

14th January, 1979. 6.10 pm.

ARCIC 199/Windsor/2

THE AGREED STATEMENT ON EUCHARISTIC DOCTRINE WINDSOR 1971: An Elucidation

1. When each of the Agreed Statements was published, the Commission invited and has received comments and criticisms. This is an attempt to expound and explain to those who have responded some points raised in connection with the first of these Statements.

The Commission was not asked to produce a comprehensive treatise on the Eucharist, but only to examine differences, should they be found to exist, in the eucharistic beliefs of the two communions. The aim of the Commission has been to see whether we could (now) discover substantial agreement in faith on the Eucharist. When the Commission uses the term 'substantial agreement' it means that the document represents not the opinion of a majority of its members but its unanimous agreement 'on essential matters where it considers that doctrine admits no divergence' (Ministry and Ordination (17) Canterbury, 1973). Members of the Commission are united in their conviction 'that if there are any remaining points of disagreement they can be resolved on the principles here established' (Eucharistic Doctrine (12) 1971).

2. In spite of the firm assertion made in the Agreed Statement of the 'once for all' nature of Christ's sacrifice, some have still been anxious that the term anamnesis may cover the re-introduction of a repeated immolation. Others have suspected that the word refers not to the historical events of salvation but only to an eternal sacrifice in heaven. Others again have doubted whether anamnesis sufficiently implies the reality indicated by traditional sacrificial language concerning the Eucharist, and in particular whether the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Mass as a sacrifice has been sufficiently affirmed. Moreover, the accuracy and adequacy of the Commission's exegesis of anamnesis have been questioned on the ground that other possible interpretations of this word have been disregarded.

Some critics have been unhappy about the realistic language used in this Agreed Statement, and have questioned such words as 'become' and 'change'. There have also been requests for a greater emphasis on the eschatological dimension of the Eucharist, but in our opinion this is not an area of disagreement between us. Others have wondered whether the permanence of Christ's eucharistic presence has been sufficiently acknowledged, with a consequent request for a discussion of the reserved sacrament and devotions associated with it. Similarly there have been requests for clarification of the Commission's attitude to receptionism, and resolution of the apparent inconsistency in speaking of Christ's presence both 'in' and 'through' the Eucharist.

3. Behind these criticisms there lies a profound but often unarticulated anxiety that the Commission has been using new theological language to conceal basic controversial issues. Related to this anxiety is the further question as to the nature of the agreement claimed by the Commission. Is there an ambiguity (either intentional or unintentional) in language which enables members of the two churches to see their own faith in the Agreed Statement without reaching genuine consensus?

4. The Commission has been criticized for their use of the term anamnesis. They chose the word because it is used in New Testament accounts of the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper:

"Do this in commemoration (anamnesin) of me."

1 Cor. 11²⁵ Lk. 22¹⁹

The word is also to be found in Justin Martyr who, recalling the Last Supper, writes:

"Jesus, taking bread and having given thanks said, 'Do this for my memorial (anamnesin): This is my body'; and likewise, taking the cup, and giving thanks, he said, 'This is my blood'."

From this time onwards the term is commonly used in patristic and liturgical traditions. Later, the Council of Trent explains the relation between the sacrifice of the Cross and the Eucharist and uses the words 'commemoratio' and 'memoria' [Session 22 Chi].

The frequent use of the term in contemporary theology is illustrated by Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (Faith and Order Commission of the W.C.C., 1975), as well as by the General Instruction (1970) of the new Roman Missal. Tradition understands the word as relating to the sphere of sacramental realities, in which the once-for-all event of salvation becomes effective in the present through the action of the Holy Spirit.

In the exposition of the Christian doctrine of the redemption the word 'sacrifice' has been used in two intimately associated ways. In the New Testament sacrificial language refers primarily to the historical events of Christ's saving work for us: the tradition of the Church, as evidenced for example in the liturgies, used similar language to designate in the eucharistic celebration the anamnesis of this historical event. Therefore it is possible to say at the same time that there is only one unrepeatable sacrifice in the historic sense, but that the Eucharist is a sacrifice in the sacramental sense, provided that it is clear that this is not a repetition of the historical sacrifice.

There is therefore one, historical, unrepeatable sacrifice, offered once for all by Christ and accepted once for all by the Father. In the liturgical action of the Church, Christ in the Holy Spirit unites his people in a sacramental way with this unique sacrifice. In consequence, even though the Church is active in the celebration of the memorial, this adds nothing to the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice upon the cross, because this action is itself the fruit of this sacrifice. The Church in celebrating the Eucharist, giving thanks for the gift of Christ's sacrifice and presenting it before the Father, identifies itself with the will of Christ who has offered himself to the Father on behalf of all mankind, and his members by their response, 'entreat the benefits of his passion on behalf of the whole Church, participate in these benefits and enter into the movement of his self-offering' (Eucharistic Doctrine (5), Windsor 1971).