

E N C Y C L I C A L L E T T E R  
OF  
His Grace  
THE MOST REVD. JOHN KERSEY, PRESIDING BISHOP OF ECCLESIA APOSTOLICA  
DIVINORUM MYSTERIORUM  
Concerning  
The Nature and Obligations of the Sacred Priesthood

JOANNES, The Servant of Jesus Christ, by the Grace of God Presiding Bishop of ECCLESIA APOSTOLICA DIVINORUM MYSTERIORUM :

UNTO Our well-beloved Sons in Christ ANDREW LINLEY, Bishop in Anglia, ALISTAIR BATE, Bishop in Caledonia; and unto all the Faithful In Jesus Christ throughout the World :

Peace, Health and Apostolic Benediction!

Most Reverend Fathers, Good People :

WHEREAS the Sacred Priesthood is instituted as a high and holy Office in the Church of Christ, to which men and women are called to devoted service following appropriate discernment and preparation.

We note that various recent circumstances have spread certain misunderstandings as to the nature of the said Priesthood and its legitimate exercise, and seek to clarify these matters so far as Ecclesia Apostolica Divinorum Mysteriorum is concerned.

1. The Priesthood of the Order of Melchizedek, perfected in Our Lord Jesus Christ and conferred through the Apostolic Succession by the laying on of hands, is of its nature different from the Levitical or Aaronic priesthood, which was hereditary. The other reasons why the Melchizedek priesthood is superior to the Aaronic are discussed in the Epistle to the Hebrews. We note further that the offering of the sacrifice of bread and wine by Melchizedek in Genesis 14:18 is the prophesy fulfilled by the Last Supper.

2. The Priesthood, as with other Holy Orders, is a sacrament that once conferred leaves an indelible mark upon the soul of the recipient. "Thou art a priest forever, after the Order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 5:6)

3. There is an important distinction between the state of being a priest, which as stated at 2 above is permanent, and the capacity to exercise the ministry of a priest which is dependent upon episcopal oversight. This distinction exists because the priesthood is not itself all-sufficient. Its completion is only found in the

episcopate, which is why we refer to the episcopate as “the fullness of the priesthood”.

4. A priest is by nature subordinate to a bishop and dependent upon that bishop for the exercise of his or her office according to the canon law of the denomination concerned.

5. The priesthood cannot be legitimately exercised by a priest who is not under any episcopal authority. The priest concerned has not ceased to be a priest, but he or she has ceased to have the necessary spiritual, sacramental and administrative context for the exercise of his or her office.

6. A priest who wishes to be excommunicated from his or her church must apply to his or her bishop for letters of excommunication. A bishop can only issue such letters where the priest is being released to another church and will therefore have continuity of episcopal oversight. If no such oversight is possible, then the bishop has no choice but to proceed to administrative laicisation.

7. Where a priest leaves a church without being formally excommunicated and is in breach of clerical discipline, no other church should normally accept him or her as a candidate for incardination. In certain exceptional cases, an investigation of the matter by the Archiepiscopal Court may conclude that the priest's actions were reasonable in conscience under the circumstances, and he or she may then be incardinated. However, since such an action will inevitably cause offence to the bishop and church concerned, given that it involves an explicit or implicit censure of their actions, it should not be entered into lightly or without the full facts being known.

8. A priest who is involved in a situation such as that at item 7 above should take all steps to heal the breach with his or her bishop and to resolve any grievance through the internal processes of the church concerned. However, in certain exceptional cases, this will not prove successful, despite the best efforts of those concerned. Upon a permanent breach with his or her church being effected through whatever means, the priest should take steps to approach another bishop with a request for temporary episcopal oversight until the matter can be investigated and decisions reached. No such approach must be made until and unless such a breach has been effected.

The bishop providing such temporary oversight should act with the following aims in mind:

- To inform the priest's previous Ordinary as a matter of courtesy and protocol that he or she has offered temporary

oversight under the circumstances, and that a full investigation of the situation will take place;

- To determine after investigation whether in the circumstances it is appropriate or not for the priest to continue to exercise his or her office while under temporary oversight or thereafter, and whether faculties should be issued to that effect;
- To determine whether any canonical penalty (such as excommunication) has been administered legally and justly, and if necessary to examine such matters and any such sentence before the Archiepiscopal Court;
- To offer pastoral support and counselling to the priest;
- To determine with the priest such plans as are necessary for the further exercise of ministry, including, where appropriate, plans to pursue incardination to the denomination of the bishop offering temporary oversight, or to another that is thought more suitable.

9. A priest who deliberately exercises the ministry of the priesthood without being under the oversight of a bishop and without having faculties so to act is not exercising the priesthood in any true Catholic sense and may be committing sacrilege. He or she puts the validity of Holy Orders received in doubt on grounds of intent, because the understanding held of the priesthood is clearly and publically demonstrated to not be that of the Catholic Church.

10. In some cases, a priest will leave a church that professes a Catholic understanding of the sacraments and exercise a ministry within a Protestant or Nonconformist organisation. In such cases, the priest is not exercising the Catholic priesthood, but a ministerial office according to the understanding of the group concerned.

11. While we must regard all works that further the Kingdom of God with charity and mercy, we must nevertheless warn against organisations that, while claiming to be Catholic in their sacramental understanding, yet promote and advocate the exercise of the priesthood without episcopal oversight, since these risk misleading the faithful.

Given on 17 July 2010 by The Most Revd. John Kersey, O. C. R.



Presiding Bishop



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Bi shop i n Angli a (Wi tness)

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