

regarded as the basis for a moral superiority over other human beings; it is the holiness of divine intention, the instrumentality of God's own saving mission in history to all people (Mt. 28:19; Acts 1:8; Jn. 17:18).

b. **Love**

The Holy God is love (I Jn. 4:8); the highest gift of God, the Holy Spirit, is love (I Cor.13:13). God's love which became incarnate in Jesus Christ, bridges the separation between God and humanity, heals the estrangement caused by sin and achieves reconciliation. The church and its members who received the gift are not only summoned to love as He loves; as both Roman Catholic and Methodist traditions emphasize, they are made holy in love by the Holy Spirit working amongst us. By sanctification we mean that the grace and power of divine love are displacing the sin of pride and faithlessness in our hearts and minds.

c. **Righteousness**

The Holy God is righteous (Isaiah 6).

God's holiness is manifested in Jesus Christ who is our righteousness and sanctification and who calls us to obedience in grace (I Cor.1:30). Persons and communities that delight in experiencing and expressing the love of God must likewise delight in the righteous law of the Lord (Ps. 1:2) or else fear the consequences of deliberate disregard of it (Mt. 7:21-23). Love without law is sentimental; law without love is tyrannical. The holiness which the Church receives from God includes both law and love. (Rom.8:2-4)

III. The church's holiness is a *gift* derived from and dependent on God. It has been accented by our two traditions in different ways. While United Methodists and Catholics are at one in their confession that the church is holy, there is divergence both within and between the two traditions regarding the meaning of the church's holiness and its realization in practice. Such divergence can be partially explained by the respective emphases on different models of the church within the two traditions. For example, in the United Methodist tradition, the church is frequently seen as the herald of God's word; accordingly, the holiness of the Church is seen as the personal response to the preaching of the Gospel. For example, in the Catholic tradition, the church is frequently seen as a sacrament, a visible sign conveying God's grace; accordingly, emphasis is given to the necessity of visible signs as means of grace and holiness.

Both these (and other) models of the church are necessary in a comprehensive ecclesiology, which views the different emphases regarding the church's holiness as complementary, not incompatible. Nonetheless, it should be candidly acknowledged that it is not always obvious how the divergent aspects of ecclesiological models can be harmonized either in theory or in practice.

Both Catholics and United Methodists agree that God's holiness is communicated to the church. While the Incarnation is the primary reality of this communication, Biblical sources and Christian history indicate that God communicates himself through a variety of channels. The variety and plurality of God's gifts overwhelm us; particularly so when it comes to theoretical appreciation of them. We do agree that manifold persons and events have been used by the Holy Spirit to actualize God's holiness in the life of the Christian community. If the two traditions sometimes diverge in their respective views of the nature of these gifts and its relation to the individual Christian's holiness, nevertheless it should be recognized that this divergence is not pervasive, since each tradition has shared elements of the other. Both the Catholic and the United

Methodist traditions recognize that the Church's holiness is general and the means of holiness in particular challenge individual Christians to a personal appropriation and manifestation of holiness in their daily lives. Both the wide-ranging diversity of gifts as well as the individuality of each Christian imply that the quest for holiness is uniquely personal. Although the holiness of Christians is quite diverse in practice, it is possible to recognize a number of trends or "schools" in the practice of holiness, in Christian life-style, in spirituality. While such diversity is both legitimate and desirable as a personal appropriation and manifestation of God's holiness in Christ through the church, it should not be allowed to cloud, much less to negate, the common quest for holiness that is characteristic of both traditions.

IV. The church's holiness is also a *task*. In the design of God, the church's members are called to serve. In the power of the Spirit, Christians are called to offer themselves to God in praise and worship, always giving thanks for his glory. They likewise devote their energies to sharing with the human family the fruits of redemption. They serve God by their life of prayer and surrender to divine grace, and by their compassionate attention to the needs of all their brothers, and sisters. Guided by the Word of God, they witness to the liberating action of Christ and bring hope to humanity in its struggle for true freedom.

V. The Lord of the church calls his people to be holy in the totality of their lives. The people of God are assisted in their response to this call by their ordained ministers (priests). Our discussions revealed to us that the basic functions of our clergy are the same, namely, to announce the good news of Christ, to interpret the Scriptures, to exhort the faithful to live in *agape*, to lead the people in prayer, to invite the faithful to meet the Lord in the sacraments, to preside at the eucharistic worship, to exercise pastoral care, to develop Christian education, and to administer the parish. Furthermore, the ordained attempt, in ecumenical dialogue, to arrive at a vision of Christian truth which will establish the authority of this truth within the whole fellowship of the disciples of Christ. They must give special attention to the specific needs of our day: the promotion of peace and reconciliation within and among families, races, classes and nations. Often at the cost of their own comfort they must show compassion for those who suffer, provide assistance to the needy, defend the victims of oppression, and participate in the struggle to achieve political, social and economic justice.

VI. The responsibilities of the ordained ministers have been performed in multiform ways through the centuries, but the fundamental purpose has remained the same: to be instruments of the Spirit in symbolizing and actualizing the community's holiness, apostolicity, catholicity and unity. No one of these four notes of the church can be understood apart from the others. The church's holiness must be seen in relation to its apostolicity, for it stands in continuity with the new age first experienced in the apostolic church. Nor can it be understood apart from its catholicity and unity. Within the church, the Spirit seeks to transform and unify Christians with one another. Through the church the Spirit reaches out to transform and unify the whole human family and all realms of society by his gracious power: the collegial exercise of ministerial oversight of the church's holiness should thus be a reminder and a symbol of the church's unity in the service of the Gospel.

VII. Ordination is a sacramental act by which the church recognizes and authenticates the Spirit's call of certain persons to fulfill the particular functions enumerated above. Accordingly, the

church prays that the Spirit impart the gift of grace for the fulfilling of its ministers' apostolic stewardship. The Spirit holds up the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the source and norm of ministerial service and contemplation. As High Priest, he sanctifies them and their actions by his continued empowering presence. We agree that there is no difference between the holiness of the ordained and that of the whole people of God. The minister's manner of being and acting should, from that fact, be in harmony with his or her high calling to be a symbol of the church's holiness, apostolicity, catholicity, and unity. The clergy knows its own frailty and dependence upon the whole company of the faithful. Its members can therefore live out their call to holiness in fellowship with one another and with the people whom they serve.

VIII. The Catholic and United Methodist traditions, in different ways and with different stresses, have both insisted upon the ordained minister's duty to lead a holy life in the service of the Lord. The minister of the word and sacraments, in addition to directing prayer and preaching about it, must be a person of prayer whose life is marked by simplicity and humility.

In the Catholic tradition, celebrating the eucharist usually has been identified as the chief source of spiritual strength for bishops and presbyters. Their mode of access to the means of Christian holiness, however, should not set them apart from the people they serve. Also, a commitment to lifelong celibacy as a means to service has been regarded as a means to holiness, although it is not cited as an absolute in recent official reports to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Deacons, bishops and presbyters are committed to approachability, not aloofness or privilege.

In The United Methodist tradition, ordained ministers are required to make an earnest and visible commitment to the pursuit of Christian perfection, in the expectation that the Spirit would empower their growth into holiness of life. In its finest expression this love for God and neighbor has taken the form of challenging the evils of one's time and of meeting the pressing needs of one's contemporaries. If this pattern has sometimes tended to degenerate into a legalizing moralism replacing the disciplined freedom of the Christian individual, it has in general served to remind United Methodist Christians of God's sovereign, sanctifying purpose. Personal restraint has been a constant characteristic. This ministry is open to men and women, married and single persons. The means to Christian holiness in the life of a United Methodist minister are not as specified as those of a Catholic minister, although some daily life of prayer and devotion is assumed. In the past it has often had an individual character and is only now becoming identified as communal or ecclesial.

These examples of holiness patterns so briefly provided are not intended as counters to play one against another. While the means of Christian holiness are or have been quite different in the two traditions, the end for both is that perfection which is love for God and neighbor. We join in seeking new modes of expression to that end.

IX. The forms of Christian holiness have necessarily been influenced by the diverse cultures in the many places in which the church has taken root. Today, various African and Asian religious traditions are making claims on the modes of expressing Christian faith and life. Along with other Christians who live in these places, Catholics and United Methodists are seeing that adaptations to indigenous cultures are indispensable if faith in Christ is to be a religious reality for all peoples. Likewise, in both hemispheres the rapid changes occurring in technological

societies create new problems for persons seeking authentic holiness of life. Ministers need the gift to discern in their situations the signs of the Spirit's direction of the human quest for a more spiritually abundant and holy life.

X. The ministers and members of the church should take a positive interest in all contemporary paths to Christian holiness. The spiritual realm, in traditional Christian speech, relates to God's Spirit and his action on the human community and the individual human spirit. The present age is marked by many characteristics not always easily reconcilable. Among them are a widespread search for personal authenticity, a return to simple ways of living, the investigation in depth of human motives, and the adoption of practices like fasting and meditation, often without any reference to Christianity. Such manifestations of the power of the human spirit are to be viewed positively so long as the danger of bondage to the elements of this world is discerned. Christian ministers should be alert to the human potential for good (as for evil) and should share in the struggle for justice against poverty and oppression, as well as for the liberation and full equality of both sexes. In no case may a thing that is good for humanity be impugned by those serving in Christian ministry or preparing for it. At the same time, every striving of the human spirit must be subjected to God's Spirit if it is to prosper as contributing to the reign of God.

XI. Ministerial authority needs to be conceived and practiced as service, not as dominion. Its chief characteristic will be an evident solidarity between ministers and those to whom they minister. For example, the poor and other oppressed should be joined in the struggle against the evils of an oppressive society. Frequently, the need is to identify and attack corporate evil: the demonic spirit of power embedded in institutions, such as the unbridled amassing of wealth and its concomitants of war and economic exploitation. The holiness of the individual, whether minister or lay person, is no sufficient answer to the evil operating in institutions.

XII. A simple way of life best befits Christian ministers, who cannot escape completely the social or individual evils they are bound by. Simplicity may go to the extreme of poverty; poverty, however, is creative only when it is voluntarily chosen or accepted. Ministry, after all, is a service, not a servitude. Therefore, neither ostentatious consumption nor an inequitable return for services fittingly characterizes the minister of the gospel.

XIII. The commitment of our traditions to the holiness of the Church and of its ministers carries with it the danger of falling into hypocrisy or arrogance. Much of the modern world reacts negatively to the assertion of the holiness of the church because of its apparent hypocrisy. Hence the need to emphasize that real compassion and true humility are an integral part of holiness. If they are honest, the church's ministers will acknowledge that they share the anguish of men and women who, like them, are unable to live up to the Gospel and to achieve in themselves the holiness to which they aspire.

XIV. There is great urgency in today's world for mankind's needs and awesome earthly powers to be challenged by moral and humane values. A central part of the church's mission is to facilitate that process. Ministers should be at the forefront of this movement, helping to allow the realities of this world to be directed and transformed by placing them at the service of Christ. In a world marked by growing separation of the secular and the religious and by the conflict of peoples against peoples and class against class, the ordained ministry should be an example of

wholeness. Essential to this wholeness is the recognition of the importance of the role of women in the church. Such concern encompasses the need of the two churches to work toward full utilization of and respect for women in all forms of ministry.

XV. As it is only in Christ that the church is holy, ministers will manifest the church's holiness in their own spirituality only if they live their lives as a gift from Christ and as a task for Christ. As they discover the Lord deeper in their own lives, they will find new strength for their service and new joy in their calling.

XVI. In the course of our dialogue we have become keenly aware that our two churches share much common ground. We have attempted to articulate afresh those common elements and convictions about the role the ordained ministry plays in the service of the holiness to which God calls his people. Our report is offered to the many persons in our two churches--as well as to the many beyond them - who sense a need to formulate and to live a spirituality that is both faithful to the gospel and appropriate to our time.

Implicit in this consensus statement is indebtedness to the ecumenical impetus provided by the Second Vatican Council; awareness that mutual criticism of ecclesiologies is necessary if the form of the church is to remain secondary in importance to the Spirit of its Lord; commitment to the Idea that Christian Unity is not an end in itself; commitment to the value of ecumenical honesty and clarity; rejoicing at convergences and mutual growth and a sense of the unique opportunity that has been afforded the participants. The sense of excitement and joy which frequently has been the experience of those who have contributed to this statement is not easily communicated in writing. It can be found, however, by those who will in the same spirit engage in their own dialogues and in "collaboration according to conscience." Hope fully, others will be enticed to an increase in holiness of heart and life which would further the pastoral need yet to be met adequately by our churches.

Footnotes

1. Begun by the former Commission on Ecumenical Affairs and continued since 1972 by the Ecumenical & Interreligious Concerns Division, Board of Global Ministries (EICD).
2. Bishops Commission on Ecumenical & Interreligious Affairs (BCEIA).
3. In the United Methodist Church, through several commissions on the ministry authorized by the General Conferences of 1964, 1968 and 1972, the nature of the ministry has been probed. In particular, these commissions have contributed important data and reflection on the questions related to ordination. The current studies are examining the relationships between ordination and the connectional polity of appointing clergy to pastoral and other ministry posts.

In the Roman Catholic Church the Synod of Bishops addressed the subject of the ministerial priesthood in 1971. This followed the earlier papal encyclical of 1967 and the (U.S.) National Conference of Catholic Bishops' statement of 1969, and the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education's document of 1974, all on the celibacy of priests. In 1972, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops received the results of weighty studies of the Catholic priesthood from sociological, historical and psychological but not

theological perspectives. One of these studies concentrated entirely on the spirituality of the ordained ministers of the church.

Appendix: Roman Catholic-United Methodist Statement

The dialogues of the Roman Catholic and United Methodist churches that have eventuated in this consensus statement had their inception at the Vatican Council II in 1965. The first actual dialogue was held in 1966. It is appropriate that a decade later, during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, this particular agreement is published.

In the years of our conversations, a number of significant and mutual stereotypes have been dissipated, unexpected areas of strong agreement uncovered, old areas of conflict examined more dispassionately and some new areas for discussion discovered.

Initially, our conversation teams consisted of a broad spectrum of bishops, clergy in pastoral offices, nuns, professors and a variety of lay men and women. The topics ranged rather widely at first, with positive results in the development of personal relationships, but the diffusion of subject matter did not produce published material. The papers for these earlier sessions are being collected and edited for modest distribution to seminary libraries and others who may be interested, though the authors of most did not intend them for publication. Some of the key topics in earlier discussions were: "Salvation Faith and Good Works", "The Spirit in the Church and in Individuals", "Government Aid for Church Related Elementary and Secondary Schools", "Shared Convictions on Education". (This last discussion resulted in a request to the parent bodies of bishops that a national conference on religious concerns and the education crisis be called.) Next, the dialogue teams examined selected ecumenical documents. At the October 1969 session, papers were given appraising several documents of the Second Vatican Council and on United Methodist views on "Church, Salvation, Sacraments and Ministries", which provoked lively discussion and the development of potentially useful areas for future concentration.

A task force on the ministry growing out of this session met several times during 1970 and 1971. As a result of its labors, a new team of scholars met for their first session in February of 1972 with papers on "Some Observations on the Ministry in The United Methodist Church and the Spirituality of the Ordained Ministry" and "Problems of Ministry". Subsequent sessions of the team of six scholars and the co-chairing bishops and representative ecumenical staff officers concentrated on related topics as the overall theme was explored and developed systematically. Papers were read in 1972 and 1973 on "The Church Is Holy", "Concerning the Holiness of the Church", "The Holiness of the Church and Ministerial Holiness", "Holiness: Some Observations from the New Testament" and "Holiness and Ministry". The team's approach has not emphasized comparison studies of the two churches, but a common search of Scripture and history as they bear on the needs of the church and the world today. Subsequent sessions in 1974 and 1975 have been devoted to the formulation of the document above. The final draft was approved in October 1975.

Since 1971, the team of scholars has been led by Roman Catholic Bishop James Malone of Youngstown, Ohio, and by United Methodist bishops Paul A. Washburn of Minneapolis (1971 and 1972) and James K. Mathews of Washington, D.C. (1972 onward). Father John Hotchkin

and the Rev. Dr. W. Huston have been the enabling ecumenical officers. Those who have served on the team include:

Methodist Members: Bishop James K. Mathews, Bishop Paul A. Washburn, Dr. John B. Cobb, Jr., Dr. Arthur Core, Dr. John W. Deschner, Dr. John Godsey, Dr. Robert W. Huston, Dr. James Logan, Dr. Paul M. Minus, Jr., Reverend Susan Morrison, Dr. J. Robert Nelson, Dr. Joseph Weber, and Dr. James Will.

Catholic Members: Bishop James W. Malone, Reverend Edward Ciuba, Reverend John Ford, Reverend Ernest Fortin, Reverend John F. Hotchkin, Reverend Carl Moeddel, Reverend J. Peter Sheehan, Reverend Gerard S. Slogan, and Reverend Georges Tavard.