

"BRIDGING" STATEMENT from EUCHARIST to MINISTRY

Before moving on to consider the relationship of the Church's ministry to the Eucharist, it may be helpful to examine a little more fully the nature of the relationship between the latter and the redeeming death of Christ.

This problem which seems to have been the crucial issue (in this area) between the Roman Church and the Reformers arises from the mystery of the sacrifice of Christ. In essence, the sacrificial achievement of Christ was brought about by his obediential service of his Father (Rom 5:19; Phil 2:8; Heb 5:8). It is important to bear in mind always that what gives redemptive, atoning or propitiatory value to the event of Calvary is, of course, the fact that this was a manifestation in outward, visible form of the interior invisible attitude of acceptance (John 10:18). In other words, it is not so much the event of calvary which constitutes the essence of Christ's redeeming work, but the underlying reality of "obedience". It is this latter which enables us to talk of Christ's "eternal" sacrifice, his "perpetual" priesthood (Heb 7:24), of the Lamb "slain from the very foundation of the world" (Rev 13:8).

What I want to suggest is that the words in the agreed statement on the Eucharist, para 5: "the making effective in the present of an event in the past", need to be modified in this sense: "historical events, whether past or present, derive their effectiveness from the underlying, timeless reality which is expressed in different ways at different times." Calvary is the redeeming sacrifice of Christ's obedience. The Eucharist is the redeeming sacrifice of Christ, not because of any link at the historical level between it and Calvary

(it is the attempt to establish such a link which leads to language-problems about "memorial", etc.) but because both Calvary and the Eucharist are different ways of showing forth, rendering visible (cf Trent) an abiding, invisible reality, the unchanging obedience of Son to Father.

To put it another way. Christ's redeeming work can be thought of in two ways. In a sense, it is a once-for-all achievement (Rom 5 etc). But it is equally true to say that it is an ongoing work, the "application" of the work of Christ, through the Church, as a matter of history. This is why Christ's priesthood is an abiding reality, the trans-temporal paradigm of the Christian ministry. Since Christ's priestly activity is his work of reconciliation through his redemptive obedience, fully manifested on Calvary, so the work of his priests is manifested in the Church, seen as subject and object of Redemption. As a royal priesthood, the people of God, sharing in Christ's salvific work, bring healing to the world, but only by themselves being first healed. Within the general priestly function of the Church, the ordained ministry has its peculiar contribution to make to the work of the whole. It is this contribution which is the subject-matter of this statement.

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