

ARC IV Statement on the Eucharist (1967)

Since the time of the Reformation, the doctrine of Eucharistic sacrifice has been considered a major obstacle to the reconciliation of the Anglican Communion and the Roman Catholic Church. It is the conviction of our commission that this is no longer true.

We have made a careful study of the Documents of the Second Vatican Council, the Lambeth Conference Report of 1958, the 1949 Statement of Faith and Order of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the USA and other statements of the contemporary position of both our Churches. From these statements, it is clear to us that the findings of modern biblical, theological and liturgical studies have transcended many of the polemical formulations of an earlier period.

We believe that it is of utmost importance for the clergy and laity of our two Churches to acknowledge their substantial identity in this area of Eucharistic doctrine, and to build upon it as they go forward in dialogue. Whatever doctrinal disagreements may remain between our Churches, the understanding of the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist is not among them.

Below is an effort to sum up the consensus at which we have arrived.

The Church is the Body of Christ and is built up by the Word through the Eucharist.

Baptism is the entrance into the eucharistic community. In the Holy Eucharist Christians are united with Christ as the fulfillment and perfection of their baptismal union with him.

In the Lord's Supper we participate at the same time in Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension; the Christian community is thus transformed in grace and the pledge of future glory is given to us.

Our communion with Christ in the Holy Eucharist is also communion with one another. Such union is achieved through the Holy Spirit.

Christian people participating in Christ's priesthood through baptism and confirmation are meant to be a living sacrifice to God. That sacrifice finds its fullest expression in the eucharistic offering of the priesthood of the people of God. Such sacramental offering of the whole people is made possible through the special action of the ministerial priest, who is empowered by his ordination to make present Christ's sacrifice for his people.

The Sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist is not just the sacrifice of the cross but the sacrifice of Christ's whole life of obedience to the Father which culminated in his death on the cross and his glorious resurrection. We offer nothing we have not first received; because of our incorporation into Christ at baptism, he offers us in himself to the Father.

Following are pertinent passages from the documents upon which the above statement is based.

From Vatican Council II

What has revealed the love of God among us is that the only begotten Son of God has been sent by the Father into the world, so that, being made man, the Son might by His redemption of the entire human race give new life to it and unify it (cf. 1 Jn. 4:9; Col. 1:18-20; Jn. 11:52). Before offering Himself up as a spotless victim upon the altar of the cross, he prayed to His Father for those who believe; “That all may be one even as thou, Father, in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (Jn. 17:21). In His Church He instituted the wonderful sacrament of the Eucharist by which the unity of the Church is both signified and brought about. He gave His followers a new commandment of mutual love (cf. Jn. 13:34), and promised the Spirit, their Advocate (cf. Jn. 16:7), who, as Lord and life-giver, would abide with them forever. (Decree on Ecumenism, par. 2)

In the human nature which He united to Himself, the Son of God redeemed man and transformed him into a new creation (cf. Gal. 6:15; 2 Cor. 5:17) by overcoming death through His own death and resurrection. By communicating His Spirit to His brothers, called together from all peoples, Christ made them mystically into His own body.

In that body, the life of Christ is poured into the believers, who, through the sacraments, are united in a hidden and real way to Christ who suffered and was glorified. Through baptism we are formed in the likeness of Christ: “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13). In this sacred rite, a union with Christ’s death and resurrection is both symbolized and brought about: “For we were buried with him by means of Baptism into death.” And if “we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall be so in the likeness of his resurrection also” (Rom. 6:4-5). (Constitution On The Church, par. 7)

At the Last Supper, on the night when He was betrayed, our Savior instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice of His Body and Blood. He did this in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the Cross throughout the centuries until He should come again, and so to entrust to His beloved spouse, the Church, a memorial of His death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us. (Constitution On The Sacred Liturgy, par. 47)

Truly partaking of the body of the Lord in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with Him and with one another. “Because the bread is one, we though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread” (1 Cor. 10:17). In this way all of us are made members of His body (cf. 1 Cor. 12:27), “but severally members one of another” (Rom. 12:5). (Constitution On The Church, par. 7)

As all the members of the human body, though they are many, form one body, so also are the faithful in Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 12:12). Also, in the building up of Christ’s body there is a flourishing variety of members and functions. There is only one Spirit who, according to His own richness and the needs of the ministries, distributes His different gifts for the welfare of the Church (cf. 1 Cor.

12:1-11). Among these gifts stands out the grace given to the apostles. To their authority, the Spirit Himself subjected even those who were endowed with charisms (cf. 1 Cor. its). Giving the body unity through Himself and through His power and through the internal cohesion of its members, this same Spirit produces and urges love among the believers. Consequently, if one member suffers anything, all the members suffer it too, and, if one member is honored, all the members rejoice together (cf. 1 Cor. 12:26). (Constitution On The Church, par. 7)

Christ the Lord, High Priest taken from among men (cf. Heb. 5:1-5), “made a kingdom and priests to God his Father” (Apoc. 1:6; cf. 5:9-10) out of this new people. The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated into a spiritual house and a holy priesthood. Thus through all those works befitting Christian men they can offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the power of Him who has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light (cf. 1 Pet 2:4-10). Therefore all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God (cf. Acts 2:142-G.7), should present themselves as living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God (cf. Rom. 12:1). Everywhere on earth they must bear witness to Christ and give an answer to those who seek an account of that hope of eternal life which is in them (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15). (same, par. 10)

Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchial priesthood are nonetheless interrelated. Each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ. The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, molds and rules the priestly people. Acting in the person of Christ, he brings about the Eucharistic Sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people. For their part, the faithful join in the offering of the Eucharist by virtue of their royal priesthood. They likewise exercise that priesthood by receiving the sacraments, by prayer and thanksgiving, by the witness of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity. (same, par. 10)

From 1949 Statement of Faith and Order of the Episcopal Church

The fundamental Christian ministry is the ministry of Christ. There is no Christian priesthood or ministry apart from His. His priestly and ministerial function is to reconcile the world to God in and through Himself, by His Incarnation and by His “one sacrifice once offered” and by the gift of the Holy Spirit, delivering men from the power of sin and death.

The Church as the Body of Christ, sharing His life, has a ministerial function derived from that of Christ. In this function every member has his place and share according to his different capabilities and calling. The Church is set before us in the New Testament as a body of believers having within it, as its recognized focus of unity, of teaching and of authority, the Apostolate, which owed its origin to the action of the Lord Himself. There was not first an Apostolate which gathered a body of believers about itself; nor was there a completely structureless collection of believers which gave authority to the Apostles to speak and act on its behalf. From the first there was the fellowship of believers finding its unity in the Twelve. Thus the New Testament bears witness to the principle of a distinctive ministry, as an original element, but not the sole constitutive element, in the life of the Church. (section D. 1)

From Vatican Council II

It is through the sacraments and the exercise of the virtues that the sacred nature and organic structure of the priestly community is brought into operation. Incorporated into the Church through baptism, the faithful are consecrated by the baptismal character to the exercise of the cult of the Christian religion. Reborn as sons of God, they must confess before men the faith which they have received from God through the Church. Bound more intimately to the Church by the sacrament of confirmation, they are endowed by the Holy Spirit with special strength. Hence they are more strictly obliged to spread and defend the faith both by word and by deed as true witnesses of Christ.

Taking part in the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is the fount and apex of the whole Christian life, they offer the divine Victim to God, and offer themselves along with It. Thus, both by the act of oblation and through holy communion, all perform their proper part in this liturgical service, not, indeed, all in the same way but each in that way which is appropriate to himself. Strengthened anew at the holy table by the Body of Christ, they manifest in a practical way that unity of God's People which is suitably signified and wondrously brought about by this most awesome sacrament. (Constitution On The Church, par. 11)

From The Lambeth Conference 1958

It is commonly acknowledged that what Christ accomplished on the cross can properly be described as a sacrifice. It is enough to recall the two sacrificial sayings of our Lord Himself, "My life a ransom for many" and "This is my blood of the covenant which is shed for many" and the phrases in the Epistle to the Hebrews (10.10, 12) "The offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all", and "when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God."

The sacrifice is an act of willing obedience, "Lo, I am come to do thy will, O God" (Hebrews 10.7; Phil. 2.8), and inasmuch as Christ is not only perfect and representative man but also the eternal Son of God, this act of will is not only the one perfect response of humanity to the will of God but also it is the will of God going out to man in yearning love. The new man, the Adam who is Christ, fulfils in the Cross the thanksgiving of man to God. In Christ the fullness of God giving himself to man meets with the fullness of man offering himself to God.

The sacrifice of Christ as the offering of willing obedience included not only his death on the Cross but all that contributed to it, of which it was the culmination. The finished work of Calvary is consummated in the resurrection and ascension.

This sacrifice is once and for all, but though it cannot be repeated, it is not merely a past fact; it is not only an event in history, but the revelation of eternal truth. He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, now seated at the right hand of God after the power of an endless life.

The fact revealed in time past has to be continually translated into the present by the operation of the Spirit. "He will take what is mine and declare it to you" (John 16.14).

Christ's sacrificial work on the Cross was for us; he died just as our Redeemer. He who once died and is now alive for ever more is also in us; he dwells in our hearts by faith. And in virtue of this union, we are now identified with him both in his death and passion, and in his resurrection life and glory. There is but one Body, of which he is the Head and we are members; and we are made one with each other because we are one in Him.

In our baptism we were united with him by the likeness of his death (Rom. 6.5) and in the Eucharist we abide in him as we eat his Body and drink his Blood (John 6.5 6). So we come to the Father in and through Jesus our great High Priest. We have nothing to offer that we have not first received, but we offer our praise and thanksgiving for Christ's sacrifice for us and so present it again, and ourselves in him, before the Father. We are partakers of the sacrifice of Christ (1 Cor. 10.16), and this is shown forth by our sacrifice of praise to God continually through Christ (Heb. 13.15), and by our life of service and suffering for his sake in the world (Phil. 3.9, 10). We ourselves, incorporate in the mystical body of Christ, are the sacrifice we offer. Christ with us offers us in himself to God. (section 2.83-8L)

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