

IFCRM

Executive Meeting, Utrecht, Friday 15 October 2010



Opening Remarks by the Chair

Let us begin our work together today in the name of our Trinitarian God, Source of all Being, eternal Word and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Our Roots

As followers of Jesus, we are called to bring about the Rule of God, the rule of justice, truth and peace, so let us pray that all that we do, is done with that ultimate objective in mind. I remind you also of the closing words of our Vienna Declaration in 2008:

This appeal of our Congress emerges from our love of Christ and Church, from the New Testament and Vatican II, from our sense of Tradition and the signs of the times, from the hope we continue to have for the Catholic community we have served all our lives.

Leading the Way

I believe that the IFRCM has a very special mission in the Church today. We are in the vanguard of thinking about ministry – having moved on from seeking to persuade people that celibacy should not be required of the Latin clergy because the majority of the educated faithful are convinced of this, we have also moved on from seeking to persuade people that ministry of all types should be open to women as well as men, because the majority of the educated faithful are convinced of this too.

We take these two urgently needed reforms as incontrovertible and do not wish to labour them. There are other associations of Catholics that bombard the Vatican with their propaganda on these two issues, hoping to be heard by a defiant and abusive leadership, but we have other concerns.

Focus on Ministry

We have chosen to focus on the wider issue of ‘ministry’. Again I remind you of the words of our Vienna Declaration:

It is time now to create anew a ministry that is inclusive in gender and marital status most especially but also a ministry that is truly collegial. Without inclusivity and collegiality as taught by Vatican II, the ministry of the Church cannot become a sacrament or sign of human rights and gospel norms. Without those rights and norms, the authority of the Church cannot be viable.

It is indeed time to welcome ministerial candidates whose callings and gifts have enriched our Church. They must be welcomed, however, not only by Church leaders but, beforehand, by the communities they serve, communities which select them and receive them.

Ordained Ministry

We assume that this must include ordained ministry, because as Catholics we believe in Apostolic ministry, however this developed over the centuries, and other forms of ordained ministry sharing in the episcopal office by delegation. We are however agreed that clericalism must be eradicated, for in the eyes of many it poisons, even vitiates, the ministry of so many of the ordained, many other of whom, however, are exemplary.

I hope that as we discuss Hein's paper and Wim's paper, we shall develop our ideas and become clearer about our distinctive objectives as an international federation of Catholic organisations.

A Plea for Accurate Terminology

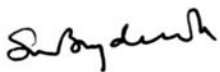
I should like to make one plea. I have made the point before. At the Second Vatican Council the fathers there took a conscious decision to refer to the ordained priesthood as the *presbyterate* and reserve the term *priesthood* for the unique ministry of Jesus, in which all the baptised share. The current leadership of the Church has sought to reverse this bold step by continuing to confuse the two entities – first, the priesthood of Jesus shared by all the baptised, and second the presbyterate, the apostolic ministry of bishop, elders and deacons.

They do this in order to preserve a distorted view of the presbyterate, ministerial priesthood, as superior to the ministry of the unordained, quasi-monastic in its commitment to celibacy and to the recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours, even to the extent of distorting *Lumen Gentium 10* to suggest that the ordained are essentially different from the unordained. I urge the members of this federation to cease using the word priest to mean the ordained and to use the term preferred by Vatican II – *presbyter*.

Seeking New Models of Ministry

I was once told by a member of CCC, my own UK organisation, that 'the priesthood must be abolished.' He meant of course the presbyterate. I was shocked, but I believe I know what he meant. The model of the ministerial priesthood, the presbyterate, promoted today by Rome and its servants is dysfunctional, abusive and non-Dominical. Many Roman Catholic women priests recognise this and in their own way are seeking to provide different models. I hope that as the IFRCM continues its work of renewing Catholic ministry it will exercise an important influence in the development of new forms of ministry in the Church. I pay particular tribute to the ministry of our married presbyters. You are convinced of the damage done by clericalism and in your different ways since resigning your official positions, you have worked at finding new ways of being presbyters and of ministering.

I see the IFRCM then as a sign of hope for the Church. As prophets we can expect only the rewards that traditionally come to prophets – persecution, contradiction, accusations of disloyalty and of abandonment of our ancient Tradition. But the Spirit is with us and I believe there are few in the Church today placed as we are in the IFRCM to have a beneficial influence on the Church's understanding and practice of ministry.



Simon Bryden-Brook