

CELEBRATION OF HOLY COMMUNION

BY THE NEWLY ORDAINED

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The Revd Colin R Williamson

At its first meeting in June 1995, the Presbytery of Perth resolved that at each occasion of ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament the newly ordained minister should preside at the sacrament of Holy Communion. This decision resulted from the deliberations of the Presbytery's Faith and Order Committee which had been asked to review Presbytery services in general. There is here reproduced the report of the Committee to Presbytery with the deliverance which was adopted.

“At the request of the Business Committee, the Faith and Order Committee has begun a review of Presbytery services, beginning with the service of ordination and now brings before the Presbytery its recommendations regarding the service.

The Committee believes that the 1988 service should continue to be used, combining as it does the requirements of the Church, the role of the Presbytery and the context of the congregation at worship in a way which is dignified yet relevant.

The Committee recommends that on each occasion of ordination the Sacrament of Holy Communion be celebrated by the Ordinand. This derives from a truly evangelical understanding of ordination and emerges naturally from a study of the Church of Scotland's belief about the nature and source of ordination.

The keystone of our belief is that it is the risen, ascended Lord Jesus Christ who ordains. He is the PRIEST who is not only God's living Word to us but is also the only one who, from our side presents the perfect

offering of faith, obedience and worship to the Father. Our ministry derives from Him and has no independent validity. Christ drew the apostles into a special relationship with himself and through them, the Church shares in that relationship. The Sacrament has an organic connection with, and a fundamental relevance to, ordination.

"Ordination means ordination in the sphere where we are all consecrated through participation in Christ's self-consecration on our behalf. But just as the disciples were specially related to that self-consecration of Christ at the Last Supper and in his solemn prayer of consecration (Jn. 17) as those who would take the Word of Christ to others so that others also would believe through their word and be drawn into the unity of the one Church of Christ, so we cannot dissociate ordination in the Name of Christ from that fact. Those ordained are to be regarded as drawn in a special way within the sphere of Christ's self-consecration so that it is only as they share in his self-consecration that they can minister the Word to others in His name. It is in this connection then that we have to see the relation of ordination to participation in the Lord's Supper; in very early times, e.g. in the Apostolic Constitutions, the rite of consecration to the ministry was looked upon as being brought to its completion when the one ordained first celebrated the Lord's Supper, for it was when the Lord at His own Table put His gifts of bread and wine into His hands, that he fulfilled the act in consecrating His servant to his ministry, as once He consecrated the apostle-disciples at the Last Supper. It is significant therefore that all the early church consecrations and ordinations of its ministers known to us took place in a Eucharist context. This is a rite that should still be followed: The act of the Presbytery in ordination should be followed by the celebration of Holy Communion in which the newly ordained person should dispense the Sacrament for the first time."

[T F Torrance : *Consecration of Ordination* SJT Vol 11 No.3]

For the ordinand, it is to this hour that he/she has been called of God; it is to equip him/her that he/she has been trained, has submitted to many examinations, been taken on trials for licence by the Presbytery, and has served a probationary term as a preacher of the Word. To speak the words of consecration and to take up bread and wine, the sacrament of Christ's presence held out to the congregation, is the fulfilment, the consummation of his/her ordination.

The Committee has given much consideration to the practical implications of its proposal and is satisfied that the celebration can be arranged smoothly and happily in every case with proper liaison with the ordinand, the Presbytery and the Kirk Session.

The Committee considered also a number of matters which, whilst of lesser importance, bear upon the seemliness and good order of Presbytery services. The relevant proposals are to be found in the Deliverance, sections 2-9, and they may be left to speak for themselves.

Deliverance :

- 1 The Presbytery agrees that at services of Ordination the Sacrament of Holy Communion be celebrated, the celebrant being the newly ordained.*
- 2 The Presbytery agrees that Presbytery services, apart from the Sacrament at Ordination, be conducted by the Interim-Moderator and the Moderator of the Presbytery.*
- 3 The Presbytery agrees that for Presbytery services a repertoire from which singings may be chosen, drawn from sources having the approval of the General Assembly, be authorised.*
- 4 The Presbytery agrees that at Presbytery services the Presbytery enters to a processional hymn, the Grace and the Call to Worship having been declared by the Interim-Moderator from an appropriate place.*
- 5 The Presbytery agrees that the hymn Come Holy Ghost, Our Souls Inspire be always included in the service of Ordination, since it is a liturgical text linked to ordination practice from early times and has important ecumenical significance.*
- 6 The Presbytery agrees that at Presbytery services the congregation(s) provides a member, or members, to read the Lesson.*

- 7 *The Presbytery agrees that at Induction the Call be placed in the hands of the Minister inducted to the charge.*
- 8 *The Presbytery agrees that for Presbytery services the Presbytery itself should be responsible for the contents of any service sheet.*
- 9 *The Presbytery agrees that it be remitted to the Business Committee to consider the appointment of a minister to oversee liturgical arrangements for Presbytery services.*

Many of the reservations expressed within Presbytery were of a 'practical' nature and included such issues as the length of the service, whether this were too much to ask of a newly ordained, who might be expected to communicate and which Eucharistic rite to follow. The issues raised were respected and answered. Presbytery having made its decision, much interest was shown in the outworking and the 'success' or otherwise of the first such occasion.

On Wednesday, 4th October 1995, the Revd Una Stewart was ordained to the Holy Ministry and was inducted to the charge of Orwell with Portmoak. Following the rite of Ordination the newly-ordained minister presided. The Moderator of Presbytery and the Interim Moderator, being seated at either side of the Holy Table, assisted and served the local elders.

Many members of Presbytery believed that the blessing experienced on the occasion was confirmation of a step taken in pursuit of theological conviction. Una Stewart here gives her own reflection.

"As a preface to my reflections I would like to say that in some respects I am not typical of a new ordinand in the Church of Scotland as I was Parish Deaconess for five years prior to going to University. This is an important observation as it reflects the experience I had, prior to the occasion of my ordination, of regular, weekly participation in all forms of worship services.

My most striking memory of the occasion was the power and strength of the presence of the Holy Spirit while sharing the sacrament with my friends and colleagues who have supported and sustained me over the years leading to this moment and how that encompassed my new congregations.

To have celebrated the sacrament on a subsequent Sunday, as was the practice, while still being an inspiring occasion, would have missed the warmth and support of so many who have known me for so long and whom it was right should be present.

The presence of the Presbytery was, I felt, a source of strength and upholding and gave a sense of the timeless quality which is a part of the Lord's Supper. It placed the evening in the larger context of all God's people - past, present and future - and was certainly an inspiration to the congregations who were lifted from what some saw as 'a local affair' to an awareness of the Church Universal.

On the other hand, the service was fairly long considering the distances some people had travelled and that there was a 'social' to follow. There was a degree of stress prior, but my past experience and the strength which lies in the sacrament itself helped to transcend this.

My final observation would be that for me, theologically and personally, there was a fittingness to the evening and it was a most blessed occasion but my reservation, which is of a practical nature, is that for someone less experienced in leading worship it could have been very stressful."

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