

COPY OF LETTER FROM MISS HELLE GEORGIADIS (Hon. Secretary of the
SOCIETY OF ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM)

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Dear Bishop Clark,

I have received from ECEW a copy of the Agreed Statement on Eucharistic Doctrine and I felt I should write to you to express my deep concern. Had this been an interim statement one might feel it was too early to start worrying. But the concluding paragraph says: "we are convinced that if there are any remaining points of disagreement they can be resolved on the principles here established".

This implies that all the fundamental issues concerning Eucharistic Doctrine are dealt with in the Statement. I appreciate the methodology used in the Anglican/R.C. conversations to seek the widest area over which agreement could be expressed, but I do not think that either in logic or in fact what is found to be common ground is the whole ground of faith.

My principal worries are as follows:-

1. This Statement is not Trinitarian in either its wording or its implications, and consequently the presentation of the action of the mass is out of balance. The Statement presents this action as Christ offering himself to men (e.g. in 3 and 7), but Christ's offering was to the Father on behalf of men. The Church's offering in the Eucharist is the offering of Christ to the Father for men in obedience to Christ and in his name.

This is quite explicit in the Roman mass and the Roman canon (now Eucharistic Prayer I) and has even survived the liturgical reformers in the New Order of Mass and in Eucharistic Prayers II, III and IV. Yet the Statement makes no reference to this - presumably because to do so would raise the whole question of the mass as a sacrifice, and it is evident from paragraph 5 and the first footnote that this aspect of the mass was intentionally played down.

2. I am worried by paragraph 5. I know it is fashionable among R.C. theologians today to seek to minimize the "sacrificial" view of the mass and to replace it with a community-celebration-meal interpretation (with eclectic quotes from the O.T. tradition).

One can see this tendency in the New Order of Mass. Chuminess with one's fellows in the congregation is regarded as much more appropriate than genuflecting at the Incarnation, or expressing penitence or kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament. The theology behind this seems to me very thin. Already attendance at mass among the young has slumped (I know this from Catholic schools here). If the Altar in Church is replaced by a simple table round which the community can celebrate a meal, what is the point of going to Church? One can celebrate with one's friends anywhere, and if gathered together in Christ's name he has promised to be there. Why have a priest at all? And if feelings of good fellowship and social concern are the end product of the communal meal one doesn't even need to invoke the name of Christ, as thousands of agnostic humanists have proved.

I fear that if this Statement on Eucharistic Doctrine is widely accepted by Catholics our Churches will very soon become as empty as the Anglican ones.

3. The comment on the Mystery of the Eucharist (3) gives a very subjective and rather ambiguous impression:

"When his people are gathered at the Eucharist ... Christ makes effective among us the eternal benefits of his victory ..." - surely in Baptism these eternal benefits have already been made effective?

"... Christ makes effective among us ... the eternal benefits ..." Why among us? What does it mean? Would the intention of this Statement be altered if "among us" was omitted? e.g. does it mean that celebrating the Eucharist cannot benefit those who are not present (the faithful departed, the dying, the 'lapsed' members etc)?

Or does it mean that the benefits are communal and not individual?

One has no sense at all from this Statement of the Pauline teaching that God became man so that man could be deified and that the sacramental meal has a deep eschatological significance. Instead the Eucharist is presented as an exercise in fellowship with Christ and with one another (not with Christ and in Christ with one another).

4. The first paragraph of the Statement declares "Our intention has been to seek a deeper understand ... which is consonant with biblical teaching and with the tradition of our common inheritance". This 'consonant with the common inheritance' presumably explains why there is no reference to devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, which has been the guide light to holiness for so many Catholics.

The explicit omission of this mode of Christ's presence among his faithful seems to me to have serious pastoral implications for Catholics. Paragraph 8 appears to say something about this devotion if one wants it to, but not if one doesn't: since the reference to 'eucharistic presence' and the context of this paragraph between 7, which refers to the entire eucharistic celebration, and 9, which declares that the Lord's words, 'Take and eat, "do not allow us to dissociate the gift of the presence and the act of sacramental eating"', clearly exclude extra-liturgical devotion to the Blessed Sacrament.

Many people argue, Anglicans in particular, that because the Orthodox and other Eastern Christians do not have special devotion to the Blessed Sacrament there is no justification for the R.C. tradition. But the argument is based on ignorance of the Eastern position:

viz. (i) The Reserved Sacrament is held in very great honour and respect in the Eastern tradition and it is approached with great reverence.

(ii) Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament is an expression of devotion to the Mystery of the Incarnation. In the Eastern tradition the Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the sanctuary which is protected by closed doors from the rest of the church. Devotion to the Mystery of the Incarnation is focussed on Holy Ikons which offer a sacramental meeting between the faithful and the Lord himself, or the Lord in his mysteries and his saints. Ikons have a liturgical place in the Eastern rite, they are not just pious decorations before which candles may be lit. The priest censes the ikons after censing the Altar and before censing the congregation.

To sweep away devotion to the Blessed Sacrament without there being any alternative means of personal devotion to the Lord's presence seems to be to leave the door wide open to progressive agnosticism on the one hand and to spurious quasi-religious cults on the other.

It may be that the 'gates of hell will not prevail' against the Church but I often remember Our Lord's words - will the Son of Man find faith on earth when he returns?

Yours sincerely,

(signed) Helle Georgiadis