

TIM BRADSHAW

# Clarifications on Eucharist and Ministry: An Appraisal

**Theological dialogue between Roman Catholics and Anglicans in the 1980s produced the ARCIC reports. Here Tim Bradshaw offers an Anglican assessment of the response of the Holy See in *Clarifications*. It is, in his view, a retrograde step from the theology of the *Final Report*.**

## Introduction

*Clarifications* was produced in response to questions put to the First Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission in regard to its agreed statements on the eucharist and ministry. These questions were put in the 1991 Response of the Holy See to the Final Report of ARCIC (1982). The questions took the form of bringing the ARCIC agreed statements to the test of traditional Roman Catholic dogmatic formulae. This method of interrogation can be seen as problematic, in that ARCIC sought specifically to get behind the contentious historic formulae so as to develop a theology which avoided divisive phrases and sought a new synthesis which encapsulated the heart of what the ancient terms and concepts expressed. It may well have been a mistake on the part of ARCIC to reply to the Holy See on the old terms which it sought to transcend.

But *Clarifications* was produced and did seek to reassure the Holy See by answering the questions put. This paper seeks to appraise *Clarifications* by way of a commentary on its short text.

## Eucharist

The initial question tackled by *Clarifications* is (a), 'The essential link of the eucharistic memorial with the once for all sacrifice of Calvary which it makes sacramentally present.' This statement does not restrict the sacramental presence of the sacrifice of Jesus to the elements or to the priest's action with them, and can easily be taken as discussing the presence of Jesus in the whole assembled congregation as they participate in the eucharistic celebration. The response given by ARCIC's clarification adds nothing new to the existing *Final Report*, and so seems reasonable.

Given that the sacrifice of Jesus was the great act of judgement on humanity, the justification of God as Forsyth puts it, and so transcending linear time, there is an essential relationship between that once for all act and its sacramental enactment

in the eucharist. The earlier agreed statement, *Church as Communion*, we read: 'In the cross are found God's judgement upon the world and his gift of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:14-19).'<sup>1</sup> It speaks of the paschal victory which abolishes differences between people, and a kind of renewal of humanity. We have a new covenant head, the second Adam, in whom we share a status of acceptance before God. There is therefore bound to be a real link between the great act of self giving by Jesus, and the memorial of his self sacrifice. That link is of course primarily the risen Christ, a personal link, not simply some 'essence' (if the term 'essential' is a scholastic philosophical one).

One point might also be worth making is to stress the uniqueness of the self sacrifice of Calvary, an NT imperative. Also it is worth emphasising that this climactic and unique sacrifice has been accepted by God the Father. This point is vividly made in the imagery of the epistle to the Hebrews in the final seating of the Son beside the Father, to indicate that the saving work of the 'pioneer and perfecter of our faith', the 'great high priest who has passed into the heavens', is complete and secure. There can be no repetition of this, as was the case with the Temple sacrificial system. As it stands, this first point and the ARCIC clarification seems fair and open to an interpretation which squares with the apostolic teaching, since it replies that 'the eucharist is a sacrifice in a sacramental sense, provided that it is clear that this is not a repetition of the historical sacrifice'.

The second main question put by the Holy See concerned (b), 'the propitiatory nature of the eucharistic sacrifice, which can be applied also to the deceased.' This does pose huge problems not only to evangelical Anglicans, but to many others, and seems almost to have the quality of a wrecking amendment! There is an irony in the effort of the ARCIC Anglicans to meet this requirement, in the light of the powerful rejection of any notion of 'propitiation' in atonement theology by many exegetes and theologians, against the conservative Evangelicals who wish to uphold some kind of substitutionary atonement. In fact the Church of England Doctrine Commission report *The Mystery of Salvation* (1995) specifically rejects the concept of propitiation (p 213).

Here the conservative Roman, and the conservative Evangelical, share an interest; one wishes to open the propitiatory effect to the eucharistic rite, the other wishes to confine it to the unique act of Jesus outside the camp, an unrepeatabe offering, once for all, and has the Thirty Nine Articles of Religion to support them in this concern (Article 31). Liberal Anglicans therefore reject the notion of propitiation altogether; classical Anglicans, who have assented to rather than dissented from, their historic formularies, uphold the trinitarian propitiatory nature of the work of Christ once for all at Calvary, where there was a self-propitiation of God as his love accepted the consequences of human sin. Propitiation means that God, being holy, is outraged by sin: we would not wish for a God who felt

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1 Second Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission, *Church as Communion*, Church House Publishing, London 1991, p 12. See also that commission's *Salvation and the Church*, Church House Publishing, London 1987, para. 17.

other than righteous anger at many of our twentieth-century indescribable brutalities. Yet God undertook responsibility for our sins, in the person of the Son, 'born of woman, born under the law', in the deepest possible act of loving judgement. The Doctrine Commission may have failed fully to plumb the depths of the sacrifice of Golgotha in rejecting the biblical term propitiation.

The uniqueness of the propitiatory or expiatory sacrifice of Jesus matters enormously. Together with the resurrection it is the very basis of the church, on which she feeds. God has been 'propitiated', *eph hapax*, given that this concept has been introduced. This is the basis of the security of the sinner saved by grace through faith; to make propitiation of God an ongoing process needing to be continued seems to offend the teaching of the epistle to the Hebrews noted above and to derogate from the sovereign moral act of Christ's work.

Further, to hold that this ongoing propitiation of divine judgement needs to continue for the sake of the dead seems almost bizarre to the Bible-based Anglican. Is there no eschatology here at all? What of the eucharist in its aspect of the messianic banquet also, taught by ARCIC in *Church and Communion*? 'The celebration of the eucharist prefigures a foretaste of this messianic banquet (Luke 22:30). In the world to come, such signs will cease since the sacramental order will no longer be needed, for God will immediately be present to his people. They will see him face to face and join in endless praise (Rev. 22:3f). This will be the perfection of communion'.<sup>2</sup> Quite so. In which case, what on earth is the earthly Church doing seeking to propitiate God for those who are now enjoying what the eucharist prefigures, the direct presence of the Lord? This theology of propitiatory masses for the dead really does go the heart of the evangelical view of salvation in the person of Christ and his completed work.

I regret that the clarification seems to have crumpled at this demand, and responded submissively and unconvincingly. The dynamic of the BCP eucharist is not that of eucharistic propitiation, rather it terminates on the eating and drinking by faith with thanksgiving of the sacramentally present Lord who feeds his church with the saving grace he has won on our behalf. It is disingenuous to claim the prayer asking God to accept 'this our sacrifice of praise' as supporting eucharistic propitiation. Cranmer carefully removed this prayer from the canon of the mass, he put it after the people had received communion as a responsive prayer, after the theology of Romans 12 for example. It is a prayer of thankful and obedient response to the grace of God poured out for us at such cost.<sup>3</sup> The framers of the clarification might have got some mileage from the ASB here, but not as much would be needed to meet the Vatican demand.

Michael Green puts the evangelical, and many would claim the classical, Anglican view: 'It is because Christ's sacrifice was at the same time expiatory and dedicatory, whereas ours is only the latter, that confusion arises. His atoning sacrifice is the root of our salvation. Our responsive sacrifice of praise, thanksgiving

2 ARCIC, *Church as Communion*, p 12f.

3 E. M. B. Green *Freed to Serve*, Hodder, London 1983, pp 80f explains this point. This popular book represents evangelical Anglican ecclesiology concisely.

and surrender are the fruit of it. The two must never be confused.<sup>4</sup> In other words the church's self offering to the Father in Christ is a responsive and 'eucharistic' one, one of thanksgiving and praise, but not one which is actually propitiatory of the Father – that act of judgement has been effected once and for all. 'Look Father look on His anointed face, and only look on us as found in Him', we sing in Bright's hymn. The fact of the church's being in Christ might approach something of the concept of pleading his sacrifice,<sup>5</sup> but pleading only in a very unusual sense that the plea is already known to have been accepted.

There will be extreme difficulty in getting this particular demand and clarification accepted by very many Anglicans. That is not to say, lest I am seeming to be deliberately negative here, that the theological motifs behind such eucharistic propitiatory language cannot be discussed fruitfully, as it was in the *Final Report* for example in terms of our entering into the self offering of Christ eucharistically. Even here, however, the distinction between the primary expiatory offering and the secondary responsive or dedicatory offering which rests solely on the primary one, needs to be observed. The excellence of the *Final Report* lay in its creative effort to get at the shared theological concerns underlying dogmatic traditional language, and the concept of entering into the self offering of Jesus broke open the old jargon and showed its potential.

Indeed that report was a significant theological learning experience for many readers. I can remember being struck by the transcending of reified notions of atonement and eucharistic offering in favour of the action of the living Christ in and through his church. 'The atonement' is not a *thing* to be applied, like an antibiotic or a poultice. The traditional evangelical theology of the eucharist can lead to the corpse of Jesus; and the traditional Roman theology of the eucharist can lead to something similar, transposed into eucharistic propitiatory offering (especially if we link demands b) and c) closely). We both get beyond this reification if we focus on the living risen Christ, the dynamic of his life in the church. ARCIC 1 helped me to see this. Augustine teaches:

The whole redeemed city itself, that is the congregation and society of the saints, is offered as a universal sacrifice to God through the High Priest, who offered himself in suffering for us in the form of a servant, that we might be the body of so great a head...This is the sacrifice of Christians.<sup>6</sup>

The theme of the church's sacrifice to God in the eucharist is explored penetratingly by the great D. M. Baillie in his essay 'The Eucharistic Offering'. He says of that the Godward offering and the movement of grace from God to the church at the eucharist is an inseparable action, two sides of one coin. 'When in the sacrament we plead the sacrifice of Christ and in union with Him offer ourselves to God, the

4 Green, *Freed to Serve*, p 79.

5 'Christ does not *plead* his sacrifice in the normal sense of the word because it is already accepted and attested by the resurrection. But he can properly be said to plead it if by that is meant that his presence as the Lamb once slain in the midst of the throne is the silent plea for our acceptance.

He does not *present* his sacrifice, if by that is meant that he continues to offer to the Father his sacrifice on Calvary. But he may rightly be said to present it, and so may we, if that is meant to draw attention to and celebrate the sacrifice once offered' Green, *Freed to Serve*, p 78.

6 Augustine, *City of God* 10.6.

whole of that process is a giving and receiving in one. It might indeed be urged that the receiving is prior to the giving, because the initiative is always with God and the response is ours. Yet it can hardly be said that there is a temporal sequence. The very giving of ourselves to God is a receiving of Him, and the very receiving of Him is already a giving of ourselves.<sup>7</sup> This Presbyterian theologian echoes Augustine and could provide a context for fruitful discussion of what the demand for propitiatory eucharistic sacrifice wishes to affirm spiritually?

The next question put to ARCIC concerns the bread and wine when consecrated in the Holy Communion; the Vatican wants reassurance that (c), 'under the species of bread and wine these earthly realities are changed into the reality of his Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity.' Here again we are taken back to the scholastic mode of theologising, away from the dynamic Christology implied in the *Final Report* and into reification. The separated elements of bread and wine are to become actually the body and blood and soul of Christ, and divinity, actually God himself. The demand is acceded to, rather than questioned at all, and the footnote about transubstantiation in the *Final Report* is effectively put into the main text as the matrix of the theology. Evangelicals, and indeed probably the majority of all Anglicans, were able to accept ecumenically the sacramental theology of the *Final Report* and its clear statement of metaphysical change of the elements because this was placed firmly in the context of a both 'grace and faith' theology, neither being separated out, both being required and the eating and drinking by the faithful, and *their* transformation, being the emphasised goal. Also the dynamic Christology underpinning the theologising meant that the living Lord was the movement of grace in and through the whole church and the celebration of the eucharist. If Anglicans wished to judge *The Final Report* against the Thirty Nine Articles, they would have to reject it – yet the Vatican's appeal to medieval scholasticism is uncritically accepted!

Acceding to this new statement somehow gives a divinisation to the elements which overshadows all that creative theology and dynamic Christology. The evangelical spirituality understands the Holy Spirit working on and in people rather than things, dynamically and not statically so as to create objects divinised for worship. There is little room now for the complementary pneumatological emphasis in *The Final Report* of the Cranmerian and evangelical type: feed on him in your hearts by faith with thanksgiving, as the Spirit mediates the reality of Christ in and through the whole eucharistic celebration, not just focused on the elements separable from the eucharistic feeding.

(d) The insistence on the adoration of the consecrated host flows very logically from (c). There is every reason therefore to separate what Baillie above argued was one reality into two and forgo the eating and drinking in favour of tabernacle piety. This does not however fit in with the *Final Report* and its stated norm that the eucharist is for consuming by the faithful first and foremost. There always was something of a fault line in the *Final Report* here, and it has been duly opened up by one side pressing its point as hard as possible.

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7 D. M. Baillie, *The Theology of the Sacraments and Other Papers*, Faber & Faber, London 1957, p 122.

The mainline Anglican theology on reservation is that it may happen for sick communions; adoration of the consecrated host is rejected in the Thirty Nine Articles, on the grounds that the eucharist entails sacramental consuming of the body and blood. Incidentally, Cardinal Cassidy seems to have made a mistake in his postscript if he is saying that the Orthodox have a cultus of the blessed sacrament; some Latinised Uniate Churches may, but not the Orthodox. They are, as the clarification argues, much more like the Anglicans in this, as are the Oriental Orthodox, reserving the sacrament but not adoring it.

May I be allowed to quote Richard Hooker as a conclusion to this eucharistic section:

It is on all sides plainly confessed, first that this sacrament is a true and a real participation of Christ, who thereby imparteth himself even his whole entire Person *as a mystical Head* unto every soul that receiveth him, and that every such receiver doth thereby incorporate or unite himself unto Christ as *a mystical member of him*, yea of them also whom he acknowledges to be his own; secondly that to whom the *person of Christ* is thus communicated, them he giveth by the same sacrament his Holy Spirit to sanctify them as it sanctifieth him which is their head; thirdly that what *merit, force or virtue soever there is in his sacrificed body and blood*, we freely, fully and wholly have it by this sacrament; fourthly that *the effect thereof in us is a real transmutation of our souls and bodies* from sin to righteousness, from death and corruption to immortality and life; fifthly that because the sacrament being of itself but corruptible and earthly creature must needs be thought an unlikely instrument to work so admirable effects in man, we are therefore to rest ourselves altogether upon the strength of his glorious power who is able and will bring to pass that the bread and the cup which he giveth us shall be truly the thing he promiseth.<sup>8</sup>

## Ministry and ordination

Under this heading ARCIC is given (a) the requirement to affirm that only a validly ordained priest, acting 'in the person of Christ' can be the minister offering 'sacramentally the redemptive sacrifice of Christ' in the eucharist.

*The Final Report's* claim that 'the ordained ministry is not an extension of the common Christian priesthood but belongs to another realm of the gifts of the Spirit' was hard to accept for many Anglicans, not just Evangelicals but the non-Tractarians as a whole. But given the affirmation that 'the ordained ministry is placed firmly in the context of the ministry of the whole Church', and given the fact that ARCIC had told us that it was working from the base of spiritual *koinonia*, with a dynamic Christology running through its vision of church and ministry, it was accepted as a workable formulation, expressing the preference of the far end of churchmanship, albeit stretched to the limit already.

The required clarification presses things too far. A minority of Anglican presbyters would call themselves sacrificing priests, particularly when the term

<sup>8</sup> *Ecclesiastical Polity* Book V, ch. lxvii.7.

'propitiatory' is added from the previous eucharist clarification. I hazard a guess (and look forward to comments from ARC members by way of correction) that not all Roman Catholic priests see themselves as offering the propitiatory sacrifice to God, except in a highly nuanced way, which is seemingly excluded by this kind of language.

This requirement reminded me of the Bull *Apostolicae Curae*, finding Anglican orders null and void because the form of ordination failed to express the 'sacred order of priesthood, or its grace and power, which is chiefly the power "of consecrating and of offering the true body and blood of the Lord" in that sacrifice which is no "nude commemoration of the sacrifice offered on the cross"'. The clarification given here by ARCIC happily responds in a way which keeps within the spirit and intendment of the *Final Report*, and does not concede anything new, stressing the whole church and the ministerial priesthood of the minister in that context, very much after Moberly's theology.

Let it be of interest, Michael Green states the mainline, non-Tractarian Anglican view usefully: 'In short, Christian priesthood is, in F. D. Maurice's distinction (taken over by J. B. Lightfoot), *representative* without being *vicarial*. That is to say, when a presbyter celebrates the Communion he is exercising the double representative function... He acts on behalf of the Lord when proclaiming pardon and performing the actions with which Christ instituted the sacrament. He acts on behalf of men when he leads the prayers and praises and presents the offerings of the congregation. He acts as a *representative*. He does not thereby take away the layman's right of direct access to God, nor of assuring a penitent of God's pardon.'<sup>9</sup> Talk of a special realm of the gifts of the Spirit, or a ministerial priesthood focusing that of the whole *koinonia* of Christ's flock, must never infringe that principle of access to the Father through the Son in the Spirit. ARCIC seems to have kept to this principle.

As to episcopal ordination, this opens up the debate again of episcopacy as of the 'esse', 'bene esse' or 'plene esse' of the Church. Evangelicals claim here to be in the mainstream of the Anglican tradition with Bishop Lightfoot of Durham and Hooker, who prized episcopacy yet declined to absolutise it, placing it within a doctrine of the church as whole. The church is not *created* by the line of ministry, as seemed to be the Tractarian teaching.

(b) The ARCIC clarification about ordination here is well handled in the face of a requirement which itself needs clarifying. The ordained ministry is both an ecclesiastical institution *and* of the will of Christ.<sup>10</sup>

(c) ARCIC also treats this well in its response to a statement which could be interpreted as consonant with ministers of many denominations, which regard ministry as configured to the priesthood of Christ in many ways.

9 Green, *Freed to Serve*, p 79.

10 'The deepest word which can be spoken about Christian ministry in all its forms is that it is nothing other than the ministry of the risen Lord among and through his

people (Rom. 15:18); this is also implicit in the very notion of the church as the body of Christ' – the teaching of the Baptist theologian, Bruce Milne, in *Know the Truth*, IVP, Leicester, p 226.

(d) Again the requirement is itself not wholly clear: what *sort* of causal relationship between episcopal succession and apostolic teaching must be affirmed to satisfy it? One can think of an evolutionary model of developing ministries from the apostolic church, which I detect in *The Final Report* which makes the analogy with the development of the canon, and also assumes development of structures as needs arose. One can think of causation in a more mechanistic way.

It was particularly apt that ARCIC responded with reference to Irenaeus, through Vatican II, since this seems to me a good model of episcopacy for Anglicans to recover from the patristic heritage. Irenaeus focused on the handing on the apostolic gospel teaching, without a notion of a line of grace through episcopal succession. He also shows a marked respect for the Church of Rome, without being under its jurisdiction and happy to disagree with it and uphold customs of other Sees.<sup>11</sup> Green reminds us that Irenaeus himself was consecrated not by another bishop but by the council of presbyters at Lugdunum,<sup>12</sup> giving us pause to adopting any narrowly mechanistic interpretation of 'causation' relating the apostolic church leadership to that of the bishops.

## Conclusion

The eucharistic clarifications will not be at all easy to sell to Anglicans, not just to Evangelicals. I think ARCIC did a better job in responding to the ministry and ordination requirements, although when both are taken together the vision of a line of propitiatory sacrificing priests emerges, and will very likely be resisted in General Synod, unless Anglicans have become so indifferentist that doctrinal meaning and truth no longer matter. I doubt that this is the case, and that Anglicans will wish to maintain their view of eucharist and ministry rooted in biblical and patristic doctrinal sources and pastoral practice.

**The Revd Dr Tim Bradshaw is a Fellow of Regent's Park College, Oxford.**

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11 'In all this', says Hall, 'Irenaeus is concerned with the succession of true doctrine and its transmission in the public teaching of the bishops. "Apostolic succession" may have included for him some idea of a sacramental grace exclusively passed on to bishops from apostles; but if so, he never refers to it. That is in fact a later idea.' Stuart G. Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*, SPCK, London 1991, p 61.

12 Green, *Freed to Serve*, p 69.