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ORDAINED MINISTRY IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

An Analysis of Documents on the Ordained
Ministry Commissioned by the
General Council of the United Church of Canada
Between 1925 and 1980

Submitted by
Georgina Fitzgerald
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
St. Paul University



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PRECIS

An abundance of material has been produced by the United Church on the subject of the ordained ministry. After the first major report on the ordained ministry in 1926 there were a number of reports on aspects of the ordained ministry, but no major study was done until On a Functional Ministry was produced in 1954. This report dealt in detail with how the church, and particularly its ordained ministry, could address the technological and industrial conditions of the 1950's. On a Functional Ministry was followed by an in depth look at the ordained ministry in the Commission on Ordination of 1962. Each of these reports is consistent with the United Church's traditional understanding of the ordained ministry as it is found in Article 17 of the Basis of Union.

The 1968 report on The Ministry in the Twentieth Century, on the other hand, indicates a marked loss of appreciation for the importance and distinctiveness of the role of the ordained ministry.

While the 1974 Task Force on Ministry Report, produced during a period of intense negotiation on union between the Anglican and United Churches, confessed its desire not to make

any recommendations that would impede the union process, the 1977 Task Force on Ministry operated with no such caution. The understanding of the nature of the ordained ministry found in the second Task Force Report was dissimilar to the understanding of the ministry presented in the Basis of Union. The Task Force Committee acknowledged the high level of frustration within their own group as persons with diverse views interacted with each other. The report itself shows evidence of the breadth of opinion it represented by presenting at various points in the document different, and in some cases contradictory, viewpoints.

The Task Force on Ministry (1977) was circulated across the United Church. A Steering Committee named Project: Ministry was asked to study the church's response to this report and to make their own recommendations. While Project: Ministry is less radical than the study on which it was asked to comment, it shares with the Task Force on Ministry a concern to empower the laity.

All of the United Church's studies on ministry acknowledge the role of the laity in the church's ministry. The Ministry in the Twentieth Century, however, is the first document to question the necessity for an ordained ministry in the church or to suggest that this ministry may be detrimental to the church's welfare if, because of its focal position, it impedes the ministry of the laity. The Ministry in the Twentieth

Century recommends that the church continue to "ordain" those who play an enabling function in the church but the understanding of ordination it presents is far removed from ordination's traditional meaning in the United Church or in the Reformed tradition generally.

While On a Functional Ministry recommended that the church consider changes in the way it exercised its ministry so that the church could be more responsive to the heavily industrialized and technological context of the 1950's, the kind of changes which the Commission on The Ministry in the Twentieth Century advocate are more basic. The Commission, although in the final analysis it suggested that the United Church continue to order its life by retaining the ordained ministry, admits that the abolition of that ministry was one of the changes it had considered.

The 1977 Task Force Report expresses many of the same sentiments found in The Ministry in the Twentieth Century. It presents a mainly functional understanding of this ministry, and creates opposition between clergy and laity via the suggestion that the laity have been prevented from realizing their ministry because of the status accorded the ordained ministry and the focal role this ministry plays in the church.

Project: Ministry, in contrast, affirms the distinctiveness of the ordained ministry and its essential role in the church while at the same time emphasizing that there is

only one ministry in the church "the ministry of Jesus Christ" in which both lay and ordained participate.

What is noticeable in an examination of the United Church's two most controversial reports, The Ministry in the 20th Century and the 1977 Task Force on Ministry is that, other than a belief in the "servanthood" model of the ordained ministry and in the fact that this ministry must be carried out in mutuality with the ministry of the laity, nothing, including the existence of the ordained ministry itself, is considered normative. These two reports, in particular, indicate that there is a group of significant size in the United Church which distrusts the ordained ministry, and a smaller but equally vocal group which would like to do away with it altogether.

While one may be surprised by the radical nature of some of the reports on ministry commissioned by the General Council, one must also note that none of the more controversial reports were accepted in total by the General Council. The United Church's official statement on the nature of the ordained ministry remains the theologically traditional, and more ecumenically acceptable, Article 17 of the Basis of Union, a statement affirmed by the First General Council in 1925.

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It is widely recognized within the United Church that the subject of ordained ministry is one surrounded by confusion and contradiction. The following statements are among numerous examples which support this claim:

In early meetings it seemed impossible that consensus could ever be achieved on such basic questions as: the nature of the church's ministry; the meaning and validity of ordination; the recognition by the church of certain specialized and non-ordained ministries... there was talk of the need for a minority report to reflect the diverse positions that were held.

From The Ministry in the Twentieth Century (1968)

Referring to their view that within the United Church ordained ministers should be ordained "to specific functions not to a special status", the Task Force on Ministry comments:

It remains unclear, however, just what those functions should be at this point in time.

From the Task Force on Ministry (1974)

Speaking of the reaction they had received from many groups and individuals within the church who were responding to the Task Force on Ministry 1974 Report, the authors of the 1977 Task Force report state that it had become evident to them that:

There are many different and often contradictory understandings of ministry within the United Church of Canada.

From the Task Force on Ministry (1977)

The United Church of Canada has always been noted for incorporating within its theology and polity a wide spectrum of beliefs and practices. One example of this is in the church's understanding of ministry. This has made it very difficult for any group to

speak for the whole church.

From the Preface to Project: Ministry (1980)

Over the years the United Church has engaged in a series of studies related to ordained ministry and its meaning. Each of these has given some consideration to the significance of ordination but none has made a definitive statement about what the United Church of Canada believes about this rite, and the statements in the various reports have, at times, been contradictory.

From An Historical Analysis of Ordination, Ministry, Personnel and Education, Paper #3, by Howard Mills (1983)

In an address to the meeting of the Montreal and Ottawa Conference given during the service of ordination in June of 1987, Donald Rabson, the president of the Conference, remarked:

If you have 800 United Church members together, you will probably find 799 different meanings of ordination.

This statement, while exaggerated, conveys the spirit of the situation surrounding the United Church's understanding of ordained ministry.

To deal with this situation the United Church has commissioned a number of studies on the ordained ministry. According to Dr. Howard Mills, presently the Secretary of the General Council of the United Church of Canada:

There has been almost no period when the United Church has not been studying and frequently agonizing about the matter of ordination and its relation to ministry. The years are dotted with commissions, reports, petitions, memorials, task forces and consultations focused upon one or another aspect of ministry. In virtually every case the church's understanding and practice of ordination has been

either front and centre or lurking in the wings.¹

Professor David Newman similarly states:

For nearly two decades "ministry" and "ordination" have been subjects of intense study in the United Church. The reports produced have been accepted in whole or in part, accepted in principle, affirmed for further study, sent back for revision or simply laid to rest. It is hard to assess the outcome of this long and rather tangled process.²

Although no major study of ministry has taken place in the United Church since Project: Ministry was completed in 1980, in 1988 a committee made up of a lay person with some training in theology, a diaconal minister and an ordained minister was asked by the Division of Ministry, Personnel and Education to produce a concise definition of ministry, including, but not limited to, the ordained ministry. This committee met on an irregular basis over the next 18 months. The definition which it produced was presented to the annual meeting of the Division of Ministry, Personnel and Education but did not receive the approval of the Division.³

The official definition of ministry in the United Church

¹ Howard MILLS, Ordination in the United Church of Canada, An Essay in Historical Analysis, MP&E Paper #3. (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 1983), p. 1.

² David NEWMAN, "Ordination in the United Church of Canada," An Essay in Liturgical Theology, Toronto Journal of Theology, (Toronto: Vol 2, # 1, April, 1986), p. 94.

³ Had a definition satisfactory to the Division been formulated, it would have been recommended to the General Council as a replacement for Article 17 of the Basis of Union.

of Canada remains Article 17 of the Basis of Union which reads as follows:

We believe that Jesus Christ as the Supreme Head of the Church, has appointed therein a ministry of the Word and sacraments, and calls men and women to this ministry; that the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit chooses those whom he calls and should thereupon duly ordain them to the work of the ministry.⁴

The PURPOSE of this thesis is to determine why the United Church has encountered difficulty in producing an official statement of its understanding of ordained ministry. In order to do this the attempts which the United Church has made in this direction, through the studies it commissioned on the subject of ordained ministry, will be examined. The intent of this examination is to determine whether there is anything in the theological content of these reports, or in the process which produced them, which accounts for the problematic nature of the ordained ministry question within the United Church of Canada.

The INTRODUCTION to the paper will include an outline of the paper's perimeters, language and methodology. CHAPTER ONE will involve a brief analysis of the MINISTRY section of the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry document produced by the Faith

⁴ The Basis of Union was accepted as the United Church's foundational statement of doctrine and polity in 1925. Article 17 was amended to read: "and calls men and women to this ministry" in 1936.

and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches in Lima, Peru in 1982.⁵ The understanding of the ordained ministry presented in the Lima statement will provide the hermeneutical framework within which the United Church's documents will be examined.

CHAPTER TWO of the paper will consider the context in which the United Church was created and the understanding of ordained ministry which existed in the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian churches, the three founding denominations of the United Church of Canada. The creation of the Basis of Union, the foundational statement of theology and polity on which the United Church of Canada was built, will be discussed.

CHAPTER THREE will examine the studies on ministry which the United Church commissioned between the years 1925 and 1980. The examination of each of these studies will be concise due to the amount of material to be covered. The purpose of this paper is not to present an in depth analysis of the individual studies but to use them as a source for tracing the United Church's development in its understanding of ordained ministry. Each of the studies will, therefore, be approached from a structuralist perspective with the emphasis being placed on the

⁵ This document will be most commonly referred to throughout the paper by its acronym BEM. All references to BEM apply only to the MINISTRY section of that document.

content of the study rather than on factors which influenced, or resulted from, its production. A summary of the study will be followed by a brief analysis which will conform to the major points addressed by BEM. The analysis will also include references to the United Church's official statement on ministry found in its Basis of Union, as well as references to previous studies on ministry. The writer's own critique will be incorporated into the analysis.

This section will also contain a brief review of the ordination of women debate which took place in the United Church between 1926 and 1936, and of the Plan of Union developed by the Anglican and United Churches in the 1970's as the basis for their prospective union.

CHAPTER FOUR will use the information gained in the previous chapter to determine what factors in the United Church's theology, and in the process through which it arrives at its doctrinal positions, account for the unsettled nature of the ordained ministry question. It will also present a brief overview of how the United Church's position on the ordained ministry has affected its relationships with other Christian denominations. This chapter will conclude with a look at the present state and future direction of the subject of ordained ministry in the United Church of Canada.

2. TERMINOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY

A. Perimeters

The paper will deal with those studies which have been commissioned by the General Council of the United Church on ministry as they deal specifically with the ordained ministry.⁶ In the early period studies were commissioned with the ordained ministry as their sole focus. In later years, particularly from the 1960's on, the studies on ministry commissioned by General Council were broadened to include the ministry of the whole people of God, that is, both lay and ordained members of the church. In these later studies, only those sections which deal specifically with the ordained ministry will be examined.

The years 1925 and 1980 were chosen to provide the chronological perimeters of the paper. 1925 was chosen because it was the year in which the United Church of Canada was

⁶ The United Church's "ordered" ministry consists of the ordained ministry and the diaconal ministry. The choice of the ordained ministry as the focus of this paper does not imply that diaconal ministry is well understood in the United Church. Some would suggest that the United Church experiences more confusion in respect to the role of its diaconal ministry than it does in regard to its ordained ministry. The difficulties the United Church has experienced in coming to terms with the role of its diaconal ministers are, for the most part, different from the problems it has encountered in defining its ordained ministry. Since one dissertation could not deal adequately with both areas of ordered ministry, the writer chose to focus on one area only- the ordained ministry.

incorporated as a Protestant denomination within Canada; 1980 was chosen as the date for closure because it was the year in which the last major study on ministry commissioned by General Council was completed.⁷

B. Language

The writer will attempt to use language which is inclusive in gender. To accomplish this the personal pronoun will be used variously in the masculine or feminine, and sometimes together as "he or she". The language will not be inclusive, however, where inclusiveness would have been foreign to the original context. An example of the inappropriateness of inclusive language would be to refer to the ordination of men and women when discussing ordained ministry in the founding churches of the United Church, or in the United Church prior to 1936. A preference of referring to ordained ministers using the masculine gender will be noticeable until the writer begins to deal with documents produced after the 1960's. It was not until into the 1970's that the number of women entering the ordained ministry totalled more than ten per cent.

⁷ Project: Ministry was the last study which dealt with the ordained ministry in a significant manner. A major study on diaconal ministry was completed in 1983. The Division of Ministry, Personnel and Education also produced several studies which dealt with the ordained ministry but these studies were not directly commissioned by the United Church's General Council.

C. Methodology

In order to analyse the documents on ministry produced by the United Church, it is necessary to examine these documents within a particular hermeneutical framework, and it is important to name and define what this framework is for two reasons:

1. In order for the analysis of the United Church documents to be ordered and coherent, the same set of interpretive principles must be applied to each document in turn.

2. The hermeneutical principles being used to analyse the documents must themselves be visible so that the reader can judge their adequacy as a tool of interpretation.

In choosing an instrument which could act as an hermeneutical framework through which to examine the United Church's studies on ordained ministry, it was necessary to find a statement of theology which dealt in a significant manner with the subject of ordained ministry. It was also important that this document include references to the areas of christology, ecclesiology and pneumatology, areas the writer specifically wanted to address. The desire for objectivity in the examination of the United Church's documents made it preferable to choose an interpretative tool which rested on a

broader base than that provided by either the United Church alone, or by the Reformed tradition. A further consideration was that the hermeneutical framework chosen be of a sufficiently contemporary nature so that its language and ideas would not be totally disparate to the ethos of the United Church.

These factors, taken together, pointed in the direction of the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry statement of the World Council of Churches produced in Lima, in 1982. BEM's examination of the subject of ordained ministry included specific references to the themes of christology, ecclesiology and pneumatology. Its length allowed it to deal with its subject matter in sufficient detail yet without being unwieldy. As a document produced by the World Council of Churches, BEM provided a broad denominational base and was, therefore, able to bring to the analysis ideas that were not intrinsic to the documents it was being used to examine. Had, for example, a statement of theology of the Presbyterian or United Methodist churches been chosen, the degree of similarity between the documents being examined and the document providing the interpretative framework, would have limited the scope of the analysis.

The contemporary nature of the BEM document provided a point of contact in language and ideas between the majority of the United Church's studies and the document that was to act as

a grid through which these studies could be analyzed.⁸ BEM's use of terms such as "the whole people of God"(the laos), and its interest in concepts such as mutuality in ministry, and the need for ordained ministers to be socially and politically conscious of their environment, facilitated its use as a hermeneutical tool. BEM had the advantage of being neither too similar to the United Church's own approach to theology, nor too disparate from it. The differences between BEM and any one of the United Church's studies was more readily apparent precisely because of the similarities that existed between them. BEM's recognition of the laity's role in the ministry of the church, for example, allowed finer distinctions to be drawn in regard to what constituted the relationship between lay and ordained ministries in the United Church than would have been possible otherwise.

The fact that the United Church is a member of the World Council of Churches and, as such, was required to respond to the views on ordained ministry expressed in the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry document, confirmed BEM's usefulness.

The following reasons lend further support to the selection of BEM as the interpretative guide through which to

⁸ The majority of studies analysed in this paper are of the post 1950 era. It is apparent that as early as its 1954 report On a Functional Ministry, the United Church is using concepts that relate to the ministry of the "whole people of God" even where that term is not directly used.

examine the United Church's studies on ordained ministry:

1. The scholarship behind the production of the BEM document includes some of the best theological minds each denomination had to offer, and it is based on a process of reflection to which the member denominations of the Faith and Order Commission had dedicated themselves for more than fifty years.

2. The tone of the BEM document is one of challenge and openness. The member denominations of the Faith and Order Commission sought to produce a document which would challenge each denomination to look anew at its understanding of ministry in light of BEM. BEM is a creative document inviting reflection and response and, through its open and non-judgmental tone, providing opportunity for further dialogue. BEM is not legalistic and this makes it particularly useful in examining documents produced by the United Church, a church which rejects any appearance of legalism.

3. BEM is hopeful. It holds out to the Christian church the possibility that one day, perhaps sooner than had been anticipated, all denominations in the family of Christ will be able to celebrate the eucharist together because they recognize the validity of each other's orders of ministry. While BEM favours visible unity among the churches, it tempers this vision with the more realistic expectation that a recognition of each other's ministries and the sharing of the eucharistic

meal, are realizable goals for the foreseeable future.⁹

4. BEM is widely recognized within the Christian community as a significant step in ecumenical dialogue and goodwill, and as a document worthy of thoughtful study and response. The United Church of Canada, as a member denomination of the World Council of Churches, was one of the churches which examined and responded to BEM.

⁹ Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry, FAITH AND ORDER Paper No. 111, (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), pp. ix-x.

CHAPTER ONE

BAPTISM, EUCHARIST AND MINISTRY

1. AN OVERVIEW OF THE LIMA DOCUMENT

In order to elicit the major points which BEM makes in presenting its understanding of the ordained ministry, a schema will be used which defines the task under four headings:

- A. The Place of the Ordained Ministry in the Church
- B. The Tasks and Forms of the Ordained Ministry in the Church
- C. The Meaning of Ordination
- D. The Mutual Recognition of the Ordained Ministries

A The Place of the Ordained Ministry in the Church

1.¹

Since BEM is being used to provide a hermeneutical framework in which to study the United Church's documents on ordained ministry, it is important to understand the hermeneutical framework out of which BEM itself operates. In its introductory section, the Lima document states that its text is the result of a long process of reflection on major issues of ecumenical concern by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. It refers specifically to the understanding of Tradition produced by the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order held in Montreal in 1963. This Conference defined "Tradition" (written with a capital 'T'), as "the gospel itself, transmitted from generation to generation in and by the church, Christ himself present in the life of the church".² Tradition includes, therefore, the Old Testament record and the history of the Jewish people, the gospel announced by Christ, the original apostolic witness to that gospel and that apostolic witness as it was later preserved in the oral and written traditions of the church; it also includes the various traditions of the churches as they have

¹ The numbered sections which appear under the four headings refer to points similarly numbered in the Summary of BEM which is found at the end of this section.

² P. Rodger and L. Vischer, ed., The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, (Montreal, 1963), pp. 50-51.

incorporated the gospel in their own confessional contexts. The church's Tradition becomes a "living" reality because it is still Christ who, through the Spirit, announces the good news of the gospel.³

The Tradition of the church is subject to both divine and human influence and through the latter source it has admitted distortions which co-exist with the apostolic truth. This is especially evident in the "traditions" of the church, as various denominations have, for example, taken a certain aspect of ministry and effected changes to it which have been distortions of the original intention found in the apostolic tradition.

The authors of BEM chose not to approach the Tradition of the church via a discussion of confessional viewpoints. What they did, instead, was offer some reflection on "the common Christian Tradition".⁴ While this position recognizes the influence of scripture, it incorporates with equal appreciation the tradition of the church in the earliest period of its life. A special prominence is accorded by BEM to the period between the beginning of the Second century and the time of the church's first great denominational schism in the 11th century.

³ RODGER and VISCHER, The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, pp. 50-51.

⁴ BEM, p. ix.

BEM's relationship to Tradition suggests that its hermeneutical starting point can be found in an historical and somewhat static reality, rather than in one which is creative, contemporary and Spirit-led. The strength of this position for the production of a document such as BEM is that it takes the churches beyond their confessional traditions and provides a seemingly "objective" standard against which to judge the practice of the church's ministry today. Churches of the Reformed tradition which do not possess an episcopal ministry, for example, are reminded that this ministry is as much part of their early history as it is of the history of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. Its weakness, in the opinion of the Reformed churches, is that it takes a particular historical period and makes this period the standard for today.

This position, Reformed churches contend, denies the varied ordering of ministry clearly evident within the New Testament itself. It also fails to take account of the fact that the order of ministry which developed in the Second and Third centuries was occasioned by the specific circumstances of that era, circumstances which made an episcopal ministry necessary, and which may even have necessitated the development of the mono-episcopate. The hermeneutical starting point of the Lima document has also been criticized, by the United Church and other denominations, as one which does not allow sufficient room for the Spirit to act in the life of

the church today. In the view of these churches, it may be that the Spirit is leading the church to a new organization of ministry--one which is appropriate to the socio-political realities and the religious and cultural pluralism of this age.

2. Since Christ's mission has been entrusted to the church, which is called to "proclaim and prefigure the kingdom of God", the church has need of persons who can unify and build up the community while pointing "publicly and continually to its fundamental dependence on Jesus Christ".⁵ Because of this need "Christ continues through the Holy Spirit to choose and call persons into the ordained ministry".⁶ The Spirit equips such persons with the specific charisms which will enable them to carry out a ministry of leadership in the church. It is BEM's belief that the ministry of such persons, "who since very early times have been ordained, is constitutive for the life and witness of the church".⁷ The authors of the Lima text would also contend that, as a prerequisite to ecumenical success, such a ministry must continue to be "ordered" and empowered through the act of ordination.

3. BEM very clearly sets its vision of the ministry of the

⁵ Since BEM's MINISTRY section is laid out in 55 numbered articles, references to BEM will indicate the number of the article(s) being discussed. This reference, for example, is to Article 8.

⁶ BEM, 11.

⁷ BEM, 8.

church within the larger perspective of the calling of the whole people of God. All who follow Christ are called to participate in his ministry of loving service. This basic ministry of the whole people of God is prior to the specific call Christ extends to some of the laos to serve in the church's ministry of leadership--the ordained ministry.⁸

BEM expressed the opinion that in order for the Church's mission to be fulfilled ordained and lay members of the church must exist in a mutually supportive relationship.⁹ The laity are to be involved in the examination and authorization of those members of the church who believe themselves called to the ordained ministry. The community's involvement in the ordination process and their presence during the act of ordination point to the fact that the ordained ministry is Christ's gift to the community and has no existence apart from it. Through ordination the one being ordained is expressing a commitment to place his or her gifts at the disposal of the community while the community, for its part, commits itself to be open to the gifts brought to it by the one being ordained, and to support his or her ministry.¹⁰

Although BEM states that the ordained ministry has no

⁸ BEM 1-5.

⁹ BEM 12, 16.

¹⁰ BEM 44.

existence apart from the community it serves, this is not meant to suggest that the ordained ministry exists under the "ownership" of the community. The ministry of the laity and the ordained ministry exist in integral relationship to one another, but they are not to be equated with each other. Each of these ministries serves Christ and the church in its own way.

B The Tasks and Forms of the Ordained Ministry in the Church

1-4. While stating that the whole people of God is responsible for maintaining the church in the apostolic truth and ministry, BEM attributes a particular role in this regard to the church's ordained ministry. BEM also expresses the belief that the episcopal ministry can act as a safeguard for protecting the continuity of the church's apostolic tradition.¹¹ In the Lima text the ministry of the bishop is understood to act as a "sign, though not a guarantee, of the continuity and unity of the church", and its own orderly succession ensures that the episcopal ministry itself is kept within the apostolic faith.¹²

BEM acknowledges that the New Testament offers no single

¹¹ BEM 35, 36, 37.

¹² BEM 37.

or universal pattern of ministry. It points out, however, that the church's ministry did develop into the threefold pattern of bishop, presbyter and deacon early on and that this was the established pattern by the second and third century. This pattern, which served to protect the apostolicity of the church in the early centuries of its life can still, according to BEM, serve the church today, for the church continues to have need of the *episcopate* of the bishop, the pastoral function of the presbyter and the service ordination of the diaconal minister. A major question faced by the members of the Faith and Order Commission was whether it was necessary for the church to ensure the episcopal, pastoral and diaconal functions of ministry in the set pattern of bishop, presbyter and deacon.

BEM's answer appears to be that this is the case especially, but not only, because of the ecumenical concerns around this issue. The task of oversight of the church's ministers and ministry is best carried out, BEM believes, in the personalized *episcopate* of the bishop. A personal, rather than a conciliar, expression of the episcopal ministry is important, BEM states, "because the presence of Christ among his people can most effectively be pointed to by the person ordained to proclaim the gospel and call the community to serve the Lord in unity of life and witness".¹³ BEM accords to

¹³ BEM 26.

the episcopal minister the role of preserving the continuity and unity of the church in all its levels of expression. This ministry serves to connect the local ecclesial community to the wider church and vice versa. The episcopal ministry is also given specific responsibility in regard to the act of ordination because of its special role in preserving the apostolic teaching and ministry of the church, and because historically there have been safeguards around this ministry which have tried to ensure its legitimate succession in the apostolic ministry.¹⁴

The pastoral minister serves as "guardian of the faith" on the local level. He or she ensures the continuity and unity of the local congregation through the proclamation of the gospel, the celebration of the sacraments, the pastoral care, nurture and education of the ecclesial community, as well as through leadership in the church's evangelistic and social ministry to the secular community. Deacons, according to BEM, "exemplify the interdependence of worship and service in the church's life".¹⁵ They are involved in liturgy and Christian education within the congregation, as well as in a ministry of service within and outside the church.

BEM clearly states that each of these three forms of

¹⁴ BEM 20, 38, 39.

¹⁵ BEM 31.

ministry should "be exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way".¹⁶ Bishops must not be "overlords" operating in an authoritarian manner or in isolation. Instead, they should share in a collegial ministry with the presbyters in their area. Presbyters must interact with the community they serve involving members of the local congregation in the church's ministry and in decisions affecting its life. A communal dimension is important to the diaconal ministry so that even when this ministry is exercised as a service ministry outside the church, the deacon is involved, and has support from a worshipping community, and members of the community have the opportunity to share in this service ministry in some capacity. Deacons also require the collegial support of fellow deacons, presbyters, and the episcopal minister.

C. The Meaning of Ordination

1. God calls the "whole of humanity to be God's people", BEM states in the opening remarks of its MINISTRY section.¹⁷ Since, however, the church which is called to announce the gospel in word and deed, must be continually built up, and kept

¹⁶ BEM 26.

¹⁷ BEM 1.

in the apostolic truth, God has appointed a special ministry in it to give leadership in the tasks which are necessary to preserve its unity and apostolicity. The ordained ministry has been instituted to serve this purpose. Through Christ and the Spirit, God calls "some" members of the laos to this ministry. The church, in Christ's behalf, tests and acknowledges this call and then appoints for service those who have been called to this ministry by Christ. The authorization and appointment of the ordained ministry takes place through an action of the community referred to as ordination. While the community's involvement in the ordination process is fully acknowledged, according to BEM it is Christ who is the "true ordainer", and it is the Holy Spirit who empowers the one being ordained enabling him to fulfil the ministry to which he has been called. In the Lima document the ordained ministry rests on a Trinitarian foundation.¹⁸

2. While not stating directly that the ordained ministry is a sacrament, BEM does, on a number of occasions, speak of its place in pointing to Jesus Christ and in representing his presence to the community.¹⁹ BEM remarks that the very presence of the ordained ministry in the church is a reminder "of the ministry of Christ". The Lima text also speaks of the

¹⁸ BEM 5, 7, 8, 39.

¹⁹ BEM 8, 11.

ordained minister as embodying the "deep and all-embracing communion between Christ and the members of his body" through the role s/he plays in the celebration of the eucharist.²⁰ It further remarks that the presence of an ordained ministry in the church signifies that God continues "to enter sacramentally into contingent, historical forms...and uses them for his purpose".²¹

It should be noted, however, that while there is a strong sacramental sense evident in the BEM document with words such as "sign", "signify", "represent", "express", "point to" being used to describe the ordained ministry's relationship to Jesus Christ and its task within the church, BEM is careful never to present this in such a way that it explicitly carries with it the notion of the sacrament as an 'efficacious' sign.²² Readers of the Lima document, depending on whether they come from a Catholic/episcopal background or a Protestant/evangelical one, have the option of interpreting the representative role of the ordained ministry in the stricter Catholic sense or in its broader Protestant usage.

BEM's ambiguous treatment of the sacramental aspect of the ordained ministry has received criticism from those churches

²⁰ BEM 14.

²¹ BEM 43.

²² Joseph EAGAN, "Ordained Ministry in BEM - A Theological Critique" in The Ecumenical Review, 36(1984), p. 267.

which believe the ordained ministry is a sacrament, and from those churches which reject a sacramental understanding of the ordained ministry. Both groups appear to have taken BEM's quasi-sacramental position as more representative of the "other side" than of their own. It may be that BEM's position on the sacramental nature of the ordained ministry is a pragmatic effort to appease those churches which hold strongly to a sacramental understanding of ordination while at the same time not offending those churches which do not share this view.

It is also possible that the understanding of the sacramental nature of the ordained ministry presented in BEM is, in fact, a legitimate reflection of the views of its authors.²³ Although no direct challenge is issued, the question of the sacramentality of the ordained ministry may be one issue, along with an episcopally ordered ministry, on which BEM is challenging the churches. The authors of the Lima text may be inviting the churches to reflect on whether their traditional position in regard to this question is an "overstatement" or an "understatement" of the sacramental dimension of the ordained ministry. As with other aspects of BEM, the reader can only surmise as to what is genuine theological theory and what is a complexly negotiated theological compromise.

²³ This suggests that the authors of BEM did not strictly mirror the confessional positions of the churches they represented.

3. BEM roots the authority of the ordained ministry in Jesus Christ, and goes so far as to suggest that this authority is conveyed by the Spirit to the one being ordained during the ordination rite. BEM is careful, however, to emphasize that this authority does not belong to the ordained minister as if it were his or her personal possession. Ordained members of the church have authority only in relation to the role of service they perform in and for the community. The Lima text describes the nature of the authority granted to the ordained minister as one of responsibility and servanthood, and states clearly that the ordained minister's authority is not to be exercised in an arbitrary manner but must involve the "cooperation of the whole community".²⁴

4/5. The Lima text suggests that the ordination rite should continue to take place, as it has historically, within the context of a service of worship, particularly of the eucharistic celebration. It is important that the community be present to signify their role in "setting apart" those being ordained to this particular service in the community's life.

The act of ordination should include the *epiclesis*- the prayer invoking the Spirit and the laying on of hands which signifies the incoming of the gift of the Spirit to the one

²⁴ BEM 15.

being ordained. Through the act of ordination, the ordained is both authorized by the community, and empowered by the Spirit, for the new role he or she is to fill in the church. In BEM's understanding of ordination this act is more than a symbol of a prior personal call of Christ which has led the one being ordained to seek this action, and certainly more than the community's authorization of this call. While acknowledging God's freedom to empower or not to empower, the Lima document affirms the understanding of ordination as an "efficacious" sign. It is BEM's belief that the empowerment of the Spirit which is pointed to in the words and gestures of the ordination service is actually taking place as these words and gestures are enacted.²⁵

The authors of the Lima document believed that an orderly transmission of the ordained ministry was important because it acted as a "powerful expression of the continuity of the church throughout history...and underlines the calling of the ordained minister as "guardian of the faith".²⁶ They also believed that the episcopal ministry should bear primary responsibility for the act of ordination because of the focal role this ministry plays in signifying the unity of the church and the succession of the apostolic teaching and ministry.

²⁵ BEM 39, 43.

²⁶ BEM 35.

D. The Mutual Recognition of the Ordained Ministries

It is a deep concern for unity among the churches which motivated the members of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches to produce the document Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. The authors of BEM ask all the churches to examine their ministries in light of the understanding of ministry presented in BEM. Their hope is that such an examination will lead the churches to reflect on what is fundamental to the nature and exercise of ministry in their own denomination and in the church catholic.

1. BEM believed that such an examination should lead the churches to consider to what degree the exercise of ministry in their own denomination has conformed to its original intentions. It is possible, BEM suggests, that churches may find that in practice they have not been entirely faithful to their stated theology of ministry, or to the original practice of ministry within their denomination.²⁷ When a church finds itself in this situation in regard to a particular issue, it may then begin to "purify" the theology or practice surrounding this issue based, not on any outside pressure--ecumenical or otherwise--but on its own desire to be faithful to its original intention.

²⁷ BEM 51.

2. BEM contends that some of the issues which presently are barriers to the mutual recognition of ministries are not substantive enough to keep the churches apart indefinitely. According to the authors of the Lima text, there may be changes which can take place in regard to a certain belief or practice within a denomination which may mean the loss of a long-standing tradition but yet not require the sacrifice of a fundamental principle. In this spirit, and stating that the mutual recognition of ministries will require "different steps...of different churches", BEM invites those churches which have not preserved the episcopate to consider whether this symbol of the church's unity and apostolicity merits recovery in their denomination.

In BEM's opinion non-episcopal denominations can make this change without seeing it as a judgment which implies that the present means of exercising episcopate within their denomination is defective. On the other side, BEM asks those churches which have retained the episcopal ministry to examine the manner in which they have exercised this ministry. It is possible that abuses may have occurred in their exercise of the episcopal ministry which will need to be corrected.²⁸

In their introductory remarks, the members of the Faith and Order Commission which produced BEM state their belief that

²⁸ BEM 25, 53.

"significant advances" in the movement toward visible unity among the churches "are possible...if we are sufficiently courageous and imaginative".²⁹ Whether in their own attempt to encourage such movement the authors of BEM were "sufficiently courageous and imaginative" is an open question. It is the writer's impression that, faced with the difficult task at hand, the authors of BEM allowed caution to rule the day.³⁰

2. THE UNITED CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO BEM

Responses to the Lima document were solicited from members of the United Church across Canada by the Secretary of the Division of Theology and Faith of the national church. These were studied by members of the Committee on Theology and Faith who handed on their information to the Executive of General Council. The Executive then held two meetings, each of several days duration, with BEM as their main focus of discussion. A preliminary response to BEM was submitted after the Executive's first meeting early in 1984 and the final response was submitted after the Executive's second meeting in

²⁹ Faith and Order Commission, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Paper No. 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), p. x.

³⁰ This impression does not bring with it any negative judgment. The writer is inclined to believe that caution was warranted.

the fall of the same year.³¹

Although the United Church expressed appreciation for the ecumenical motives of the Lima document, motives which the United Church itself historically shared, it did not give a predominantly positive response to BEM. Several major issues were identified by the United Church as problematic to their acceptance of the Lima document. One was the hermeneutic with which the United Church read the document. As a conciliar church, the United Church found it difficult to accept what it saw as the "decidedly hierarchical tone and perspective" of BEM, and it felt that this "tone" was particularly noticeable in BEM's MINISTRY section. The United Church did not believe that the involvement of the whole community was given sufficient support in this section. In its opinion more responsibility should be allotted to the community in regard to "decision making and the ordaining processes".³²

The second area of disagreement was with the Lima statement's discussion of the meaning of sacrament. It was

³¹ Although the United Church was open to hearing the comments of its constituency regarding BEM, the contact of the general membership of the United Church with the BEM document was slight. The United Church's response cannot, therefore, be taken to represent a 'grassroots' response. It is, in fact, the response of the General Council Executive which had received some input from other sources.

³² " A Working Draft for a Response from the United Church of Canada, to the WCC Commission on Faith and Order, with respect to the document titled Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry", (General Council Publication, 1985), p. 2.

the United Church's belief that Jesus' presence in the Spirit provided the basis for the meaning of any individual sacrament. In the eucharist, for example, Christ's presence is symbolized by the elements, "which point to Jesus as primal sacrament". The United Church did not believe, therefore, that the ordained person could act as a "visible focus" of the eucharist, representing Christ, when Christ himself was already present through the Spirit. The ordained person was, in its understanding, representative of the community not of Christ.³³

Another problem which the United Church had with the BEM document was "its lack of contemporaneity". The United Church from its own perspective tried to "live out its situation in a pluralistic and secular society". It did not see the Lima document as taking into account either the socio-political milieu of our era or the degree to which other religious faiths were impacting on the Christian faith.³⁴ One example given by the United Church to support this point was its recognition of a "male bias" throughout BEM. Although the United Church did express its appreciation for the "use of non-sexist language with regard to persons" in the Lima statement, it believed that descriptions of the deity should also be gender inclusive. In the opinion of the United Church BEM's waffling on the issue of

³³ Ibid., p. 2.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

the ordination of women was not appropriate at a time when, it believed, "an unambiguous statement affirming the ordination of women to all levels of ministry is required".³⁵

The United Church further complained that BEM did not give proper affirmation to the Christian church's heritage in Judaism. Its own view was that any ecumenical discussion should always involve the contemporary Jewish community.³⁶

The United Church's response also included a concern around the "Christocentrism" in BEM which implied that one can relate to God only through Jesus Christ. In the United Church's view this emphasis was not necessary for "we not only live in a world of varied Christian denominations, but of a plurality of religious traditions".³⁷

With particular reference to the MINISTRY section of BEM, the United Church believed that too much attention was paid to the ordained ministry leaving the impression that the "ordained" minister was "qualitatively different from the "lay" minister, and that the ministry of the ordained was more important to the church than the ministry of the laity. BEM's reference to the ordained ministry as "constitutive for the life and witness of the church" did not meet a positive

³⁵ Ibid., p. 9.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

response from those who were drafting an official response to BEM. In the opinion of the United Church it was one thing to grant the necessity of the leadership which the ordained ministry offers to the church, and "quite another thing to affirm that persons giving such leadership are more 'constitutive' of the church than those persons who use their gifts in other ways".³⁸

Despite the fact that the United Church has difficulty with BEM in regard to a number of issues, it expressed the belief that BEM could be "studied with profit by our church courts and by individual members of our denomination".³⁹ In effect, this thesis (written by a member of the United Church), is one way of profiting from a study of BEM while at the same time using BEM to assist the writer, and hopefully the reader, in profiting from a study of the United Church's own views on ordained ministry.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 9.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

3. SUMMARY

In order to facilitate an examination of the United Church's documents on the ordained ministry, material from the overview of BEM presented above is summarized below in point form under the four headings previously designated. Because of the amount of material contained in both BEM and in the documents on ministry produced by the United Church, the following summary will touch on only those points which are major themes in BEM.

The system of sub-titles and numbers which are provided under the headings of each of the four sections will make it easier for the reader to refer back and forth between BEM and the United Church document being examined. To avoid redundancy in the analysis following each United Church document, BEM's position will not always be stated directly. It is implied, however, through reference to the section and number in the "Summary".

The examination of the United Church documents will take place in chronological order relating to the points on the BEM "Summary". All sections in the "Summary" will be referred to in the analysis of each United Church report, but not all points under each section will be covered. When this is the case, the numbering in the analysis of the United Church study

will follow the order of the BEM "Summary"--for example, if the writer is addressing only points one, three and four of section III of the "Summary" when analysing a particular document, the numbering in the United Church document will read one, three and four instead of one, two and three. The reader will always be able to determine which point is being addressed by relating the section and number in the United Church study back to the same section and number in the "Summary" of BEM.

The numbers at the end of each paragraph are a cross reference to the article(s) in BEM which this point in the Summary addresses.

SUMMARY

A. The Place of the Ordained Ministry in the Church

1. HERMENEUTICAL POSITION: An understanding of the ordained ministry can only be determined by placing this issue in the context of how, according to God's will, the church's life is to be ordered.(6) For BEM the starting point for making this determination is found in scripture and in the tradition of the church, particularly its early tradition.⁴⁰

2. THE CONSTITUTIVE NATURE OF THE ORDAINED MINISTRY: "As Christ chose and sent the apostles, Christ continues through the Holy Spirit to choose and call persons into the ordained ministry".(11) Those chosen to be ordained ministers act as Christ's representatives to the community and remind the church that Jesus Christ as living Lord continues to be the source of its mission and unity. Because the ordained ministry exists by divine decree, and because its role is to nurture and build up the church, to protect and proclaim the apostolic faith, and to act as a focus of the church's unity, this ministry is "constitutive for the life and witness of the church".(8,11,12,13,35,39)

⁴⁰ BEM p. ix.

3. THE INTER-RELATION OF LAY AND ORDAINED MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH: ordained and lay members of the community are inter-related and interdependent; the ordained ministry requires the recognition, authorization and support of the community and has no existence apart from it.(12)

B. The Tasks and Forms of the Ordained Ministry in the Church

1. THE APOSTOLIC NATURE OF THE ORDAINED MINISTRY: while the primary manifestation of apostolic succession is to be found in the apostolic tradition of the church as a whole, the ordained ministry has the particular task of preserving and actualizing the apostolic faith and, in its role as "guardian of the faith", of ensuring the "continuity of the permanent characteristics of the church of the apostles..."(34,35)

2. THE THREEFOLD PATTERN OF MINISTRY AND THE EPISCOPAL MINISTRY: the historic threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon "may serve today as an expression of the unity" the churches seek, and "also as a means for achieving it".(22) The episcopal ministry, in particular, plays an important role in expressing and guarding the unity of the church by preserving the continuity of the apostolic teaching, and by maintaining an orderly transmission of the apostolic ministry through the church's ordained ministry. The episcopal functions of

"oversight, continuity and unity" are best served through the personalized episcopate of the bishop rather than through the presbyteral ministry, or the more dispersed episcopate of the presbyteral court.(23,24,29)

3. TASKS OF THE ORDAINED MINISTER: the chief responsibility of the ordained minister is to assemble and build up the body of Christ through proclamation and teaching, the celebration of the sacraments, and by guiding the church in its worship, mission and caring ministry.(13)

4. THE PERSONAL, COLLEGIAL AND COMMUNAL NATURE OF THE ORDAINED MINISTRY: the ordained ministry should be organized and exercised in such a way that it includes personal, collegial and communal dimensions.(26)

C. The Meaning of Ordination

1. THE TRINITARIAN NATURE OF THE ORDAINED MINISTRY: to enable the wider ministry of the church, God has appointed a special ministry in the church, and through Christ and the Spirit calls some members of the church to this ministry.(1,4,5,8,13) Ordination is the means through which the church recognizes those who have been appointed to this ministry. Although ordination is an action of the church, Christ himself is the "true ordainer".(39) The ordained

ministry rests on the same christocentric-pneumatological foundation as the church itself.(1-5,40)

2. THE SACRAMENTAL NATURE OF THE ORDAINED MINISTRY: although BEM does not state directly that the ordained ministry is a sacrament, it tends more toward the sacramental than the functional view of ordination. It speaks of the ordained minister serving as a representative of Christ to remind the community of "the divine initiative" and of its dependence on Jesus Christ;(11,12) it speaks of the ordained minister signifying Christ's "presidency" at the eucharist and thus embodying "the deep and all-embracing communion between Christ and the members of his body";(14) it refers to the imposition of hands during the act of ordination as a "sacramental sign", and to ordination as a sign "God...enters sacramentally into contingent, historical forms...and uses them for his purpose".(41,43)

3. THE AUTHORITY OF THE ORDAINED MINISTRY: the authority of the ordained ministry derives from Christ and the nature of this authority is responsibility and servanthood.(12)

4. ORDINATION AS A RITE OF EMPOWERMENT: through the words and actions of the ordination rite, particularly the imposition of hands and the use of the *epiclesis*, the community signifies its belief that God is acting through Christ and the Spirit to empower the one being ordained for the role he or she is to undertake.(39,43)

5. THE TRANSMISSION OF THE ORDAINED MINISTRY: because the ordained ministry has a special role in preserving the apostolic faith of the church, its orderly transmission can act as "a powerful expression of the continuity of the church throughout history".(35) To ensure such orderly transmission, BEM recommends that the act of ordination be carried out by the episcopal ministry whose own historical succession may act "as a sign, though not a guarantee, of the continuity and unity of the church".(37,38)

D. The Mutual Recognition of the Ordained Ministries

1. DENOMINATIONAL CLARIFICATION OF ORDAINED MINISTRY: churches must examine their understanding and practice of the ordained ministry in light of their stated theology and their initial practice of the ordained ministry.(51)

2. RECOVERY OF THE THREEFOLD PATTERN OF MINISTRY AND THE OFFICE OF BISHOP: the recovery, in those churches which have retained neither, of the historic threefold pattern of the ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon, including the recovery of the office of "bishop" as the form which episcopal ministry should take, will act as both a sign and a means to accomplish the mutual recognition of ministries within the church.(25,36-38)

CHAPTER TWO

THE ORIGINAL CONTEXT

1. THE BIRTH OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

All three of the churches which eventually formed the United Church of Canada were themselves uniting churches. The Methodists had brought together four different strands of Methodism in 1884, the Presbyterian Church in Canada was formed in 1875 when four different Presbyterian churches all having their roots in the Church of Scotland united, and the Congregational Union of Canada was brought into being in 1906 when the Congregational Union of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick united with the Congregational Union of Ontario and Quebec.¹

The idea of union was a familiar one to the Canadian context. By the time the United Church was inaugurated more than one thousand local unions had taken place throughout Canada. It is difficult, as a result, to trace the exact

¹ The Statement Concerning Ordination in the United Church of Canada, (Toronto: United Church of Canada, 1926), pp. 153, 246.

moment when the idea for a united church surfaced. Some would say that the spirit of unity which ultimately resulted in the formation of the United Church of Canada was expressed years before in 1899 during a meeting of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. At that meeting a committee was appointed to confer with representatives of other Protestant denominations to see if they could prevent the overlapping which was taking place in the home mission fields.² The Board of Missions of the Methodist Church appointed a similar committee and a plan for the two denominations to cooperate in the area of home missions was effectively worked out.

Credit for the first public expression of the idea of a nation-wide union among Protestant churches in Canada is generally given to Principal Patrick of Manitoba College who voiced the idea for such a union in 1902. Principal Patrick had been appointed by the Presbyterian General Assembly, which was meeting in Winnipeg in 1902, to bring greetings to the Methodist Church which was holding their national meeting in Winnipeg at the same time. At one point in his prepared speech Principal Patrick introduced into his remarks a spontaneous and passionate plea for the organic union of the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches in Canada. In response the Methodist Church passed a resolution favouring organic

² The Manual of the United Church of Canada, (Toronto:United Church Publishing House, Revised 1954), p. 6.

union among the Protestant churches of Canada. In their remarks, the Methodists noted that, "The Congregational, Presbyterian and Methodist Churches of Canada had been marked by a great deal of spiritual unity".³

The Methodists then appointed a committee composed of clergy and lay people to confer with similar union committees which the other denominations might set up. The following year, during the meeting of its General Assembly in Vancouver, the Presbyterian Church expressed interest in pursuing the idea of organic union and that same year, 1903, the Congregational Union of Ontario and Quebec formed a similar committee.⁴

The three union committees met for the first time in Toronto in April of 1904, and formed at that initial meeting a Joint Committee of Union. The Joint Committee, at the end of its meeting, issued a statement saying that in its opinion, "organic union was both desirable and practicable", and commending the idea to its denominations for positive response.⁵ The Joint Committee met next in December of 1904 and, at that meeting, preparation of the Basis of Union, the foundational statement of doctrine and polity of the United

³ Samuel D. CHOWN, The Story of Church Union in Canada, (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1950), p. 125.

⁴ George PIDGEON, The United Church of Canada, The Story of Union, (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1950) p. 125.

⁵ Manual, p. 7.

Church of Canada, began.

It is significant to note that in the early discussions on union the first questions to receive immediate attention related to the doctrine and training for ministry, and the sub-committees on ministry and polity experienced considerably more difficulty than the sub-committee on doctrine. Since all of the uniting churches recognized the validity of one another's orders there was little disagreement on the nature of the ordained ministry itself. The arrangement of church government also caused little problem since the three churches soon learned that, although called by different titles, their officers and courts performed basically the same tasks. There were, however, two areas of disagreement. One was the imposing of tests upon candidates for the ministry to which the Congregationalists objected;⁶ the other was the manner in which ministers would be placed in their pastoral charges.⁷

The Joint Committee held meetings in four centres--Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal and Halifax--over the next four years. When it presented its completed report in 1908, the report was accepted with only a few revisions. It was this report, referred to as the Basis of Union, which became with

⁶ The problems the Basis of Union presented to the Congregational Church, and the formulation of the Basis of Union itself, will be discussed later in Chapter Two.

⁷ H.H. WALSH, The United Church in Canada: The Story of Union, (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1950), p. 43.

only slight revision over the ensuing years, the Constitution of the United Church of Canada when it was incorporated as a national Protestant denomination in 1925.

It can be noted that those who believed in the creation of the new church saw it, not as the extinction of their own denomination, but as the fulfilment of their denomination in unity. While federation, a looser alliance in which the denominations could have protected their own identity, was an option, the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches chose organic union instead and merged their separate identities into one.

Application for legislation to incorporate the United Church as a national religious denomination was made to the Canadian Parliament in April of 1924. A bill to this effect was introduced into the House of Commons as a Private Members Bill by Robert Forke, Leader of the Progressive Party.⁸ After receiving first and second reading the Bill was referred to the Private Bills Committee. Here the applicants, and those opposed to the Bill, presented their arguments. For several weeks lawyers, clergy, and members of Parliament cross-examined each other on doctrine, church history, property rights, the rights of dissenters and other issues. With several minor amendments the Bill then went to the House. In the debate in

⁸ George PIDGEON, The Christian Church in Canada, (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1956), p. 89.

the House of Commons the leaders of all three parties took an active role. On the 26th of June by a vote of 110-58 the new church was given official authorization to begin its existence as a Canadian religious denomination on June 10th of the following year, 1925.⁹ A third reading took place on July 4th, and the Dominion Act creating the United Church of Canada was finally passed on the 19th of July, 1924.¹⁰

There is no consensus on what lay behind the creation of the United Church of Canada. Some point to the social and political necessity of having to provide churches of the Reformed and Methodist traditions across the vast expanse of Canada at a time when financial resources were limited for both the average Canadian and the institutional churches. Others suggest that the missionary spirit that sought to announce the Good News of Jesus Christ to all areas of the country, no matter how remote or small in population, made the union necessary. Still others believe the motivation for union was solely economic since none of the three denominations could afford to support churches in all of the small communities across Canada. Most people within the United Church would agree with the conclusion of one of the United Church's foremost church historians, John Webster Grant. Dr. Grant

⁹ Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 44-49.

writes:

The creation of the United Church was motivated not primarily by financial or social or theological reasons but as the result of the interactions of a particular view of the mission of the church with a particular national situation.¹¹

In the formation of the United Church of Canada, it appears that the ideal of christian unity was supported by the pragmatic need to have such a union take place.

The compatibility of the three uniting churches can be supported by the fact that no vote in a church court after union has ever been decided along the old denominational lines.¹² It has also been noted that, while in the first years after union congregations often called as their ministers men who had been ordained in the denomination to which their church had belonged before union, within a decade this practice had ceased. Although differences had existed in the theology and polity of the three denominations which comprised the United Church, the blending of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches worked surprisingly well. The concluding words of the final report of the Joint Committee on Union summarize the spirit and vision which gave birth to

¹¹ John Webster GRANT, "Blending Traditions: The United Church of Canada," in Canadian Journal of Theology, Volume IX, 1963, p. 94.

¹² C.E. SILCOX, Church Union in Canada: Its Causes and Consequences, (New York: Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1933), p. 138.

the United Church of Canada:

The present union now consummated, is but another step toward the wider union of evangelical churches, not only in Canada, but throughout the world.¹³

At the time of union the approximate strength of the United Church of Canada was 8,000 congregations, 600,000 members and 3,800 ordained ministers.¹⁴

2. ORDAINED MINISTRY IN THE FOUNDING CHURCHES

A. The Presbyterian Church in Canada

Of the three major types of church government, the Presbyterian Church stands in the middle between Congregationalism and Episcopacy. Decisions on church polity within the Presbyterian Church, whether at the congregational or supra congregational levels, are made by councils. At the congregational level the council consists of the minister and the elected elders of the congregation who form the Session. The local congregations meet together in a regional council, the Presbytery. A Presbytery consists of lay representatives

¹³ Manual, p. 9.

¹⁴ Manual, p. 9.

from each congregation within the region as well as all of the clergy in that region. The General Assembly is the highest governing body in the Presbyterian Church.

The Presbyterian Church does not have an hierarchical ministry. All ordained ministers, whether the local pastor, the chairperson of the presbytery or the moderator of the General Assembly, are on an equal level. The Presbyterian Church professes a belief in the priesthood of all believers and, therefore, spiritual equality between ordained and lay members of the church. This should not be taken to suggest that the Presbyterian Church does not accord authority to the ministerial office, nor to imply that, within Presbyterianism, there is no belief in a special call to the ordained ministry. Such is not the case.

The Presbyterian Church's understanding of ordained ministry is found in the Westminster Confession, which follows closely the view of ordained ministry presented in the Augsburg Confession. In these statements the ordained ministry is defined as "being of divine appointment", and being "of perpetual ordinance for the church". The chief responsibility which rests upon the ordained minister is "the gathering and perfecting of the saints".¹⁵ The Presbyterian Church sees the ordained ministry as more than a convenience for the efficient

¹⁵ The Statement Concerning Ordination in the United Church of Canada, p. 67.

ordering of the church; the ordained ministry is an ordinance of Christ and, by its very nature, essential to the church's life and mission.

In the Presbyterian Church the ordained minister is seen as the 'teaching elder'. The 'teaching elder' performs a role which is partly different, and partly similar but more concentrated in form, than the other elders who, along with the ordained minister, comprise the Session of the local church. In Presbyterianism the ordained ministry is seen as an institution of Christ which calls one to a lifelong commitment. Although the standards of doctrine of the Presbyterian Church in Canada contained no formula of subscription to a particular creed, part of the procedure that led toward ordination in the Presbyterian Church involved subscribing publicly to the standards of the Westminster Confession. This presented a dilemma for those ministers in the Presbyterian Church who were advocates of the new approach to biblical interpretation advanced by the German school of high criticism in the late 1800's, an approach which did not agree with the literalist view of scripture advocated by the Westminster Confession.

Those seeking ordination in the Presbyterian Church are first recommended by the Session of the local church, and then placed under the oversight of a Presbytery committee. Applicants for candidacy must be considered to lead lives

suitable to members of the ordained ministry, and they must possess the education and abilities essential to anyone who is to fill the office of an ordained minister. Ordination in the Presbyterian Church is by prayer and the laying on of hands of fellow Presbyters.¹⁶ Ordination, as well as induction into a pastoral charge, is the prerogative of the Presbytery although the initiative in extending a call to an ordained minister is the right of the individual congregation, with the Presbytery having a technical right to decline concurrence.¹⁷

Approximately 1500 Presbyterian ministers entered the United Church of Canada in 1925. These ministers believed that in entering the United Church of Canada they continued the unbroken continuity of orders which was originally passed from the Church of Scotland to the Presbyterian Church in Canada.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ralph CHALMERS, See The Christ Stand: A Study in the Doctrine of the United Church of Canada, (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1925), p. 47.

¹⁷ The Statement Concerning Ordination in the United Church of Canada, p. 121.

¹⁸ Information on the Presbyterian Church is found in "Section One: Ordination to the Ministry in the Presbyterian Church in Canada" in The Statement on Ordination, p. 87.

B. The Methodist Church in Canada

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, insisted to the end of his life that he was still a clergyman in the Church of England, the church in which he had been ordained. Methodism, in the beginning, had been a revivalist movement within the Church of England, and Wesley made a point of stating publicly that he had no wish to act in a manner contrary to the government and practice of the Anglican tradition. Strain in the relationship between the Methodist movement and the Church of England was inevitable because the Church of England's view of the church and its authority was different from that held by the Methodists. The Methodist view was based more on a pragmatic concern for the well being of Christian people than on the kind of idealistic theological concepts which supported the Anglican view. If the church was so structured that it brought the gospel to all people, and not only those of status and wealth, Wesley and the Methodists approved of it; if the church's organization set up barriers so that the gospel was not made available to all people, Wesley could not support it and would try to change it. The major incident illustrating this clash of attitudes had to do with providing clergy for the Methodist Church in America.

After the Revolutionary War, most of the missionaries whom John Wesley had sent out returned to England. Since there were

no bishops left in North America to perform the ordination rite, those wanting to be ordained had to return to England. Not only was this journey expensive, dangerous, and time-consuming, but the Church of England was refusing to ordain anyone who would not take the Oath of Allegiance to the King and those who intended to return to serve as ministers in America were automatically considered disloyal to the Crown. This combination of events and attitudes made it impossible for the Methodist Societies to provide clergy to serve in North America. As a result there was a generation of Christians growing up in America to whom the sacraments were not available.

John Wesley agonized over the problems presented by this situation. In conflict were on one hand, his strong desire to abide by the authority of the Church of England and, on the other, his passionate belief that the gospel and the sacraments must be available to all people. Wesley searched the scriptures for a way to deal with this problem. He finally reached the conclusion that he, himself, could and must act as bishop and, with several other Methodist presbyters, perform the ordination rite. Wesley supported his decision by reference to scripture for he had come to believe, during the time he had closely studied the scriptures for a solution to this problem, that in the early church the office of presbyter and bishop were interchangeable. John Wesley performed several

ordinations. He also authorized one of the men who had previously served in North America, and who had been ordained in the Church of England, to return to America as a bishop so that further ordinations could be performed there. Because of Wesley's decision, Methodism survived and flourished in America.

Notwithstanding Wesley's departure from the regular practice of the Church of England occasioned by the situation discussed above, adherents of Methodism held the ordained ministry in esteem and insisted on its correct ordering. The standards of the Methodist Church state:

All religious rites suppose order, all order direction and control and these a directive and controlling power. Thus government flows necessarily from the very nature of the institution of the Christian Church, and since this institution has the authority of Christ and His Apostles, it is not to be supposed that its governance was left unprovided for.¹⁹

In Methodism the ordained ministry, while not seen as the sole governing or controlling body within the church, is seen as essential to the correct ordering of the church's life and mission, and it is seen as instituted by Christ and in succession to the Apostles. The call to ministry is held to be of divine inspiration, and this call is experienced in an internal and external manner. The internal call is the voice and power

¹⁹ The Statement Concerning Ordination in the United Church of Canada, p. 121.

of the Holy Spirit which leads a person to believe that he is being called by Christ into the church's ministry; the external call is the recognition and setting apart of this individual by the church courts. While these calls are distinct in character, they are "equally divine in the economy of God's grace and providence".²⁰ The combination of divine and human authority is evident in the choosing and setting apart of the ordained minister. Further, it is this combination which allows the ordained minister to have the confidence that the ordained ministry is the work God intends for him and that God will support him in this vocation.²¹

The Methodist Church professed a belief in one order of ministry. While it believed that the episcopal ministry was the wisest form of church government, it did not see bishops as a superior order of clergy, nor did it believe that the exclusive authority to ordain lay with the episcopacy.

The following are the principles of ministry set forth in the standards of the Methodist Church:

1. The ministry is of divine appointment and is a perpetual ordinance for the church.
2. A minister is ordained to the ministry of the church catholic, and only secondarily to the ministry of his own denomination.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 81.

²¹ Ibid., p. 82.

3. The function of an ordained minister is to act as a shepherd to the flock of Christ. "The ministry exercises representatively in the name and by the authority of the Lord who is the head of the church, the powers and functions which are inherent in the church".

4. The fundamental order of the ministry is the presbyterate; bishops and presbyters are identical in order.

5. Christ as the head of the church has given to the ordained ministry the authority to preach the word and administer the sacraments in his church. Christ has given to clergy and to lay officers the authority to govern the church.²²

Ordination in the Methodist Church is by prayer and the laying on of hands. The power to ordain is vested magisterially in the constituted courts of the church, and ministerially in the ordained ministry. An ordained minister, therefore, is constituted by the election of the annual conference and by the laying on of hands of those ordained ministers who have been appointed to this task.²³

The Methodists did not believe that the office of the ordained ministry was conveyed by the people. They believed that in the early church the ministry was handed from Christ to the Apostles and from the Apostles to others who were set aside for leadership in the church. The Methodist Church upheld the principle of succession--the sending by those who are sent. It understood its own ministry to have been

²² For information on the Methodist Church in Canada see: "Section Two: Ordination to the Ministry in the Methodist Church(Canada)" in The Statement Concerning Ordination, pp. 64-155.

²³ Ibid., pp. 83-84.

maintained in an uninterrupted presbyteral succession derived from the presbyters of the Church of England which, in turn, had maintained an unbroken succession in its ministry.²⁴

In 1925 the Methodist Church brought 2061 ordained ministers into the United Church of Canada.

C. The Congregational Union in Canada

The most distinctive feature of Congregationalism is its doctrine of the church. Congregationalists see the church primarily as a spiritual entity and, therefore, consider whatever form of ecclesial organization its visible structure takes in order to serve the gospel as legitimate. While the episcopal form of church government lends itself to hierarchy, and while Presbyterianism is partially democratic, Congregationalism is fully democratic, at least in theory. Congregationalism affords a large amount of freedom to the local church in regard to both doctrine and organization.

The emergence of the Congregational Church as an independent denomination was due to the belief among its leaders that the fullest expression of the church of Christ was found in the local congregation. Their view was derived

²⁴ Ibid., p. 93.

from the description of the primitive church found in the New Testament. In the New Testament there appeared to be no supra local organizational structure to which each local church owed its allegiance. A vital connection did exist among the churches of the New Testament era, but that connection was of a spiritual nature, as each church shared in common its profession of faith in Jesus Christ. "The great church," the Congregationalists believed, "was not organized out of the small ones but into them".²⁵

Congregationalism was brought to America by the Puritans who settled in New England during the reign of Charles Ist. In 1620 the pilgrim colony had arrived in Plymouth, with the main flux of emigration beginning about 1639. The Congregationalists of New England shared a belief in the freedom of the local congregation from exterior control, but they were not separatists in outlook. They valued the continuity of their ministry with that of the Church of England and they were in the habit of involving other Congregational churches in the rite of ordination. Congregations within a particular geographic area shared an 'association', and when one congregation wished to have an ordination take place, clergy from other congregations within the 'association' assisted. It was this practice which later made it easier for

²⁵ The Statement Concerning Ordination, p. 199.

the Congregational Church to accept Conference ordination within the United Church of Canada.²⁶

The conception of ministry in the Congregational Church was that of a distinct order initiated by Christ and recognized and set apart by the church. It saw ordination as "an act of the church at large", and as being "to the ministry of the church of Jesus Christ", not simply to the ministry of the denomination.²⁷

Decisions concerning ordination in the Congregational Church were made by the authority of a council of ministers and lay delegates. The ordination rite was performed within a service of worship which included the *epiclesis*, and the laying on of hands by those who had been previously ordained.

Ordained ministry in the Congregational Church was not hierarchical in nature nor was it believed that ordained ministers were invested with an official power in or over the church in which they ministered.²⁸ Congregationalists believed strongly that clergy must not be constrained in the expression of their faith, or in their search for the truth, by having to subscribe to doctrinal statements as a condition of their ordination. It was the strength of this conviction among the

²⁶ Ibid., p. 247.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 235.

²⁸ Ralph CHALMERS, See the Christ Stand, p. 75.

Congregationalists which forced the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches to reconsider their wish to have all candidates for ordination in the new United Church subscribe to the Basis of Union.

This is not meant to suggest that Congregationalists were not concerned about correct belief; they were. What it does suggest, however, is that they sought consensus only in the essentials of faith and allowed for diversity of belief and expression in what they considered of secondary importance. Although tension was not unknown among the Congregationalists as they debated what was essential and what was not, their goal was to allow freedom of expression and to encourage all participants in any debate to listen to and respect one another.

The Congregational Church did not possess as "high" a view of the ordained ministry as the other two denominations which formed the United Church of Canada. It was more open, for example, to having a layperson administer the sacraments although this was not a regular practice in the Congregational Church. Congregationalists did not see ordination as constitutive of the church in the way that the Methodist and Presbyterian churches did. They pointed out that the Apostles, as well as Paul and Barnabas were elders or presbyters without the laying on of hands identified with the rite of ordination.

The Congregationalist understanding of the role of the

ordained ministry in the church can be summed up thus:

There may be the essence and being of a church without any officers, since officers are not absolutely necessary to the simple being of the church, yet ordinarily they are necessary to its well-being and therefore Jesus has appointed and ordained officers.²⁹

The Congregationalist Church was the smallest of the three denominations to enter the United Church of Canada. Of the three churches it was, however, the only one to have all of its congregations enter the new church with it.³⁰

3. THE BASIS OF UNION

The Basis of Union is the foundational statement of theology and polity of the United Church of Canada. Because of the place this document holds in the United Church, it is referred to in all of the United Church's studies on ministry.

Preparation of the Basis of Union began in December, 1904 when the Joint Union Committee, comprising representatives from each of the three negotiating churches, met for the second time. The Joint Committee formed four sub-committees to

²⁹ Statement Concerning Ordination, p. 199.

³⁰ For information on the Congregationalist Union in Canada see: "Section Three: Ordination to the Ministry in the Congregational Churches of Canada," in The Statement Concerning Ordination in the United Church of Canada, pp. 197-249.

discuss different aspects of the theology and polity of the new church. These committees met in four centres across Canada--Toronto, Winnipeg, Halifax and Montreal. As homework, they were asked to look at a brief creedal statement which had been recently published by the Presbyterian Church in the United States, and to use this statement as a starting point for their own reflections on what the doctrine of a future United Church might look like.

The subcommittees reported back a year later in December of 1905. The Halifax and Winnipeg groups had found the Statement of Faith of the American Presbyterian Church one with which they could agree, and in their discussions, they had not found any significant obstacles to organic union. The Toronto group was also in agreement with the Statement of the American Presbyterian Church and suggested only minor modifications. Only the Montreal sub-committee returned with a detailed report. The Montreal group not only offered comment on the American statement, they put forward a statement of their own containing fifteen articles of faith. The Montreal group's statement was largely based on a creed which had been published in 1890 by the Presbyterian Church in England.³¹

The Joint Committee began, at the December 1905 meeting,

³¹ E. Lloyd MORROW, Church Union in Canada: Its History, Motives, Doctrine and Government, (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1923), p. 116.

to draw up titles of articles upon which, it believed, the three churches could agree. It looked to the creedal statement produced by the American Presbyterian Church and to the fifteen articles of faith submitted by the Montreal group, "for corresponding headings and fitting phrases". Their aim, according to E. Lloyd Morrow, in his incisive critique of the formation of the United Church of Canada, and of the preparation of the Basis of Union in particular, was to see whether "they could find a sufficient number of doctrinal points upon which to unite".³²

In Morrow's opinion, the Joint Committee had no intention of drawing up an original creed. Such an enterprise would have required a more extensive discussion of theology and, as a result, opened up the possibility of uncovering areas of disagreement. This was precisely the situation which the Joint Committee sought to avoid. By looking for the common ground among them the members of the Joint Committee on Union were able to produce a creedal statement which they could recommend to their respective denominations for approval. On the receipt of such approval the union to which they were so favourably disposed could then proceed.

At the third meeting of the Joint Committee in 1906 the Presbyterians and Methodists were very positive toward the

³² Ibid., p. 116.

draft statement which had been produced summarizing the theology of the new church. The Congregationalists were not as favourably disposed and raised the following points of criticism:

1. The first draft of the Basis of Union was too complicated and, they felt, should be replaced with a simpler statement of faith.
2. Provision for progress of thought, and therefore, provision for making changes in the statement itself, should be built directly into the document.
3. The Congregationalists objected to having any required subscription to the Basis of Union on the part of candidates for the ordained ministry as a condition of their ordination.
4. The Congregational Church also wanted a provision within the Basis of Union of the new church, which would provide to the local congregation the right to be the final arbiter of its doctrine and practice.³³

The next draft of the Basis of Union, presented to the Joint Union Committee in 1908, was accepted with minor revision. The Congregationalists were the only denomination among the three to express any serious theological concern with this draft. Only one major change was made to this document. Following the suggestion of the Congregational Church, it was agreed that candidates for ordination need not subscribe to the Basis of Union but had only to be "in essential agreement" with it. With only a few other changes, all of them minor, this 1908 document became the constitution

³³ Ibid., pp. 117-130.

of the United Church of Canada when it was incorporated by the Canadian Parliament in 1925.

In 1910, a year in which all three participating denominations were to hold their national meetings, it was decided to present the Basis of Union report to each of their national assemblies. The Congregationalists approved it by an eighty per cent vote. The Methodists approved it by a vote of 220-35, and the Presbyterian General Assembly approved the report and directed it back to the presbyteries for their input.

One of the most detailed commentaries on the Basis of Union was published in 1923 by Dr. E. Lloyd Morrow, a Presbyterian minister who had at one time been in favour of union, but later experienced a change of heart. Writing in the heat of the discussions in the early 1920's, and after the Presbyterian Church had begun to face a major split on union support, Morrow strongly criticized the idea of union and in particular the lack of theological concern among those who were entrusted with preparing the Basis of Union. Another writer, C.E. Silcox, a Canadian academic resident for a time in the United States, wrote a book on church union offering an analysis of the process of union and making reference to the formulation of the Basis of Union. Silcox, writing seven years after the union had been consummated, put the formation of the United Church in a more positive light than Morrow. Both men,

however, shared a similar view of the Committee responsible for formulating the doctrine of the new church. Silcox wrote:

The committee or sub-committees did not overwork themselves. The old school of theology predominated. The Basis was not an example of the most progressive theology of the time. It was, rather, a drawing together of the basic theological tenets of each of the three negotiating churches with no concern for producing a fresh statement of theology taking into account new and progressive ideas".³⁴

John Webster Grant also shares the position of Morrow and Silcox in regard to the production of the Basis of Union. He makes the following comment:

The Basis of Union betrays no sign of an effort to adapt it to the needs of a 20th century church. The union was brought about without any searching experience of bringing conflicting traditions before the bar of common tradition. A preoccupation with sharing their inheritance, rather than mere conservatism, may account for the lack of creative thought in the Basis of Union.³⁵

Most people looking at the preparation of the Basis of Union would agree with the comments of a Methodist minister who served on the Joint Union Committee. He described the Basis of Union as a statement of theological belief which was "a compendium of previous views in the negotiating churches

³⁴ C. E. SILCOX, Church Union in Canada, p. 129.

³⁵ John Webster GRANT, "Blending Traditions: The United Church of Canada," in Canadian Journal of Theology, Volume IX, 1963, p. 52.

compacted together".³⁶ The production of the Basis of Union and its acceptance as the foundational statement of faith of the new church is due to certain underlying presuppositions which were accepted by both those who produced this document and those who approved it.

Among those presuppositions were the following:

- the firm belief that Christ calls his church into unity and that each denomination has the responsibility to pursue opportunities in this direction;

- an adherence to a type of theology known as evangelical orthodoxy, a theology which held as its dual goal the preservation of the orthodoxy of the reformed tradition and an enthusiastic interest in spreading the gospel;

- the belief that practical considerations are every bit as serious and relevant to evangelization as pure or speculative theology; the need for a united church led the framers of the Basis of Union to place theological reflection, and thus theological precision, in a secondary position to the pragmatic considerations which would promote the actualization of union.

- a spirit of pluralism; although the term is not named directly, pluralism is indicated by the inclusion in the preface to the Basis of Union of the doctrinal standards of all three founding churches. It can be noted that while the

³⁶ George PIDGEON, The United Church of Canada: The Story of Union, (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1950), p. 173.

standards of belief of these three churches did overlap at many points, differences remained. The fact that the Basis of Union expressed a comprehensive allegiance to all of them indicates that those who formulated the Basis were willing to include within the new church differences in theology and polity.

A commemorative volume published in 1925 to mark the formation of The United Church of Canada describes the spirit behind the Basis of Union in these words:

Our polity, the whole Basis of Union, is the best expression of our life and thought just now. We are seeking for more light, and wisdom and larger service. When greater demands are made upon us and we face new responsibilities, we believe that the spirit of God will still be with us and we shall hold ourselves in readiness to follow where he shall lead, no law or state or church daring to make us afraid.³⁷

The framers of the Basis of Union, and the membership of the three churches which approved it were, apparently, willing to leave much of the theology of the new church unstated. The brevity of the Basis of Union, and its inclusion of a variety of visions of doctrine and polity, make it clear that neither theological creeds nor institutional structures was the primary concern of the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches when they came together in 1925. Their overriding concern was the belief that the deepest need of the Canadian

³⁷ W.H. SMITH, Commemorative Review of the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregational Churches, (Vancouver: van Wrigley, 1925), p. 216.

people could only be met through the gospel of Jesus Christ, and an equally firm belief that they could meet this need more effectively as a united church than as separate denominations.

The Basis of Union remains, today, the only official statement of theology of the United Church of Canada.

CHAPTER THREE

ORDAINED MINISTRY UNDER REVIEW

1. THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN DEBATE (1926-1936)

Before examining the United Church's studies on the ordained ministry, some mention must be made of the debate over the ordination of women which took place in the United Church between 1926 and 1936. While the need for more clergy occasioned the debate, the need was not so great that it would have forced the church to choose between a proper understanding of ordained ministry and fulfilling its mandate to provide an ordained minister to every pastoral charge. The United Church undertook what it knew would be a controversial debate because it considered this issue to be worthy of serious discussion both on practical and on theological grounds. Its willingness to address an issue as sensitive as the ordination of women can be seen as a precursor to its later interest in exploring, with little constraint, ways in which to develop a more faithful ministry in the church.

The debate began when a Committee on the ordination of women was appointed by the second General Council in 1926. This move was occasioned by a petition from Saskatchewan Conference requesting the ordination of Miss Lydia Gruchy. Miss Gruchy had met the educational requirements for the ordained ministry and was serving a pastoral charge of two small churches in rural Saskatchewan. Since the requirement for ordained ministers exceeded the number of ministers available, Saskatchewan Conference recognized that a need for Miss Gruchy's pastoral services would continue. This led to their request for her ordination.

The Committee of the General Council which considered the petition for Miss Gruchy's ordination recommended that the larger question of the ordination of women should be referred to the presbyteries. It also suggested that a committee be set up to prepare a recommendation to the presbyteries in this regard. In its report back to the church, this Committee stated its recognition of the professional contribution women had made to the church over the course of its history as deaconesses and missionaries. It was also impressed "with the desirability of giving fuller ecclesiastical recognition to certain ministries that are already exercised by women". On the matter of the ordination of women, however, its recommendation was that the church take no action in that

direction at the time.¹

Four reasons were offered in support of this advice. The Committee pointed out that ordination means that "the functions and duties of the Ministry become the primary and life-long vocation of the ordained. He is to give himself wholly to this one thing."² Its members did not believe women were as free to make this whole-hearted commitment as men were. It was also pointed out that the ministry of the Word and Sacraments, as it was constituted in the United Church and described in the Basis of Union, referred to its members exclusively in terms of the male gender. A third consideration was the fact that no other Christian denomination was ordaining women.³

This Committee's final point was to warn the church of the controversy that would arise if it sanctioned the ordination of women. It did, however, recommend that deaconesses be ordained. Members of the Committee saw this as a way of giving full ecclesiastical recognition to women who were employed by the church, most of whom were serving as deaconesses, without placing the church in the hazardous position of encouraging

¹ The United Church of Canada Year Book 1928, Toronto, Publication of the 2nd General Council of the United Church of Canada, p. 366.

² Ibid., p. 365.

³ Ibid., p. 366.

women to become ministers of the Word and Sacraments. The final recommendation of the Committee was to encourage the church to engage in "the fullest possible study of the subject of women's relations to the church, and to encourage all ministers to inform themselves and their congregations concerning the history and present aspects of the subject".⁴

A remit on this question was sent to the presbyteries and discussed during 1927. Much debate followed with the whole issue coming to a head at the 4th General Council in Winnipeg in 1928. While only 12 presbyteries had returned a definite "no", 33 stated that they wished to proceed immediately, and 43 said they believed in the principle involved but did not think the United Church as a whole was ready for it.⁵ Anxious to avoid controversy, the Sessional Committee dealing with the question of the ordination of women recommended to the church that it put this question on hold for the present, but this Committee also put on record its belief that "there is no bar in religion or reason to such ordination".⁶ It should be noted that this debate did not align men against women--there were many men who supported the ordination of women and many women who did not.

⁴ Ibid., p. 367.

⁵ Mary HALLET, "Ladies- We Give you the Pulpit", Touchstone, Vol.4, Jan. 1986, #1, p. 11.

⁶ The United Church of Canada Year Book, 1928, p. 121.

Although the Committee's report was unanimously accepted the debate did not end. Dr. Edmund Oliver, an ardent supporter of women's ordination and a strong advocate for Miss Gruchy, was elected moderator of the United Church in 1930. He argued his support for women's ordination from both a theological and practical perspective. Dr. Oliver believed that "the church cannot afford to maintain barriers of sex, race, colour, or nationality if it would exhibit the mind of Christ and foster true brotherhood". As moderator, Oliver put forward his views and kept the issue alive as did Nellie McClung and others in articles, speeches, public debates and letters to the United Church magazine of that era, The New Outlook.⁷

In 1934 the Secretary of the Saskatchewan Conference was instructed to notify the General Council that it intended to ordain Lydia Gruchy at its next meeting in 1935 unless General Council sent them an official objection. It was customarily the prerogative of the Conference to decide whom it should ordain, and the Saskatchewan Conference requested that "no obstacle" be placed in its way in regard to the ordination of Lydia Gruchy.

In response the 6th General Council passed a resolution that another remit should be sent to the presbyteries on the question of the ordination of women. This time the question

⁷ Hallet, "Ladies- We Give You the Pulpit", Touchstone, Volume 4, Jan. 1986, #1, p. 11.

was straight-forward: "Do you approve the ordination of women? Answer "yes" or "no" without qualification." When the remit came back the response was 79 for, 26 against.⁸ After a ten year struggle, Lydia Gruchy was ordained by the Saskatchewan Conference on Nov. 6th, 1936. Although the main battle was won skirmishes broke out now and then as opponents to the ordination of women continued to press home their point of view. During the period 1936-1944 only 14 other women were ordained. Most women ministers were given rural churches, or served as assistants to male clergy, and until 1957 no married woman was permitted ordination. The number of women entering the ministry has increased gradually, until in 1989 forty-six per cent of ordinands were women, many of them married.

The United Church's decision to allow the ordination of women not only generated strife within its own denomination, it put at risk the possibility of union with other Christian denominations who had not yet taken a similar step.⁹ It is evident that the United Church was not willing to sacrifice what it believed to be a matter of principle, i.e. allowing women into the ordained ministry, even for goals it had previously identified as highly desirable, namely, good

⁸ Ibid., p. 17.

⁹ The Baptist Church in Canada, for example, did not ordain women until the late 1940's; the Anglican Church began ordaining women in the 1970's.

ecumenical rapport and the possibility of future unions with other Christian denominations.

2. THE STATEMENT CONCERNING ORDINATION
IN THE
UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA (1926)

The United Church's initial study on the ordained ministry was commissioned by the first General Council in 1925. The Committee responsible for producing the Statement Concerning Ordination presented a 258 page report to the 2nd General Council in 1926. This report is divided into four parts. The first three sections, 252 pages in length, present the understanding of ordained ministry which existed in each of the founding churches of the United Church of Canada. Section Four on "Ordination to the Ministry in the United Church of Canada" is six pages in length. Only Section Four will be examined in detail.

Section Four begins by quoting the first paragraph of the Basis of Union affirming the United Church's belief in scripture as the primary source of Christian faith and life, and its acceptance of the creeds of the ancient church. This initial paragraph also reiterates the United Church's allegiance to the doctrinal standards of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches. The Statement Concerning Ordination goes on to quote the following articles in the Basis of Union: Article 15 "Of the Church", Article 17 "Of the Ministry" and Article 18 "Of Church Order and

Fellowship". While Article 15 "Of the Church" does not refer to the ordained ministry specifically it does speak of the church as the place where public worship, the administration of the sacraments, the upbuilding of the saints and the propagation of the Gospel takes place. Article 17 "Of the Ministry", reads:

We believe that Jesus Christ as the Supreme Head of the Church, has appointed therein a ministry of the Word and Sacraments, and calls men to this ministry; that the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit recognizes and chooses those whom he calls and should thereupon duly ordain them to the work of the ministry.¹⁰

Only one sentence in Article 18 "Of Church Order and Fellowship" is relevant to our discussion. It reads as follows:

We believe that the supreme and only head of the church is the Lord Jesus Christ: that its worship teaching, discipline and government, should be administered according to his will by persons chosen for their fitness and duly set apart to their office."

Section Four also refers to the Polity section of the Basis of Union which describes the responsibility that the Presbytery and Conference have to inquire into the character, doctrinal beliefs, and general fitness of candidates for ministry. The Ministry section of the Basis of Union is quoted

¹⁰ United Church of Canada, Basis of Union, Toronto, 1925, Doctrine Section, Article 17.

¹¹ Ibid., Article 18.

in relation to the examination of candidates before ordination to determine whether they are "in essential agreement" with the beliefs of the United Church as they appear in the Basis of Union. No comment is offered on any of the quotations taken from the Basis of Union.

After stating that the doctrine and ministry of the United Church are "in accord with Catholic doctrine, and with the doctrine and practice of the three uniting churches", the Statement Concerning Ordination goes on to offer five quotations from notable clergy representing the various denominational backgrounds of the United Church.¹² These quotations appear in the document without commentary. They are followed by a final paragraph, and a two-statement General Conclusion. One can assume because of the lack of commentary accompanying these quotations that the authors of the Statement Concerning Ordination believed these quotations, along with articles 15, 17 and 18 of the Basis of Union, provided an adequate reflection of the United Church's understanding of ordained ministry.

The first quotation is from Dr. George Pidgeon, the new moderator of the United Church of Canada, and formerly moderator of the Presbyterian Church. The writers of the 1926 Statement suggest that Dr. Pidgeon's comments "may be of value,

¹² The Statement Concerning Ordination in the United Church of Canada, United Church Publishing, Toronto, 1926, p. 254.

as indicating the spirit and thought in the United Church in regard to the matter treated in this Statement..."¹³ Dr. Pidgeon's comment involves a discussion of 1 Corinthians 12, which speaks of the complementary parts of the body of Christ and their fulfilment in union with one another. He points out that in the early years of Christianity, church communities that were "as far apart as the poles", joined hands with each other in service to Christ because they shared a similar experience of the grace of God mediated through Jesus Christ. Dr. Pidgeon also remarks that diversity within the church is both necessary and healthy: "If we were alike, we would not need each other; because we are different we are able to meet the varied needs of men".¹⁴ Dr. Pidgeon, who had been one of the leading proponents of union, believed that the coming together of different traditions would lead to a fuller expression of what the church was meant to be. This quotation which is the lengthiest in Section IV makes no direct reference to the ordained ministry.

The second quotation is from Dr. Ernest Thomas, a former Methodist who had been appointed Associate Secretary of Social Service and Evangelism in the new church. It appeared originally in July of 1925 in The New Outlook. Dr. Thomas

¹³ Ibid., p. 254.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 255.

expresses his desire for "a more catholic religion".¹⁵ He points out that Canada can never be merely an Anglo-Saxon nation and asks, why then should Canada's religion be so tied to its British roots. He suggests that religion in Canada must outgrow its national, sectarian and traditional roots for these can never adequately serve the future.¹⁶

While acknowledging that "efficiency and economy and mission resources" may have supplied part of the motivation for the creation of the new united church, Dr. Thomas sees the "authentic voice" of the new church as a spiritual cry to have a church that welcomes "the contributions of racial experience". Thus, he says, "it comes about that Methodist passion for human redemption combines with Presbyterian demands for order in thought and action and with the Congregational insistence on freedom of local adjustment to produce the new order".¹⁷

Dr. Thomas believed that the success of the united church in Canada would inspire other churches to commit themselves to similar visions. Because of its status as a model that other churches could emulate, it was doubly important that the Canadian union be successful, and it could only be successful,

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 255.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 256.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 256.

he believed, if each person and each denomination were willing to practice "radical self-renunciation". Thomas stressed that the old days of self-assertion, seeking a church which suits our private whims and crudeness, must go once for all".¹⁸

In Dr. Thomas's view a new united church would succeed not because the denominations comprising it blended into uniformity but because they were able to appreciate varied opinions and rituals. Fixed opinions must give way to the Spirit's desire to create fellowship among Christian people. Thomas also believed that the church could not afford to be tied to any social or economic order for such ties necessarily led to divisions among Christians.¹⁹

The third quotation in the Statement Concerning Ordination, comes from Dr. D.L. Ritchie, the former principal of the Congregational College in Montreal. Dr. Ritchie's comments had also appeared originally in an article in The New Outlook in July, 1925 under the title "The Christian Ministry for the New Day". Dr. Ritchie saw the union of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches as presenting a unique opportunity to raise the standard of the ministry. He believed that the new church would attract to it young men who might have been offended by the former

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 256.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 256.

denominational rivalries. This united church would present to these young men resources for training and opportunities for service which would not have been previously available to them.²⁰

The fourth quotation in the Statement Concerning Ordination is from an article which appeared in The New Outlook in April of 1926 written by Professor Richard Davidson, a former Presbyterian who had taught at Knox College in Toronto. His subject was "The Ministry of the Word and Sacraments". Professor Davidson points out that there is only one ministry in the church of Jesus Christ. "At ordination a man is not admitted to a local order; he is made a minister of the whole church."²¹ Dr. Davidson thought deplorable that the divided state of Christendom meant that the ordained minister could not exercise his ministry in all parts of the church. He believed that at ordination the new minister was made "an organ of Christian unity, an organ of apostolic succession...a steward of the whole church's spiritual heritage. To his flock a minister represents the whole church."²²

The final quotation in the Statement Concerning Ordination is from Dr. S.D. Chown, a previous General Superintendent of

²⁰ Ibid., p. 256-257.

²¹ Ibid., p. 257.

²² Ibid., p. 257.

the Methodist Church. Dr. Chown saw the new united church as representing God's will that the church of Christ "supersede, as far as it is possible, at the present time, the fractional representations of Christianity..."²³ He believed that the divisive tendency of Christendom had run its course, and that Canadians should be proud that they were the ones to take "the first great step in recovering the lost unity of the body of Christ and in rebuilding the church of Christ on its primitive foundation".²⁴

Section IV of the Statement Concerning Ordination describes the similarities in the ordination rite of the three founding churches of the United Church. Ordination in the founding churches was by "imposition of hands" of some who had been previously ordained, and this practice was to continue as normative in the new united church. The writers of the Statement Concerning Ordination offer a new definition of what constitutes an ordained minister so that the position of the United Church of Canada in regard to this matter will be clear to other churches. This definition, which was approved by the Second General Council of the United Church, reads as follows:

Within the jurisdiction of the United Church of Canada, a minister is constituted by the call of God, the consent of the people, the election of the Conference, or General Council, and ordination to the

²³ Ibid., p. 257.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 257.

office and work of a minister in the Church of God is by prayer and the laying on of hands of the ministers duly authorized thereto.²⁵

The final section of the Statement Concerning Ordination, states as its General Conclusion:

"The evidence presented in this Statement shows:

1. That the existing ministry of the United Church of Canada is a true ministry of the Church of God;

and

2. That those ordained by the United Church of Canada have a true ministry in the Church of God."²⁶

A. The Place of the Ordained Ministry in the Church

1. The first impression left with anyone reading the Statement Concerning Ordination is that the main concern of its authors was to prove the legitimacy of the United Church's ordained ministry. This accounts for the fact that in a 258-page document on the ordained ministry, 252 pages relate to the understanding of ordained ministry found in the three founding churches of The United Church of Canada, and how these ministries connect directly to the ordained ministry of the new

²⁵ Ibid., p. 258.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 258.

united church. The authors of the Statement Concerning Ordination show no particular concern for the differences in the understanding of ordained ministry which existed among its founding churches, neither do they show any desire to create a fresh and comprehensive theology of ministry for their own church.

While the Statement Concerning Ordination does not provide an in depth study of the ordained ministry, it does offer the new church the reassurance that its ministry is legitimate; it also inspires the new church to continue on in the same spirit of unity and goodwill which brought it into existence. It is obvious that the authors of this report believed that such reassurance and inspiration were more important to the church at this juncture in its history than a systematized theology of the ordained ministry.

Evidence of the inspirational nature of this report can be found in the kinds of words and phrases which appear liberally throughout Section Four: Dr. Pidgeon's reference to the "spirit" of unity that joins the different parts of Christ's body together; Dr. Thomas's remarks on the "dreams" for Christian unity that the new United Church can encourage by its own success; Dr. Ritchie's comment about the "imagination" of young men to which teachers of religion must appeal through their competence and "vision"; Dr. Chown's statement about the opportunities the new church has to embody "the spirit of unity

which is the spirit of Christ"...Such an ideal is", Dr. Chown remarks, "the only hope for abiding success in this another springtime in the life of the world".²⁷ Words such as "imagination", "vision", "dreams", "spirit" and "springtime" set a tone rather than argue a point.

The fact that this document veers away from speculative and technical details regarding ordination could also be accounted for by a spirit of practicality. Had its authors produced a detailed and original study of an issue as important, and often as sensitive, as the ordained ministry, this could have opened up the possibility of dissension within the church. The authors of the Statement Concerning Ordination may have believed that, in a denomination which had only been in existence for one year, this was a situation it would be wiser to avoid.

Also underlying this report is a respect for pluralism and diversity in church order. Rather than approaching the issue of unity among the churches, as BEM does, by asking all of the churches to conform to a certain standard, the advice of the authors of this report is that churches must develop an appreciation for "rich and glorious variety" rather than seeking "uniformity of opinion and worship". Dr. Pidgeon's comment that in the early church, worship communities "as far

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 254-257.

apart as the poles" were united in love and service to Christ indicates a belief that where communities, or in this case denominations, are united in service to Christ their differences should not otherwise divide them. The content of this report suggests that, from its beginning, the United Church displayed an open-mindedness toward diversity in doctrine and ministry.

2. The presence of an ordained ministry in the church is assumed in this document, and it is assumed as God's will for the church and as an appointment of Christ. Presumably, the authors of this report would consider a ministry so ordained as integral to the life of the church and not as superfluous or incidental to it. The major thrust of this report is, in fact, to prove the legitimacy of the United Church's ministry. Had its authors not believed in the essential role the ordained ministry plays in the church, they would not have gone to the lengths they did, to prove that the ordained ministry in the United Church was, as their Conclusion states, "a true ministry of the church of God".²⁸

3. The Statement Concerning Ordination does not speak of the relationship of the ordained ministry to the ministry of the whole people of God. This should not be taken to imply, however, that the authors of this report did not believe in an

²⁸ Ibid., p. 258.

inter-connectedness between lay and ordained members of the church. The new church inherited from its founding denominations a form of church government in which lay people played an important role. The involvement of lay persons in the courts of the church continued in the new United Church in which its presbyterial and Conference courts, as well as its General Council, consisted of a balance between lay and ordained members.

The Statement on Ordination does assign the laity a crucial role in the ordination process when it affirms their role in recognizing and choosing those whom God calls into the ordained ministry and in carrying out the act of ordination on Christ's behalf. In its own definition of what constitutes an ordained minister in the United Church of Canada, it refers to the "consent of the people" and the "election of the Conference or General Council".²⁹ The sparse discussion of the inter-relationship of the ordained and lay ministries of the church in this document is due more to the cursory nature of the document itself than to an intentional depreciation of the communal nature of the ordained ministry.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 258.

B. The Tasks and Forms of the Ordained Ministry in the Church

1. This report makes one direct reference to the ordained ministry's role in transmitting the apostolic faith when it quotes Dr. Davidson's description of the ordained minister as "a steward of the whole Church's spiritual heritage...and vision of truth".³⁰ In specifying, however, that a major role of the ordained ministry is to "teach from the scriptures", it indirectly assigns the ordained person the role of perpetuating and safeguarding the doctrine of the apostolic church as it is contained in the scriptural witness.

The concern of the authors of the Statement Concerning Ordination that the church satisfy itself that a candidate for ordination is in agreement with the doctrine of the Catholic Church also implies a belief that the ordained have a specific responsibility for guarding the apostolic faith. Because they have this responsibility, candidates for ordination are required to know and agree with the historic faith of the church since that is what they will be required by the church to teach.³¹

2. The Statement Concerning Ordination recognizes only one form of ministry--the presbyteral or pastoral ministry. Although its mandate was to present an understanding of the

³⁰ Ibid., p. 257.

³¹ Ibid., p. 254.

ordained ministry in the United Church, it does not devote any attention to the ordering of that ministry. This may have been due to its belief that the traditional ordering of ministry which the United Church had inherited as part of the Reformed tradition did not require change. This form of ministry consisted of one order of ministry, the presbyteral order, with no special juridical or ontological status being attached to any of the larger roles in the courts of the church, whether the chairmanship of the Presbytery, the presidency of the Conference or the moderatorship of the General Council. The latter were all elected positions whose only status derived from the visibility of those who served that particular function in the court.

C. The Meaning of Ordination

1-4. The Statement Concerning Ordination places the ordained ministry on a Trinitarian foundation. This is evident from its reference to the ordained ministry being "constituted by the call of God", and its inclusion of Article 17 of the Basis of Union which speaks of "Jesus Christ as the Supreme Head of the church" appointing "therein a ministry of the Word and Sacraments".³² This report also refers to the role of the

³² Ibid., pp. 258, 253.

Holy Spirit in guiding the church in its recognition of those whom God has called into the ordained ministry.³³ In a document which provides little information on the nature of the ordained ministry, one attribute of this ministry which is not left in doubt is its christocentric-pneumatological basis.

The understanding of ordained ministry in this document relates to the normative understanding of this ministry in the Reformed tradition which saw it as Christ's gift to the church. The authors of a Statement Concerning Ordination expressed their opinion that the practice of ordination in the United Church should be in agreement with Catholic doctrine and practice. This meant that the ordination service would normatively include the use of the *epiclesis* and the imposition of hands. This report states further that the laying on of hands ought to be carried out by previously ordained ministers who have been authorized to perform this action.³⁴

The concern that ordination be correctly practiced in the United Church had behind it an interest in producing for the United Church rightly constituted ordained ministers. Such ministers, upon ordination, become ministers of the whole church, i.e. the Catholic church, and in this role they act as agents of the church's apostolicity, unity and catholicity.

³³ Ibid., p. 253.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 253.

Although this report does not, as BEM does, state directly that the ordained minister represents Christ, by speaking of the ordained ministry as an appointment of Christ, and describing the tasks of the ordained minister as representing the will of Christ, this is the implication. The community's role in the ordination process is one of recognition and consent not of constitution. The ordained ministry thus belongs pre-eminently to Christ and secondarily to the community which grants it authorization.

5. A concern for the orderly transmission of the ordained ministry underlies the whole of this report. The amount of space it devotes to connecting the ministry of the United Church's founding denominations to the apostolic ministry and back to the United Church is proof of this. Its belief that the doctrine of ministry in the United Church, and its practice in ordination, existed "in accord with the doctrine and discipline of the Catholic Church" also supports this view.³⁵

The recommendation that the imposition of hands on the one being ordained should be carried out by "previously ordained ministers" who are "duly authorized for this responsibility" implies both a concern for the orderly transmission of the ordained ministry as well as a belief in the collegial nature

³⁵ Ibid., p. 254.

of this ministry.³⁶ These specifications signify the concern the United Church had that its ministry be maintained through an orderly transmission and that this be recognized by the larger church. While the depth of this concern may have been occasioned by the United Church's desire to legitimate its status as a newly formed Christian denomination, it also indicates that the authors of this report recognized that a direct link existed between the legitimacy of the new church and the legitimacy of its ordained ministry.

D. The Mutual Recognition of the Ordained Ministries

The Statement Concerning Ordination was produced by a church which had only the previous year come into existence based on the union of three separate denominations. A number of the leading clergy quoted in the Statement speak of their desire that the new church continue to be a uniting church. It is obvious that the recently effected union which had resulted in the formation of the United Church of Canada served to engender confidence in respect to future unions.

The compassionate spirit of ecumenism underlying this document is evident in a number of its quotations. One is Dr.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 254, 258.

Pidgeon's reference to Christ finding completeness through "the growth of his church toward completeness".³⁷ Another is Dr. Thomas's remark that "in the success of the United Church of Canada lies the success of similar dreams elsewhere".³⁸ This spirit is also evident in Dr. Davidson's reference to "one flock and one shepherd...one membership and one ministry", and in Dr. Chown's comment that "the purpose of God in creating this United Church...is to supersede as far as it is possible, at this time, the fractional representations of Christianity".³⁹ Quotations of a similar type pervade this document and are evidence that its authors, and the theologians whom they quote, were committed, as were the authors of BEM, to a universally united church.

The United Church had already, in its Basis of Union, acknowledged its willingness to recognize that all churches which professed faith in Jesus Christ were part of Christ's one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.⁴⁰ This Article of Faith, which appears on the first page of Section Four of this report, can also be taken to represent the view of those who produced a Statement Concerning Ordination.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 255.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 256.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 257.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 253.

3.

INTERIM REPORTS

Between 1926 and 1954 a number of General Councils commissioned studies on aspects of the ordained ministry. These studies embraced such topics as the training necessary to produce qualified clergy, the content of seminary education including a full curriculum outline, recruiting requirements and methods, and the reception of ordained ministers from other denominations into the United Church of Canada. Studies in both 1948 and 1952 addressed the question of the reception of clergy from other denominations into the United Church. The 13th General Council in 1948 recommended that ministers from churches not members of any of the ecumenical bodies named in section 14 of the Manual, which included most of the mainstream churches of the Reformed tradition, could be accepted into the ministry of the United Church if approved by Conference, by a commissioning with prayer and the laying on of hands.⁴¹

The 14th General Council in 1950 set up a committee to study the matter of commissioning, and the question of what constitutes valid ordination to the ministry of the Word and sacraments. This Council stated its conviction in the Report on Reunion that "we cannot now or, at a later stage, accept any implication which casts doubt upon our heritage in the Holy

⁴¹ United Church of Canada, 1948 Agenda, RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS, 13th General Council, Toronto, 1948, pp. 65-69.

Catholic Church, or upon the reality of our ministry as a true and effective ministry of the word and sacraments". It was evident to the 14th General Council that if the United Church was to participate in future negotiations on union, it had a "responsibility to protect the Order of Ministry which we have received as a trust".⁴²

The 15th General Council (1952), studying this matter further, recommended that a section be written into the Manual specifying the requirements that had to be fulfilled before ministers from denominations other than those recognized in section 14 could be accepted into the ministry of the United Church. These requirements were satisfactory evidence from the applicants:

1) that their ordination was intended to be within and to the ministry of the catholic and universal church.

2) that their ordination was performed by the authority charged with the exercise of this specific church power within the ordaining communion.

3) that their ordination has been accompanied by prayer and the laying on of hands by such as have themselves been ordained similarly.⁴³

These specifically outlined criteria for the admission

⁴² 1952 Agenda, RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS, 15th General Council, Toronto, 1952, pp. 83-84.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 84.

into the ministry of the United Church of Canada of those who were not from mainstream Protestant denominations show the United Church's concern that its ministry be seen as a legitimate expression of ordained ministry within the church catholic. The primary motive for this concern for the catholicity of its orders was the United Church's continued commitment to Christian unity. Because of this commitment it wanted to avoid having anything in the ordering of its ministry that would act as a barrier to future negotiations toward union.

4. ON A FUNCTIONAL MINISTRY (1954)

In 1952 a Commission was appointed by the 15th General Council with the following terms of reference:

Believing our present industrial society presents a real challenge to the church: It is recommended that this General Council appoint a commission to study the relationship of the church to our present industrial society and report its findings to the next meeting of the Council. Such a study will of necessity cover a wide variety of subjects but the question of a Functional Ministry shall be given special attention.⁴⁴

General Council also directed that the Commission have among its members representatives from the United Church's Boards of Evangelism and Social Service, Home Missions, Colleges, and two representatives from each of the following groups: employers' associations, organized labour, agriculture. The Commission produced a twenty-page report with its first eight pages devoted to describing the nature of an industrialized society and its effect on people both within and outside the church.

While General Council believed that industrialization was responsible for the enormous and urgent problems Canadian society was experiencing, it recognized that industrialization was not the only factor involved. It pointed to other factors

⁴⁴ United Church of Canada, On a Functional Ministry, RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS, the 16th General Council, Toronto, 1954, p. 122.

such as "the growth of new knowledge, the emergence of a technological civilization with a world outreach, the new media of communication, and above all, the vast power now in human hands".⁴⁵ All of these conditions had produced a fast-paced society with less continuity and cohesiveness than in the past. General Council also acknowledged that while there was an urgent need for spiritual resources that could help people deal with this situation, the conditions which produced the problems were the very conditions which diminished people's capacity to recognize or find the spiritual support they needed.⁴⁶

After discussions began, it became clear to the Commission that it was not the professional ministry alone which comprised the ministry; it was the whole church. The Commission stated its belief that there is only one ministry in the church and that is the ministry of Jesus Christ who continues as "the chief pastor of the church".⁴⁷ It also recognized that "from the beginning of the church, and not less today, God has called men and women to specific service as Christ's ministers, so that in a distinctive sense they are ordained to holy office".⁴⁸ Referring to the fact that "minister" means

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 122.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 122.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 129.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 124.

"servant" rather than "ruler", the Commission described the nature of the ministry in terms of sacrifice, servanthood and love, and it warned against the tendency of religious persons to withdraw from the world and concentrate on their own spiritual well-being.⁴⁹

Although the Commission saw the need for the church, particularly in times of rapid change, to remain mindful of its heritage in the New Testament and in the church's tradition, it expressed the belief that the ministry should be determined by "function rather than custom".⁵⁰ To illustrate this the Commission referred to the appointment of deacons, mentioned in the New Testament, as proof that in the earliest days of the church "new forms of ministry were devised to meet emergent needs".⁵¹ The Commission did not believe that this kind of response to the needs of a specific time and place was meant to cease with the apostolic age. It recommended that the contemporary church also be responsive to its context, particularly in regard to the manner in which it expressed ministry.

On a Functional Ministry describes ordained ministers as those who have been called of God to devote themselves "not

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 129.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 130.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 131.

more fully but more specifically" than others to the service of the ministry. The ordained are "ministers" of the church in a special sense for they serve a prophetic, priestly and pastoral role in a "representative" way.⁵² As representatives of the community, the ordained are authorized to take leadership in worship and in the administration of the sacraments but, the Commission points out, "the word and the sacraments" belong to the church as a whole.

The question the Commission struggled with was not whether the traditional role of leadership in worship, administration of the sacraments and pastoral care was appropriate to the ordained ministry's function--they believed it was--but whether in order to meet the needs of an industrial society, the functions of the ordained ministry would be extended beyond the tasks with which it was normally identified. The Commission's conclusion was that the tasks of the ordained ministry should extend beyond the ecclesial duties generally associated with it. On a Functional Ministry noted that the ordained were already engaged in tasks outside the church such as teaching in colleges and acting as chaplains in hospitals and in the armed services. It recommended that the range of ministry performed by the ordained be expanded to an even wider area.⁵³

⁵² Ibid., p. 131.

⁵³ Ibid., pp. 131, 135.

The Commission also advised that the distinctive ministry of women should not be overlooked. Women, it believed, should be encouraged to pursue opportunities for ministry not only in the pastorate, but also in specialized ministries such as factories, the armed forces, hospitals and penal institutions. While women were encouraged to participate in all forms of ministry, the authors of this study saw women as being "particularly fitted for work among children and young people".⁵⁴

On a Functional Ministry, although a relatively brief document comprising twenty pages, devotes four of these to education and preparation for the ordained ministry. Its authors believed that anyone entering the ordained ministry must receive a general theological education which would equip that individual for any sphere of ministry. They also suggested that specialized training be given to those entering ministry so that they would be able to develop particular talents and interests and, therefore, capable of embracing a wider range of ministry. Knowledge of the socio-political make-up of contemporary society and of new insights in education and psychology were also considered important.⁵⁵

The Commission was careful to point out that a

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 137.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 131-134.

"functional" ministry implied more than the various duties performed by the ordained minister. It applied not only to the diverse responsibilities carried out by the ordained but to an overall desire to serve the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is inaccurate, the authors of this document contend, to believe that the chief concern of the church and its ministry is one of "re-organization or of developing new ministerial techniques".⁵⁶ In their view a functional ministry would order itself in ways that would allow the good news of Jesus Christ to be communicated to the contemporary world. The basic question, they state, is "How are we to order our ministry that the gospel may be declared in such a day as this?"⁵⁷ The major recommendations sent to the 16th General Council by the commission On a Functional Ministry were:

1. That the church, nationally and locally, consider how it could appropriately address the needs of people, both inside the church and in the community at large, in an industrialized society such as Canada.

2. That the preparation for ministry equip ministers to respond to the issues and problems endemic to contemporary Canadian society.

3. That the church give special attention to the ministry of women, and to training lay people for their involvement in ministry.

Early in the document, the authors of On a Functional Ministry note that the creation of the United Church was "a

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 123.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 122.

functional response under the good hand of God to meet the challenge of new conditions for which older ecclesiastical orders had become outmoded".⁵⁸ This statement could act as a summary of the report which they, themselves, produced.

A. The Place of the Ordained Ministry in the Church

1. The two documents On a Functional Ministry and BEM, differ in regard to the situations which produced them, the scope of their study on ministry, and in the way in which each makes use of scripture and tradition. On a Functional Ministry does not attempt to present a full understanding of the nature and role of the ordained ministry as BEM seeks to do, although in abbreviated form. The task given to the Commission which produced the United Church document was to consider how the church could more adequately address the highly industrialized society in which the United Church found itself in the early 1950's.

As part of that task, and because of the close connection which it saw existing between "the welfare of the church" and "the office of the ministry", this report places its major

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 124.

focus on the exercise of the ordained ministry.⁵⁹ The basic question the Commission on a Functional Ministry addressed was how the church's ministry could be ordered "that the gospel may be declared in such a day as this."⁶⁰ Its authors also acknowledged their desire to approach this task in a way that was "concrete and practical" rather than "doctrinal and discursive". This stands in contrast to BEM's wider scope and its more theoretical and doctrinal approach.

The way the two documents use scripture and tradition also differs. BEM examines the early witness of the church in both scripture and tradition in order to determine from this record what God's will is for the life and ordering of the church. Even while admitting that more than one pattern of ministry appeared in the early church, it believes that those early traditions can serve as the revelation of God's will for the ministry of the church in successive generations. According to the Lima document, there is merit in all Christian denominations examining their own practice of ministry in light of these early patterns, particularly the three-fold pattern of ministry which was the almost universal practice in the church between the second and the sixteenth centuries. In order to achieve its purpose of effecting unity among the various

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 131.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 122.

denominations of Christ's church, BEM looks to the church's early Tradition hoping to find there the common elements that held the church in apostolicity and unity during the first centuries of its life.

The United Church's report looks at scripture and tradition to find a basis for the way in which it is to approach its task of revitalizing the church's ministry and making it responsive to society today. What it finds there does not lead it to call for a recovery of early forms of church order to invigorate the church's ministry. It finds, instead, a rationale for ordering the church's ministry in a way that is responsive to the context in which it finds itself today. In the early church, it states, it was common for "new forms of ministry" to come into being to meet "emergent needs".⁶¹ This was the way in which the Spirit directed the church then and it is, according to the authors of this report, the way in which the Spirit has continued to guide the church throughout its history.

It was the belief of the authors of On a Functional Ministry that this contextualization of ministry was not only part of the church's history but it was, in many cases, a sign of the church's own revitalization. On a Functional Ministry, therefore, believing it has the blessing of both the biblical

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 130.

and historical witness of the church, directs the church toward the issues and needs that are part of the experience of men and women in the present, as the basis for its re-organization of the church's ministry.

2. While not stating directly that the ordained ministry is constitutive for the life of the church as BEM does, the understanding of the ordained ministry as one of the essential marks of the church is implicated in this United Church document. "From the beginning of the church," it states, "and no less today", God has called men and women to "specific service as Christ's ministers so that in a distinctive sense they are ordained to holy office".⁶² There is also nothing in this document to suggest that the United Church's traditional understanding of the ordained ministry as appointed by Christ for the welfare of the church is being challenged. Although Article 17 "Of the Ministry" of the Basis of Union which contains this view is not directly referred to, there is no evidence that this understanding of the institution of the ordained ministry is being called into question. More likely it was taken for granted.

The recognition of the crucial role played by the ordained ministry within the church is reinforced by the fact that this document, despite its belief that the whole church is called to

⁶² Ibid., p. 123.

participate in Christ's ministry, allots most of its space to discussing what the ordained ministry's role will be in "directing" the church's response to its present context.⁶³ One of the major thrusts of this document is to suggest that the laity must be made aware of the fact that they share in Christ's ministry along with members of the ordained ministry. It is never implied, however, that if the laity were to recognize and accept *their* ministry this would, in any way, substitute for the ministry exercised by the ordained.

3. The United Church was a church in whose structure lay persons had traditionally played an important role. They were part of the decision making process in the congregation as members of the Session and the Official Board, and in the presbytery as lay representatives from their pastoral charges. They were also engaged in roles within the congregation as elders, stewards, Sunday School teachers and youth leaders. There is no doubt, however, that the ministry of the ordained had been perceived both by clergy and lay people alike, as the visible focus of ministry within the church. This report had, as one of its goals, to bring about "a new church consciousness" which would make the laity aware of *their* participation in Christ's ministry.

On a Functional Ministry supports this contention by

⁶³ Ibid., p. 123.

speaking of the one ministry of Christ which is expressed in the church which is "the ministering body" and which within this body has a variety of expressions, one of which is the ordained ministry. This view parallels the understanding of ministry presented in the first section of BEM entitled "The Calling of the Whole People of God". This United Church report never subjugates the ordained ministry to the ministry of the laos, or for that matter, to the church itself. On the other hand, it clearly defines the role of the community in testing and authorizing the call of God to members of the ordained ministry, and it defines the relationship between the ministry of the laity and the ministry of the ordained as one of inter-dependence and mutual support.⁶⁴

B. The Tasks and Forms of the Ordained Ministry in the Church

2. The major recommendation of the report On a Functional Ministry is that the church diversify its ministry in order to meet the needs of contemporary society. Pointing to the example of the development of the diaconate in the New Testament, the United Church report suggests that the church today must also create new forms of ministry which will communicate the gospel to those who live in a fast-paced,

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 122, BEM 1-6.

industrialized society. The fact that there is no reference in this document to the threefold order of ministry is not surprising for several reasons. First, it was not the traditional practice of the United Church to order its ministry in the episcopal fashion. The suggestion inherent in this particular pattern of ministry that there are different "orders" of ministry, one of which--the episcopal ministry--is a "full" expression of ministry from which the others are derived, would not have been acceptable in a church which strongly advocated a non-hierarchical ordering of ministry, and which carefully avoided any "official" connotation of a difference in spiritual status between lay and ordained members of the church.

A second reason for the lack of reference to the threefold pattern of ministry is a noticeable prejudice in this report against any institutional pattern of ministry connected to the past. Its authors believed that the way in which the ordained ministry had been ordered in the past, while useful in its own time, was not adequate to meet the contemporary needs of church or society today or in the future. In light of this judgement there would have been no logic in discussing a recovery of the threefold pattern of ministry. This document's strong emphasis on the Spirit directing the church's ministry in the present and its overwhelmingly positive attitude toward change would also preclude an appreciation of the merits of the threefold

pattern of ministry, and particularly, any interest in recovering the episcopal ministry.

3. On a Functional Ministry shares with BEM the view that the primary tasks of the ordained ministry are leadership in worship, particularly preaching the Word, administration of the sacraments, meeting the pastoral needs of the community and offering leadership to the church's outreach ministry. Where they differ is in the emphasis that the United Church report places on extending the ordained ministry into areas outside the congregational setting. It is difficult to determine whether this difference is due solely to the fact that the United Church's report is specifically aimed at discussing the "functional" aspect of ministry in a pragmatic manner, whereas the BEM document is a more balanced presentation of a variety of aspects of ministry looked at from a theological perspective.

The Commission On a Functional Ministry places a clear emphasis on the ministry of the whole church noting that "the church must go to the people and this can only be accomplished by laymen and laywomen". At the same time, however, it encourages members of the ordained ministry to maintain a visible presence in areas of employment generally considered secular, a seemingly contradictory position. The desire of its authors to support specialized ministries while at the same time encouraging the church "as a whole" to take up its

ministry, reveals a marked philosophical dichotomy in this document.

On a Functional Ministry's predilection for "specialized", non-congregational ministries for the ordained does exactly what it hoped to avoid--it devalues the ministry of the laity. By implication it makes the presence of the ordained in the secular sphere an important sign of the church's presence rather than attributing that important function of "being the church" to the "priesthood of all believers".⁶⁵

The Lima document, while it does not place the same emphasis on the participation of the ordained in specialized ministries, does refer to the ordained ministry being involved in occupations not directly related to the church. It states that "ordained persons may be professional ministers in the sense that they receive their salaries from the church", or they may "remain in other occupations or employment".⁶⁶ There is no commentary to explain why persons in "other occupations or employment" should be ordained. Further, BEM shows no awareness of the issues that might arise when an ordained minister is involved in an occupation outside the normal sphere of the church. There is no discussion, for example, of how those ordained ministers who practice outside the ecclesial

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 131.

⁶⁶ BEM #46.

community, would be able to maintain adequate contact with both their colleagues in the ordained ministry and the ecclesial community itself. The failure to address these underlying issues pinpoints a deficiency in both the United Church report and the Lima document.

C. The Meaning of Ordination

1. The report On a Functional Ministry describes Christ's direction to the apostles, "As the Father has sent me, so send I you", as passing "through the apostles to the church".⁶⁷ When it speaks of the specific call into the ordained ministry, however, it attributes this call to God rather than to Christ. In this regard, one must note that there is no evidence elsewhere in the document to indicate that it wished to break with the United Church's official statement on ordained ministry found in Article 17 of the Basis of Union which refers to the ordained ministry as the institution of Christ.

One might also attribute this change in terminology to the fact that the United Church was strongly Trinitarian in its theology, so that to make God responsible for the institution of the ordained ministry was inclusive of Christ. What this report does make clear is that the ownership of the ordained

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 130.

ministry does not rest with the church. The ordained ministry is always referred to as the work of God, with the community testing and giving recognition in God's behalf to the one who has experienced a call of God into this ministry.

While the relation of the first and third persons of the Trinity to the institution of the ordained ministry is not as clearly defined in this document as it is in BEM, the place of the Holy Spirit in mediating God's call and in guiding and empowering this ministry is not ambiguous. The Spirit acts both for God and for the church in the ordination process.

The United Church document is very clear in linking the nature of the ordained ministry to the nature of the ministry of Jesus Christ. It describes the ordained ministry as "prophetic, priestly and pastoral" as Christ's own ministry was; it describes it as a ministry of "reconciliation" and as a "servant" ministry.⁶⁸ The gospel proclaimed, the sacraments celebrated and the pastoral activity of the ordained ministry are directly related to the teaching and pastoral ministry of Jesus Christ and to his commands of institution concerning the Lord's Supper and baptism.

On a Functional Ministry, written during the period 1950-1952, attempted to situate the ordained ministry in its proper place as a unique and divinely appointed expression of

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 129.

ministry within the one ministry of Jesus Christ. The ownership of the ministry, in this view, rests not with the ordained or lay ministries of the church, nor with the church per se, but rather with Christ who continues as the "chief pastor" of the Church, and who is the source of the fundamental and integral relationship of these two expressions of ministry within the church.⁶⁹

2. In discussing the ordained ministry the authors of this report are careful to state that their understanding of ordained ministry is not purely functional. While the "functional" aspect of ministry may be the specific concern of their work, they deny that "ministerial techniques" or "re-organization" will maintain a faithful ministry in the church. The "chief concern of the church" in addressing the challenge of an industrialized society will be to proclaim the gospel in a fresh and relevant manner. For it is bringing the "fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ into the lives of men and women" which provides the "test" of faithful ministry in the church.⁷⁰ Further evidence of the lofty view of ordination in this document is the fact that it places the designation "holy" before the word "ministry" on a number of occasions, yet never applies this same designation to the ministry of the

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 123.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 123.

laity.

Despite the elevated understanding of ordained ministry found in this report, the sacramental understanding of this ministry which underlies the BEM document, is not present.⁷¹ On a Functional Ministry puts in place a direct relationship between the content and manner of Christ's ministry and the ordained ministry, but it never does this in a way that makes the ordained minister specifically representative of Christ in a way that a lay person is not. Instead, this document speaks of worship, preaching and the sacraments belonging to the church. It is the church, in turn, which recognizes God's choice for those who will offer leadership and direction to its ministry. The ordained ministry is called of God to "represent" the community.

In this understanding of the representative nature of the ordained ministry, the ordained ministry represents the community in terms of the functions he or she performs within the church but the ordained minister is first a Christian and, therefore, representative of Christ in the same way as every other Christian.

3/4. On a Functional Ministry locates the source of authority for the ordained ministry in God. The church, recognizing God's authority to appoint an ordained ministry

⁷¹ The reference here is to the 'broadly' sacramental understanding of the ordained ministry found in BEM.

within it, acts under the guidance of the Spirit to "set apart" such a ministry. It also connects the authority of the ordained ministry to the community it serves, noting that its authority to act in a "representative" manner is not personal, but one which it has been given through the community's authorization.⁷² The community's involvement in the exercise of the ordained ministry can be traced back to its involvement in the ordination process, and in the act of ordination itself.

Although there is no reference to the rite of ordination in this document, there is no evidence to suggest that any dismissal or devaluation of this rite was intended. The absence of such a reference is more likely due to the limited scope of this report and to the fact that its subject matter concentrates on the "exercise" of ministry and not on its institution or the process of ordination per se. It is likely that the practice of this rite, including the traditional rituals of the *epiclesis* and the imposition of hands associated with it, were considered normative by the authors of this report. It would certainly be in keeping with the report's emphasis on a Spirit-led ministry, if the act of ordination which was designed to invoke and transmit the Spirit, was considered the initial act of empowerment for those entering the ordained ministry.

⁷² Ibid., p. 131.

While this document has as its major concern the question of how the church is "to order" its ministry "that the gospel may be declared in such a day as this", its concern is not so much for the "ordering" of ministry as for its "exercise". It is more concerned with how the ordained ministry interacts with its social milieu than it is with the institutional aspects of this ministry. The authors of On a Functional Ministry express the view that there is a "need for new and adventurous service as a response to the challenge of our industrial society".⁷³ Because this is a document which looks to experience in the contemporary for the order and exercise of ministry, and because of its obvious tenor suggesting that "new is better" and "change is good" it was unlikely that it would be concerned with the correct ordering of the institutional succession of the ordained ministry.

The primary concern of this report is that the ordained ministry should reflect both the ministry of Jesus which it identifies as a "sacrificial, self-forgetting...servant" ministry, and the apostolic ministry of the early church, which it describes as a ministry of service responsive to the issues and needs of its varying contexts. The faithful rendering of Christ's ministry in "praxis" seems to be the only kind of ministerial transmission in which the authors of this document

⁷³ Ibid., p. 130.

were interested.

D. The Mutual Recognition of the Ordained Ministries

There is no mention of ecumenical considerations in On a Functional Ministry. Although one cannot assume from this that the United Church of the early 1950's was not interested in ecumenicity, this report does not demonstrate an interest in the subject. This is evident in the way it dismisses the custom and tradition of the past in respect to the ordained ministry and focuses, instead, on contemporary issues and problems. It is heavily critical of the church "clinging to the past" and highly encouraging of change in regard to ministry in the present.⁷⁴ In its emphasis on revitalizing the church through contextualizing its ministry, On a Functional Ministry gives no consideration to the effect that any marked changes in the ordering or practice of ordained ministry would have on the United Church's relationship with other churches including churches also within the Reformed tradition.

None of this is meant, however, to imply a lack of recognition of other denomination's ministries at the theological level. Such recognition was part of the doctrinal position of the United Church and is stated in Article 15 of

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 122, 123, 128, 130.

the Basis of Union. Although no judgement is made of the ministries of other churches in this report, if the authors of On a Functional Ministry had commented on them, it 's likely that they would have judged their practical merit rather than their theological or juridical legitimacy, and they would have done this on the same basis as they judged the ministry in their own denomination--on how effectively it contextualized the servant ministry of Jesus Christ.

5. COMMISSION ON ORDINATION (1962)

When the 18th General Council met in Ottawa in 1958, it was presented with two memorials which had been referred from the Committee on Law and Legislation. One of these sought clarification concerning the relation of an ordained woman minister to her work following marriage; the other asked that a lay supply minister who had previously been granted the privilege of dispensing the sacraments should have the right to be chairperson of the Session and Official Board of the charge he was serving. The Law and Legislation Committee thought that these issues could only be clarified by a complete analysis of the history and doctrine of the ministry. It realized as well that if the United Church were to continue to seek union with other churches, it must have a clear understanding of its own position in regard to the nature of the ordained ministry. A Commission was put in place to study this question and to report its findings to the 20th General Council in 1962.

The Commission began its work with a study of the office of the priest in the Old Testament, and the ministries of Jesus, the apostles, and the prophets, teachers and evangelists of the New Testament era. It was the belief of the members of the Commission that knowing the history of the church's ministry would be a useful place to begin their

search into the meaning and role of ordered ministry.

The report of the Commission on Ordination noted that the forms of ministry which existed in the early church either were based on the pattern of the synagogue, or they were forms which emerged to meet specific contextual needs. Its conviction was that the past and its organization of ministry should not be an object of worship. The report remarks: "New times may call for new types of organization and expression; new situations may demand great changes and adjustments within the body and structure of the church so that God's loving purpose may be fulfilled."⁷⁶

After presenting an historical overview of the ordained ministry in the tradition of the church, and a summary of its meaning in other major denominations, the Commission went on to describe what ordination means in the United Church of Canada. It defined ordination as "an act of the church by which, in accordance with her laws and procedures, certain of her members are set apart for the ministry of the Word and Sacraments". The authors of this report also note that ordination cannot be defined in detachment from the office or function it fulfils, nor can it be understood other than in relation to the church, and "its total ministry under God to the world".⁷⁷

⁷⁶ United Church of Canada, Commission on Ordination, RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS, 20th General Council, Toronto, 1962, p. 328.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 340.

The report of the Commission on Ordination pointed to Jesus Christ as the chief minister of the church, remarking that all authority for ministry derives from him. According to the report, Jesus Christ has given the gift of ministry to the church for its nourishment and growth. While Christ has committed the continuance of his ministry to the whole church, the ordained ministry stands, by Christ's will, as a particular order within that total ministry.⁷⁸

Christ calls from within the church those whom he desires to have as ministers of Word and Sacrament. A personal awareness of this call is the first requisite for ordination. The church's responsibility in the ordination process is to judge whether the individual's call is genuine, and also whether it is useful to the church. The Holy Spirit is the intermediary of Christ's call into ministry. The report pointed out that the call of Christ and the recognition and authorization of that call by the church are complementary. "No one can be ordained by the advancement of a personal claim; on the other hand, the church must seek to ordain only those who have been called to the holy ministry by Christ himself."⁷⁹

According to the Commission on Ordination, the apostolic succession resides not in a particular ministry but in the

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 335.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 342.

ministry of the whole church, and the ordained ministry exists in succession to the apostles as one part of the church's ministry. It accepted the historical evidence that the office of the apostolate was perpetuated in an orderly succession through some form of the presbyterate from the early church until the present, and expressed its belief that the United Church's ministry stood within that orderly succession. The Commission stated:

Our acceptance of a particular ministry of the Word and Sacraments, continued from the ordained to the ordained does not in any way invalidate the priesthood of all believers, in the sense that the witness of any Christian, ordained or not ordained, when made on behalf of Christ, the sole head of the church is always the same.⁸⁰

While the Commission acknowledged that the tradition to which the United Church belonged did not recognize that "ministerial succession or succession in the laying on of hands" secures the possession of the Holy Spirit or guarantees a lawful ministry, it stated that "within the order of the Word and Sacraments we recognize certain necessary conditions without which no true ministerial succession is possible".⁸¹

According to the Commission these conditions were:

1. The succession must be ordered in accordance with apostolic doctrine.
2. A true succession depends on Christ and that rules out any

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 345-346.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 346.

possibility of a self-perpetuating succession. It is only as the ministry declares the Lordship of Christ that it exists in continuity to the apostolic ministry.

3. A true ministerial succession is only there when it is related to the whole continuity of the redeemed life of the people of God.⁸²

When the above conditions are met a ministerial succession is valid but even then its validity is only one part of the apostolic succession that has been passed to the whole church.

The Commission described ordination in the United Church as an act of Christ and the church accomplished by prayer invoking the Holy Spirit and by the laying on of hands of some who have been previously ordained and who have been appointed to that task. The rite of ordination is always to take place within a service of worship where the community is present and should include a celebration of the eucharist.⁸³

The Commission on Ordination stated its agreement with the doctrine of ministry given in Article 17 of the Basis of Union, and with the definition of the ordained ministry found in the 1926 Statement on Ordination. It also commented that in the United Church's understanding of ordination, the act of ordination does not convey divine grace 'ex opere operato'. The authority which is exercised by the ordained minister is

⁸² Ibid., p. 346.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 343.

not personal authority and cannot be exercised apart from the church. According to the Commission the ordained ministry could exercise authority within the church because of its connection to Jesus Christ who calls men and women into the ministry, and because of its link with the community which has recognized and given official authorization to that call.⁸⁴

Because it was their view that "no report of the church concerning ministry and ordination can be complete without a study of the role of the laity in the life and mission of the church", the authors of this report included in their study a section on the ministry of the laity. The laity, they defined, as "the people of God called to witness to the world in Christ's ministry of reconciliation".⁸⁵ The term laity by this definition included all baptized Christians including members of the ordained ministry. The Commission then expressed its desire that any attempt to define and enhance the role of the laity in the church not be seen as an attempt to make the laity fulfil its function by becoming a supplement to the ordained ministry. Nor, it says, is the re-affirmation of the role of the laity a form of anti-clericalism: "a high doctrine of the laity does not exclude but rather includes a new high doctrine

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 342-344.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 346.

of the clergy".⁸⁶

The Commission on Ordination did not see the ordained ministry as differing from other ministries in its apostolic character, rather, its uniqueness lay in the role it played within the church. Because the church must be continually sustained and built up, because it must have at the centre of its life the word proclaimed and the sacraments celebrated, all of which point to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the ordained ministry is called by Christ and set apart by the church to carry out these responsibilities. In the opinion of the authors of this document the ordained minister "stands in Christ's stead before his people" and thus shares "to a degree shared by no other ministry, the prophetic, the priestly and the kingly ministry of Christ". Although this report does not understand ordination as being indelible in character, it does express the opinion that the character and intent of ordination are such that it is unrepeatable.⁸⁷

The Commission on Ordination had been set up to assist the church in responding to two specific issues: one was "the relationship of an ordained woman minister to her work following her marriage"; the other was whether a Lay Supply could also serve as chairperson of the Session and Official

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 347.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 350.

Board, a role generally reserved for members of the ordained ministry.

Its recommendation regarding the latter was that Lay Supplies who had been licensed to administer the sacraments in a congregation were eligible to act as chair of the Session of that congregation.⁸⁸ In regard to the position of an ordained woman after her marriage, the Commission acknowledged the changed status of women in the modern era but it did not believe that a woman who had entered into the "special calling of wife and mother", should serve in a pastoral charge. It did advise, though, that if at a future time a woman who had been previously ordained should become the sole support of her family because of the illness or death of her husband she could apply to Conference for permission to return to the pastorate. A married woman would also be allowed to serve a pastoral charge when she was "no longer required in the home as a mother and if suitable ministry can be arranged which does not interfere with the stability of her marriage and her position as wife".⁸⁹

While admitting that one of its members did not accept the position it had adopted on the role of ordained married women, the Commission's majority view was that most married women

⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 352.

⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 352.

would not wish to continue serving a pastoral charge after marriage.⁹⁰ It also assumed that a married woman would not be able to adequately "discharge the duties of ministers assigned to a pastoral charge" if she possessed the parallel vocation of wife and mother.⁹¹

When The Commission on Ordination was presented to the 20th General Council in 1962, its Introductory Statement and its first eight sections were received as written; following much discussion the four recommendations relating to the role of women clergy were referred to the Executive of General Council for further consideration.

A. The Place of the Ordained Ministry in the Church

1. The concept of a dynamic, creative, and contemporary church led by a responsive, flexible and contextualized ministry pervades this study, and perhaps accounts for the ease with which it distances itself from the ecclesial structures of the past. The authors of this report present

⁹⁰ In the Commission's words: "for there is one member who believes that...there could be some women who could fulfil both roles at least as satisfactorily as some men". The membership of the Commission on Ordination consisted of eleven men and two women.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 350.

stern warnings against what they refer to as "worship of the past".⁹² While acknowledging that former patterns of ministerial organization may have served a useful purpose in their time, the Commission stressed that adherence to "the old structures" must not be allowed to prevent God's will from being fulfilled in the church today. "The clay of the church", in its view, "must remain pliable in the creative hands of God". The Commission's use of such phrases as "launch out into the deep", and "venture with God into the new and untried" illustrate this report's penchant for change. Such words might give one the impression that the authors of the Commission on Ordination possessed a single-minded view of the beneficence of change and new experience, but their position on the role of married women ministers shows that this was not the case.

The general consensus of the Commission was that the woman in a marriage was responsible for the stability of the marriage and the raising of children in a manner, or to a degree, different from that of a man. On the basis of this opinion, it was considered unlikely that a married female minister could adequately meet the demands of home and pastoral charge. This view, along with the fact that similar reservations were not raised in regard to married male clergy indicates that, in some matters at least, the Commission stayed very much with the

⁹² Ibid., p. 328.

status quo.

Although the Commission on Ordination begins the task of studying the ordained ministry by reviewing its history, it is evident that the specific details of this history do not form the basis for its understanding of the ordained ministry today. The reason for this is the Commission's belief that ordered ministry in the early church was under the direct guidance of the Spirit and was exercised in a manner that was responsive to the varying contexts of each local ecclesial community.⁹³ What is important from this perspective is not adherence to details of ordering which originated in the past, but an openness to the guidance of the Spirit who still acts today. How the ordained ministry should be understood and exercised today then becomes a matter of how the membership of the church will hear and respond to the Spirit's leading. This, of course, begs a question which has plagued the church, particularly non-magisterial denominations, for centuries: "Who speaks for the Spirit in the church?". No answer is provided to this question.

BEM, in contrast to the Commission on Ordination, looks to the past organization of the church's ministry as the revelation of the form and content God intended for the church's ministry today. Even while noting that "the Spirit

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 334-335.

has many times led the church to adapt its ministries to contextual needs" the Lima statement affirms the early expression of the church's ministry as signifying God's permanent revelation in regard to the church's ministry.⁹⁴ BEM acknowledges the ambiguities and differences that existed in the ministry in the early church, yet it believes that the Spirit led the church over the first centuries of its life to develop an understanding and an "ordering" of ministry that could be universally and permanently useful. This is why BEM can recommend the threefold pattern of ministry as a means of ordering the church's ordained ministry today without, in its opinion, sacrificing a contemporary, dynamic and responsive ministry.

2. The Commission on Ordination states the belief that "the church is constituted by the ministry of Christ", not by any particular ministry within it, including the ministry of the ordained.⁹⁵ Since, however, the ministry of the Word and sacraments is vital to the life of the church, and since Christ acts through the ordained to bring the Word and Sacraments to the church, the role of the ordained ministry is crucial for the nurture and upbuilding of the church. While stating that other ministries may "undertake for a time" some

⁹⁴ BEM 22.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 334, 341.

of the essential tasks which sustain and perpetuate the church, the Commission expresses the view that the ordained ministry is the specific ministry which assumes this role as a permanent vocation. It speaks as well of the ordained ministry sharing "to a degree shared by no other ministry" the prophetic, priestly and kingly ministry of Christ. Not only does this report consider the ordained ministry to serve a unique and necessary role in the church, it also points out that this ministry exists "in response to the call of Christ", as well as to the "need of the church".⁹⁶ There can be no doubt that this report gives the ordained ministry an essential role to play in the life and witness of the church.⁹⁷

3. The authors of this report were of the opinion that although the ordained ministry existed as a divine appointment, it was also directly situated in the ecclesial community. They state the view that ordination can only be understood "in relation to the church and its total ministry under God to the world".⁹⁸ The Commission further remarks that the ordained ministry can have no existence of its own outside the church--a position expressed twenty years later in the Lima document. Even stronger evidence of the integral relationship

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 319.

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 337, 338, 341, 348, 349.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 341.

between the ordained ministry and the ecclesial community is the Commission's belief that members of the ordained ministry "who resign from their pastoral charges or request to be left without one in order to enter upon employment which...is not related to the service of the church", should be asked to resign from the ordained ministry.⁹⁹

B. The Tasks and Forms of the Ordained Ministry in the Church

1. The Commission on Ordination speaks of the church as the primary repository of the apostolic teaching and ministry. It then goes on to say "we admit, however, to a particularity of use of the term (i.e. apostolic succession) as applied to the ministry of Word and Sacrament".¹⁰⁰ In the Commission's view, members of the ordained ministry through their prophetic and priestly ministry facilitated the apostolic teaching and ministry of the whole church.

It is interesting to note that in the Commission's discussion of what constitutes a valid succession of apostolicity within the church, it mentions the preservation of the teachings of Jesus, and the continuity of "the pastoral office and government of the church". It is difficult to fit

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 350.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 350.

together this statement which refers to maintaining the apostolicity of the church, in part through the pastoral office, with other statements which warn against clinging to "ancient patterns of organization" and "old structures".¹⁰¹ Since the church's "ancient patterns of organization" include the pastoral office one awaits, but does not find, a description of a newly organized expression of this office. This provides another example of the Commission on Ordination's tendency toward generalization at the expense of specific, clarifying detail.

2/3. In discussing how the ordained ministry should be ordered today, the Commission on Ordination rejects past patterns of ministry without any specific critique of them except to suggest that their usefulness is now past. While the authors of this report strongly advocate that the church develop new forms of ministry to respond to the social and spiritual needs of its contemporary context, they do not offer any substantiation of why "new" forms are needed or any information on how they would be implemented. This report, for example, acknowledges the threefold pattern of ministry as the historic order of the church and recognizes its continued presence in other denominations, yet does not discuss either its merits or inadequacies before dismissing it. The longevity

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 346.

of the threefold pattern of ministry, if nothing else, would not commend it to a Commission whose strong propensity for change led it to the belief that God was calling the church to "new days, new adventures and new creative experiences".¹⁰²

In examining this document's disavowal of the past and its penchant for "new types of organization and expression", it must be noted that the rhetoric in the document is far more radical than the substance of what is suggested and, in fact, very little is suggested in concrete terms. In contrast to the study On a Functional Ministry which preceded it in 1954, there is little reference in the Commission on Ordination to members of the ordained ministry becoming involved in specialized ministries outside the local ecclesial community. This, plus the fact that it describes the chief end of ordination in traditional terms as "proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments", leads one to the conclusion that, for all its talk of "new expressions" of ministry, the Commission on Ordination did not envision any fundamental change in the traditional understanding of the nature of the ordained ministry.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 328.

¹⁰³ The suggestion of the Commission on Ordination that ordained ministers who were not professionally engaged in work within the church should resign their ordination lends further support to this observation.

C. The Meaning of Ordination

1. A christological-pneumatological foundation for the ordained ministry is strongly affirmed in the Commission on Ordination Report. The Commission speaks of the ordained ministry's presence in the church being the result of "a double calling"--the personal call by Christ to the individual and the public or corporate acknowledgement thereof by the church".¹⁰⁴ These calls are complementary to each other, however, since both of them ultimately derive from Christ. It is the work of the Spirit to mediate the personal call of Christ to the individual and to guide the church toward recognition of this call through the act of ordination.¹⁰⁵ As BEM does, this document refers to Christ as the "true ordainer", and speaks of the empowerment of the Spirit through the rituals of the ordination rite.¹⁰⁶

2. This document also speaks of the ordained ministry serving a dual "representative" function within the church. Members of the ordained ministry represent both Christ and the community. In offering leadership in prayer and worship, "the minister represents the people in the holy presence". The

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 328.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 342, 344.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 341, 344.

ordained minister also represents the community as he ensures the celebration of the sacraments, and carries out pastoral care and other acts of service both within the congregation and through the church's ministry of outreach.¹⁰⁷

While the whole church shares in Christ's prophetic, priestly and kingly ministry, the ordained ministry does so "to a degree shared by no other ministry".¹⁰⁸ The ordained minister represents Christ in delivering the prophetic word through "preaching, teaching, acting and being".¹⁰⁹ In acting as priest the ordained minister represents Christ before the congregation, particularly in the celebration of the sacraments. "In the consecration and delivery of the bread and wine the minister stands in the place where Christ stood at the Last Supper", and in baptism and confirmation "the minister represents Christ as in His name he receives the lambs into the flock laying his hands upon them and blessing them". The Commission is cautious to add, however, that the ordained person is never to carry out this priestly role "in any manner which would exclude the congregation's participation in priesthood". The ordained minister also participates in the kingly role of Christ by acting as pastor and leader in the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 336.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 350.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 335.

community but always in the manner of a "shepherd", not as a "master".¹¹⁰ In carrying out these roles the ordained minister represents Jesus Christ who is truly prophet, priest and king.

Although the Commission on Ordination does not present a strictly sacramental understanding of the ordained ministry, its references to the representative nature of this "unique and holy service" comes close to BEM's broad understanding of the sacramental nature of this ministry.¹¹¹

3. Both the Lima report and the Commission on Ordination are specific in attributing the authority of the ordained ministry primarily to Christ, and secondarily to the community. As well their understanding of the nature of such authority is the same. The ordained minister "is not a hired man", the United Church report points out, but speaks by the authority of Jesus Christ, an authority which is conveyed through the rite of ordination enacted by the community. Both reports describe the nature of this authority as responsibility and service. The ordained minister "does not exercise lordship over God's people", the Commission remarks, "rather is he their chief servant".¹¹²

4. The Commission on Ordination describes the act of

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 336.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 349.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 336.

ordination as the means whereby the church recognizes that an individual has been called by Christ to the ordained ministry and grants public recognition of that call. It also refers to the "carefully prescribed" regulations found in the Manual of the United Church of Canada which outline the essential prerequisites for a legitimate service of ordination.¹¹³ Among these is the stipulation that the ordination rite is to take place within a public service of worship which will ideally include a celebration of the eucharist. The act of ordination itself is to include the use of the *epiclesis* invoking the presence and empowerment of the Spirit, and the imposition of hands, signifying the granting of the Spirit to the one being ordained. The belief that it is Christ himself who performs the act of ordination, and the use of the *epiclesis* and the laying on of hands which point to the Spirit's presence in the action taking place, again point to the christocentric-pneumatological understanding of ordination found in this document.

The recommendation in this document that the laying on of hands be carried out by "presbyters who had themselves been previously ordained", a practice which was normative in the United Church to that date, signifies the Commission's acceptance of a belief in ministerial succession through the

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 343.

presbyterate.¹¹⁴ Ordination in the United Church's report is understood to be first to the Holy Catholic Church, and secondarily to the denomination which the ordinand represents. The authors of the Commission on Ordination recognized, however, that because of the divided state of the church, "there is no ordination which carries the authority of the whole church". Nevertheless, they affirm: "We believe there is a Holy Catholic Church and that our ordination is to its ministry".¹¹⁵ BEM, on the other hand, speaks of ordination as establishing "a new relation...between this minister and the local Christian community and, by intention, the Church universal".¹¹⁶

Too much should not be made of this divergence, since both documents at some point describe the relation of the ordained ministry to its local, supra-local and universal ecclesial contexts. What this divergence may account for, however, is the difference in the appreciation of the episcopal ministry shown in these two documents. The episcopal ministry as a "ministry of unity" becomes more essential where the authority in presbyteral ordination is closely related to the local ecclesial unit. The episcopal minister then serves

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 344.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 344.

¹¹⁶ BEM 42; Ibid., p. 344.

the role of "linking" these local congregational units, and their ordained ministers, into a diocese, and a higher form of episcopal ministry becomes necessary at each level where unity needs to be effected, eventually suggesting the need for a universal episcopal minister--the latter being, admittedly, a point to which BEM does not go.

In contrast, in a church which believes that the authority and relationship of its ordained presbyters is primarily to the universal church, it is not as essential that a specific ministry, such as the episcopate, link the presbyter, and the presbyter's congregation, to other levels of church. The presbyter even while serving the narrower unit, the local congregation, is able to link this unit to all other expressions of church, because "the sphere of authority" given to the presbyter in ordination is "the whole Catholic Church".¹¹⁷

5. The United Church report describes what constitutes a true succession of the apostolic ministry of the church as preservation of the teaching of Christ as well as continuity of the pastoral office. It does not suggest, however, that either of these requires the presence of an episcopal ministry. This Commission, and the United Church generally, considered ordination by the court of the church to which this

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 344.

responsibility had been designated, namely the Conference, as sufficient assurance of an orderly succession of the ordained ministry.

D. The Mutual Recognition of the Ordained Ministries

Early in the document, the Commission on Ordination states its belief that the United Church should examine its own understanding of ordained ministry before approaching other denominations in regard to union.¹¹⁸ Later in the report, it expresses the conviction that "it is essential in a united Church that there should be a common ministry universally recognized".¹¹⁹ Although these remarks appear to indicate ecumenical interest, the authors of this document go on to reveal in general, if not in specific terms, a willingness to yield the church's ancient traditions for new and, as yet, undelineated forms of ministry. This is a position radically different from that found in the Lima document. It is also one which, in light of the many denominations which continue to use and to treasure historic forms of ministry, could do little to promote ecumenical dialogue.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 227.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 339.

6. THE MINISTRY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY (1968)

In 1964 the 21st General Council, in accordance with a special resolution of the Sessional Committee on Colleges and Secondary Schools, established a commission on the church's ministry in the 20th century. The resolution referred to twenty memorials from eight conferences which revealed a "growing sense of frustration amongst congregations, presbyteries, and ministers as they seek to actualize the church's ministry in our changing society".¹²⁰ The Commission was appointed in January, 1965. It included 18 ordained and 11 lay members, seven of whom were women.¹²¹ Among the Commission's terms of reference were the church's need:

1. To explore the nature of the church's ministry in the Twentieth century in its congregational, national and specialized aspects;
2. To interpret the relationship of the ministry of the word and sacraments to the larger ministry of the church;
3. To define the place of specialized ministries in

¹²⁰ United Church of Canada, The Ministry in the Twentieth Century, RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS, 23rd General Council, Toronto, 1968, p. 33.

¹²¹ Dr. N. Keith Clifford points out that despite the number of ordained members on the Commission "most were either pastors or administrators and though some had graduate degrees they were in practical rather than systematic or historical theology". N. Keith CLIFFORD, "Which Way Will the United Church be Taken by Learning on the Way?", Touchstone, January, 1987, p. 6.

relationship to the ministry of word and sacraments.¹²²

The Commission met in three day sessions twice each year from 1965 to 1968. Between meetings, the work was coordinated by a central steering committee. Working papers prepared by members of the Commission, as well as reports from the Commission's seven regional committees, were supplemented by reports that were requested from presbyteries, theological colleges, and other boards and committees of the church. Resource persons representing the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches were also invited to participate. A progress report was submitted to the 22nd General Council in 1966. The final report was placed before the 23rd General Council in 1968. What follows is a summary of the major points addressed by the Commission on The Ministry in the Twentieth Century.

The Commission from the time of its inception and throughout its tenure, heard "the call of the church for radical change...loud and clear".¹²³ Its desire to respond to that call often appeared to meet with pragmatic difficulties. This was one obstacle they faced; another was that "in early meetings it seemed impossible that consensus could ever be achieved on such basic questions as the nature of the church's ministry; the meaning and validity of ordination; and the

¹²² Ibid., p. 33.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 34.

recognition by the church of certain specialized and non-ordained ministers".¹²⁴ During the course of its meetings over a period of three years, "impatience, conservatism, anxiety and hope were melded by a process of study and earnest discussion into a consensus of opinion".¹²⁵ The Commission submitted its study to General Council with the disclaimer that it was not the whole answer for the church's ministry, and the acknowledgment that its recommendations would require constant review and amendment.

At the beginning of its report the Commission names six working presuppositions which will form the basis for its report. It speaks of God's self-disclosure in Jesus Christ so that people might realize "who they are and what their human situation means".¹²⁶ It describes the purpose of the church as making known God's intention for humanity within a community exemplified by self-giving love, and it describes the functions of the church as being "God's servant (minister)", and fulfilling itself in "service (ministry) in the world". The mission of the church is to "make God's redeeming love known and relevant to the needs of the whole world".¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 34.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 34.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 34.

¹²⁷ Ibid., pp. 34-35.

Under presupposition four, the document speaks of the structures required for the whole church. The residential parish, it notes, is a necessary part of the church's structure but it must be supplemented with other ministries that arise in settings outside the congregation such as in prisons, hospitals, and universities. The document also states that "in times of unprecedented change all structures must remain open to change and subject to removal", and it also suggests that the church must not fear to experiment to see what new expressions of ministry will prove useful to the church today.¹²⁸

As presupposition five, the report defines the church's ministry as "God's ministry which he gives to the church in Jesus Christ".¹²⁹ Ministry is not, therefore, a "facility or an organizational structure of the church; it is God at work extending the ministry of Jesus Christ into the world".¹³⁰ In obedience the church takes up this ministry and in that context ministry can be defined as "the whole people of God (laos) daring to do Christ's work in the world".¹³¹ By baptism and confirmation, members of the church accept a ministry. Within

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 35.

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 36.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 35.

the ministry given to the whole church some division of labour is needed so that the church's ministry will be efficient. For that reason some members of the church are ordained or commissioned to specific functions "because God has equipped them with special gifts and they desire and are willing to be trained and employed in ministry".¹³²

In the view of the authors of The Ministry in the Twentieth Century, ordination "constitutes appointment to a particular function within the whole body".¹³³ They point out, however, that members of the ordained ministry are not an order of persons "religiously different from those commonly referred to as laymen". Ordained ministers are "office holders" who "perform certain functions" for the church, and who carry out these functions with the support of the lay membership of the church. The ordering of the ministry, according to the Commission, refers to the adoption of the most effective organization of personnel that will enable the church to fulfil its mission.¹³⁴

This document goes on to speak about the changes that have occurred in our world during this century--changes in technology, in productivity, in media, and particularly

¹³² Ibid., p. 36.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 36.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 36.

changes in attitudes toward belief and the Christian mission in the world. It also notes that this is a world where pluralism is taken for granted. The report on The Ministry in the Twentieth Century recognizes that the church must be sensitive to the changes that have occurred in society and the toll that these changes have taken on the stability of relationships and community, and it comments that its own efforts have been directed toward developing an appropriate response to these circumstances. The following statements are made among its 'Findings and Recommendations':

1. The Commission believes that in order for the church to carry out its mission it requires "enabling persons with the skills, insights motivation, and training to equip the people of God for this ministry. For the sake of order, reference is made to these "enablers" as the order of ministry within the general ministry of the church".¹³⁵

2. Those who work in the ministry of the church should possess theological, political and personal competence, and should be trained according to professional standards.

3. During its discussions the Commission found it had serious questions concerning the meaning and usefulness of ordination. Some of the factors which raised these questions were:

- the growing acceptance of the ministry as belonging to the people of God, thereby erasing distinctions between clergy and lay;

- the increasing recognition of ministries other than the ministry of Word and Sacrament which is the one with which ordination has generally been associated;

- the increasing number of persons leaving the ordained ministry which has led some within the church to ask how it could be that these persons who once felt they were "called"

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 38.

into ministry no longer experience this "call";

- "the developing concept of the ministry as profession as well as calling and the accompanying emphasis upon function and skill training in theological education";¹³⁶

- the increasing number of lay ministers permitted to administer the sacraments which has created a situation in which distinctions between ordained and lay ministry are mainly in the areas of salary and training.

The Commission was divided about ordination. "Some members felt it should be abolished or re-interpreted and broadened so that confirmation becomes ordination".¹³⁷ Others believed that there is a unique function which the church assigns to the ordained. In this view the church ordains those whom it deems to possess the gifts of leadership and gives them a special responsibility "to ensure that the church continues to be church".¹³⁸

The report on The Ministry in the Twentieth Century points out that in the church, ordination has always meant more than ordination to function, and "if certain functions are more basic than others such functions will necessarily have more status than others".¹³⁹ In this regard the Commission saw its problem as trying to recognize the value which has been placed on the ordained ministry because of the role it plays in

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 39.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 39.

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 39.

ensuring "that the church continues to be church", while at the same time repudiating any caste system between clergy and lay people, and between commissioned and ordained members of the church's ordered ministry. Its final recommendation was that the term ordination should continue to be used for those members of the one order of ministry "who have a prescribed level of training", and who perform those responsibilities within the church which have generally been associated with the ordained ministry in the past.¹⁴⁰

This United Church document rejected the idea of a second order of ministry, or diaconate, on the grounds that ordination or commissioning was to function and not to status. The Commission believed that there were diverse roles and functions within the order of ministry but "all ordained and non-ordained share alike in one 'enabling' ministry".¹⁴¹ It recommended that there should be only one order of ministry within the United Church of Canada and designated the function of that ministry as enabling the whole church to perform its ministry. Depending on their education, training and responsibilities some members of the order of ministry will be ordained, others commissioned.

The Commission on The Ministry in the Twentieth Century

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 41.

goes on to list a variety of responsibilities to be carried out by members of the order of ministry. One responsibility will be preaching both within the congregation and through the media and "other contemporary means deemed acceptable by the courts of the church". Another responsibility will be teaching within the congregation and in theological schools; another capacity in which members of the order of ministry must function is that of pastor. This role must be filled both within the congregational setting and in other places such as hospitals, prisons, etc. The Ministry in the 20th Century also describes the role of the ordered minister as that of "priest"--the one who performs "the representative and liturgical functions including the conduct of worship and the administration of sacraments".¹⁴²

The authors of this document recommended that the ceremonies associated with ordination and commissioning should make clear the church's belief that there is one essential ministry of the whole church. In the Commission's view those appointed to perform the laying on of hands should represent the whole church, not just those already ordained or commissioned to the professional ministry. This report also expressed the view that "the laying on of hands now practiced in ordaining should be understood as appropriate but not

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 41.

essential".¹⁴³

The report of The Ministry in the Twentieth Century was presented to the 23rd General Council in 1968. Some of its recommendations concerning transfer and settlement issues in the church and the setting up of a Division of Ministry and Personnel Services were adopted; the body of the report was "received for information".¹⁴⁴

A. The Place of the Ordained Ministry in the Church

1. The Ministry in the 20th Century and BEM differ in the starting point from which each develops its understanding of the nature and role of the ordained ministry. The starting point for the United Church document is found in human experience and social consciousness. The Commission sought to determine the place of the ordained ministry in the church by examining the socio-political situation of its time and how this situation impacted on human lives. One of the theological underpinnings of United Church theology was its belief that God

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 70-71, 81-82.

called the church to serve the needs of people. If this ministry of service was to be faithfully carried out then the church must be aware of the kinds of situations which comprised the lives not only of its own members but of all persons with whom it had contact. The authors of The Ministry in the 20th Century believed that in order for the church to make an adequate response to individuals and to the society in which they lived, its ministry must be contextualized.

The authors of the Lima document believed that God in Christ had bestowed on the church, from its inception, all the gifts it required to perpetuate the ministry of Jesus Christ, one of these gifts being the ordained ministry. They also believed that God did not give the ordained ministry to the church without providing sufficient revelation to permit the church to exercise this ministry in a manner commensurate with the ministry God had begun in Jesus Christ. The church's need at present, according to this perspective, would be to determine whether it had continued to exercise its ministry in a manner which was faithful to God's intentions. BEM sought to determine what these intentions were by examining the ordering and practice of ministry in a time period closer to the ordained ministry's christological referent, namely, the New Testament era and the first four centuries of the church's life.

2. The Lima document and the United Church report also disagree in the conclusions they reach on whether the ordained ministry's place in the church is "constitutive to its life and witness" as BEM believes, or useful "for the sake of order" as The Ministry in the 20th Century concluded. BEM understands the ordained ministry to be essential to the life of the church because this ministry is present at Christ's initiative, and because of the role it plays in "publicly and continually" reminding the church of its dependence on Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁵

The United Church report speaks of the ordained ministry as useful to the church because of the "enabling" role it plays in regard to the general ministry of the church. It is the function it performs which legitimates this specific ministry. There is no suggestion, however, that the ordained ministry is constitutive to the life of the church. The Commission's comment that it agreed that the term ordination 'would' continue to be used implies that a deliberate choice was made in regard to retaining the ordained ministry as a useful way of ordering the church's life; it also implies that the choice may have gone the other way or may, in fact, go that way in the future.

There are a number of places in this report which refer to the expendability of the ordained ministry. When, for example,

¹⁴⁵ BEM 38.

it states that all structures in the church "must be open to change or subject to removal", it does not give any indication that the ordained ministry is precluded from among such structures.¹⁴⁶ The fact that the Commission chose to state publicly the position held by some of its members that ordination should be abolished or re-interpreted, as well as its own conclusion that "many people...questioned the usefulness of ordination in the church today" is evidence that the Commission itself, although ultimately deciding against it, considered the question of the expendability of the ordained ministry a legitimate one.¹⁴⁷

3. The Lima document and The Ministry in the 20th Century hold different positions on the relationship that exists between the ordained ministry and the general ministry of the church, i.e. the ministry given by God to the whole people of God (the laos). BEM speaks of the Holy Spirit bestowing "diverse and complimentary gifts" on the community, one of which is the ordained ministry, and it describes the mutually supportive relationship which must exist between the ordained ministry and the ministry of the whole people of God.

The United Church's report speaks of God giving to the

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

supportive relationship which must exist between the ordained ministry and the ministry of the whole people of God.

The United Church's report speaks of God giving to the church one ministry, the ministry of Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁸ It is the understanding of the authors of the United Church document that the ordained ministry exists as a specific function within the general ministry of the church. This position suggests that the Commission believed that recognizing a separate ministry of the ordained would detract from the recognition and support they wanted to give to the ministry of the whole people of God. Supporting this contention is the fact that on several occasions this document speaks of the ordained ministry as if it actually presents an impediment to the ministry of the laos.¹⁴⁹ The tenor of The Ministry in the 20th Century is one which places the ordained and lay ministries of the church in opposition to each other, although this is precisely the kind of situation this report wanted to redress.

B. The Tasks and Forms of the Ordained Ministry in the Church

1. The authors of The Ministry in the 20th Century would agree with those who produced the Lima document that the primary responsibility for perpetuating the apostolic faith is

¹⁴⁸ BEM 5, 36.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 38, 39.

apostolic teaching or ministry, when it speaks of the special responsibility given to the ordained "to ensure that the church continues to be church", this is the inference.¹⁵⁰ This implication is also present when, in referring to the status which has often accrued to the ordained ministry, the United Church study remarks that this situation has arisen because certain functions are "more basic" to the church than others, and the ordained have often been associated with such functions.¹⁵¹ While the United Church report never spells out what these "basic" functions are, it is likely that one of them would involve the preservation of the apostolic teaching through the preaching and teaching responsibilities of the ordained ministry.

That this document is not more forthright in attributing a special responsibility for preserving the apostolic faith to the ordained ministry can be accounted for by its understanding of the ordained ministry as the "professional" component of the ministry of the whole people of God. While The Ministry in the 20th Century may imply that the ordained minister has a particular role in guarding the apostolicity of the church, to say this more directly, for example to refer to the ordained minister as "guardian of the faith" as the Lima document does,

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 39.

would have suggested that ordained members of the church hold a distinct responsibility in this regard over and above that given to the laity. Such a position could lead to an understanding of the ordained minister as more than "a professional servant of the church", and this, in turn, might lead to a distinction in status developing between lay and ordained members of the church. Making a distinction between ordained and lay members of the church which was not based solely on "function", was a situation which the authors of The Ministry in the 20th Century wanted to avoid.

2. In discussing the form which the ministry is to take in the church there is again wide divergence between The Ministry in the 20th Century and BEM. While BEM favours the historic pattern of the threefold order of ministry as the preferred order for all Christian denominations, The Ministry in the 20th Century makes no reference to this pattern. In considering the form which the church's ministry should take, the United Church document refers not to the church's past tradition but to the attitudes and issues that are part of the present psycho-social milieu.¹⁵² It states that because attitudes toward belief and Christian mission are changing, there should be "forms of church life appropriate for the church's witness in

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 36.

a radically changing human society".¹⁵³ Further, the United Church document speaks of church order as "the adoption, under God, of the most effective organization of personnel and resources that will enable the church" to perform its mission in the world.¹⁵⁴

The authors of The Ministry in the 20th Century did not believe that the recovery of the church's historic ordering of ministry would provide an appropriate means through which the church could respond to its present context. They are very clear in stating their opinion that "new" times call for "new" forms of ministry.¹⁵⁵ Their reason for suggesting that traditional forms of ministry would not be adequate to the needs of church and society today is never stated. The fact that this document shows a strong propensity for change, while at the same time lacking any ecumenical directive, may account for its failure to seriously address the question of the threefold ministry. It would also explain why there is no reference to the episcopal ministry in this report.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 35, 36, 37, 39.

C. The Meaning of Ordination

1. The differences between BEM and The Ministry in the 20th Century on such points as the relationship between the ordained ministry and the general ministry of the church, the starting point for developing an understanding of the nature and role of the ordained ministry, and the question of whether the ordained ministry is constitutive of the church's life or simply a useful organizational component within it, can be traced to where each document places the ownership of the ordained ministry.

BEM rests the ordained ministry on a Trinitarian foundation: it is God continuing to work through Christ and the Spirit who initiates and sustains the ordained ministry. Christ calls people today, as he once called the apostles, to continue his ministry on earth. Through the Spirit members of the ordained ministry are called and empowered to act as representatives of Christ to the community.¹⁵⁶ The church, for its part, acts under the guidance of the Spirit, to recognize the personal call of Christ experienced by the individual, and to grant to that individual the authority to carry out his or her special responsibilities. The ownership of the ordained

¹⁵⁶ BEM 1.

completes the ordination process.¹⁵⁷

In the United Church document the ordained ministry is owned by the church. There is, it states, only one ministry in the church--"God's ministry which he gives to the church in Jesus Christ".¹⁵⁸ Because there is only one ministry and that ministry is given directly to the church, the ordained ministry is not seen as a "special" ministry related to the ministry of the laos, but as an appendage or outgrowth of that ministry.¹⁵⁹ While the ministry of the church itself is not "an organizational structure of the church", but an indication of "God at work extending the ministry of Jesus Christ into the world", the ordained ministry is an organizational convenience which exists to facilitate the general ministry of the church. The ordained ministry is the "professional" component of the church's ministry and exists "so that the church's ministry may not be useless and ineffective".¹⁶⁰

It is this supposition which accounts for the Commission's difficulty in dealing with the ordained ministry question, an area which, it confessed, was one of its "most vexing problems". It readily admits that some of its own members

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 38.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 36.

questioned the validity and usefulness of ordination, and that some of them had suggested abandoning the practice altogether.¹⁶¹ This kind of critique, extending as it does from scepticism to distaste, can only be justified if those holding such views understand ordination as an enterprise of the church, and not as an institution of Christ.

Further evidence of the "low" understanding of ordination in this report is found in its understanding of the experience of "call". The Commission speaks of those entering the ordained ministry as responding to God's call to "life in Christ" meaning, presumably, to Christian life or discipleship. With this basic "call" in place, it then becomes the responsibility of the individual to determine if "through aptitude and ability given to them by God, as well as their own personal conviction and inclination", they should enter the ordered ministry of the church. The suggestion that there is no special "call" to the ordained ministry over and above the call into the general ministry of the church, was a departure from the way in which ordination had been traditionally understood in the United Church of Canada.

One of the factors which influenced the Commission in this regard was the number of ordained ministers leaving the church to enter other professions. Its members wondered how

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 39.

those who had previously spoken of an experience of "call" could lose the sense of this call, necessitating a change in profession. Their answer was to doubt the legitimacy of the "call experience" itself in reference to all ordained ministers, not only those leaving the profession. This suspicion toward the experience of "call" can be accounted for more readily if the ordained ministry is understood to be an ecclesial institution, rather than one which exists under divine inspiration. If it were understood as having a divine origin, the "power" of God rather than the "inclination" of the individual would be the determining factor in the experience of call. If this were the case then the church's involvement in the "call" process becomes one of determining if the individual's call is legitimately from God, and not, as this report suggests, that of questioning the legitimacy of the call experience per se.

2. The ownership of the ordained ministry, i.e. whether it rests with Christ or with the church, also accounts for the difference between the sacramental understanding of the ordained ministry found in BEM and the purely functional understanding explicit in The Ministry in the 20th Century. In BEM the ordained minister is seen as Christ's representative to the community, a role which is particularly evident in the eucharistic celebration. In The Ministry in the 20th Century the ordained minister is not understood to represent Christ in

a way that is different from the way the community as a whole, as Christ's "body" the church, represents him.¹⁶²

In the United Church document the ordained minister is seen as a "professional servant of the church".¹⁶³ In this view even the priestly "representative and liturgical functions" which the ordained person carries out are not performed in direct representation of Jesus Christ but rather on behalf of the whole community to whom they have been entrusted.¹⁶⁴ One can also note that in describing the ordained ministry, this document speaks variously of "function", "obligation", "work", "labour" and "appointment"; terms, all of which, suggest a functional understanding of the ordained ministry.¹⁶⁵

The openness to change in the structure of the ordained ministry evident in this report is also related to its premise that the ordained ministry rests on an ecclesial foundation. Once one accepts the Commission's assumption that the existence of the ordained ministry is a result of the church seeking to order its ministry effectively, one is compelled to agree with its conclusion that "any structure which has ceased to serve

¹⁶² BEM 8, 14.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 34, 35, 36.

God must be changed" or "destroyed", including the ordained ministry itself.¹⁶⁶ Further, the judgement of whether or not the ordained ministry serves God will then rest in the hands of the church. If the ordained ministry is not acknowledged to exist under the authority of Christ, decisions concerning its re-arrangement, no matter how radical, or even its demise, are well within the authority of the church.

The fact that a purely functional role is given to the ordained ministry in this United Church document, is evident in the Commission's recommendation that "a person remains ordained as long as the basic ingredients for ordination are operative. When either party, (i.e. the ordained minister or the church), has ceased to fulfil the necessary functions, that party can initiate his (i.e. the ordained person's) resignation from the order of ministry".¹⁶⁷ In making this recommendation, the members of the Commission were stating a position quite different from the traditional view of the United Church which understood ordination as a permanent vocation.

Another example of this report's functional understanding of the ordained ministry is its reluctance to associate any particular spiritual or transcendent quality with the ordained ministry. This becomes evident when its authors explain their

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 40.

decision to suggest to the church that it continue to include the ordained ministry in its "ordering" of the church's life. The Commission comments that its members agreed that "the term ordination would continue to be used to describe persons who have attained a prescribed level of training and exist in a particular kind of relationship to the church".¹⁶⁸ The way this statement is worded suggests that although the church would continue to need people with a certain kind of training to serve in a leadership capacity, there was no acknowledged constraint on the church to "ordain" these persons.

This statement also implies that ordination was considered a practical "term" which could be applied to a specific kind of employment in the church. The church thus had its choice of whether it would continue to use this term or possibly apply another term to the rite of entry into the church's ministry of leadership. The authors of this document decided that it would be useful for the church to continue its present practice of applying the term "ordination" as one way of referring to the entry into professional ministry. In making this suggestion the members of the Commission would have been aware that had they recommended against either the continued use of the term ordination, or the practice of ordination itself, the result would have been anger and confusion within their own

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 39.

denomination, and an insurmountable barrier to ecumenical dialogue.

In this United Church document there is no connotation of hierarchy, necessity or sacramentalism associated with the ordained ministry.

3. There is no reference in The Ministry in the 20th Century to any special authority accruing to the ordained ministry. In the document's only reference to authority, it speaks of God working "through the instrumentality of men" but it also adds that even as God works through people who serve him, "he does not surrender his authority into their hands".¹⁶⁹ The failure to attribute particular authority to the ordained ministry stands in contrast to BEM. While both documents would acknowledge that the ordained ministry is a ministry of servanthood and not one which involves the exercise of personal power, BEM understands the ordained ministry to possess inherent authority. Such authority is integral to the ordained ministry because the one whom the ordained minister represents, namely Christ, has authority.

4. The Lima document speaks of the authority that accompanies the ordained ministry as being conveyed to the person undertaking that ministry through the act of

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

ordination.¹⁷⁰ While the community oversees the ordination process, including the liturgical act of ordination, the official authorization which it grants to the one being ordained is given in behalf of Christ who is the "true ordainer".¹⁷¹ Ordination, as it is understood in BEM, has both a horizontal and vertical dimension.

In The Ministry in the 20th Century the vertical or transcendent dimension is largely absent from the act of ordination. This is not to suggest that the act of ordination did not have a spiritual component or that God's presence wasn't part of that particular service of worship. What is lacking in the United Church document but present in BEM, is the sense of a "direct" transcendent action taking place in reference to the one being ordained.

The Commission's comment that the "laying on of hands", which was traditionally part of the ordination rite, should now be considered "appropriate but not essential" shows its desire to place the ordination rite in a more "functional" perspective. Because the imposition of hands was traditionally understood to both symbolize and effect divine empowerment, its acceptance as a normative part of the act of ordination would imply a belief that the ordained receive specific spiritual

¹⁷⁰ BEM 15.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 39.

gifts via their ordination. This, in turn, might result in a special spiritual status accruing to the ordained ministry. Perhaps it was to avoid such a situation as this, a situation which the Commission believed would be detrimental to the overall ministry of the church, that it adopted a more or less casual attitude toward the imposition of hands during ordination.

The Ministry in the 20th Century did recommend, however, that where the laying on of hands was practiced, lay people be encouraged to participate in this action. The reason given for this change in the normal procedure of the ordination rite was that it would signify the inclusion of the whole church in the ordination process. This recommendation illustrates that a report which believed in theory that the ordained ministry was simply a "division of labour" within the one ministry of the church, in practice, understood the ordained ministry as separate from the church's general ministry to a degree which BEM did not. Surprisingly, it is the document which emphasizes the ecclesial basis of the ordained ministry that also discounts the possibility of the ordained ministry representing the whole church in the act of ordination. This apparent contradiction surfaces on numerous occasions in this document.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Ibid., pp. 36, 38, 39, 40.

The Lima document, on the other hand, believed that the ordained ministry, and specifically the episcopal ministry, could be the agent of ordination because of its integral relationship to the ministry of the whole church. In BEM the distinctive nature of the ordained ministry is never understood as a factor which disconnects it from the ministry of the *laos*, or which impedes the appropriate exercise of lay ministry.

D. The Mutual Recognition of the Ordained Ministries

The report on The Ministry in the 20th Century is one which centres in on what is happening within the United Church and does not directly address ecumenical concerns. It is evident, however, that this report's understanding of ordination would not have a positive effect on ecumenical dialogue. Although the Commission had invited representatives of the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches to serve as resource persons, the tone and content of this study reveals either a lack of interest in, or lack of regard for, the ecumenical community.

The admission by the authors of The Ministry in the Twentieth Century that there was a marked disparity in the views of its own membership on questions such as "the nature of the church's ministry and the meaning and validity of

ordination", leads one to the conclusion that it would have been difficult for the Commission to produce a statement that was sensitive to ecumenical concerns when it was encountering sufficient difficulty in being reaching a consensus among its own members.

7. PLAN OF UNION (1973)

Between the mid-1960's and 1975 the Anglican Church of Canada and the United Church of Canada worked out a schema for the organic union of the two churches into the proposed new Church of Christ in Canada. The final draft of what would have become the constitution of the new church was contained in the Plan of Union. Although this document will not be analysed, a brief overview of its content is important because it reveals an understanding of the nature and ordering of the ordained ministry which, for a time at least, received the approval of the United Church of Canada.

The Plan of Union supported an ordained ministry modeled after the threefold episcopate. Presbyters and bishops were to share in the ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral care. Deacons would be a distinctive order primarily serving in other than liturgical functions although entitled to assist in the conduct of worship including the sacraments.

Ordination in the proposed new church was to be by the laying on of hands with prayer. For the ordination of presbyters both a bishop and presbyters were to be involved in the laying on of hands, with deacons and lay persons also being able to participate. Bishops, who were chosen by election from among the presbyters, were to be consecrated by

the laying on of hands of not less than three bishops. Members of the episcopal ministry were understood to act as "signs and agents of the church's continuity" in regard to the apostolic "doctrine, mission and ministry" of the church. They were also recognized as the "chief pastors of the church with oversight of the pastors, and laity within their sphere of responsibility", and given charge of the proclamation of the word and administration of the sacraments within their district.¹⁷³ Bishops were also to act as the principal ministers of ordination.

The polity of the Church of Christ in Canada recognized three elements in the exercise of ministry which can be identified as congregational, presbyterial and episcopal. The Plan of Union stated that the ordering of ministry in the new church should not be identified exclusively with any one of these but should include some recognition of all three elements. Although the ordering of ministry agreed upon in the Plan of Union was to be episcopal, it was to contain the communal or congregational dimension by allowing the local congregation to have input into the decision making for their congregation, and through lay and clerical representation to the regional councils of the church, to have input into a

¹⁷³ Plan of Union, Anglican-United Church Joint Publication, Toronto, 1973, Articles 90, 91, p. 34.

larger area of decision making.¹⁷⁴

The form of episcopacy to be exercised in the new church was to have a strong presbyterial dimension. The bishop was, in effect, a bishop-in-council. An episcopacy with such a marked emphasis on collegiality was an attempt to combine the presbyterial system of the United Church with the episcopal system of the Anglican church. While the Anglican church could acknowledge a communal and collegial dimension to the episcopal office, it could not do so to the point where these elements diminished the personal authority of the bishop. The United Church, on the other hand, could not accept the view of the bishop as "father-in-God" to all the clerical and lay members of his diocese. It agreed with the Anglican position that the bishop is supervisor, chief pastor and the pre-eminent symbol of unity and apostolicity in the church, but recognized this status or authority as a function of the episcopal "office", rather than attributing it to a special position which the bishop held in a separate "order" of ministry.

In the opinion of many Anglicans the understanding of episcopacy presented in the Plan of Union was not related to important ecclesial values or theological considerations but was, as one Anglican remarked, something "which had been injected into a church without being organic to its faith,

¹⁷⁴ Plan of Union, Anglican-United Church Joint Publication, Toronto, 1973, Article 105, p. 37.

liturgical practice and pastoral structure".¹⁷⁵

While the concern of the Anglican Church centred around protecting the integrity of the office of bishop, one of the concerns of the United Church was to safeguard its understanding of diaconal ministry. As in the United Church, the diaconate in the new church would be a *commissioned* ministry. During the commissioning service the bishop and representative deacons were to participate in the laying on of hands, with presbyters and lay persons also being eligible to take part in this ritual. What gave rise to the United Church's concern was that the Plan of Union recognized the diaconal ministry as "a distinctive order" within the church's ministry of leadership.¹⁷⁶

The United Church had accepted the recommendation of its 1968 report--The Ministry in the Twentieth Century--that its deaconesses and certified churchmen be admitted to its *one* order of ministry. Both its 1968 and 1974 reports expressed a firm conviction that while the education and tasks of those serving as diaconal and presbyteral ministers might differ, the relationship between the two forms of ministry should be lateral rather than hierarchical. The United Church feared that dividing the church's 'ordered' ministry into the three

¹⁷⁵ W. CROCKETT, "The Function of Bishops, Priests and Deacons," (Anglican), Undated, p. 26.

¹⁷⁶ Plan of Union, Article 75, p. 31.

separate 'orders' of deacon, presbyter and bishop, would lead also to divisions in authority and status. Such divisions would not be acceptable to the United Church.

The United Church's contribution to the Plan of Union had, as its starting point, a belief in the priesthood of all believers, stressing that "apostolicity is the gift of no man; it is the commission of Christ to all people".¹⁷⁷ While the United Church was agreeable to an episcopal form of ministry, it wanted to divest the office of bishop of its hierarchical and paternal nature. In the United Church's view the episcopal role would be best characterized by 'ministerium', i.e. service, rather than 'dominium', i.e. authority and power.¹⁷⁸ This view was further supported by the United Church's belief in the parity of all orders of ministry. The Anglican contention that the United Church saw the episcopal role purely as a matter of function and not as the pre-eminent or "fullest" expression of ministry which included within it the presbyteral and diaconal ministries was, in fact, an accurate reading of the United Church's position.

The Anglican church was also concerned that the United Church did not uphold the distinction between the general ministry of all believers and the ordained ministry, a position

¹⁷⁷ John Webster GRANT, "Bishop's Task Force on Revisions," (unpublished paper-United Church), April 1974, p. 1.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

which was basic to their own understanding of ordained ministry.

When the Plan of Union was brought before the 27th General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada in the fall of 1975, the synod could not accept its understanding of ordained ministry and, particularly, what it saw as a weakened version of the episcopal ministry. After the Plan of Union was rejected, negotiations on union between the two churches ended.

8. THE TASK FORCE ON MINISTRY (1974)

The 24th General Council referred the recommendations of The Ministry in the 20th Century (1968) to the Committee on Christian Faith which was to study them further and report back to the 25th General Council in 1972. The report produced by the Committee on Christian Faith will not be examined separately because the material it contains is covered elsewhere, either in its predecessor, The Ministry in the 20th Century, or its successor, the Task Force on Ministry. When the 25th General Council received the Report of the Committee on Christian Faith, it approved the concept of ministry in it, and instructed its Executive to appoint a small task force to work out the implications for the United Church of accepting the report's recommendations.

The Task Force on Ministry accepted this mandate and began its task by rewording those recommendations as follows:

1. There is one ministry, the ministry of God himself, into which ministry he calls his whole church (the laos).

2. Within this ministry there is one order of ministry known as "the Ministry of Word and Sacrament" through which the church performs and is enabled to perform its ministry.

3. Within this one order of ministry there are three distinguishable functions: a)oversight
b)pastoral
c)service.

4. Admission to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament is by

ordination.

5. The relationship between the three functions in the ministry of Word and Sacrament is lateral not hierarchical.

6. Through induction by an appropriate court of the church an appointment is recognized and authority given to perform designated functions of the ordained ministry.¹⁷⁹

The Task Force on Ministry (1974) saw its task not as developing a theology of ordination but as giving the church direction on how to organize an efficient ministry. The Basis of Union had restricted its comment on ministry to the ordained ministry and to a narrower understanding of ordained ministry than the United Church had begun to experience in the 1960's and 1970's. The Task Force recognized the new and broader sense of ministry that prevailed within the United Church and sought to take account of this in its recommendations.

The Task Force found general agreement within the United Church with the concept of an 'ordered' ministry and with the idea of equality among those who are set apart to ordered ministry regardless of the specific ministerial functions they perform. It saw the major problem regarding ministry in the United Church not as a questioning of whether there was one order of ministry in the church, nor of whether the various functions within the ordered ministry should share equal

¹⁷⁹ United Church of Canada, The Task Force on Ministry, RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS, 24th General Council, 1974, p. 235.

status. The problem, it believed, was how to order and what to call an ordered ministry which had expanded to include far more functions than those originally attributed to the ordained ministry when the Basis of Union was drawn up.¹⁸⁰

The writers of the Task Force report agreed with The Ministry in the Twentieth Century which described the role of those in ordered ministry as comprising that of preacher, teacher, pastor, priest and administrator. It also named the same areas of function for those in ordered ministry as had been named by both the Plan of Union and the Committee on Christian Faith: presbyteral, diaconal and episcopal. The Task Force further affirmed the unity and interdependence of these three functions of ministry. Because of the complementary and lateral relationship among these ministries, the Task Force suggested that those who engaged in the diaconal function as commissioned ministers should be given the option of becoming ordained and the category of commissioned ministry should cease to exist within the United Church of Canada.¹⁸¹

According to the report produced by the Task Force on Ministry the term "ministry of Word and Sacrament" could be

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 237.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 242. Commissioned ministers were a category within the ordered ministry of the church generally comprising those who had previously been designated as 'deaconesses' or 'certified churchmen'. Their roles were for the most part parallel to that of the ordained minister but with less formal education and training.

used to describe all three functions of ministry: episcopal, diaconal and presbyteral.¹⁸² Enlarging on its concept of the nature of "Word and Sacrament", the Task Force report expressed the belief that God had given to humanity in Word and Sacraments "symbolic expressions of the living Christ at work in our midst", and it went on to speak of "the flow back and forth of the reality behind and within the symbols of Word and Sacrament and their actualization in the life of the world". In order to prevent this high, almost sacramental view of Word and Sacrament from becoming associated with the ordained minister who was the one generally responsible for enacting this ministry, the Task Force broadens the concept of Word and Sacrament to refer to "the Word made flesh and body broken", and expressed the view that these can and do become reality "whenever any Christian offers his life to God and speaks the Good News to the world".¹⁸³

In the view of the Task Force ordination presupposed three main elements: a) a call of God, b) a particular course study and training, and c) testing and confirmation of the call by the church.¹⁸⁴

The authors of the Task Force on Ministry were careful to

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 237.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 238.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 241.

point out that the relationship that should exist between the three functions of ordered ministry is a lateral not an hierarchical one.¹⁸⁵ This view, they realized, contrasted with the idea expressed in the Plan of Union which ordered the three functions of presbyteral, episcopal and diaconal ministry in a manner which made the diaconal function subordinate to the episcopal and presbyteral ministries. In referring to the episcopal function, the report speaks of the episcopal role as one involving oversight and counselling of ordained ministers, and co-ordination and administration of the institutional church.

The Task Force report does state that the episcopal ministry exercises "a representative function to the whole church and from and on behalf of the whole church", but does not enlarge on this 'representative' aspect of episcopacy.¹⁸⁶ At no time in the report is the episcopal ministry referred to in the personal singular as "episcopal minister" or "bishop", nor is it suggested the presbyteral or diaconal ministries derive from the episcopal ministry.

In discussing the usefulness of the threefold pattern of ministry, the Task Force refers to both the efficiency of this organization of ministry, and to the opportunities its adoption

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 238.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 241.

would open up for the United Church to pursue discussions on union with other Christian denominations.

One of the more controversial aspects of the Task Force report was its recommendation that the church tighten its procedures to specify when an ordained minister can function as an ordained minister. It advised that only those ministers who had been inducted into a charge or authorized by presbytery for a special or a temporary ministry could function as ministers. Those ministers not inducted into a charge or authorized for a special ministry would hold their ordination "in suspense of function". The Task Force did recommend, however, that those ministers who were in a situation of "suspense of function" could request to have their membership in presbytery retained if they planned an active role in that court of the church.¹⁸⁷

Two sensitive areas were touched on in the Task Force report. One was the matter of expanding the ordained ministry to include those presently serving in commissioned ministries; the second was the designation of retired ministers as "in suspense of function" unless otherwise authorized by presbytery.

When the Task Force on Ministry report was presented to the floor of the 26th General Council in August, 1974 it was decided that the report should be received as "a report of

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 240.

progress", and a continuing Task Force should be appointed to follow up on the recommendations made by the original Task Force. The General Council offered the following guidelines to the new Task Force:

1. It recommended setting the original Task Force report within "an adequate statement concerning the ministry of Christ as entrusted to the whole people of God".¹⁸⁸
2. It asked for further explanation of the principles involved in the report and of the kind of changes in practice and polity its adoption would entail.
3. The General Council asked that the original report be sent to the presbyteries for study and response, and that a final report be made to the 27th General Council.

An amendment was moved to suggest that the General Council "affirm the principles contained" in the Task Force report. This amendment was approved.¹⁸⁹

A. The Place of the Ordained Ministry in the Church

1/2. The purpose of the Task Force document is not to provide an understanding of the nature of the ordained ministry. Its role is to offer the United Church some

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 244.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 231.

direction on how to organize its life to include all the functions necessary for an effective ministry. Laying the ground work for its directives, the authors of the Task Force report point to three trends which had been identified in the church's understanding of ministry. These were identified as: God's call to the whole church to engage in ministry; the need for an order of ministry to "enable" the ministry of the whole church; and the idea that those in this ordered ministry are "ordained to specific functions, not to special status."¹⁹⁰ Although it acknowledges that these trends are not in alignment with the definition of ministry found in Article 17 of the Basis of Union, the Task Force accepts them as a working premise for its own report.

In the Task Force on Ministry report the existence of an ordained ministry in the church is taken for granted in line with its premise that "within the church there is a need for an order of ministry which is "set apart" to an enabling and representative function on behalf of the whole people of God". The Task Force also recognized that there was "no particular argument" in the United Church against the existence of an order of ministry.

3. In this document laity and ordained ministers are part of the one ministry given to the church by God, the ministry of

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 231.

Jesus Christ. Both lay and ordained members of the church share in the three primary functions of service, pastoral and oversight ministry, all of which are necessary for the life of the church. While BEM sets the ordained ministry within the ministry of the whole people of God and does so without blending it in to the point where the ordained ministry is indistinguishable from the ministry of the whole people of God or is, in fact, derived from it, the Task Force on Ministry understands the ordained ministry as simply one component in the ministry of the laos.¹⁹¹

B. The Tasks and Forms of the Ordained Ministry in the Church

The Task Force on Ministry (1974) is the first United Church document to do more than make a passing reference to the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon. The reason it does so has, perhaps, more to do with the parallel discussions which were going on regarding union between the Anglican and United Churches than with an appreciation for any intrinsic merit in this pattern of ministry. This contention can be supported by the fact that although the threefold pattern is mentioned and the particular roles of bishop, presbyter and deacon are referred to on several occasions in

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 235.

this report, most often this threefold pattern of ministry is approached by reference to the functions it involves rather than by reference to its embodiment in the roles of bishop, presbyter and deacon.

The Task Force report names the three functions of oversight, pastoral care, and service as part of the ministry of Word and Sacrament.¹⁹² It also recognizes the episcopal function as an important one which has the major responsibility for the pastoral care of clergy, and the oversight of clergy and institutions within the church. The episcopal ministry also exercises "a representative function to the whole church and from and on behalf of the whole church" to the local congregation.¹⁹³ Although the Task Force seems to prefer that the episcopal role be carried out by an ordained minister working for a court of the church in a "personnel" role, it holds to its principle of not doing anything to impede the discussions on union which were taking place between the Anglican and United Churches, by allowing that the episcopal function could be personalized in a bishop.

The episcopal function is seen as one of the functions necessary to the practice of ministry in the church but not as a function that is more important to the church's life than its

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 239.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 241.

pastoral or service ministries, and not as a role which exists in an hierarchical relationship to the other two forms of ministry.¹⁹⁴ The episcopal ministry is not given any particular responsibility in regard to the apostolicity of the church or any significant role in respect to ordination.

This view of episcopacy stands in contrast to the role attributed to the episcopal minister in the Lima document where the episcopal function, personalized in the office of the bishop, possesses special responsibility for preserving the apostolicity and unity of the church and serves, as a result, as the chief minister of ordination.¹⁹⁵

The Task Force's recommendation that all who perform the function of diaconal ministry should be ordained would have meant a change in United Church polity. While diaconal ministers were considered part of the church's one "order" of ministry, their initiation into the order of ministry was through commissioning rather than through ordination. The Task Force pointed out that this, in effect, created two categories within the one order of ministry and had the consequence of having diaconal ministers appear to be in a subordinate position to ordained ministers. It was the belief of the members of the Task Force on Ministry that this situation could

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 243, 244.

¹⁹⁵ BEM 21, 23.

only be remedied by admitting diaconal ministers to the "ordered" ministry through ordination. The United Church's understanding of diaconal ministry as "equal but different", and the Task Force's recommendation that people enter diaconal ministry through ordination, stood in contrast to the understanding of this ministry found in episcopally ordered churches where the diaconal ministry commonly served as a prerequisite training ground for the ordained ministry.

BEM acknowledged the confusion that existed in the churches around the role of diaconal ministers (deacons). It recognized that some churches wanted "to restore the diaconate as an ordained ministry" where diaconal ministers would serve for life rather than using this ministry as a stepping stone to the ordained ministry. The kind of pressure BEM exerts on the ecumenical community in reference to a recovery of the office of bishop by non-episcopal churches is not exerted in a similar fashion when it discusses the diaconal ministry. In regard to the latter it advises only that "differences in ordering the diaconal ministry should not be regarded as a hindrance for the mutual recognition of the ordained ministries".¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ BEM, Commentary (31).

C. The Meaning of Ordination

In the understanding of the Task Force, God has bestowed one ministry on the church, the ministry of Jesus Christ. Within that ministry there is a need for an "order" of ministry, which it identifies as the ministry of Word and Sacraments, to "intensify the ministry of the people".¹⁹⁷ The Task Force does not attribute either the initiation of the ordained ministry per se, or the specific call of the individual into that ministry, directly to God in Christ as BEM does. In its view the ordained ministry arises from the church as an organizational feature of its one ministry, the ministry of Jesus Christ given to the whole people of God. Whereas BEM speaks of God giving to the church through the Spirit "many gifts", one of which is the ordained ministry, the United Church's document speaks of the one ministry of Jesus Christ expressing itself in the three ministerial functions of oversight, pastoral care and service.¹⁹⁸

This United Church report does not place the ordained ministry directly on a christocentric-pneumatological foundation; instead, as one aspect of the church's one ministry, it shares the same Trinitarian foundation as the

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 236.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 242.

church itself.

2. The understanding of ordained ministry in the Task Force report is that of a functional rather than a sacramental ministry. The ordained ministry is perceived as the "professional" component of the ministry which God has entrusted to the church. The authors of the Task Force on Ministry acknowledge that ordination in the United Church has traditionally been understood as not being "purely to function alone". In enlarging on this statement the Task Force explains that ordination in the United Church has never been understood as "purely to function alone but to those functions performed at a defined level of intensity and competence".¹⁹⁹ It is obvious that the understanding of ordained ministry in this report is purely functional since the only difference the Task Force recognizes between a "purely functional ministry" and the ordained ministry is the fact that the latter carries out its functions in a more professional manner.

Evidence of this functional emphasis is found in the manner in which this document discusses the ministry of Word and Sacraments which it describes as "symbolic expressions of the living Christ at work in the world". It states its belief that all those in the church's one order of ministry, which includes both lay and ordained members of the church, "share

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 241.

equal responsibility for Word and Sacrament".²⁰⁰ This statement would indicate that even in regard to "function", the Task Force saw nothing unique about the ordained ministry. The ordained ministry's lack of uniqueness is evident in the Task Force's references to the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments. The Task Force reworks the understanding of this ministry, which had been traditionally associated with the ordained, to suggest that "whenever a life is offered up and poured forth in the incarnating of the Good News in the world", the gospel is proclaimed and the eucharistic celebration takes place.²⁰¹ In doing this, the authors of the Task Force report have expanded the meaning of Word and Sacrament beyond its normal identity as part of the worship experience of the church. They have also opened up the practice of this ministry, although in a form not identifiable with its traditional character, to the laity.

Enlarging areas of ministry generally associated with the ordained ministry to include lay persons is a trend evident throughout this document, and it occurs in reference to episcopal, diaconal and pastoral functions of ministry. One can account for the Task Force taking this direction when one reviews the basic premises that underlie this report. A belief

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 236.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 238.

in the church having one ministry has led the members of the Task Force to collapse the ordained ministry, both in respect to its identity and its function, into that one ministry. This one ministry then includes all the functions which were formerly attributed to the ordained ministry. Since, however, this one ministry is given to the whole church which includes clergy and lay members, all of these functions are now the responsibility of all members of the church.

Its views in this regard suggest that the authors of the Task Force on Ministry were trying to avoid attributing tasks as essential to the life of the church as the proclamation of the gospel and celebration of the sacraments to the ordained ministry, because making such a connection would have suggested a distinction in status or authority between lay and ordained members of the church. This position would have called into question the equality of lay and ordained as participants in the church's one ministry.

3. It is not surprising that a document which stresses the unity of lay and ordained members of the church to the point of having them share equally in functions normally associated only with those in the ordained ministry, makes no mention of any special authority being associated with either the ordained ministry per se or with the functions most closely identified with the ordained ministry.

4. The Task Force on Ministry does not speak specifically of the ordination rite other than to say that representatives of the three functional areas of ministry--presbyteral, episcopal and diaconal--should participate in it. At this point the Task Force does not go further, as the report of The Ministry in the 20th Century had, in recommending that lay persons be involved in the laying on of hands which was part of the ordination rite. One cannot tell whether this was because it did not agree with that recommendation, or whether it was occasioned by the knowledge that such a recommendation would endanger the United Church's desire to effect union with the Anglicans.

D. The Mutual Recognition of the Ordained Ministries

2. The Task Force's stated desire not to do anything which would impede the Anglican-United Church dialogue on union is especially evident where reference is made to the form the episcopal function is to take. While it affirms the view that every church needs a ministry of *episcopate*, it offers only a vague description of the form this ministry will take. It speaks of episcopal functions being performed "by ordained ministers inducted to that function by the church", but it does not specify whether these ministers would be referred to as

"bishops" or as ordained "personnel officers". The Task Force does acknowledge that the Plan of Union favoured the episcopal role being carried out by a bishop, and states its own view that it would accept that direction if union were to succeed.

In discussing the usefulness of the threefold pattern of ministry, the Task Force refers not only to the efficiency of this ordering of ministry but to the opportunities it could open up for discussions on union with other Christian denominations. This sudden embracing of the threefold pattern of ministry was likely occasioned more by the desire of the members of the Task Force to support the United Church's negotiations on union with the Anglicans than out of a sincere appreciation for this ordering of ministry. It also explains why this report prefers to place its emphasis on the three "functions" of episcopal, pastoral and service ministries, while saying little about their embodiment in the roles of episcopal minister, presbyter and deacon.

9. TASK FORCE ON MINISTRY (1977)

The first Task Force on Ministry report was presented to the 26th General Council in August 1974. General Council received it as a progress report and recommended that a continuing Task Force be appointed to follow up on its recommendations with a first step in this process being to send the original report to the presbyteries for study and reaction.

With this mandate in mind, the Executive of General Council authorized the distribution of the report in November of 1976. After analysing close to 150 written and many more verbal responses, the Task Force on Ministry presented its report to the 27th General Council in August of 1977. A precis of the contents of that report follows:

The members of the Task Force acknowledged the difficulty of defining and structuring the ordained ministry in a church which is known for its theological pluralism. This difficulty was felt within the committee itself which consisted of representatives of the various theological polarities found within the United Church. The Task Force admitted that many of its members would have preferred more specific statements from within the narrower confines of their own theological perspective but had to compromise by using broad generalities

to "encompass the enormous spectrum of theological opinion and church life" that constitutes the United Church.²⁰²

The Task Force on Ministry stated that the use of scripture was fundamental to all of its theological discussions, as was the belief that each member's understanding of scripture and of tradition was made known through her or his own experience of the faith. It also acknowledged the tension that existed within the committee as a variety of theological opinions, some of them contradictory to each other, were forced to interact.²⁰³

The Task Force also sought to be guided in its discussions and recommendations by the ecumenical principle that "no church can wholly escape the impact of another's church's action" and, therefore, in making changes each church, wherever possible, "should seek to be as sensitive as possible to the potential ecumenical implications of its solutions to its problems".²⁰⁴ It should also be noted that in its report the Task Force regularly used footnotes to indicate the relationship between its findings and some of the World

²⁰² United Church of Canada, Task Force on Ministry, RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS, 26th General Council, Toronto, 1977, p. 503.

²⁰³ Ibid., p. 504.

²⁰⁴ "One Baptism, One Eucharist, and a Mutually Recognized Ministry," Faith and Order, Paper No. 73, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1975, p. 51.

Council of Churches' studies on these same questions.

The major criticism of the initial Task Force report of 1974 was that it paid only lip service to the ministry of the laity and spent most of its time dealing with issues directly related to the ordained ministry. One of the directives given to the new Task Force was that its final report on ministry be "set within an adequate statement concerning the ministry of Christ as entrusted to the whole people of God".²⁰⁵ The reconstituted Task Force spent three years doing research and consultations on a variety of issues related to ministry as well as participating in many local and regional study sessions and analysing responses on the 1974 report which were submitted by several hundred congregations and individuals. Another influence on its proceedings was the demise of the discussions on union with the Anglican Church of Canada in 1975.

The Task Force names its starting place as the concept of the laos--all the people of God (lay and ordained). It goes on from there to develop a schema with that concept in mind. This schema, outlining its views in brief, was transmitted to the church for reaction and when the reactions of the many groups and individuals who had responded were correlated, it became evident that there were "many different and often contradictory understandings of ministry within the United Church of

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 505.

Canada".²⁰⁶ The schema used by the Task Force dealt with the subject of ministry under five headings: "Theological Perspectives", "The Ministry of the Whole People of God"; "The Ministry of the Laity", "The Ministry of the Ordained" and "Structuring This View of Ministry".

1. Theological Perspectives

The Task Force begins with the stated assumption that "ministry begins with God who has declared himself in the history of Israel and in Jesus Christ".²⁰⁷ God who has revealed himself in history, in nature and in the heart of man, continues to speak through persons "moved by the Holy Spirit"--a reference to Article II of the Basis of Union. During this section of the report reference is made to the Basis of Union twelve times. The Task Force defines its use of the term "ministry" as restricted to "activities related to the community of believers" that have two essential ingredients--divine call and human response. Christian ministry, therefore, has to do with church, call and response. It points out that on the basis of this definition, all Christians are called to ministry, for all Christians are called to a life of service

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 505.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 505.

and proclamation of the gospel. Stressing this point, the report expresses the belief that "there is only one call to ministry--Jesus' words "Follow Me" and, "these words are extended to all of his people". Within this inclusive call, God "calls specific persons to specific tasks". The Committee recognizes that the scriptural witness is so strong on this point that they could not define "an order of ministry as being simply a creation of the institutional church".²⁰⁸

The authors of the Task Force believed that much of the structuring of the ordered ministry was the work of the church, but added that "ultimately it is God who calls to ministry and his Holy Spirit who gives power and authenticity".²⁰⁹ This does not signify, however, that the church shouldn't be involved in the process of the call to ministry. It is, in fact, the church's responsibility to mediate and test God's call to the individual. Attempts to differentiate among kinds of "calls" were, in their opinion both unnecessary and unproductive.²¹⁰ While "the basic thrust of God's call to ministry is unchanging and common to us all", they remarked, "the specifics of that call will be different for particular individuals...and our responses will also vary". According to

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 506.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 506.

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 507.

the Task Force on Ministry it is the church's responsibility to provide structures "so that the intent of God's call may be actualized in the world".²¹¹

2. The Ministry of the Whole People of God

Both lay and ordained members of the church share in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Sometimes their functions overlap, sometimes they are distinct. The ministry of all Christians is pre-eminently a ministry of witness to Jesus Christ and it will only have validity if congruity exists between the "gospel message and the gospel messenger".²¹²

The Task Force asserted that ministry is both personal and corporate.²¹³ It is corporate as the institutional church brings the gospel to bear on the socio-political context in which it finds itself. It is personal as individual members of the church practice their ministry "in the arena of their personal life-space", in their vocation for example. In the opinion of the Task Force on Ministry Christians, "whether self-employed or employed by others, whether involved in coupon-clipping, preaching, homemaking or making plastic pens

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 507.

²¹² Ibid., p. 508.

²¹³ Ibid., p. 508.

have a responsibility to assess the work they do and the way in which they do it, in the light of the Gospel".²¹⁴ With this high view of one's private occupation as ministry, it is possible, the report remarks, that some jobs or occupations may prove intolerable to the Christian conscience. The one example provided of such an occupation is tobacco farming.²¹⁵

Besides the ministry that takes place through the church to the world, it is important for both lay and ordained ministers to share a ministry in and to the church. "The giving to the church of one's time, skills, intellect and money are all part of ministry", the report states, but it goes on to say "not all of the laos will exercise this kind of church-related ministry".²¹⁶ No information is given to explain how it could be that Christians within the community of the church could continue as "practicing" Christians and yet not participate in at least one of the above mentioned areas of ministry.

The Task Force names three main areas of ministry, "all of which can be entered into in different ways by both lay and ordained ministers of the church". They are designated as i)service ministries (diaconal); ii)pastoral ministries

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 508.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 508.

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 508.

(presbyteral); iii) oversight ministries (episcopal). The Task Force then attempts to delineate the difference between lay and ordained ministries. It points to the fact that a division of labour was deemed necessary very early in the church's life and that it was based on the threefold order referred to above. Although both the priesthood of all believers and an ordered ministry were understood to be the will of Christ for his church, the Task Force expressed the idea that as Christianity spread the church "accommodated aspects of other cultures and pagan religions, with the result that the order (referring to the ordered ministry) took on connotations of a priestly class". As a result the priests were given the work of ministry and the laity was "obscured for centuries beneath a cloak of sacerdotalism".²¹⁷ That situation, according to the Task Force, changed to some degree with the Reformation, but must be eliminated in a more effective and widespread manner today if the laity are to take up the ministry Christ has given them.

The Task Force held that there were valid differences between lay and ordained ministries, differences which "are of God and for the well-being of the church".²¹⁸ It described lay ministries as "spontaneous and dispersed", while ordained

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 508.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 509.

ministries are described as "accountable and locatable". These two types of ministry are inter-dependent and in the course of the church's life they at times overlap so that lay people engage in 'ordered' ministry, and ordained ministers engage in acts of spontaneous ministry. Both forms of ministry exist not for themselves but for the good of the whole and can be seen as God's gifts to the church.²¹⁹

3. The Ministry of the Laity

The authors of the Task Force report emphasized the need for lay people to adopt a new vision of the church, "a vision of the church wherein every person who has acknowledged the claim of Jesus Christ on his or her life has a ministry to perform."²²⁰ It envisioned the whole membership of the church becoming "active yeast", and bringing "their Christian perspectives to bear on society at whatever point they touch it --in the home, in politics, in the office, in the mine,...in the courtroom, the jail cell, the farm...".²²¹ If this vision is to become a reality, the Task Force remarked, lay persons

²¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 509-510.

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 511.

²²¹ Ibid., p. 511.

"must come to realize that truth of the statement "We are the church", and must take an active part in all areas of ministry rather than continuing to regard the clergy as "experts in all matters ecclesiastical".²²²

The Task Force stressed the need the church has to use the talents of its laity so that it will be able to respond in relevant and creative ways to the cultural environment of the times. It ends its sub-section entitled "The Church Tomorrow" with the grim prediction that "the church will die if it is left to the clergy to fulfil the ministry of Jesus".²²³ The Task Force report also recommended that on appropriate occasions and "with the authority of the appropriate church court", lay persons be allowed to celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion.²²⁴

4. The Ministry of the Ordained

The Task Force on Ministry acknowledged that both the ministry of the laity and the ministry of the ordained are essential to the full expression of Christ's ministry and that

²²² Ibid., pp. 511, 512. The underlining of the words "we are" is found in the Task Force report.

²²³ Ibid., p. 515.

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 521.

each has its own distinct characteristics.²²⁵ While recognizing that the church attributed special importance to the ministry of preaching and the administration of the sacraments, the members of the Task Force saw the danger of a "special status" then attaching to those whom the church had designated to perform these acts, i.e. its ordained ministers. They suggested that the church could avoid both the "undesirable connotations of 'holy status' and the pitfalls of attempting to define lay and clergy differences in terms of different functions, by thinking of the order of ministry as fulfilling a representative office within the church's total ministry".²²⁶

The primary distinction between clergy and laity was not, according to the Task Force report, that clergy performed different functions than lay ministers but that they performed them in a more representative way and with the authorization of the total community. In acting in this representative fashion, ordained members of the church symbolized the catholicity of the church.²²⁷ The Task Force understood ordination as a means of "giving form and recognition" to this representative order of ministry. In its opinion there was no need for two

²²⁵ Ibid., p. 516.

²²⁶ Ibid., p. 516.

²²⁷ Ibid., p. 516.

designated forms of ministry within one Order of Ministry. It therefore recommended that the commissioned ministry should cease to exist within the United Church and that those who were presently commissioned ministers should be offered ordination.²²⁸

The Task Force on Ministry included as one of its appendices a statement of dissent by Professor William Fennell, the principal of Emmanuel College, a United Church theological college. Professor Fennell expressed his belief that the sound doctrine of lay ministry outlined in the Task Force report was "purchased at the price of loss of integrity with regard to the ordained ministry".²²⁹

The Task Force on Ministry was presented to the United Church's 27th General Council in 1977. After considerable discussion a motion was passed confessing that the United Church was not yet satisfied with its theology of the ministry of the laity or of the ordered ministry. This motion was followed by another motion in which General Council voted to:

"1) provide structures to engage all levels of the church in study and decision relative to the Task Force report;

2. Set up and monitor controlled experiments in the practice and policy of ministry articulated in the report;

3) Provide adequate funding, personnel and ancillary support to permit all levels of the church to engage quickly and deeply

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 522.

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 539.

in the process of study and decision making."²³⁰

A steering committee, which was to be referred to as Project: Ministry, was set up to oversee this process.

A. The Place of the Ordained Ministry in the Church

1. Debate within the Task Force Committee was grounded in an "understanding of scripture and church tradition as experienced in the faith of the members" of the Task Force. Using a dialectical form of theological method, the individual's experience was then allowed to interact with the experience of other members of the group. The Task Force believed that in this kind of interaction, the truth regarding ministry would emerge.²³¹

In placing its emphasis on the personal faith experience of the Task Force members as the grid through which the witness of scripture and tradition would be sifted, the Task Force on Ministry adopted a more subjective hermeneutical point of reference than BEM. The members of the Faith and Order Commission which produced BEM sought to develop an

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 522.

²³¹ Ibid., p. 503.

understanding of the ordained ministry by determining, from the record of scripture and tradition, "how, according to God's will", the church's life should be ordered. BEM's choice of an external referent (Tradition) instead of an internal referent (the individual's faith experience), provided it with an objective standard against which to judge its understanding of the ordained ministry. As a result, BEM could point back to the Tradition of the church and show where in that Tradition its position on some aspect of the ordained ministry, whether its ordering, its succession, or its Christocentric foundation, had a scriptural or ecclesial basis.

2/3. The major focus of the Task Force on Ministry report can be summed up in its statement that "All the people of God, the laos, are called to ministry".²³² While describing the ordained ministry as "essential to the full expression of Christ's ministry on earth", the Task Force also states that both the ordained and lay ministries of the church have "unique characteristics" which are required for the life of the church.²³³ One of the major roles of the ordained ministry will, in fact, be that of encouraging and guiding lay members of the church as they take up their ministry.²³⁴

²³² Ibid., p. 507.

²³³ Ibid., p. 515.

²³⁴ Ibid., p. 513.

While the Task Force on Ministry and BEM share a common belief in the need for lay and ordained members of the church to co-exist in a mutually supportive relationship, the United Church report does not see this relationship as a present reality and it places the blame for this situation predominately at the feet of the ordained, with some criticism directed toward those lay people who "thrust holy status upon their clergy".²³⁵ At places in its report, it appears as if the Task Force Committee believed that the ordained ministry stood in opposition to the ministry of the laity or, at the very least, impeded it. This attitude of blame pervades the document.

The following examples from the Task Force report support this contention:

- the reference to the development of a "priestly class" mentality among the ordained which obscured the role of the priesthood of all believers under "a cloak of sacerdotalism" - a situation which the Task Force believed had not been completely quenched by the Reformation.²³⁶
- the description of the ordained minister as "General Manager" with lay people kept at a "sub-managerial level".²³⁷

²³⁵ Ibid., p. 515.

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 509.

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 511.

- a remark that the health and, perhaps the survival of the church, depend on whether the church can present a "new vision" to its members, a vision in which all of its members would participate in the church's ministry rather than leaving it in the hands of the clergy.²³⁸
- the tendency, which the Task Force notes among lay people, "to regard the clergy as the experts in all matters ecclesiastical", so that in church meetings "tough businessmen...become docile as kittens".²³⁹
- the Task Force's need to state that "ordination to office does not release the ordained clergy from the universal call to personal authenticity".²⁴⁰
- the comment that "The church will die if it is left to the clergy to fulfil the ministry of Jesus".²⁴¹

No specific proof is offered to support any of these claims, yet they are accepted as truisms. It is not taken into account, for example, that while some "tough businessmen" may turn into docile kittens when in the presence of an ordained minister, it is equally true that some clergy are intimidated by tough businessmen. There is also a question as to why the

²³⁸ Ibid., p. 511.

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 512.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 517.

²⁴¹ Ibid., p. 515.

Task Force considered it inappropriate for lay people to think of ordained ministers as "experts in all matters ecclesiastical", when one of its own recommendations was that intensive theological and practical training should precede ordination.

There are suggestions throughout this document that once lay persons rid themselves of the notion that those in the ordained ministry are the real ministers of the church, and come to see themselves as "ministers", they will assume a new manner of acting and, as a result, will change the face of the church and of society. "We envisage", the authors of the Task Force on Ministry write, "the impact on every part of society if these 1,000,000 persons (referring to the membership of the United Church) became active 'yeast'... bringing Christian perspectives to bear on society at whatever point they touch it."²⁴²

This vision of what will happen when lay people take up their ministry denies the active discipleship carried on by countless Christians before the term 'ministry' was used to describe their activity. At the same time, it fails to recognize that the practice of Christianity is not attractive to all people, not even to all who have, for whatever reason, taken out membership in the church. Suggesting, as this report

²⁴² Ibid., p. 511.

does, that the church will only survive when a "new vision" of a church "wherein every person has a ministry to perform" occurs, makes light of the wholehearted response which many Christians have given to Jesus Christ under the church's "present vision" of ministry. It also overlooks the fact that the church, despite its imperfections, has survived, and has done so through times of social and political upheaval no less challenging than the socio-political context today.

In contrast to BEM which espoused both an active laity and an authoritative ordained ministry, the authors of the Task Force report chose to advance the ministry of the laity at the expense of a clearly defined and authoritative ordained ministry.

B. The Tasks and Forms of the Ordained Ministry in the Church

1. There is no direct reference in the Task Force report to the ordained having a specific responsibility to continue the ministry and teaching of the apostles. In discussing the ministry to which the whole people of God is called, the Task Force describes this ministry as primarily one of witness in which lay and ordained members of the church "share in the apostolic ministry of witness to Jesus Christ".²⁴³ It presents the belief that "in the actual life of the church lay people as

²⁴³ Ibid., p. 508.

well as clergy can and do perform" most of the functions of the church, including preaching, may have been partly responsible for the fact that the only reference to the continuity of the apostolic witness found in this document is one which attributes such witness to both ordained and lay members of the church.²⁴⁴

The primary reason this document gives for not attributing to the ordained ministry a specific role as guardian of the apostolic faith is a belief in the "shared" nature of the ministry of the church. Had special responsibility in respect to the apostolic teaching been seen as the prerogative of the ordained ministry, the laity may have interpreted this to mean that the ordained possessed an authentic ministry while they did not. The authors of the Task Force saw this as the situation already in place and they believed that it accounted for the laity's inability to both see and actualize the ministry which Christ had given them. For this reason, the authors of the Task Force could not promote an idea which gave the ordained ministry a crucial role in the church which was not shared equally by members of the laity.

2. In regard to the three main areas of function within the church's ministry, areas which this report identified as: service (diaconal), pastoral (presbyteral), and oversight

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 515.

(episcopal), the Task Force document remarked that both clergy and lay persons participate in all three of these functions. Members of the Task Force believed that it would be particularly difficult to separate clergy and lay in respect to the diaconal function of ministry since both were called to acts of service in and through the church.

In discussing the episcopal function, the Task Force on Ministry report acknowledged oversight as the responsibility of the courts of the church and it also pointed out that "oversight is an obvious and exhausting aspect of parenthood and family life". The pastoral role of ministry, according to the Task Force, found expression "no less effectively in the life of the laity as they witness and counsel and support those whom they encounter", as it does in the work of members of the ordained ministry.²⁴⁵ Its authors recognized that once the church grasped the concept of shared ministry which they were advocating it would be "even more difficult to define differences between lay and ordained ministries on the basis of the tasks performed by each".²⁴⁶ Their point was well taken.

While this report expressed support of the threefold ministry, it is the "function" rather than the personal dimension of this way of ordering ministry which it affirmed.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 521.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 521.

This is particularly true where mention is made of the episcopal and diaconal functions. These functions can, the Task Force remarks, but need not, be performed by people in special ministries; they are functions which the presbyteral minister can include in his or her list of duties. In recognition of this, the authors of the Task Force on Ministry recommended that the commissioned ministry of the United Church, a ministry associated with the diaconal function, should be eliminated. Those who believed themselves called to this function could carry out their service ministry either as lay persons or as members of the ordained ministry.

The Task Force acknowledged that the episcopal role in the United Church was traditionally carried out by the courts of the church. The Presbytery, for example, was given oversight of the pastoral charges within its region. It also recognized that this system had its defects since the personal element was missing when pastoral oversight was carried out by a committee acting on behalf on the church court. In response to this situation, the Task Force on Ministry advised that personnel officers could act as a useful expression of the church's episcopal ministry. It is careful to add, however, that these personnel officers "are in no sense bishops". Their role, according to the Task Force, was that of "helping the committee structures function effectively". It is apparent that this "helping" function has no authority attached to it, and does

not relate to the episcopal role referred to in BEM.²⁴⁷

BEM also speaks of lay and ordained members of the church being called to participate in the church's ministry together but it does not have their roles overlap in the way that the Task Force report does. BEM defines the threefold pattern of ministry in narrower terms than the Task Force, and does not envision equal participation by lay and ordained members of the church in the threefold ministry. BEM also did not equate episcopal ministry with parental oversight.²⁴⁸

The Task Force on Ministry report was written during the period after union negotiations had broken down between the Anglican and United Churches. The most contentious issue during those discussions had centred around the nature of the episcopal ministry. While the United Church had agreed that the new church should be ordered according to the historical threefold pattern of bishop, presbyter and deacon, its understanding of the nature of episcopacy differed from that of the Anglican Church. The Anglican Church was not able to accept the United Church's view of an episcopal ministry which would be dominated by the courts of the church, and was collegial to the point that it was virtually divested of all personal authority. As well, the Anglican Church, which

²⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 525.

²⁴⁸ BEM 7, 46.

believed in the succession of apostolic ministry through the episcopate, found the United Church's agreement to episcopal ordination solely an accommodation to union rather than an acceptance of the theology of apostolic succession. For these reasons the two churches broke off negotiations on union in 1975.

In light of the bitter disappointment felt in the United Church because of this experience, the fact that the episcopal "function", if not the episcopal "person", is discussed positively in this report is a sign of the United Church's commitment to a ministry of oversight. Its omission of a discussion of the office of bishop, however, and its remark to the effect that personnel officers are "in no sense bishops" indicates that the United Church's former espousal of episcopal ministry was occasioned more by a desire for union with the Anglican Church than by a genuine appreciation of this form of ministry.

C. The Meaning of Ordination

1. The authors of the Task Force on Ministry expressed the belief that there was "one" call to ministry and that was the call Jesus extended to all people to become his

followers.²⁴⁹ Within this inclusive call they acknowledged that particular people experienced a call to a specific form of ministry, one of which was the ordained ministry. Although they believed that much of the structuring of the church's ordained ministry was a result of the church ordering its life, they also recognized that it was not possible to define ordered ministry as being "simply a creation of the institutional church". Ultimately, according to the members of the Task Force, the ordained ministry is Christ's gift to the church.²⁵⁰ They further remarked, referring to the church's ordered ministry, that "it is God who calls to ministry and his Holy Spirit that gives power and authenticity".²⁵¹

This clear statement of the Trinitarian foundation of the ordained ministry co-exists in this document with other statements that appear to set the ordained ministry on an ecclesial foundation. One of these is the belief that there is only one call to ministry and that call is to the general ministry of the church, with the call to the ordained ministry being a call to specific "tasks" only and not to an "order" of ministry. If taken to its logical conclusion this would place the ordained ministry on an ecclesial foundation.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 507.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 505, 529.

²⁵¹ Ibid., p. 506.

An ecclesial basis for the ordained ministry is also implied in this report's reference to the "architects of church polity as those who can provide an explanation of why "some designated leadership" is needed in the church "for the sake of 'orderliness' and 'order'".²⁵² But, as Dr. Fennell writes in his statement of dissent, what exists in the church at Christ's initiative does not need its validity defended through "sociologically valid principles of institutional management". In this regard, Professor Fennell accuses his fellow Task Force members of having confused "matters of organization" which have to do with the "pragmatic efficacy" of arranging the church's ministry, with "matters of order" which have to do with the question "What is Christ's unchanging will for his church as concerns ministry?".²⁵³

Part of the confusion in this document regarding the foundation of the ordained ministry stems from its lack of clarity in regard to the source of the "call" to that ministry. The Task Force emphasizes in several places that there is only one call to ministry, and yet goes on to enumerate a variety of calls to a variety of ministries. Perhaps what the Task Force meant to convey was very close to what BEM says in its section on "The Calling of the Whole

²⁵² Ibid., p. 519.

²⁵³ Ibid., p. 541.

People of God" where the inclusive call to discipleship is seen as existing prior to the call to ordained ministry. The Task Force does, in fact, imply the same but in a round about fashion. The difference between these two documents is that BEM clearly delineates a separate call to the ordained ministry and clearly identifies the ordained ministry as a separate ministry which, while not identical with the general ministry of the church, has no existence apart from it. BEM places the lay and ordained ministries of the church in an integral relationship to each other, yet with a separate dynamic in regard to their call and functions.

The Task Force makes little distinction in regard to both call and function between the lay and ordained ministries of the church. It places the ordained person's expression of ministry through the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments, alongside the lay person's expression of ministry in church related activities, family life and secular occupation. While the Task Force is clear in encouraging all members of the church to participate in the ministry of Christ, it does not state with equal clarity which ministerial tasks it sees as essential to the church being the church. It also fails to designate who is responsible for carrying out tasks that are fundamental to the life of the church and, if these tasks or those performing them require "ordering", how this is to be done.

One of the results of this report's lack of clarity regarding the nature of the ordained ministry is that it ends up blending the lay and ordained ministries together to the point where both lay and ordained members of the church are uncertain as to what roles and tasks are rightfully theirs. Such a situation is bound to create opposition between them, with lay people going on alert watching for clerical infractions of authority, and clergy living in fear that they will unwittingly overstep the specific confines of place and function which the church has given them.

2. The Task Force on Ministry (1977) goes out of its way to reject a sacramental understanding of the ordained ministry in favour of a functional one. One way it does this is by divesting the ordained ministry of any connotation of status or authority. Even in its discussion of the representative function which the ordained ministry fulfils, the one role which separates it from the ministry of the laity, the Task Force adds the disclaimer that it does not wish its affirmation of the importance of this function to imply that "the representative ordained ministry is more important than lay ministries". ²⁵⁴

In regard to the celebration of the Lord's Supper which

²⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 517.

was normally identified with the ordained ministry in the United Church, the Task Force on Ministry expressed the belief that to make a close identification between the ordained ministry and this sacrament could lead to a sacerdotal understanding of ordained ministry.²⁵⁵ For the same reason, it is tentative about using the traditional phrase "Ministry of Word and Sacraments" to describe the ordained ministry believing that it too could lend itself "to a cultic interpretation (i.e. the priests have the divine power and only they can dispense it through the rites to the ordinary people)".²⁵⁶

To avoid such an interpretation of the ordained ministry the Task Force, while affirming "the existing norm" of the ordained minister celebrating the Lord's Supper during public worship, suggests that there are occasions on which it would be appropriate for lay persons to celebrate this sacrament. The authors of the Task Force report believed that lay celebration would act as a "powerful and visible symbol of the call of all Christians to ministry".²⁵⁷ This recommendation provides another example of the Task Force's desire to promote the ministry of the laity at the expense of the traditional

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 515.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 517.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 537.

understanding of the nature of the ordained ministry.

The Task Force goes on to describe lay celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as "an enrichment in the life of the church". In explaining how a group would be enriched by a celebration of Holy Communion led by one of its members, the authors of the Task Force offer the comment: "They will participate and the event will mean what it will mean to those taking part". They also suggest that "such celebration would not require either authorization or notification of any church court", presumably including the Session of the local congregation.²⁵⁸ In light of this, it appears that not only was the ordained ministry denied any sacramental or ontological content, but the sacrament of Holy Communion itself was open to interpretation. It could mean whatever those celebrating it wanted it to mean. The Task Force on Ministry's recommendation in this regard was not accepted by the United Church.

Further proof of this report's functional understanding of ordained ministry is found in its sections entitled "Laity in the Ordered Ministry" and "Clergy in Lay Ministries". Under these headings, the Task Force describes the lay person who performs professional functions within the church becoming "a lay person in ordered ministry", and the ordained minister who

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 538.

is not working professionally for the church as being in "lay ministry". Speaking of "lay" people in "ordered ministry" and "ordered" people in "lay ministry" reflects a belief that the ministry one is "in" is determined by the function one performs.²⁵⁹ This idea is also present in the report when it discusses the differences between lay and ordained ministries. After describing the nature of "Christ's ministry through the laity", and "Christ's ministry through the ordained", the Task Force refers to the interdependence of these two types of ministry adding that "no Christian exists totally in one or the other".

The authors of this report reject a sacramental understanding of the ordained ministry and appear to be offended by any connotation in language, form, or practice that might lead to such an interpretation.

3. The Task Force report recommended to the church, as had the previous Task Force on Ministry, that ordination should be understood as "the means of setting some apart to a representative office" in the church, and induction "as the means of authorizing" this ministry.²⁶⁰

The tradition in the United Church had been to see ordination as the rite giving authority for ministry, with

²⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 521, 522.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 524.

induction for the ordained person, and installation for a lay person, formalizing entry into a particular position. It was a marked change to recommend, as this document did, that the one rite of induction should convey "both the responsibility and authority to function in a given charge". One may note that this recommendation did not meet with the approval of General Council. Had the church adopted this course it would have been difficult to determine what kind of authority, if any, was conveyed through the act of ordination. And if authority to exercise ordained ministry was not conveyed through ordination but found elsewhere what, in fact, did ordination really signify?

D. The Mutual Recognition of the Ordained Ministries

1/2. The Task Force on Ministry stated as one of its guiding principles a concern for the impact of its report on the ecumenical community, and expressed the view that "in making changes each church, wherever possible, should seek to be as sensitive as possible to the potential ecumenical implications of its solutions to its problems".²⁶¹

Despite their desire to be ecumenically sensitive, the authors of the Task Force on Ministry (1977) produced a report

²⁶¹ Faith and Order, Paper No. 73, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1975.

which was out of line with what most denominations accept as the "common" elements in ordained ministry, including its direct institution as an "order" of ministry by Christ, a "call" that is recognizably different from the "call" to general ministry, the sole responsibility of the ordained for the administration of the sacraments, and the need to be able to connect the ordering and practice of ordained ministry back to the Tradition of the church. Since this report veered away from what was considered normative within its own denomination, it cannot be surprising that it did not handle the ecumenically sensitive areas of the threefold pattern of ministry (in particular the office of the bishop) in a way that would promote unity between the United Church of Canada and episcopally ordered churches.

When the Report of the Task Force on Ministry was presented to the United Church's General Council, it aroused considerable debate. Finally, it was decided to receive the report as a "working document", and instead of appointing another committee to produce a new study, the General Council chose to appoint a steering committee to elicit the church's response. Although the Task Force on Ministry provides evidence of a dynamic process at work, it is apparent from the reaction it received that this report raised as many questions as it answered.

10. PROJECT: MINISTRY (1980)

The 27th General Council did not give official acceptance to the Report of the Task Force on Ministry (1977) but received it as a "working document" which deserved further investigation by the church at large. A steering committee was appointed by the General Council to gather the general reaction of the United Church to the findings and recommendations of the Task Force report. This steering committee was given the name Project: Ministry.

Project: Ministry was responsible for proposing a process that would enable congregations to study and respond to the Task Force'77 report. Over a two year period, the Task Force report was made available to congregations and Presbyteries across Canada, and sixty-six representative congregations were chosen as testing grounds for some of the major recommendations of the Task Force on Ministry report.

The response to the Task Force report gathered by Project: Ministry revealed, to no one's surprise, that a variety of different and often conflicting views of ministry existed in the United Church. Referring to ministry as a "river" which the United Church was struggling to navigate, Project: Ministry identified thirteen different "currents" in that river. While Project: Ministry acknowledged that at certain times in history

this "river" had flown peacefully, it did not believe that the river "ministry" was presently in such a period. Instead, the authors of Project: Ministry saw strong currents in the river, currents which created "whirlpools" when they collided. It was their belief that the United Church as a whole must acknowledge the presence of all these "currents" within the church and recognize that all of them were part of the river's "legitimate dynamism".²⁶²

Among the currents mentioned as "vital" to understanding the meaning of ministry in the United Church were the tradition of the church which the authors of Project: Ministry believed worthy of "respectful investigation", and the witness of scripture which they acknowledged as "absolutely crucial" to any understanding of ministry. They also added that the scriptural record concerning ministry was "at the same time, fragmentary, varied and inconclusive regarding many matters which need decision".²⁶³ The report then quotes nineteen New Testament texts which refer to ministry.

In its section sub-titled "Understanding Ministry", Project: Ministry observed that there were three basic ways in which the word "ministry" was understood:

- a) as a description of what those who serve as ordained

²⁶² United Church of Canada, Project: Ministry, Toronto, 1980. p. 4.

²⁶³ Ibid., p. 4.

ministers do, so that it becomes, in effect, "a code-word for those we sometimes refer to as 'the clergy'".

b) as the involvement of all members of the church in serving Jesus Christ; ministry then becomes a generic word which "refers to the ministry of Jesus Christ in which the whole church participates".

c) as a reference to the ministry of Jesus Christ; thus "anyone in the church, whether ordained or not ordained, will be 'in ministry' only in so far as the ministry of Christ is finding expression in what she/he is doing".²⁶⁴

It was the impression of the authors of Project: Ministry that the term "ministry" was being used carelessly and in ways which impeded rather than clarified how and where Christ's ministry was being carried out in the church and in the world.²⁶⁵ They suggested that it would be helpful if the church used the term "ministry" only in the most "chaste and rigorous way" outlined under point "c" above. While acknowledging that such an expectation was not realistic for general use in the church, they chose to follow this practice in their own report and expressed the belief that such use would have some "cleansing and liberating effect upon the use of 'ministry' language".

Project: Ministry stated the belief that the church as a whole, and every member individually, is called to participate in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Membership in the church is,

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 8, 9.

therefore, the "basic and ultimate category" through which people are called to practice ministry. Every member of the church is committed to participate in Christ's ministry by virtue of her membership and there is, as a result, "no distinction of worth between the various persons and the different ways through which Christ's ministry is fulfilled in the community".²⁶⁶

It named the following as fundamental marks of the church which are constitutive to its life: proclamation of the Gospel in preaching and teaching, the celebration of the sacraments, the rituals of public worship, and acts of service. Because these marks of the church are constitutive for its life and welfare, Project: Ministry believed "they would always generate, under Christ, a corporate focus of leadership and oversight". This leadership, which must be modeled after Christ's lifestyle of servanthood, "will be empowered to call forth within the community the discipleship, discernment and discipline necessary to embody these elemental 'marks' in its common life and in its witness in the world".²⁶⁷

Project: Ministry recognized that many people within the United Church believed that referring only to ordained members of the church as "ministers" "inhibited the full capacity of

²⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 18.

the Christian community to be in ministry", for this identification carried with it "the assumption that the basic and normative ministry" in the church is that of the ordained.²⁶⁸ In the opinion of the Steering Committee of Project: Ministry, it was important for the church to "transcend" this usage. The authors of this report also believed that the term "lay" as it was generally used to refer to those members of the church who were not ordained, was no longer a useful word because it had come to imply "uninformed", "not fully competent", "amateur", and "subordinate".²⁶⁹ Its use appeared to support the idea of first and second class levels of ministry.

Project: Ministry named baptism/confirmation as the sign of membership and summons to ministry in the church. Baptism signified entrance into "the order of ministry of the whole people of God". In light of this understanding of initiation into ministry, this report suggested that members of the ordained ministry reflect on where their "basic sense of Christian identity and participation in ministry" was rooted--whether in their baptism or their ordination "or, if in both, in what proportion".²⁷⁰ The Project: Ministry report spoke of

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 21.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 19.

"Christ's ministry" finding expression in a variety of interrelated activities. Each member of the church is able to perform his or her particular assignment as the Spirit and the community distribute the various gifts and opportunities for service among the members of the community.²⁷¹ It agreed with its predecessor--the Task Force on Ministry (1977)--that there were three basic functions of ministry, diaconal, presbyteral and episcopal; that these functions were all needed for the church's life; and that movement between them was lateral not hierarchical.²⁷²

While acknowledging the need within the church for these three functions of ministry, Project: Ministry also recognized that one of them took "a logical and theological priority" over the other two. The presbyteral function of gathering the community, proclaiming the Word, and celebrating the sacraments, acted as a prerequisite to the service and oversight functions of ministry. While the other assignments and "offices" in the church, specifically teaching, service, and oversight, are also fundamental to its welfare, the pastoral office is prior and necessary even to these.²⁷³ Project: Ministry further supported its view of the priority of

²⁷¹ Ibid., p. 19.

²⁷² Ibid., p. 22.

²⁷³ Ibid., p. 23.

the pastoral or presbyteral function by suggesting that there was also a "a certain primacy and priority to the area to which the pastoral function is basically applied", namely, the presbytery and the congregations within its boundary.⁷⁴ It recommended, therefore, that this area be considered the basic unit in United Church polity, and that the United Church's understanding of ministry and its 'ordering' must take this into account.

The presbytery is described as the "lynch pin" which holds the ecclesial system of the United Church together. In the understanding of Project: Ministry the presbytery functioned as a corporate and collegial bishop and, as such, performed the ministerial function of oversight for all the congregations within its boundary. The important place of the presbytery in United Church polity was shown by the fact that membership in the United Church is made up of those whose names appear on the roll of their local congregation and those whose names appear on the presbytery rolls as ordained or commissioned ministers.

The authors of Project: Ministry found that the question of ordination dominated much of their deliberations about ministry. As they received responses from across the church to the Task Force on Ministry report, they identified five distinct opinions each of which was seriously defended by some

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 23.

group within the United Church.

One group suggested that the practice of ordination be abandoned since it believed this practice prevented the church from affirming that all its members shared in Christ's ministry. Another, much larger, group affirmed the value and necessity of ordination but differed in their opinion of who should be ordained.

Recognizing that the church would "continue to clarify its mind about ordination", Project: Ministry offered the following judgement concerning ordination:

- the church should continue to practice ordination.
- ordination should be reserved for those who normally perform "the central acts which are intended to represent and symbolize the totality of Christ's ministry, in the context of the congregation, as it gathers to hear the word, and to participate in the sacraments.
- some are called by Christ and the community to be "sign and agent of this calling together and focusing of the community".
- those who are thus called by Christ and the community to this leadership role should receive appropriate training and formation after which they should be "set apart and ordained" to their responsibilities.²⁷⁵

The authors of Project: Ministry stressed that "ordination is not so much a setting apart into 'an order of ministry' as a setting apart of some within the community to ensure that the congregation remains focused in the Word". They also noted that the ordained minister serves the ministry

²⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

of the 'one, holy, catholic, and apostolic' community. This report described the ordained minister as someone who should be willing to commit herself to the work of ministry "as a personal, collegial and corporate calling". Ordained members of the church must, according to Project: Ministry, be willing "to undertake their assignment in life-long accountability to Christ and the community".²⁷⁶

In contrast to the view expressed in the Task Force on Ministry which stated that although preaching and celebration of the Lord's Supper are normally the sphere of the ordained minister, on occasion lay persons may do either, Project: Ministry recommended against lay celebration of the Lord's Supper. There could be two exceptions to this: lay supply ministers having sole responsibility for ministry on a pastoral charge could be given permission to celebrate the sacraments, and so could the acting chairperson of presbytery, president of Conference or Moderator of the General Council who was a member of the laity.²⁷⁷

In reviewing the confusion that has existed in the United Church concerning ministry, the authors of Project: Ministry noted that the decision of the Commission on the Ministry in the 20th Century (1968), which spoke of "one order of ministry

²⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 32.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 50.

with two categories, ordained and commissioned", with two distinct forms of entrance and recognition (ordination or commissioning), needed to be re-examined. "In what sense", this report asks, "is this 'one order of ministry'?"²⁷⁸ Its own recommendation is that there be one order of ministry in the United Church and that this one order include only the ordained ministry.

After its review of the debate on ministry which had been taking place over many years within the United Church, the Steering Committee of Project: Ministry concluded: "we have been forced again and again to recognize ruefully that the United Church of Canada goes about the business of defining its views in a very ambiguous way".²⁷⁹ It pointed out that in the previous decade a series of reports on ministry had come before the General Council, received brief debate, been accepted 'in principle' and then been referred back to the church for further 'study' as 'working documents'. None of these statements had received the official support of the church. A consequence of this, according to the authors of this report, was massive confusion around the issue of ministry as well as considerable frustration and misunderstanding.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 53.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 53.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 54.

When the Report of Project: Ministry was presented to the 28th General Council in 1980, the General Council affirmed "the essential thrust" of the report and voted to implement many of its recommendations. The comment made during the General Council's discussion of this document to the effect that "the Report of Project: Ministry involves education not legislation" was, according to its chairperson, Dr. Anne Squire, a prophetic one.²⁸¹ In her words, having the church enact "the concept of all ministry being the ministry of Jesus Christ in which we as ordained, commissioned and lay members participate" would involve a slow but steady process of change in the United Church of Canada.²⁸²

A. The Place of the Ordained Ministry in the Church

1. The Steering Committee of Project: Ministry identified thirteen different influences which were involved in the United Church's understanding of ministry. It acknowledged that among these, and evident within the Steering Committee itself, were diverse and contradictory opinions and for this

²⁸¹ Anne SQUIRE, Project: Ministry Revisited, M.P.&E. Paper No. 9, Toronto: United Church of Canada Publishing, p. 1.

²⁸² Ibid., p. 3.

reason Project: Ministry did not attempt to work toward a consensus.

Reflecting on the variety of opinions in the United Church concerning ministry, the Committee states its view that all of these are part of the "legitimate dynamism" of the river "ministry". It was the Steering Committee's belief that the interaction of these various influences within the United Church was leading the church forward, and would ultimately result in a "more faithful church".²⁸³

Project: Ministry's description of the scriptural witness as "absolutely crucial" for developing an understanding of ministry, along with its incorporation of a respect for tradition and an appreciation of the present experience of the church, shows that its authors took a multi-faceted approach to developing its statement on ministry. The authors of this document took all of the above factors into account without embracing an unrealistic view of the validity of any one of them.²⁸⁴ Its hermeneutical position stands in contrast to BEM which did not incorporate with the same degree of balance the contemporary experience of the church.

Project: Ministry singles out the use of language as a

²⁸³ Ibid., p. 4.

²⁸⁴ Project: Ministry, for example, acknowledged that the scriptural record was itself "fragmentary, varied and inconclusive". p. 648.

major factor affecting the understanding of ministry in the church, and one which is responsible for an inappropriate distribution of authority between clergy and laity. The appropriateness of the terms "lay" and "minister"--with 'lay' referring to a member of the 'laos', and 'minister' referring to one who is offering leadership in the 'ministry' of the church, is rejected on the basis that these words have become 'tainted' through their association with other factors such as competence, professionalism, and status.

While, doubtlessly, language can effect, or at least lend support to, a particular vision of reality, the contention in Project: Ministry that it is the use of 'clerical' language which is largely responsible for the "first and second class" distinctions which it believes exists between clergy and laity is overstated. This point of view does not recognize that it is not the title of 'minister' per se, but the learning and experience of the ordained person which makes people see him/her as more 'competent' and 'professional' than the average 'lay' person in relation to the more focal areas of ministry.²⁸⁵

2. Project: Ministry refers to proclamation of the Word and celebration of the sacraments as the central acts of the community which "represent and symbolize the totality of

²⁸⁵ The "focal" areas of preaching and pastoral care are being referred to here.

Christ's ministry in and through the church".²⁸⁶ While acknowledging that these central acts are "in principle" acts of the whole community, the authors of Project: Ministry specifically identify them with the ordained ministry. In the opinion of the Steering Committee it is the presbyteral or pastoral ministry which has the responsibility for gathering the community to hear the Word, and celebrate the sacraments, and this has been so "from the earliest history of the church".²⁸⁷ It is for this reason that this particular ministry has a "logical and theological priority" among other forms of ministry in the church.²⁸⁸

This report also affirms the ordained ministry's essential role in the church by identifying "ordination as an aspect of the congregational reality of the church".²⁸⁹ It is the presence of an ordained ministry in the church which ensures the corporate nature of the church, and which ensures that Christ's ministry will continue to be "at the centre of its life".²⁹⁰

Project: Ministry, like BEM, gives the ordained presbyter

²⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 29.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 27.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 23.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 29.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 31.

a unique and necessary role within the church.

3. The major emphasis of this document is a belief that all the people of God are called to ministry. Christ's ministry will, therefore, find expression in the church "in a great variety of interrelated activities and services as the various members of the Body respond to the summons and presence of the Spirit".²⁹¹ Ordained and lay members of the church are meant to work together in a relationship of "maximum inter-change where the mutuality and the uniqueness of their special mandates are worked out together".²⁹²

The authors of Project: Ministry believe that the ministry of the laity has been thwarted by a church which has seen members of the ordained ministry as the "real ministers" and members of the laity as "just lay persons". Referring to clergy as "ministers" indicated, according to Project: Ministry, that the basic and normative ministry is what the ordained do, while "for their part "lay" persons support and receive the ministry of the ordained". This situation, it believes, has had a debilitating effect on the ministry of the laity.²⁹³

In the view of Project: Ministry the mutuality between lay

²⁹¹ Ibid., p. 19.

²⁹² Ibid., p. 29.

²⁹³ Ibid., p. 650.

and ordained members of the church is an ideal which has not yet been realized. While this report does not place the ordained and lay ministries in opposition to each other, it does appear to have some confusion around the relationship these ministries have to each other. Its statement that the laity see themselves as those "who support and receive the ministry of the ordained" is given as an example of a situation which is "wrong" and which must be corrected.²⁹⁴

What is not explained in this and similar statements is precisely where the problem lies. Surely this statement is not meant to imply that the laity who, through the church courts, choose and set apart an ordained ministry and who as congregations hire ordained ministers, presumably for their leadership skills, should not support or receive their ministry by attending the worship they conduct, receiving the sacraments they administer or being recipients of the pastoral care, or other kinds of ministry they offer.

What is suggested here is that there is some kind of connection between "supporting and receiving" the ministry of the ordained and a failure by the laity to express their own ministry. Logic would dictate, however, that the opposite should be true. What happens under the leadership of the ordained ministry, particularly the proclamation of the gospel

²⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

and the celebration of the sacraments, should enrich and sustain the faith of the laity and thus encourage them in their expression of Christ's ministry, not detract from it.

The solution Project: Ministry offers to the dilemma of the ordained ministry overshadowing the ministry of the laity is the recognition by the church that any ministry in which it engages is valid only in so far as it expresses Christ's ministry. It refers to this idea as an insight which is crucial to an understanding of ministry in the church and which, once grasped, will have a profound effect on the way that the church's ministry is exercised. Any church, however, which values the continuity of apostolic teaching and ministry, already understands that underlying the church's practice of ministry is the normative and still present ministry of Jesus Christ.

If this is not the case, then what is at stake here is more than the laity's supposed reluctance to value their contribution to the church's ministry; at stake is whether the church has failed to convey that Christ calls all of his followers to participate in his ministry of reconciliation and loving service. In light of this, one must ask to see evidence that the gospel has not been faithfully proclaimed in the United Church for, in the final analysis, it is only the failure to deliver Christ's message to his people that can account for a passive, unchallenged laity.

In contrast to the Task Force report which preceded it, Project: Ministry decries the position of the laity in the church without placing blame for this situation directly on the ordained. At one point, in fact, Project: Ministry states clearly that it wishes to see "a new and vigorous collegiality between lay and ordained members of the church, but does not wish to see such collegiality gained at the expense" of the apostolic and prophetic dimensions of ministry.²⁹⁵ This statement on ministry aims for a collegiality between lay and ordained members of the church which honours both their ministries.

B. The Tasks and Forms of the Ordained Ministry in the Church

1. Project: Ministry speaks of the responsibility which the ordained ministry has for "declaring and safeguarding" the central acts of the community's life which include proclamation of the gospel and celebration of the sacraments. Concerning the proclamation of scripture, it states: "this constant reference to the scripture's witness to Jesus is an essential safeguard built into the church's life. It is the primary way in which as a community we encounter the risen Christ".²⁹⁶ These statements suggest that the ordained ministry which has

²⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 56.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 15-16.

primary responsibility for the proclamation of scripture has, as a result, primary responsibility for declaring and safeguarding the apostolic witness as it is found in the New Testament record.

The Steering Committee of Project: Ministry describes the difference between the "public preaching of the Word" and the witness of the laity as "telling the story" and "telling our stories". "Telling the story" can be taken as a reference to the apostolic nature of the ordained ministry for the story to be told is, presumably, the apostolic teaching concerning Jesus Christ. The ordained ministry's particular role in preserving the apostolic teaching of the church is referred to directly when the authors of Project: Ministry speak of the ordained minister acting as "an effective sign and agent of the catholic and apostolic dimensions of the whole church".²⁹⁷ In expressing this view Project: Ministry is very much in line with BEM's position on the apostolic nature of the ordained ministry.²⁹⁸

2. Project: Ministry speaks of the church's need to have its ministry cover three basic areas of function which it names as diaconal, pastoral and episcopal. The two Task Force

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 33.

²⁹⁸ BEM, of course, goes further than Project: Ministry in attributing a particular role in regard to apostolic succession to episcopal presbyters.

reports which preceded it also referred to the importance of these areas but they did not name one of these as more important than the others.²⁹⁹ The Steering Committee also saw these three areas of function as important to the church's ministry and as inter-related. In contrast, however, Project: Ministry believed that there was a certain primacy to one of them, the pastoral function, because of the role it played in relation to the other two. While all three of these ministerial functions contributed to the "fullness of the church's life", the ministries of service and oversight would have no communal connection were the pastoral function not exercised prior to them.

As in the previous Task Force report the threefold ministry is discussed mainly in terms of function rather than in reference to the role of episcopal minister, presbyteral minister and diaconal minister. Project: Ministry, referring to the interest found in the United Church in the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon, and recognizing that this interest was sparked by a strong desire within the United Church to continue to be a 'uniting' church, advises that the church exercise caution in this area. It is important,

²⁹⁹ The concern of these reports that all functions of ministry be part of the one 'order' of ministry and be considered of equal importance was, according to Project: Ministry, based on the fear that the episcopal function would dominate the other functions of ministry, resulting in "an episcopal overlordship" which the United Church would find unacceptable.

according to Project: Ministry, that the United Church in its quest for church union "not forget or forfeit certain aspects of its own self-understanding and practice which are part of the most valuable treasure" which the United Church brings to any discussion on union.³⁰⁰

The authors of Project: Ministry acknowledged a fear within the United Church that the adoption of episcopal ministry personalized in the office of the bishop, would "open the door to distinctions and orders of ministry". In its own understanding of episcopacy, it did not see it as "a separate or additional category of 'ministry'", which was "in essence, really distinguishable from the pastoral, teaching and diaconal assignments of the church". It saw the episcopal function as a complex of all of these.³⁰¹

While Project: Ministry acknowledges an important role for a personalized episcopal ministry in the area of pastoral oversight, it does not see this ministry as more important to the apostolic continuity of the church than the church's other ministries, particularly the presbyteral ministry. In this it stands in contrast to BEM which gives the bishop a significant role in guarding the continuity of the apostolic ministry and the unity of the church.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

³⁰¹ Ibid., p. 42.

Project: Ministry also acknowledged the confusion which surrounded the role of the commissioned or diaconal ministry of the church. The recommendation of the previous two Task Force reports had been to eliminate the category of commissioned ministry in favour of one ministry of Word and Sacrament which would include three areas of function--episcopal, presbyteral and diaconal--with entry to all forms of ministry being through ordination. While this recommendation was welcomed by some members of the commissioned ministry, it was rejected by others. Because of the voices of dissent among diaconal ministers, plus its own desire to restrict the identity of the ordained ministry to the presbyteral role within the congregation, Project: Ministry recommended that the diaconal ministry continue as a commissioned ministry within the church but that it no longer be considered part of the church's "ordered" ministry.

While this position may appear to assign diaconal ministry to a lesser category than the presbyteral ministry, this recommendation must be understood in relation to Project: Ministry's belief that there is only one ministry in the church, the ministry of Jesus Christ. This understanding of ministry denies superiority to any particular category or function of ministry, choosing instead to assign all authority to the church's basic ministry, the ministry of Jesus Christ. Any ministry in the church, whether ordained, commissioned or

lay, will have integrity and possess authority only in so far as it is a reflection of that one ministry.

C. The Meaning of Ordination

1. Project: Ministry speaks of a basic call to ministry which is given to the whole people of God through baptism, and which has a lifelong character. This call "remains basic to all the other callings or summons we may subsequently receive". The call to the ordained ministry is separate from the call to the general ministry of the church but both have the same source. Both are the result of the divine initiative as Christ calls into the ordained ministry "some among us" who have already been called to the "order of ministry of the whole people of God".³⁰²

Although the initial and foundational call to the ordained ministry is Trinitarian in nature, this call must be tested by the community to prove whether it is genuinely of God or not. When the community is satisfied regarding the validity of the individual's personal call to ministry, it then acts to recognize and authorize that call through the rite of ordination.³⁰³ Project: Ministry, in a similar fashion

³⁰² Ibid., p. 29.

³⁰³ Ibid., p. 30.

to BEM, separates the call to lay and ordained ministry in the church. Both documents also recognize that the invitation to ministry which God extends to the laos- the whole people of God,- precedes the specific call into the ordained ministry.

2. While Project: Ministry does not present a sacramental understanding of the ordained ministry, it presents a higher understanding of ordination than several of the reports which preceded it. The ordained ministry is understood as functional but the functions which it carries out are *specific* to the ordained ministry and were themselves ordained by Christ for the being and welfare of the church. It is the functions which the ordained ministry performs which ensure the apostolicity and catholicity of the church, and which also ensure the corporate nature of the church so that wherever any local unit of the church meets the whole church is present.³⁰⁴

The centrality of the ordained ministry is clearly stated in this document. Project: Ministry acknowledges the unique and essential role which the pastoral ministry holds in the church without surrendering its own special concern that the ministry of the laity be recognized and empowered by the church. The Report of Project: Ministry reads very much like BEM when it speaks of the ordained ministry exercising "guardianship" in the church so that the church can be assured

³⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 33.

that in the midst of all its activity, Christ's ministry continues "at the centre of its life as its source and norm".³⁰⁵

The Project: Ministry report, in contrast to the Task Force on Ministry (1977), rejects lay celebration of the sacraments even for small group celebration outside of public worship. This recommendation is made in the face of the belief by some within the church that lay celebration of the sacraments is a test of the United Church's commitment to the ministry of the whole people of God. The authors of Project: Ministry reject this view for several reasons. One is the "confusion of roles and functions" which would result from lay celebration of the Lord's Supper, a confusion which could only harm the church. Another is because it would injure the United Church's relationships "with other churches who make such distinctions".³⁰⁶

The fundamental reason lay celebration is rejected is the Steering Committee's belief that the eucharist is a sacrament that belongs to the 'being' of the church so that whenever it is celebrated the "fullness" of the church is effected. The presence of an ordained minister in a small group within the congregation which wished to celebrate the eucharist, would

³⁰⁵ Ibid., P. 31.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

enable such a group to be fully "the church" in a way that would not be possible without a member of the ordained ministry being present.³⁰⁷

Project: Ministry's authors saw ordination as placing the one being ordained in a unique relationship to the community so that by virtue of ordination he or she becomes a "sign and agent" of the apostolicity, catholicity, and unity of the church. Unlike several previous reports on ministry in the United Church, this report does not blend the general and ordained ministries of the church together.

While it does not, in the same manner as BEM, state that the ordained minister acts in direct representation of Christ's person, Project: Ministry shares BEM's view that the ordained ministry serves the church by reminding it of its dependence on Jesus Christ "as the source and norm of its ministry".³⁰⁸ It states that the ordained ministry carries out certain acts that are central to the community and which "represent and symbolize the totality of Christ's ministry in and through the whole church".³⁰⁹ It is thus not by person but by function that the ordained ministry is directly representative of Jesus Christ.

³⁰⁷ This is because the ordained minister is ordained to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church and is authorized by Christ and the community to represent that reality at every level within the church.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 31.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

D. The Mutual Recognition of the Ordained Ministries

1/2. The authors of Project: Ministry recognized as one of the "currents" within the United Church a "concern for church union", and for the "participation of the United Church in the wider quest for Christian unity".³¹⁰ They also acknowledged that this quest would commit them to "exploring ways of affirming a threefold order of ministry" including "the episcopal element of oversight in persons...designated as bishops". The Steering Committee of Project: Ministry recognized, as well, that there was a "longstanding resistance to episcopacy" among some members of the United Church, a resistance occasioned by the belief that the adoption of an episcopal form of church government would create further divisions between lay and ordained members of the church.³¹¹

Although fully aware of the significance which the threefold pattern of ministry held in ecumenical discussions, Project: Ministry did not find enough consensus, either in its own group or in the church at large, to recommend that the United Church of Canada adopt this pattern of ministry as it was practiced in episcopally ordered churches.³¹²

³¹⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

³¹¹ Ibid., p. 3.

³¹² Ibid., p. 28.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSIONS: PROCESS AND EFFECT

1. PROCESS

a) The Committees

The members of the committees which were set up to produce the United Church's studies on the ordained ministry were selected using a variety of criteria. Each task group consisted of ordained and lay members, with gender and regional representation also being taken into consideration.¹ In respect to the theological make-up of the committees it can be noted that when those groups which were studying the subject of the ordained ministry were relatively homogeneous in their

¹ The desire to set up committees which would include gender, regional and lay-clerical representation becomes more noticeable in the task groups formed in the late 60's and onwards. While there is an attempt to have females and lay people play a role in formulating the theology of the United Church, the composition of the committees does not show a balance in these areas. The majority of members of all committees were ordained males from central Canada.

views, the reports they produced were equally so, and all of these, specifically the 1926, 1954 and 1962 reports, retained the understanding of ordained ministry found in the Basis of Union.

The later reports acknowledged the lack of theological agreement among their members and the tension which this disagreement engendered. The Commission on the Ministry in the Twentieth Century confessed that the internal struggle within their committee led to a final report which did not reflect fully the views of any one constituency within the committee and was, therefore, less than satisfactory to all of them. The 1977 Task Force on Ministry included a "Statement of Dissent" in its appendix, but even this attempt to separate out the committee's strongest voice of dissent did not rescue the Task Force report from unclarity.

While all of the task forces studying ministry had some input from the larger church, the Task Force on Ministry (1977) and Project: Ministry were particularly conscientious in gathering input from presbyteries, congregations, theological colleges and individual church members. Many of the committees made use of consultants when dealing with specific theological issues, and all of the later committees included consultation with representatives of other denominations.

The time frame in which each report was produced was over a two to four year period during which the committees would

meet several times annually with each meeting lasting three to four days. Some of the committees formed sub-groups which met periodically between full committee meetings. All of the later commissions were assigned a national staff person to do research for the committee and to assist with the production of their reports.

b) Methodology

The United Church's method of "doing" theology has always involved the use of *scripture*, some reference to the church's catholic *tradition* and, particularly in the post-1950 period, reference to the *experience* of the people of God. Adding the fourth component of *reason* this methodology came to be identified with John Wesley's "quadrilateral".² Criticism of this methodology has centred around the fact that in practice it has placed scripture on the same level as the other components of reason, experience and tradition rather than placing scripture in the dominant role as Wesley had intended. This critique is usually accompanied by the judgement that when all four components are allowed the same value, it is generally *experience* which prevails in influence. The most controversial of the reports on ministry, The Ministry in the Twentieth

² Project: Ministry makes specific reference to the use of the Wesley Quadrilateral.

Century and the second Task Force on Ministry, were recipients of this particular criticism.

In establishing its theological positions the United Church uses the theological methodology referred to above, along with principles of decision making based either on the democratic principle of one person one vote, or the relational principles of consensus building. As a conciliar church the United Church finalizes its decisions in its courts. Courts such as the Session of the local congregation or the area presbytery, make decisions affecting the local life of the church and contribute to decisions made by their representatives in the wider courts of the Conference and General Council.³ While the courts of the church make their decisions by majority vote after a period of discussion and debate, committees given the responsibility of formulating theology or polity generally reach their conclusions through a process of consensus building.⁴

³ In the United Church "wider", i.e. General Council which is the national court of the church, does not necessarily mean "higher". In regard to polity, for example the employment practices of the church, the directives of General Council carry legal import. In regard to theological matters, however, the local congregation and the presbytery carry significant weight, that is, they can choose not to follow General Council's theological directives with relative impunity.

⁴ The statements produced by committees which have been set up by the national church are presented back to the Division which sponsored them, and if approved at that level, are sent to the General Council for final authorization.

Consensus building as a model of decision making is particularly suited to use in the church for it takes seriously the Christian ideal of "hearing" and "affirming" people. Because it allows for the accommodation of a range of viewpoints, it is more likely than other methods of decision making to avoid polarities, and the alienation which usually accompanies them. The use of consensus building is particularly appropriate in the United Church where a variety of theological opinions co-exist and where authoritarian structures and narrow or rigid theological positions are frowned upon.

When it works formulating theology through consensus is both useful on a pragmatic level and appealing on a spiritual one. Unfortunately, it does not always work, and the more sensitive and significant the issue under discussion the less likely this process is to meet with success.⁵

The United Church's most controversial reports, The Ministry in the Twentieth Century (1968), and the Task Force on Ministry (1977) are both illustrations of consensus theology at work. Through negotiation and compromise the varying views held by members of the committees were melded into a final report. This melding did not take place without serious

⁵ The human reality is that those issues about which people feel the strongest will also be those on which they are least likely to compromise, and compromise is integral to consensus building.

struggle, however, nor did the end result exhibit the same level of clarity one would find in a report produced by a more homogeneous group.

Rodney Booth, the chair of the second Task Force on Ministry, in a letter to Professor William Fennell, a dissenting member of the Task Force, referred to the serious struggle within that group as a test of "whether or not the United Church can do consensus theology".⁶ Booth comments that the United Church's "much vaunted plurality exists only as long as we do not speak directly to each other on anything important". His experience was that when dealing with an important issue the members of the United Church seemed to "balkanize into enclaves of the like-minded". Booth's comments reveal that even a church as committed to producing theology through consensus as the United Church, is not always able to arrive at a genuinely unified position.

The United Church has a history of attempting to hear the variety of theological opinion represented in its membership and producing theological positions which are as inclusive of these views as possible. In the Front Page segment of the July edition of The United Church Observer, Grant Dawson, a staff member of a United Church in Calgary writes: "A valid Christian

⁶ Undated letter to Professor William Fennell from Rodney Booth, the chair of the Task Force on Ministry. This letter was found in Box 1, File 7 of the Task Force on Ministry Papers in the United Church Archives in Toronto.

decision is reached only when the majorities and minorities, the strong and the weak, the radicals and the conservatives have all been heard and in some way affirmed."⁷ Mr. Dawson expresses an opinion not uncommonly heard in the United Church. A respect for diversity, along with a concern that the views of the more marginalized members of the church, and of society, be heard and "in some way affirmed", is characteristic of the United Church. Generally speaking, the membership of the United Church sees this approach to theology as evidence of the kind of openness and inclusivity which ought to characterize the church of Christ.

Difficulties arise, however, when the United Church confronts an issue of considerable importance on which opposing views exist, and about which it must make a precise statement.⁸ At that point it becomes apparent that the United Church's ability to hear and respect its various theological constituencies, is not matched by equal skill in bringing these constituencies together and drawing from them a unified and

⁷ Grant DAWSON, "Front Page", The United Church Observer, July, 1992, p. 1. The United Church Observer is the national magazine of the United Church.

⁸ This applied to the United Church's attempt to define the nature and role of the ordained ministry. It was also evident more recently during the lengthy and heated debate surrounding the ordination of self-declared homosexuals.

conclusive position.

Interestingly enough, it may be its own Basis of Union which paved the way for the United Church's acceptance of diversity at the expense of theological precision. As indicated in Chapter Two, those who formulated the Basis of Union were willing to overlook the differences that existed among the parent denominations of the United Church of Canada, and chose to concentrate, instead, on those points on which the three founding churches were already in agreement. In doing this, the Basis of Union set an example for the United Church's approach to successive theological discussions.

From a negative perspective, it introduced into the United Church an unrealistic toleration of diversity, so that one often hears the United Church described as a church which "believes nothing" or put another way, a church which "believes everything". This expansive attitude of tolerance, which sees diversity solely from a positive perspective, has allowed within the membership of the United Church people who hold not only varying but conflicting theologies. It is largely responsible for the serious tensions which have arisen within the United Church when on occasion its members cannot, as much as they try, accept each other's points of view.

On the positive side, the United Church's appreciation of theological diversity and its respect for pluralism has encouraged a free exchange of ideas among its members. It has

made them proud to be part of a denomination whose life is marked more by inclusiveness and affirmation than by rigidity and judgmentalism. Many in the United Church see their church's approach to theology, as much as its involvement in social issues, as directly in keeping with the teaching of Jesus Christ.

The way the United Church approaches theology, while it may have the negative effect of being unsettling to the church, and of leaving important questions unresolved over a lengthy period of time, has the positive effect of holding groups with diverse opinions together also over a long period of time. It is, after all, less alienating to be confused or unsettled by one's church than it is to be chastised or excommunicated for holding a position contrary to the official view of the denomination.

c) Reception

Once a study or policy statement commissioned by the General Council is complete, it is presented to the General Council for discussion and authorization. While none of the ministry documents was enshrined as an official statement of the United Church's theology of ministry, all of them including The Ministry in the Twentieth Century and the two Task Force reports, received a positive response from the General Council.

With a few amendments to each, the successive ministry reports were either "accepted in part" with other parts being referred for further study (the 1962 Commission on Ordination), "approved in principle" (The Ministry in the Twentieth Century), affirmed as the "direction in which the church should be moving" (the 1974 Task Force on Ministry), "accepted as a working document" (the 1977 Task Force on Ministry, or "referred to the appropriate divisions, courts and committees of the church for implementation...(and)"commended to the whole church for study" (Project: Ministry).

Many of the recommendations which these reports presented to the church have since been enacted and are now part of the theology and polity of the United Church. Certainly, the recognition of the ministry of the laity, referred to in reports back into the 1950's, encouraged in the Commission on Ordination, and strongly promoted by successive reports, became an integral part of the United Church's theology of ministry. Those recommendations which led to changes in polity were sent to the appropriate division of the national church for fine tuning and implementation. They eventually made their way into The United Church Manual which is updated after each meeting of General Council.⁹ Once in the Manual they become the official practice of the United Church.

⁹ The United Church's General Council meets every two years.

In regard to theological matters the United Church prefers to educate and influence rather than to legislate and enforce. Considering its authority in this area to be more of a moral than a juridical character, the national church rarely metes out discipline in order to force compliance with specific theological positions. As a result congregations and presbyteries which do not agree with a decision of the General Council are not reluctant to challenge it.

This open-ended system, while positive in many respects, has the unfortunate consequence of encouraging continued debate on issues that might well benefit from closure. Those who hold a contrary position to the one adopted by the national church see themselves as being able to influence the church's position and, over the course of time, change it. Because the national church holds its authority loosely and rarely enforces discipline in doctrinal matters, no theological issue is ever truly closed in the United Church.

2. ECUMENICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The introductory section of the Basis of Union contains only two statements. One gives the name of the new church as "The United Church of Canada". The other reads:

" It shall be the policy of the United Church to foster the spirit of unity in the hope that this sentiment of unity may in due time, so far as Canada is concerned, take shape in a church which may fittingly be described as national."

The United Church began as a "uniting" church, and an interest in pursuing both visible union and positive ecumenical relations has always been a part of the ethos of the United Church of Canada. Although, during the time of its own formation, its efforts to effect union with other churches in Canada, notably the Baptists and the Anglicans, did not meet with tangible results, the United Church continued to conceive of itself as a "uniting" church. In 1968 this "sentiment of unity" did bear fruit when the Canada Conference of the Evangelical United Brethren Church became a part of the United Church of Canada. Unfortunately, the United Church's desire to enter into an organic union with the Anglicans, a desire which brought the two churches into serious dialogue in the 1960's and 1970's, did not have a positive result.

The United Church's concern to have its ministry

recognized by other churches, whether to open up possibilities of union or simply to maintain good ecumenical rapport, is evident in the Report on Reunion adopted by its 14th General Council in 1950. In this report the United Church stated that "we cannot now or, at a later stage, accept any implication which casts doubt upon our heritage in the Holy Catholic Church, or upon the reality of our ministry as a true and effective ministry of the Word and Sacraments".¹⁰

The 15th General Council stated further that if the United Church were to maintain this position in future negotiations looking toward union, it had a serious responsibility "to protect the Order of Ministry which we have received as a trust".¹¹ It advised that ministers entering the United Church who had not been presbyterially ordained, i.e. "ordained by presbyters orderly associated for this purpose", had to produce evidence to show that "their ordination was intended to be within and to the ministry of the Catholic and Universal Church,...that their ordination was performed by the authority charged with the exercise of this specific church power within the ordaining communion; and that their ordination had been accompanied by prayer and the laying on of hands by such as

¹⁰ Quoted in Order of the Ministry, AGENDA 1952, p. 83.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 83-84.

have themselves been similarly ordained".¹² Ministers who were not able to fulfil these prerequisites were required to be ordained according to the custom of the United Church.

This procedure illustrates the United Church's belief that ordained ministers who were entering the United Church from other churches could be recognized as members of the ordained ministry only if their ordination had been legitimately to the ministry of the Holy Catholic Church. The United Church believed its own ordained ministry to have been legitimately constituted and transmitted in orderly fashion through presbyteral ordination.

This deep concern over the legitimacy of its ordained ministry was evident in the United Church's 1926 document--A Statement on Ordination--and it is reiterated in the 1962 Commission on Ordination. The report, The Ministry in the Twentieth Century, did not show a similar concern that procedures be in place to ensure the continuing catholicity of the United Church's ordained ministry. Its understanding of the nature of the ordained ministry as the "professional enabling ministry" of the church, and the act of ordination as not requiring any prescribed ritual such as the laying on of hands, illustrates a lack of sensitivity regarding the United Church's relationship to the ecumenical community.

¹² Ibid., p. 84.

The 1974 Task Force on Ministry was more sensitive to ecumenical concerns since it was written while negotiations on union were taking place between the Anglican Church and the United Church. The 1977 Task Force on Ministry, written after the discussions on union had collapsed, offers a view of the nature of the ordained ministry likely to alienate most denominations in the ecumenical community. Its denial of a specific call to the ordained ministry, and its identification of "induction" rather than "ordination" as the "means of authorizing" those who are to undertake ministry in the church, was not likely to find acceptance in any of the mainline Christian denominations. Certainly its expansive understanding of the pastoral, diaconal and episcopal functions of ministry, and its belief that the ministry of oversight should be exercised by "personnel officers who are in no sense bishops", would not promote ecumenical convergence between the United Church and churches which are episcopally ordered.

The 1980 report Project: Ministry did express genuine ecumenical concern and even an openness to a threefold order of ministry which it saw as "having its roots in an inner development in our own life as a church and in concern for church union".¹³ The authors of this document had to acknowledge, though, that there was a strong current in the

¹³ Project: Ministry, p. 22.

United Church which was resistant to the idea of an episcopal ministry, and this realization kept them from recommending that the United Church adopt an episcopal form of church order in the present.

The United Church's interest in forging ecumenical alliances and in pursuing, in some instances, the possibility of organic union faced three major obstacles. From the beginning, the understanding of presbyteral ministry which it inherited from its founding denominations, made it unlikely that the United Church could accept the understanding of episcopacy found in either the Roman Catholic or the Anglican Church. John Wesley had determined from his reading of scripture that the offices of presbyter and bishop were interchangeable. The United Church shared this belief. It ordered its life so that even those ordained ministers who served in an official capacity, as chairs of presbytery, presidents of Conference or Moderator of the church, were not considered to possess any authority over and above that exercised by a pastor serving in a congregational setting.

The belief that all offices of ministry stand on an equal footing was a major barrier to the United Church's plans for union with the Anglican Church of Canada. While the United Church had agreed to accept an episcopally ordered ministry, it became apparent that it could not conceive of the episcopal role other than as a supervisory, functional one.

A second barrier to union with other denominations was the United Church's understanding of diaconal ministry. It was The Ministry in the Twentieth Century in 1968 which included the professional lay ministries of the church in its 'ordered' ministry. The United Church was firm in its belief that the church should have only one 'order' of ministry, and that the various functions of ministry within that order should be considered of equal value.¹⁴ Its unwillingness to accept a three-fold ordering of ministry in which the 'fullness' of ministry dwelt at the top and the third layer, the diaconal ministry, was subordinate in authority to the other two put the United Church at odds with most episcopally ordered churches.

A third obstacle to union with other Christian denominations, including some within its own theological tradition, was the decision the United Church took in 1936 to ordain women. While some of the mainstream Protestant denominations had followed in this path in the ensuing years, this decision was a barrier to union with the Anglican Church until that church decided to allow the ordination of women in

¹⁴ Project: Ministry is the only post 1968 report which takes a different view on this matter. While speaking highly of the merit of diaconal ministry and, in fact, acting as an advocate so that diaconal ministers might have a stronger voice in the church, Project: Ministry suggested that commissioned ministers not be considered part of the church's one order of ministry. Its reason, in part, was that it saw the presence of two categories of ministry, commissioned and ordained, in one 'order' of ministry as illogical. This recommendation was not acted on by the church.

the 1970's. It remains today one among several major obstacles to discussions on shared ministry with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches.¹⁵

The United Church has not been as eager to pursue discussions on union with other denominations in Canada since the failure of negotiations with the Anglican Church. Instead, it has engaged in a series of ecumenical dialogues with other churches within Canada, and has been active within the World Council of Churches. The request by the World Council of Churches that its member denominations provide a response to the BEM document, gave the United Church an opportunity to show what its present position on ecumenicity is.

In its response to BEM the United Church took what can only be termed "a hard line". The General Council Executive which responded to BEM believed that the amount of space BEM's MINISTRY section allotted to the ordained ministry was a denial of the equal role of the laity in the ministry of the church. It also believed that BEM's view of the ordained ministry was too hierarchical (most likely a reference to the threefold ministry with its episcopal component), and that it was not sufficiently contemporaneous in regard to specific issues such as the ordination of women.

The writer, who was an observer at one of the meetings in

¹⁵ Among other major issues would be the United Church's non-sacramental understanding of ordination.

which this response was formulated, can attest to the existence of a marked level of hostility toward BEM. This hostility was occasioned by the belief that the Lima document fell short of the theological and social-justice requirements of the United Church. There was little recognition of the enormity of the task BEM had undertaken nor of the constraints under which those who authored a statement representing so wide a theological spectrum had to work.

Unlike the representatives of the United Church's three founding denominations who prepared the Basis of Union, the Executive of General Council which responded to BEM was not in a mood to compromise and, apparently they did not, as their forebears had, value unity on a par with theological truth.

The keen interest which the United Church held in being a uniting church has, in recent years, been replaced by a milder form of ecumenical involvement. Its ecumenical goal at present is to generate dialogue and goodwill among Christian denominations, as well as between the Christian Church and other faith communities.

3. EFFECT

In his important work, Ministry to Word and Sacrament, Bernard Cooke remarks that "acquiring more accurate understanding of Christian ministry is... basic to everything Christianity claims to be and do".¹⁶ If the United Church did not share a similar belief it would not have conducted as many studies on this one subject as it has. Besides the major studies referred to in this paper, all of which were commissioned by the General Council of the United Church, a plethora of smaller studies on ministry were produced by the United Church within the same time-frame, many of them under the supervision of the United Church's Division of Ministry, Personnel and Education. Whatever else can be said of these studies, they are proof of the United Church's passionate concern to ensure that its ministry, ordained and lay, be a faithful expression of God's will for the life of the church.

The United Church's concern to produce an official statement of its understanding of ordained ministry followed a long and circuitous route. In the latter part of the 1960's its report, The Ministry in the Twentieth Century, moved away from the traditional understanding of the ordained ministry

¹⁶ Cooke, Bernard, Ministry to Word and Sacraments, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1976, p. vii.

found in the Basis of Union. This report was followed by a less radical report in 1974 which was, in turn, expanded on in the 1977 Task Force on Ministry.¹⁷ The second Task Force on Ministry proved to be less radical than the 1966 report, The Ministry in the Twentieth Century, although it too placed a strong emphasis on the ministry of the laity. Its successor, Project: Ministry, affirmed the importance of the laity's participation in Christ's ministry while at the same time acknowledging the essential role which the ordained ministry plays in the church. Project: Ministry was succeeded in 1988 by an attempt of the National Division of Ministry, Personnel and Education to formulate an official definition of ministry. The definition produced, which was to be considered as a replacement for Article 17 of the Basis of Union, was not approved by the Division and, therefore, did not come to the General Council for its approval.¹⁸

Based on the analysis of the studies on ministry which this paper has undertaken, the following three areas stood out

¹⁷ The term "radical" is meant to convey a significant degree of change between the new document and Article 17 of the Basis of Union.

¹⁸ One of the statements in this two paragraph definition reads: "Ministry begins with God's action and all of creation may participate in it". The acceptance of a definition of ministry which names "all of creation" as possible participants would certainly have been a radical departure from previous statements on ministry and was, perhaps, one of the reasons this statement was not found acceptable to the Division which had commissioned it.

as factors contributing to the difficulties which the United Church has experienced in defining its understanding of ordained ministry:

- a) The hermeneutical framework in which the United Church formulates theology.
- b) Confusion surrounding the roles appropriate to clergy and laity in the church.
- c) The United Church's understanding of ecclesiology.

a) The Hermeneutical Framework

One of the factors responsible for the uncertain state of the ordained ministry question in the United Church is the church's shifting relationship to scripture as a foundational hermeneutical tool. As a church of the Reformation, the assumption of the supremacy of scripture as a vehicle of revelation was the starting point from which the United Church had traditionally launched its doctrinal discussions. A noticeable change took place in this pattern between the production of its 1962 and 1968 documents on ministry.

In the 1962 Commission on Ordination there are fifty-nine references to specific scripture texts, in The Ministry in the Twentieth Century (1968), a document of similar size, there are two and both of these refer to the ministry which God has given to the whole church. The scarcity of references to scripture

in the 1968 document indicates that the authors of this study did not use scripture as their primary guide in developing an understanding of the ordained ministry. The content of the report shows that, in fact, principles of psychological and social organization filled that role.¹⁹

The 1977 Task Force report also relies heavily on contemporary psycho-social principles and, like the 1968 report, leans toward an ecclesial and functional understanding of the ordained ministry. What keeps it from fully supporting such a position is, however, the witness of scripture.²⁰ Direct references to scripture appear eight times in the 1977 Task Force report. While there are twenty-two references to scriptural texts in Project: Ministry, the number of texts quoted are not as important as the way in which this document creates a dialogue between the understanding of ministry found in Hebrew and Christian scripture and the contemporary experience of the church. The material indicates that those documents which relied most heavily on scripture are also those which are more positive toward the ordained ministry and more

¹⁹ The psycho-social dynamics of the relationship between clergy and laity is closely examined in this document.

²⁰ Under the section "Theological Perspectives" at the beginning of the document, the Task Force recognizes that the Biblical witness is strong in indicating that God calls specific individuals into a ministry of leadership so that "we cannot define an order of ministry as being simply a creation of the institutional church". (The Task Force on Ministry, 1977, p. 5)

inclined to embrace a traditional view of it.

The fluctuation in the role accorded to scripture in the production of each of the ministry documents is matched by a similar fluctuation in the way the various documents relate to the Basis of Union. Until the 1968 report on The Ministry in the Twentieth Century, Article 17 of the Basis of Union which spoke of a christologically appointed ordained ministry, was accepted as the normative understanding of ordained ministry in the United Church. Whatever else the studies produced prior to 1968 dealt with, the authority and usefulness of the ordained ministry was assumed.²¹

The report of The Ministry in the Twentieth Century, on the other hand, gave only passing recognition to Article 17 and did not hold it as a standard against which to judge its own conclusions. This allowed its authors to present an understanding of the laity's role in ministry which challenged the role of clergy as the purveyors of ministerial authority in the church. The Ministry in the Twentieth Century not only offered a purely functional understanding of the ordained ministry but went so far as to voice the opinion of some of its members that the ordained ministry should be abolished

²¹ Some of the other issues addressed included: educational standards for the ordained ministry; its position vis a vis other ordained ministries within the church catholic; how the ordained ministry could more appropriately address the needs and aspirations of an industrial and technological society.

altogether. Reports which followed, while they may not have taken such a radical position, were also less than deferential to the Basis of Union.

The change away from granting normative status to the Basis of Union reflected changes which were occurring in Canadian society at large. In the 1960's and 1970's challenges to traditional beliefs and values embodied the 'spirit' of the times, and holding positions adopted in the past as 'normative' for the present and future held limited appeal. The openness to new ideas and solutions characteristic of this era, as well as its disdain for authority and legalism, struck a sympathetic chord in the United Church. Its resonance is felt in all of the United Church's studies on ministry produced during this period.

The United Church's longevity as a Christian denomination may also have contributed to its ability to exchange the normative positions of the past for what it considered a progressive approach to the present. As a church whose existence was numbered in decades and not in centuries, the weight of tradition did not fall as heavily on its shoulders as would have been the case with other denominations.

Another factor which gave rise to the plethora of studies on the ordained ministry commissioned by the United Church was its belief that the church must be responsive to its contemporary context. The value placed on a contextual

ministry is to some degree evident in all of the ministry reports beginning with the 1926 Statement Concerning Ordination. The 1954 report On a Functional Ministry, for example, shows that the United Church, which had a history of being sensitive to its social context, wished to ensure that its ordained ministers shared this vision, and were qualified to enact it.²² A contextualized ministry signified the church's desire to address the "whole" person, taking into account not only the spiritual concerns of the individual but social, economic and political factors as well. This concern extended to persons and institutions outside of the church as well as to its own membership.²³

The process of contextualization by its very nature will involve a periodic reassessment of the church's ministry to determine whether what has become the status quo can still effectively convey the gospel in contemporary circumstances. A commitment to a contextualized ministry makes it necessary for the church to sponsor studies on ministry at relatively

²² The United Church was a leading proponent of the social gospel movement in Canada during the 1920's and 1930's.

²³ The United Church was the first denomination in Canada to officially and sympathetically address the personal and social issue of divorce. It has also been involved in pressing government and business to be more responsive to the weaker and more marginalized groups in Canadian society. The United Church, in 1986, was the first Canadian denomination to make an official apology to the Native peoples of Canada for any mistreatment they had received at the hands of the church.

short intervals since only such close scrutiny can ensure that changes taking place within the church, and in society at large, are being adequately addressed.

The manner in which the United Church embraces theological diversity also contributes to the unresolved nature of the ordained ministry question. Professor William Fennell, addressing this concern in an article commenting on Project: Ministry, suggests that what the United Church may need to do before setting up any more commissions to study ministry or any other important theological question is to engage in "a serious discussion of how a church so pluralistic in understanding and so committed to "democratic" ways of discovering and expressing its mind, can arrive at authoritative decisions in matters of faith and practice".²⁴ The validity of Dr. Fennell's remarks are attested to by the fact that whenever a controversial issue arises, the United Church's pride in its diversity is replaced by questions regarding the degree to which it can stretch its theological boundaries before the cord holding these diverse theologies together finally snaps.

The high value which the United Church places on diversity and inclusiveness creates an atmosphere which does not encourage definitive positions since such positions tend to be

²⁴ William FENNELL, Perspectives, Toronto, United Church Observer Publication, p. 4. (undated)

narrow and close out other options. This, in turn, makes it difficult for the United Church to provide precise answers to theological questions and to seek closure on them.

b) The Relationship of Clergy and Laity within the Church

The laity have always played a significant role within the United Church serving in the official capacity of elder or steward in the local congregation and comprising, along with clergy, all the courts of the church.²⁵ In the 1968 report, The Ministry in the Twentieth Century, the roles of clergy and laity which had previously been taken for granted as being mutually supportive and appropriately differentiated, are reassessed. While all the reports beginning with the 1954 report On a Functional Ministry refer to the importance of the role of the laity in the church's ministry, The Ministry in the Twentieth Century and the 1977 Task Force on Ministry both suggest that the laity's contribution to the ministry of the church has been significantly undervalued.

The thesis in these two reports is that only a weaker ordained ministry will make possible a stronger laity. Neither

²⁵ Except for the official board of the local congregation where lay greatly outnumbers clerical representation, the higher courts of the church, the presbytery, Conference and General Council try to maintain a balance between clerical and lay membership.

report considers that, in fact, the opposite may be true, and an empowered ordained ministry can *facilitate* effective lay ministry. The emphasis these reports place on reducing the "status" of the ordained ministry also overlooks the fact that abuse of power is less the mark of those whose roles are clearly and appropriately defined than it is of those who are uncertain as to what their role is, and what limits it carries with it. Furthermore, when authority is not accorded to members of the ordained ministry through the "office" which they hold, it will be exercised on the basis of "personal" appeal. One can contend that this kind of personal or charismatic authority is far more dangerous to the laity than systemic and, therefore, regulated authority.²⁶

Whenever those reports which decry the bondage of the laity at the hands of the more visible and powerful clergy use the word "power" in reference to the ordained ministry, its connotation is negative.²⁷ The authors of these reports would have benefited from a more positive or, at least, a neutral understanding of 'power', and its institutional component 'authority'. Webster's Dictionary gives one of the definitions of power as: "the ability to act or produce an effect". If the

²⁶ The career of the Rev. Jim Jones, which ended in the Jonestown mass suicide, illustrates the danger of charismatic leadership.

²⁷ This applies to all the ministry reports beginning with The Ministry in the 20th Century in 1968.

ordained are acting on behalf of Christ, or the church for that matter, and if the effect they wish to produce is to have the church embody Christ's teaching so that it can be, in turn, a Christ-like presence in the world, why should their ability to exercise *this kind of power* be curtailed? This question is never addressed. Instead the concentration, particularly in The Ministry in the Twentieth Century and the second Task Force on Ministry, is on the negative aspects of clerical authority and the misuse of clerical power.

None of the documents on ministry examined for this paper give sufficient attention to what happens *in practice* at the congregational level. The fact is that it would be difficult to locate a United Church congregation in which the ordained minister along with the Church Board were not actively, if not desperately, seeking more lay participation in its communal ministry. Further, if one considers the myriad demands to which the ordained minister must respond, sharing ministry with the laity is not only a matter of theological correctness, it is a prerequisite to the mental and physical health of clergy.

Those reports which minimize the authority of the ordained ministry also fail to take into account the direct link that exists between "function" and "status". Even if the ordained ministry is seen as purely functional, or should ordination be abolished altogether and the professional leader in the congregation called by a name other than "ordained minister",

the importance and visibility of the "functions" which s/he performs, particularly preaching and celebration of the sacraments, will ensure the occupants of that role "status" and "influence" in the community. Unless a church is run by roster, with a different person taking leadership each week, some form of status will accrue to the person with whom leadership functions are normally identified.

Underlying all of the United Church's reports from the late 1960's and onward is the belief that all members of the church are called to ministry. These reports do not make, as the church has historically, a clear differentiation between the call to discipleship and the call to ordained ministry.²⁸ Instead, they take what is understood in scripture to refer to a communal unit, i.e. the ecclesial community referred to as the "laos" or the "royal priesthood", and grant them a non-communal expression, i.e. the individual church member. The documents which contain such a misrendering of the communal nature of the laity's ministry are also those which express the most frustration concerning the relationship of lay and clergy in the church.

Operating out of this individualistic conception of the laity's ministry, Jesus' words "Follow Me", traditionally understood as a call to "discipleship", become a call to

²⁸ Project: Ministry is an exception in this regard.

"ministry", and this one call now covers the ministry of both lay and ordained Christians.²⁹ The result of this is confusion in regard to which tasks of 'ministry' are appropriate to each group of 'ministers', as well as a loss of the distinctiveness of the ordained ministry. Regrettably, these reports do not take into consideration the harmful effects this situation could have on the overall ministry of the church, one of these being the introduction of an unhealthy competitiveness between clergy and laity.

The United Church's belief in the church as 'the whole people of God' and 'baptism as the basic ordination of all Christians' came, at least in part, from the ecumenical community. According to N. K. Clifford, these were themes developed in the late 1950's and early 1960's by Hendrik Kraemer, the director of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey in Switzerland and his associate director Hans Ruedi Weber".³⁰ A renewed interest in the laity's role in the church was evident within the World Council of Churches which in 1954 created a Department on the Laity, and which at its Third Assembly in New

²⁹ The Task Force on Ministry (1977), p. 6. While one can agree with the Task Force that Jesus' words "Follow Me", are "extended to all of his people", there is no scriptural evidence to suggest that these words form the basis of the call to the church's ministry of leadership, although they are certainly a prerequisite to it.

³⁰ N. Keith CLIFFORD, "Which Way will the United Church be Taken by *Learning on the Way?*", Touchstone, Jan., 1987. pp. 4-15.

Delhi in 1961 "established an ecumenical enquiry on the training of the ministry which assumed that baptism was the basic ordination of all Christians".³¹ Coincidentally, one of the consultants involved in this ecumenical enquiry also served as a consultant to the Commission on The Ministry in the Twentieth Century. In that same period the role of the laity was also being examined in the Roman Catholic Church which, during the meeting of the Second Vatican Council (1960-1965), produced a significant decree on the Apostolate of the Laity.³²

Also pushing the "cause" of the laity to the forefront of discussions on ministry within the United Church between 1964 and 1980 were the social conditions characteristic of that period in the church's life. The distrust of authority and institutions, identified with the protest movements of the 1960's, continued into the 1970's accompanied by the goal of making these institutions more responsive to democratic and egalitarian principles. This set of psycho-social dynamics had, no doubt, a direct bearing on the emphasis which came to be placed on declericalizing the church and developing a more equal relationship between clergy and laity.

³¹ Ibid., p. 9.

³² Ibid., p. 10.

c) The United Church's Ecclesiology

A third factor contributing to the unsettled nature of the ordained ministry question is the United Church's ecclesiology. In United Church theology the church is believed to rest on a christological-pneumatological foundation. Articles 15 and 17 of the Basis of Union speak of the Holy Spirit's role in mediating Christ's presence to the church and form the basis for the United Church's deep-seated belief in the activity of the Spirit in the church. Because Christ is ever-present in the church through the Spirit, and is present not as a passive icon but as active pastor and guide, the ordained ministry is not understood to carry the "weight" of the church's ministry as it would be expected to do in a church which believed that Christ's ministry had been "given over" into the hands of the church.³³

The belief in a pneumatological ecclesiology, while not in itself reason to discount the traditional role of the ordained ministry, does provide the church with a rationale for allowing itself freedom to "be led" to new forms and tasks of ministry.

³³ This explains why the United Church is cautious about speaking of the ordained person "representing" Christ whether at the eucharist or otherwise. It is believed, for example, that Christ is present through the Spirit as the true celebrant of the eucharist and the ordained person's role while physically more visible is spiritually secondary.

It also accounts for the United Church's emphasis on ministry in the present and future, with less concern for how ministry was exercised in the past.

From the perspective of a pneumatological ecclesiology, the forms and praxis of the church's life continue to unfold as God's will is made known to the church through the Spirit. There is, therefore, no particular era, not even that of the New Testament or the sub-apostolic church, whose organization of ministry supersedes any other period in the church's life, including the present. This point of view suggests that keeping the past sacrosanct is of no particular virtue; where virtue lies is in the church's *openness* to hearing what the Spirit is saying today. The United Church would suggest that the more radical that openness- the more faithful the church.

An approach to theology, and to ministry, which depends on intuiting the direction in which the Spirit is leading, by its very nature, will lack the kind of control and verifiability that is found, for example, in the BEM document in which Tradition acts as a readily identifiable point of reference. Where a church chooses an ethereal referent such as the Holy Spirit over an historical or objective one such as scripture or tradition, it still has to translate what it believes the Spirit is saying to the church into concrete terms. The danger in this situation is that the church will be unduly influenced by its surrounding culture as it seeks to ground its spiritual

vision. As a result, current psychological trends, social values and organizational principles may be applied to the church's ordered ministry without the corroboration of a scriptural source and even in contrast to it. And, for better or worse, whatever the church in a given era sees as appropriate to the exercise of its ordained ministry will be considered normative for that time and place.³⁴

³⁴ With so much freedom to reconstruct itself in the present, both the church and its ministry will have to resist a movement towards politicisation- a situation which some in the United Church believe has already occurred. While the United Church's well known involvement in issues such as peace, poverty, capital punishment, ecology and Native rights can be justified by the fact that these issues have "moral" as well as social and political dimensions, its opposition to Free Trade and its presence on the side of the armed Natives at Oka suggests politicisation. In all of these involvements the ordained ministry has played a substantial and visible role.

4. PRESENT AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Despite the time and effort which the United Church has expended over the last several decades in trying to define the meaning of ordained ministry and to determine what role, if any, this ministry should play in the church, the ordained ministry question remains unsettled. A feature article which appeared in The United Church Observer in August of 1992 provides some insight into the state of the ordained ministry question at the present time.

The cover of the August Observer depicts an ordinand kneeling during the 'laying on of hands' ritual of the ordination service, and is accompanied by the title "Is ordination still necessary?" The feature article inside, written by Patricia Clarke, a contributing editor to The Observer, and entitled "The Future of Ordination", is a compilation of opinions on ordination from nineteen respondents. While the number of respondents is small, this article can serve as a reflection of the state of the ordained ministry question at the bureaucratic level in the United Church because of the roles which the contributors to the article play in the church. Of the nineteen people interviewed, all are or have been in the employment of the United Church. Included in the number were the United Church's

highest appointed officer--the General Secretary of the General Council, several Conference personnel officers, a former moderator and chair of Project: Ministry, a present and former Secretary of the Division of Ministry, Personnel and Education, several members of the national staff who are involved in making policy decisions related to the ordained ministry, and two professors of theology.³⁵

The following quotations offer an overview of the content of this article:

--the question is again raised "Has ordination become, as some insist, a roadblock that gets in the way of real ministry, that discourages and disables lay people in their ministry".

--"Let us admit, to begin with, that the United Church does not know officially what it means to be ordained."

--"Some ordained persons are reluctant to relinquish the power and prestige which they consider rightfully theirs."

--"As more women move into what has been a man's role, they raise questions about power and authority. Many women see themselves rather in mutual, equal ministry."

--"People are backing away from the traditional role of the sacred person at the centre. They want to do the job of ministry but don't want to be seen that way."

--"When I hear a lay person say 'I'm only a lay person', I feel sick inside for being ordained."

--the article quotes a national committee which defined what it means to be called of God: "The call of God is to the church to be the people of God, ...the call to individuals is to become

³⁵ Thirteen of those interviewed were clergy, two were diaconal ministers, two were lay pastoral ministers, one was a staff associate (i.e. a lay person working in a professional ministry position), and the fourth lay person was a former moderator and the chair of Project: Ministry.

part of a community." It goes on to state that it is the community which discerns gifts and calls to leadership roles in the church.

--from a theological professor and ordained minister: "Most of our clergy are locked into a theological perspective of the tradition that is rooted in understandings that are deeply patriarchal, androcentric, misogynist, based on racial, class, gender, heterosexual, elitist biases."

--"Of course, ordination separates people, so does being a doctor or a checkout clerk at Safeway."

--The former chair of Project: Ministry, who is also a former moderator, and former Secretary of the Division of Ministry, Personnel and Education is quoted as saying that she is "still not sure what ordination means or whether we need an ordained ministry".

--"The church has added some baggage around ordination that was never intended, setting people apart not just for service but for prestige, power and all those things."

--"Clergy monopolize theological education...people deem themselves unable to interpret Scripture and are dependent on clergy for theological analysis."

--"Do we need to perpetuate pedestal power? Do we need ordination, and castes of ministry?"

--"Ordination is initiated by God's call, and is a sincere response by those who have offered themselves to be tested, trained and affirmed by the larger Christian community."

--"Others of you(diaconal, lay pastoral workers, staff associates) seem to know what you are about. I don't know what it means to be ordained any more."

This article reflects the uncertainty, disagreement, and cynicism which surrounds the ordained ministry among those who serve in the professional employment of the church. One cannot, however, use this segment of the church's membership to extrapolate a similar degree of uncertainty and cynicism among

the membership of the church at large.³⁶

One reason that the ordained ministry has not become a focal point of discussion at the congregational level is that the local church knows the ordained ministry through its relationship to a particular ordained minister and, as a result, its relationship to this ministry is experienced in practical rather than theoretical terms. Questions regarding the ordained ministry at the local level tend to relate to the specifics of the job which the ordained minister in that congregation is doing. When a pastoral relationship does not work out, the local church may question the need to keep its particular ordained minister; it is unlikely, however, that it would question the need for an ordained ministry in the church. For the most part, the professional skills of the ordained minister are appreciated at the local level where they are both most needed and most visible. It is left to the bureaucracy of the church, and the committees to which it gives birth, to deal with speculative questions regarding the nature, role and value of the ordained ministry per se.

The Observer article shows that the moderate position of

³⁶ The eight letters printed in the October edition of the Observer to represent the response to its August article on ordination were generally unfavourable to the composition and tone of the article. Lay people expressed disappointment that their views had not been sought for the article and that the tone of the article had been decidedly negative toward the ordained ministry.

Project: Ministry which supported the role of the laity in the church without diminishing the role of the ordained, is under attack in the United Church. The number of respondents in the article who questioned the need for an ordained ministry and who appeared to see this ministry as an impediment to the ministry of the laity, is more in line with the views presented in the United Church's 1968 report--The Ministry in the Twentieth Century.

This article underscores the supposition, stated earlier in the paper, that where the ordained ministry is understood as primarily ecclesial and functional, the integrity and authority of that ministry are more likely to be called into question than if it is understood to rest on a christological foundation.³⁷ The Observer article echoes the frequent allusions to the problematic nature of the ordained ministry question which are heard whenever this subject comes under discussion in the courts and committees of the church.

In summary, this paper has shown that there are a number of factors which have contributed to the difficulties experienced by the United Church in defining the nature and role of the ordained ministry: One is the United Church's

³⁷ The statements of most of the respondents interviewed for the Observer article imply a primarily ecclesial and functional understanding of the ordained ministry.

theological diversity and the accompanying spirit of inclusiveness which have led the church to try to accommodate a significant range of views on the same subject. Another related factor is the process through which the United Church arrives at its official positions, a process built on gaining consensus among its varying theological constituencies.

The degree of examination which the United Church has given the ordained ministry over the years can also be traced to the emphasis it places on the church's need to take seriously its social and cultural context. The principle of contextualization, which has its foundation in the incarnational activity of Jesus Christ, has forced the church to continually reassess the way in which it relates to the world, particularly through its ministry.³⁸ A final factor contributing to the unsettled nature of the ordained ministry question is the United Church's ecclesiology--based, as it is, on a belief that the Spirit is active in the church today and may be leading the church and its ministry in new and different directions.

Each of these factors has contributed to the United Church's inability to define its understanding of ordained

³⁸ The corollary of this, some would argue, is that the United Church, itself, is open to the influence of its surrounding culture to an unhealthy degree. This view is frequently voiced inside the United Church, and is directed at the United Church from outside as well. It is not an opinion shared by the writer.

ministry in a conclusive manner. Taken together, they indicate that the chances of the United Church resolving this, or any other major issue, in a neatly packaged, once-and-for-all manner, is unlikely. In the United Church at present, no resolution to the ordained ministry question is in sight.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that in all of its discussions on the ordained ministry, the United Church's goal has been not primarily to get the ordering of such ministry correct but to ensure that, however the ordained ministry is ordered, it is faithful to Christ. The position of the United Church can, perhaps, be summarized in a paraphrase of Matthew 16: "What would it profit the church to gain a precisely ordered, and theologically correct, understanding of its ordained ministry and yet, in the practice of this same ministry, fail to convey the love of Christ to the world he calls his ministers to serve?"

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³⁹ The acronym MP&E refers to the Division of Ministry, Personnel and Education of the United Church of Canada.

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