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the **Eucharist: sacrament of unity**

or

When the chickens come home to roost!

David Phillips

the Eucharist: sacrament of unity (ESU), published in 2001, is a response by the House of Bishops to the Roman Catholic teaching document *One Bread One Body (OBOB)*. The report begins with affirmations followed by reservation and in dealing with the latter voices the hurt felt by many at the content of *OBOB*.

Affirmations

The Bishops lead the reader through some of the key areas of *OBOB* and the apparent agreements between Anglicans and Roman Catholics which it represents. Most of these areas are supported by reference to Anglican teaching. There is a refreshingly heavy dosage of the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Book of Common Prayer. The Bishops wish to show that in many areas historic Anglican understanding is in line with Roman Catholic teaching. Areas covered include mutual recognition of baptism, the necessity of faith at the eucharist, the necessity of the ministry of the Word, the understanding of memorial (anamnesis) and the once for all nature of the sacrifice of Christ.

There are several problems with these affirmations. First is the fact that, in common with most ecumenical reports, there is a looseness of language. The fact that Anglicans and Roman Catholics use the same terms does not mean that they mean the same thing. One is left feeling that there has been some slight of hand when the rabbit pops out of the hat saying 'we all agree on this'.

Secondly, one quickly realises in reading a document like this how foolish compromise can be in Church politics. In the Synods of the Church many people vote for, or at least do not vote against, liturgy and reports (in particular ARCIC) not because they agree with everything in it but because it is the best compromise we can get. These liturgies or reports are then cited as authentic Anglican doctrine.

Thirdly, the frequent citing of the Thirty-Nine Articles and BCP can lull one into thinking that what is being said is consistent with reformation teaching, but this is not so. There is a selectiveness about what is quoted as will be seen below. As a consequence many of these positive affirmations feel like a sell-out.

Reservations

The 'reservations' expressed in *ESU* fall into five main areas:

- The nature of the real presence (section 29)

- ❑ The nature of the Church of England (sections 30-31)
- ❑ The validity of Anglican orders (sections 32-33)
- ❑ The bar on mutual communion (sections 34-38)
- ❑ The definition of Church (sections 39-40).

The 'reservation' regarding the real presence is not that Anglicans do not believe it. Indeed both the Porvoo Common Statement and the ARCIC Final Report speak of some sort of real presence. Rather, Roman Catholics are too clear about what they believe whereas Anglican 'divines' have been consistently loath to speculate as to the mode of that presence'. This is unacceptable historical revisionism. Many of the Anglican reformers were put to death precisely because they refused to accept the errors of Rome in teaching the real presence. Our articles are abundantly plain - 'The Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner.' The fact that Anglican 'divines' like Thomas Cranmer did not try to speculate too much about the mystery of the sacrament does not mean they did not refute the error of the doctrine of the real presence. (See, for example, Cranmer on the Lord's Supper Book III)

On the second 'reservation' the Bishops rightly refute the notion that the Church of England began at the reformation. They also pick up on the fact that in *OBOB* churches which have been reformed under the Word of God are not called 'churches' but 'ecclesial communities'. This is not an honour bestowed on the various Orthodox churches. These things serve to highlight the fact that Roman Catholics and Anglicans have very different notions about the nature of the Church. There is a tendency in ecumenical dialogue to buy into the Catholic ideas and this is evident in ESU. However, the Bishops do quote Article XIX in explaining why we disagree, although they stop short of the paragraph which states 'the church of Rome hath erred'.

Underlying these differences about the nature of the Church, and indeed the nature of the eucharist is the issue of ministry. *OBOB* alludes to *Apostolicae curae* which, in the last century, proclaimed Anglican orders void. It was a shock to many that after 30 years of ecumenism Rome has not changed its view and this was forcefully highlighted last year in the document *Dominus Iesus*. Here, we, as Anglicans are receiving a dose of our own medicine. Whether it be Lutherans, Methodists or Moravians the assumption has been that they must accept episcopal ordination in order for there to be genuine unity. The notion of tactile (hands on) apostolic succession has consistently hindered genuine unity. It is based on sustaining a power structure which is alien to the gospel.

One area not dealt with in the 'reservations' section is the notion of sacrifice. Here, it has to be said, the arguments are complex because of the slipperiness of language. One of the notable features of *OBOB* was the fact that they claimed reformed Christians have misunderstood the Roman Catholic view on the nature of the sacrifice of Christ. They insist in the once for all nature of Christ's sacrifice. There can be no 'repetition or addition to what has been accomplished once for all by Christ'. Instead in the Mass the sacrifice of Christ becomes 'effectively present'. This can sound promising, but the flaws soon become apparent. *OBOB* draws attention to the difference between Communion Services and the Mass. The difference is that the Mass cannot be celebrated without a

priest. Presumably this means that any Anglican service is at best a Communion but definitely not a Mass. The Mass, as protestants have always known, is therefore something entirely different to what is found in scripture. It is the invention of men rather than the ordinance of Christ and all the notions of 'sacrifice', 'priesthood' and so on are a means of propping up a corrupt practice.

ESU is a frustrating report. The advent of *One Bread One Body* and the more recent *Dominus Iesus* have shown just how little Roman Catholic teaching has changed since the reformation and how much it has distorted and deviated from the plain teaching of scripture. *ESU* draws attention to many of these errors but it is too weak in the way it does so. However, it also shows that the Church of England has already drifted a long way from its reformed heritage and just how much damage the ecumenical movement has done to the biblical faithfulness of the Church.