

## Article reprinted from *Cross+Way* Issue Winter 1998 No. 71

(C)opyright Church Society; material may be used for non-profit purposes provided that the source is acknowledged and the text is not altered.

### Clarifications

#### Eric Bramhall

*There has been much consternation amongst Evangelicals about the Roman Catholic document Clarifications. In response to an attempt by Eric Bramhall of Liverpool to have Clarifications rejected by General Synod a fringe meeting was held at York. Although many members of Church Society would not want to be as positive about ARCIC (Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission) as Eric, his speech at that meeting is valuable and with Eric's permission, printed below.*

I believe *Clarifications* is seriously flawed and should be rejected by the General Synod. Over 100 members have supported my Private Member's motion that this should at least be debated.

My reasons for saying it is seriously flawed involve methodology and theology.

#### METHODOLOGY

1. *Clarifications* puts a spin on the *Final Report* **after** it has been approved by Anglicans in dioceses, General Synod and at the 1988 Lambeth Conference. I do not believe it would have received such backing if Anglicans had known it was to be interpreted this way.

In any case how can we now support further reports from ARCIC if we do not know how they are to be interpreted later? This way of doing things threatens the process.

Mary Tanner pointed out the difficulty when she wrote :  
'Some Anglicans have posed the question whether *Clarifications* was simply making explicit what was implied in the text or whether they interpret the text in one direction and then call into question the original understanding on which the acceptance of the Lambeth Conference was given.' (Unity Digest August 1995)

2. I was under the impression that the purpose of the ARCIC discussions, which I wholly approve, was to try to do some fresh thinking on issues that have divided us and to avoid polemics.

Gerard O'Connell in *The Tablet* (20.4.1996) interviewed Cardinal Cassidy. The Cardinal said that the Vatican still had confidence in the ARCIC method. The method ARCIC has tried to follow from the beginning is very important, going behind formulas which originated in controversy, not to relativise them but to discover if there may be common ground underlying them.'

Nevertheless Cardinal Cassidy phrased his questions to ARCIC in a way which is highly polemical for Anglicans and not in keeping with the mandate given to the Commission.

3. Cardinal Cassidy believes '*Clarifications*' throws 'new light on the issues raised'. If something new is being stated should it not be brought to the House of Bishops at least for approval? Secondly, how does

the Roman Catholic Church understand the Anglican Church today? Is it in ‘the new light’ that has been given? In the *Tablet* interview, Cardinal Cassidy says, ‘For us the situation is now clear.’

After Monseigneur Billy Steele spoke at Synod in the Methodist debate and referred to the ARCIC agreements, I asked him whether he understood these in the light of *Clarifications*, knowing that these have not been ratified by the Bishops or the General Synod. He responded that this is a difficulty which needs to be addressed.

There is an issue of openness and honesty that needs to be faced if Roman Catholics think that *Clarifications* is where the Anglican Church stands. My belief is that if we were asked, ‘Is this consonant with the Faith of Anglicans?’, a large number would say, ‘No, it is dissonant with what we believe.’

## **THEOLOGY**

I do not wish to go into the issues at length. Dr Tim Bradshaw and Bishop Colin Buchanan have done this far better than I can. But some of the issues that I believe very many Anglicans would not see as consonant with their faith include:

1. *The propitiatory nature of the Eucharistic sacrifice, which can be applied also to the deceased.*

God has been propitiated and this is the basis of the security of a sinner saved by grace through faith. To make propitiation of God an ongoing process needing to be continued seems contrary to the teaching of Hebrews and to detract from the sovereign moral act of God’s work.

To hold to this idea of propitiatory masses for the dead is intolerable to the Bible-based Anglican who sees the Eucharist as a foretaste of the Messianic banquet which those who have gone to be with Christ now enjoy.

2. *The certitude that Christ is present sacramentally and substantially, when I order the species of bread and wine these earthly realities are changed into the reality of His Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity.*

Many Anglicans, following Cranmer, would find it hard to accept that the elements are changed in this way, and would not want to separate them from their receiving Christ into their hearts by faith with thanksgiving. Tim Bradshaw has pointed out that by acceding to Cardinal Cassidy’s demand the Commission has effectively put the footnote about transubstantiation in the *Final Report* into the main text as the matrix of its theology. Consonant with Article 28, many Anglicans would agree with Dr McAdoo who wrote to the effect that Anglicans have many ways of understanding the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist but transubstantiation is not one of them.

3. Because, I believe, many Anglicans do not accept the concessions made in *Clarifications*, they also would not accept *the adoration of Christ in the reserved sacrament*, and only a minority of Anglican clergy would see themselves as sacrificing priests.

I believe we cannot leave things as they are and that the most positive step that could be taken for the ARCIC process would be for the Synod (or the House of Bishops) to reject *Clarifications* as methodologically flawed and to produce a paper explaining why and looking to Rome to respond to the paper since, according to the *Tablet* article, they have a clear understanding of the ARCIC method and are committed to it.

**Eric Bramhall** is Vicar of All Saints, Childwall and General Synod Member for Liverpool Diocese.