

THEOLOGICAL TRENDS

REFLECTIONS ON THE AGREED STATEMENT ON EUCHARISTIC DOCTRINE

III. EUCHARIST AND COMMUNITY

THIS ARTICLE serves as a postscript to the two articles already published¹ on the *Agreed Statement on Eucharistic Doctrine*, issued by the Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission. Its theme is the relation between Eucharist and community. It is hoped that this may contribute to greater understanding of the Eucharist within the two communions, and provide a growth-point for further ecumenical dialogue.

This theme touches theology at many points (though there is not the space here to develop this at any length). It raises the question of the action of the holy Spirit in the Eucharist, and so in the community which grows *as community* through the Eucharist; of the relation of 'charisms' to 'structure' in the life of the Church; of the place of liturgical prayer in the growth of community; of the 'shape' of community in religious life. It is an important element in the related problems of the ministry and intercommunion.

But the basic question concerns the nature of the community that we call the Church.

Eucharist and Church

One of the most important aspects of the Eucharist is the relation between the Eucharist and the Church. *Eucharistia facit Ecclesiam*: the Eucharist creates the Church. In some sense, Eucharist and Church are identical.

We have been seeing more clearly in recent years the profound truth that Christ's presence in the Eucharist is a *community* presence. Christ's eucharistic presence is primarily for sacrifice, to enable the whole Church to offer his sacrifice, and so enter more and more fully into the New Covenant. He makes the Church present to his Father, and sends the holy Spirit to build up the Church to be more and more fully his mystical Body.

We have been re-discovering too the work of the holy Spirit in the Eucharist. The gifts that he brings are primarily community gifts, though they are given through individuals. The great gifts of the Spirit that are mentioned in the liturgy are those of unity and peace. The holy Spirit is the bond of love, not only within the Trinity, but also in the Church.

The Church is primarily a communion. We enter this communion through Baptism, which can be called a 'collegial' sacrament: it creates a supernatural bond which links all the baptized. This togetherness in Christ,

¹ *The Way*, July and October, 1972.

this belonging to each other in the Spirit, finds its nourishment and principle of growth in the Eucharist. Through the Eucharist the Church grows *as Church*.

Community

What kind of community is the Church? What is its essential nature? How far is it capable of change? How far is it capable of growth? What are the means of its growth? These are the fundamental questions for christian unity. The light that the Eucharist throws on these questions is the main concern of this article.

The Church community is not just any kind of community. It is a community whose life is centred on the Eucharist, the highest point of its activity. It is a different kind of community from any 'natural' community: it is brought into being by the holy Spirit to be the Body of Christ. It is at its deepest level a *supernatural* community, not simply a gathering of people for a human purpose, however praiseworthy.

Yet it is more than a supernatural community (as one might describe a community of religious, gathered together for a supernatural end). It is a supernatural *communion*, a spiritual unity in which individuals are bound together to form a single spiritual reality. It is more than a moral unity. The unity in which christians share is not just 'fellowship' in the ordinary human sense, through the experience of 'togetherness' or 'belonging'. It is fellowship in the holy Spirit. 'Fellowship' is not so strong a word as 'communion', because it tends to have overtones of the personal and social values that belong to the community of ordinary life. The Church community does not depend on a shared experience at the emotional level, or on a shared 'spirit', but on the communion of the holy Spirit himself.

Yet we could underestimate (as we so often do) the natural social values in the community life of the Church. We must always remember that the Church is not an invisible Church of the Spirit but a Church of incarnation, of flesh and blood. We see this most clearly when we share the eucharistic action. The supernatural fellowship must be incarnated if it is to be the Body of Christ, visible, tangible, perceptible. St John, writing of our sharing in the christian life, speaks of the Word of life expressing himself through the relationships of ordinary life:

We have heard it;
we have seen it with our own eyes;
we looked upon it,
and felt it with our own hands.²

The basic way in which the Word of life is expressed and incarnated in the life of the Church is by means of the sacraments. The sacraments, of course, do not exhaust the rich vitality of life within the Church. There are, for example, the basic gifts of faith, hope and charity. There is too the ever-

² I John 1, 1.

present word of God in the scriptures. But at the heart of the Church's life is its sacramental centre.

This does not deny the existence of other, less definable gifts within the Church. There are those relatively uncharted seas that we call the 'charismatic' life of the Church. But the Church cannot be defined as a charismatic Church (as if Pentecost had not given it its essential structure and endowment), whereas it can, and must, be defined as a sacramental Church. It is from the sacramental source that charisms flow: the charismatic 'renewal' must be related to the 'structural' sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and holy Order, for each of these is a 'charism',³ not transient but enduring.

A community requires an identity. The Church too must have a 'structure', an identity in the midst of change, incarnated in a special form of community peculiar to herself. We may call this her *ecclesial* identity, that is, her personality as *ecclesia*, as the Church, a communion brought into being and sustained continuously by the holy Spirit, and focussed in the sacraments, and especially in the Eucharist. This *ecclesial* identity is a constant, an invariable. Other aspects of the community life of the Church may be variable: this one by definition is invariable.

Here we come to the very core of the problem of Church unity. What we seek ultimately is *ecclesial* unity. Uniformity of outward structure and practice – though often desirable and perhaps to some degree humanly necessary – is always secondary.

The levels of community

The problem we have just raised is, however, deeper than simply that of christian unity. It is not only a question of isolating the kind of unity that will provide the basis for christian reunion. There is another problem to be tackled also: the interaction between the different levels of community in the very complex life of the Church. We may define the essential unity of the Church, and forget that in the human situation other factors play their part in fostering or hindering this unity. We never live in an abstract world of theory. We have to examine the ways in which the various dimensions of the Church's life interact on each other, and the influence they have on the *ecclesial* unity that is at the very heart of the Church.

Here we consider three broad areas of community life within the Church. To isolate them helps us to see what is really essential, but we must remember that they can never be entirely isolated from each other in the real world of flesh and blood.

There is, first, the *social* dimension of community life, with all its emotions, prejudices, tensions, scales of value. There is, secondly, the life of the Church as a religious society. This we can call the *ecclesiastical* life of the Church, and so distinguish it (necessarily too neatly) from the third and most important level of the Church's life, that of its strictly *ecclesial* identity.

³ 1 Tim 4, 14 (of the charism of priesthood).

We turn now to take a very sweeping view of these three dimensions of the Church's life. Our object is to try to discover the kind of 'community' proper to each. This will help us to see where change is possible, where change is necessary, and where change, though possible, may bring with it its own special problems. Our investigation serves a double purpose: an ecumenical one, in bringing into clearer light the fundamental ecumenical problem, and a spiritual one, in helping on the process of renewal within each church, which is itself the indispensable preparation for ecumenical growth.

The Church as social community

The Church is, as we have said, a Church of flesh and blood. Its members are, by and large, ordinary human beings, living in a real world. They are likely to share the mental and cultural background of the social group into which they are born. They are men or women, adults or children, of their generation and culture.

Two principles are relevant at this point. The first is positive. There are certain personal, social values which must find expression in any truly 'human' community, even in the unique society that we call the Church. The Church does not preach an etherialized doctrine of salvation from this world: she preaches a gospel to be incarnated in the world. The world was made to be one in Christ. The Church prepares the world for Christ by building on the human values sanctified by Christ through his incarnation. The world is not simply to be saved from 'the world', but is to be restored to its true unity and wholeness.

There is in fact an interdependence between the unity of mankind and the unity of the Church. This was the main theme explored at the Faith and Order Commission meeting at Louvain in August, 1971.⁴ We can see the importance of this theme for christian unity: the vision of a world united at the human level is a partial realization of the great vision of the fulness of unity in Christ. Conversely, the vision of the *una sancta*, the Church made fully one in Christ, can provide a stimulus to prepare the world for Christ through the unity of mankind. But these twin unities, though each belongs to the fulness of unity willed by Christ, must not be confused with each other. Of the two, the unity of the Church is incomparably the more important, but the search for this unity will be seriously hampered if it is not accompanied by the search for the other.

A Church which concentrates on supernatural unity without seeking to incarnate in its life the values of a truly human community of people is hardly likely to achieve its goal. There are therefore two extremes to be avoided: a purely natural gospel of salvation in this world, and a purely spiritual gospel of salvation in the world to come.

The second principle is negative. Because the Church exists in the world,

⁴ 'Faith and Order, Louvain 1971', Study Reports and Documents, Faith and Order Paper No. 59, World Council of Churches, Geneva.

it always stands in need of purification. The sinful, unredeemed world invades the Church all too easily. The world and its bogus values wound the members of the Church through personal sin, or leave their mark in the inherited, often unconscious, attitudes that pass from generation to generation. These are largely the product of community pressures, the overspill of false 'community' values in the past. They cripple the Church in its efforts to form a truly human, truly ecclesial, community.

The Church lives between partial and total redemption. There are areas within each of us – and within the various social groupings with which we allow ourselves to be more or less identified – where we are still 'unredeemed', prisoners of a sinful past not of our own making. It is part of the Church's mission to liberate society – communities, cultures, groups – through the redeeming and healing power of the gospel. There is always a need for a gospel before the gospel, casting out the demons of society, replacing them by true values for social community living, and so reclaiming for Christ the areas of unredemption in our midst.

But it would be a mistake to identify the whole mission of the Church in these terms or at this level. The world will never fully realize its unity in Christ until it is one at all levels of a truly human community and of a truly ecclesial society. But there is always the danger of deception. We can be victims of false categories of thinking, even in the defence of what is essential to the Church. The concepts of freedom and authority – both intrinsic to the mission of the Church – can take on a distorted meaning from a false, but unconscious, equation between society and Church. It is right to reject authoritarianism in the Church, but wrong to replace it by the concept of an open and free society conceived in political terms. The model of freedom and authority in the Church is unique: the Son who is also Servant of all.

The Church as religious society

The Church is a special kind of human society as well as a community created by the holy Spirit and living by his gifts. It has then to establish, preserve and promote the sense of its own identity, and the identity of the individual in relation to the community. The need for external structures helping to establish identity is deep in human nature, and part of our body-soul personality. We cannot live wholly by ourselves: we are made for community, and so need to identify our relationship with it, and having identified it to express it in meaningful ways. The same is true of our life in the holy Spirit.

The external structures of the Church are important (and the same is true of religious life) because they embody certain supernatural values. In themselves they may be of greater or less value. They can change, and be renewed or altered with increasing insight into the values they seek to incarnate. In the religious society of the Church, this is the general area of canon law. Canon law is necessary to support, defend and maintain the inner reality of the Church's life, its strictly ecclesial endowment: what

makes the Church to be essentially the Church. If these structures do not give the support they exist to provide, still more if they weaken or obscure our insight into the ecclesial reality of the Church, they must be exchanged for other structures which will help us to see more clearly the splendid vision of what the Church really is.

But there must be some structure. In the quest for its own identity human nature requires a good deal of community support. There is a delicate interplay between the structure of society and the values it embodies. We can see this, for example, in the case of liturgy, which is an external structure embodying supernatural values.

A note on liturgy

The sense of belonging, that is, of community, may be intensely felt in the liturgy, or sharply missed. But community can exist at different levels, meeting different needs. There is the emotionally felt sense of 'togetherness' experienced by a group of like-minded young people. There is the quiet sense of communion with God that grows out of an adult's experience of life itself. The liturgy has to meet both needs, and gradually deepen the sense of belongingness of the young until it becomes the fuller experience of the more mature. It has also to support obscurity of faith, dryness in prayer, the moods of later years.

We cannot live always at the intensity of emotion that characterizes youth. There are times when the liturgy must support our faith by its very objectivity, its familiarity and sense of timelessness. The structures of the liturgy – its shape, its language, its silences – help us to grow in understanding of our relationship with God. We grow to see ourselves as we really are, and the Church as she really is. Such structures do not create identity, but they help to establish it.

The Church as ecclesial community

The Church's true identity exists at the ecclesial level. At this level the Church is most fully Church. It may be difficult to say exactly what the Church is in its inmost being, but at least some indications can be given.

The ecclesial life of the Church is the life of faith, hope and charity in its living source, the unique partnership between the holy Spirit and the Church. It is the gospel at the heart of the Church. It is the sacramental life of the Church.

The sacramental life of the Church, because it is sacramental, can be seen to exist at two levels. There is the essential sacramental reality of grace, and its outward expression in the liturgy. The ritual of liturgy is properly described as ecclesiastical rather than ecclesial, but it enshrines an ecclesial reality.

This ecclesial life of the Church will manifest itself in the fruits of the Spirit. It is a life that, though hidden as to its ultimate mystery, reveals itself in the christian way of life.

We must here distinguish between what is ecclesial and what is charismatic. The Church is essentially a sacramental Church; it is also a charismatic Church. But the Church would still be Church without the charismatic manifestations of the Spirit. It would not be fully the Church if it did not have the sacraments, for the centre of its ecclesial life is sacramental and eucharistic.

The ministry as ecclesial reality

This raises the question of the minister of the Eucharist: in catholic theology the celebrant of the Eucharist is bishop or priest. Each possesses the sacrament of holy Order, though not in equal degree. Holy Order is part of the ecclesial reality of the Church.

This is one of the most acute problems for christian unity. But the exact area of the problem can be seen more clearly with the help of the distinction we have drawn between the three dimensions of the Church's life. The problem exists at the level of the ecclesiastical and the ecclesial, not at the social level. There may exist social or cultural accretions to the notion of the ministry – the concept of *sacerdotium* overlaid by that of *imperium*, for example – but this does not touch the essential problem.

We can also, within the limits of catholic orthodoxy, allow a certain freedom to the Church in the way it has arranged the structures of the ministry. The emergence of bishop, priest and deacon as separate orders – or rather as different degrees of participation in the one sacrament of holy Order – can be interpreted as an *ecclesiastical* rearrangement of the *ecclesial* powers of the sacrament. What we cannot say is that each degree is a purely ecclesiastical structure.

In the ecumenical dialogue on the nature of the ministry certain points must be kept in mind. First, the concept of 'hierarchy' cannot be based on a 'political' model of personal superiority or inferiority. It is based on a differentiation of *function*. The true subject of dialogue is not therefore the threefold ministry but the nature of the powers inherent in the episcopal function.

Secondly, the sacrament of Order is a *collegial* sacrament: the bishops, in virtue of their ordination, form one college, one sacramental communion, whose centre is the bishop of Rome. Apostolic succession is to be seen as essentially the succession of the college of bishops to the college of the apostles; the fact of being 'in the apostolic succession' comes from being admitted to the college of bishops through the collegial act of ordination to the episcopate, the seal set on unity of faith.

Thirdly, the sacrament of Order is a *conciliar* sacrament. The college of bishops in communion with the Pope have the power of binding and loosing, that is, of declaring the ecclesial faith of the Church and of establishing its ecclesiastical practice. And, just as the college of bishops exercises the ecclesial function of the apostles, so the Pope exercises the petrine function as its head.

Here is the material for a constructive dialogue on the ministry: the discernment of what is truly ecclesial in the ministry, and how it differs from what is ecclesiastical.

Intercommunion

Finally, let us look at another problem connected with the Eucharist and its relation to the community of the Church. This is the problem of 'intercommunion'. There is a growing pressure on the catholic church, especially from young people or those who speak in their name, to relax its traditional attitude to intercommunion. The catholic church sees admission to holy communion as dependent normally on full acceptance of its teaching, including its doctrine of the ministry.

This pressure can be a great stimulus to theology. It focusses attention on the most important area of the Church's life: the expression of unity in the great sacrament of unity itself. But the pressure may come from a false concept of 'community'. Young people – and older people too – place great value on 'fellowship', on a shared experience. They feel that there is something wrong in calling each other christian and being unable to share in the expression of their common christian life in holy communion.

But such a sharing in holy communion as an expression of fellowship must be authentic: it must express the true depth of community, and reach right down to the level of the Church's inmost reality. Intercommunion, if it is to be a genuinely ecclesial experience, must be based on a fully shared faith, not on a shared emotion only.

This ecclesial character of the Eucharist has been stressed again in a recent instruction from the Secretariate for Promoting Christian Unity.⁵ It seeks to do justice to two fundamental aspects of the Eucharist, the ecclesial and the pastoral. The first concerns the corporate life of the Church, that is, the Church as ecclesial community: at this level, by receiving holy communion one identifies oneself completely with the Church. The second concerns the spiritual needs of individuals. The guidelines already given by the Secretariate⁶ try to harmonize both these aspects without injury to the first, in those exceptional cases where individuals, members of other churches or ecclesial communities, are seriously deprived of the ministrations of their own pastor and request communion from the catholic church. The most recent instruction offers some clarifications, without changing the principles already given.

⁵ 'Instruction concerning cases when other christians may be admitted to Eucharistic Communion in the Catholic Church', 1st June, 1972.

⁶ 'Ecumenical Directory, Part 1', nn. 44, 55 (1967); 'Declaration of the Secretariate for Promoting Christian Unity: The Position of the Catholic Church concerning a common Eucharist between Christians of different Confessions', 7th January 1970.

This apparently negative attitude of the catholic church on the question of intercommunion may well prove in the long term to be one of the most constructive contributions to the ecumenical movement. It invites other christians to a fundamental dialogue on the nature of the Church itself. The relationship between Eucharist and Church, between Eucharist and community, must lead to a renewed vision of the Church as the eucharistic community of faith and love.

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