EuroJTh (1999) **8:1**, 49–59 0960–2720

• The Cross and the Eucharist: the doctrine of the atonement according to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
• *La croix et l'eucharistie: la doctrine de l'expiation dans le* « catéchisme de l'Église Catholique »
• *Das Kreuz und die Eucharistie: Die Sühnelehre des* Katechismus der Katholischen Kirche

Leonardo De Chirico, Rome

RÉSUMÉ

Dans le « Catéchisme de l'Église Catholique » de 1992, la doctrine de l'expiation est traitée sur un mode quelque peu « mineur ».

Le point de vue catholique sur l'expiation est présenté dans le contexte du commentaire de l'article IV de la profession de la Foi Chrétienne (c'est à dire le symbole des Apôtres) qui déclare: « Jésus-Christ a souffert sous Ponce Pilate, il a été crucifié, il est mort et a été enseveli ». Le commentaire du magistère se trouve dans les paragraphes 595 à 623.

La portée du sacrifice du Christ pour le salut est précisée en termes de « réconciliation » (613, 614), « de rédemption et de réparation », « d'expiation et de satisfaction » (616), mais on ne rencontre aucune explication de ces termes. Le Catéchisme adopte le point de vue d'une expiation universelle et illimitée, en accord avec la tradition bien établie du concile de Trente.

Le bref exposé consacré à la portée rédemptrice de la passion et de la mort de Jésus-Christ ouvre la porte à la compréhension spécifiquement catholique des sacrements en général et de l'eucharistie en particuller (1322–1419). Une lecture, même rapide, du contenu du Catéchisme laissera percevoir un contraste frappant entre une théologie de la croix rapidement esquissée, et une théologie des sacrements largement développée. Le Catéchisme accorde beaucoup plus d'importance à la représentation eucharistique de l'expiation et à son actualisation sacramentelle, qu'à l'événement historique survenu une fois pour toutes et à sa portée rédemptrice. À la fin de la section sur la passion et la mort de Jésus-Christ, le Catéchisme parle de « notre participation au sacrifice du Christ » (618). La participation réelle de l'Église au sacrifice du Christ est parfaitement légitime, et est en fait un pur truisme, dans le cadre de la dogmatique catholique. L'implication de l'Église est si importante que l'eucharistie elle-même est présentée comme « le mémorial sacrificiel du Christ et de son corps l'Église » (1362). L'eucharistie est pour l'Église, mais aussi de l'Église et par l'Église (1118). Si nous examinons attentivement ce qui est explicitement affirmé ou implicitement admis dans le Catéchisme en ce qui concerne l'œuvre de la rédemption, il est clair que les lignes directrices fondamentales de la théologie sont en jeu dans les points que nous venons de voir brièvement. La notion de la re-présentation sacramentelle du sacrifice du Christ, alliée à celle de la participation de l'Église à ce sacrifice, touche au cœur du catholicisme. Dans sa manière d'aborder l'œuvre de la croix et l'eucharistie, le

Catéchisme réitère simplement l'ensemble de l'enseignement du concile de Trente tel qu'il a été réaffirmé par Vatican II, sans apporter d'élément nouveau qui pourrait le rapprocher d'une théologie de l'expiation plus évangélique.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Im Katechismus der Katholischen Kirche von 1992 wird der Sühnelehre nur eine Art Nebenrolle zugestanden. Die katholische Sicht der Sühne wird im Zusammenhang mit der Auslegung des vierten Artikels des Bekenntnisses des christlichen Glaubens (d. h. dem Apostolischen Glaubensbekenntnis) erläutert. Dort finden wir die Worte: 'Jesus Christus, gelitten unter Pontius Pilatus, gekreuzigt, gestorben und begraben'. Der maßgebliche Kommentar dazu findet sich in § 595–623.

Die Heilsdimension von Christi Opfer wird mittels der Konzepte 'Versöhnung' (§ 613–614), 'Erlösung und Wiedergutmachung' sowie 'Sühne und Genugtuung' (§ 616) beschrieben. Eine nähere Erläuterung der Begriffe findet sich jedoch nicht. Der Katechismus vertritt im Einklang mit der etablierten tridentinischen Tradition die universelle und unbegrenzte Dimension der Sühne.

Die knappe Erläuterung der soteriologischen Bedeutung des Leidens und Sterbens Jesu Christi bahnt den Weg zu einem spezifisch katholischen Verständnis der Sakramente im allgemeinen sowie der Eucharistie im besonderen (§ 1322–1419). Selbst ein flüchtiger Blick in das Inhaltsverzeichnis des Katechismus offenbart die gewaltige Diskrepanz zwischen der knapp umrissenen Theologie des Kreuzes und der ausführlich entwickelten Sakramentelehre. Der Katechismus hat scheinbar ein größeres Interesse daran, die Repräsentation der Sühne in der Eucharistie sowie deren Aktualisierung im Sakrament hervorzuheben als ihren historischen (als etwas ein für allemal Geschehenes) und heilschaffenden Charakter aufzuzeigen.

Am Ende des Abschnitts über das Leiden und Sterben Jesu Christi verweist der Katechismus auf 'unsere Teilhabe am Opfer Christi' (§ 618). Daß die Kirche tatsächlich Teil hat am Opfer Christi, erscheint im Rahmen der katholischen Dogmatik als vollkommen zulässig, ja als eine Binsenwahrheit. Die Rolle der Kirche ist so maßgebend, daß die Eucharistie als das 'Gedächtnis an das Opfer Christi und seinen Leib, die Kirche' erscheint (§ 1362). Die Eucharistie ist also ein Opfer für die Kirche von der Kirche und durch die Kirche (§ 1118). Wenn man die expliziten Behauptungen und impliziten Annahmen des Katechismus bezüglich des Versöhnungswerkes sorgfältig betrachtet, dann wird deutlich, daß in dem hier kurz Umrissenen das elementare Gedankengebäude des Katholizismus zutage tritt. Die Theologie der sakramentalen Repräsentation des Opfers Christi zusammen mit der Theologie der kirchlichen Teilhabe am Opfer Christi stellen das Herzstück des Katholizismus dar. In seiner Behandlung von Kreuzesthematik und Eucharistie wiederholt der Katechismus schlicht das Gros der tridentinischen Lehre in der Form, wie sie vom Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil neu formuliert worden war. Neues im Sinne einer eventuellen Annäherung an eine stärker evangelisch geprägte Theologie der Sühne findet sich hier nicht.

Generally speaking, Roman Catholic doctrinal statements, both creedal formulations and catechistic tools show a high degree of theological sophistication. The wisdom, depth, width of the sapiential tradition of the church is apparent in its official writings. Moreover, Catholic magisterial documents are usually articulated in a language so meditated, pondered and polished that they often require several readings in order to be grasped. It should be recognised that the Vatican, among many other things, also produces masterful pieces of theological elaboration. This is even truer with regard to the works of individual catholic theologians, think of Yves Congar, Karl Rahner, Avery Dulles.... However, there are two doctrinal areas in which this combination of richness of thought and expository ability is not so evident as one would expect: one is these is eschatology, the other is the doctrine of the atonement.

On eschatology and the atonement, just to name two very broad theological *loci*, Catholic magisterial teaching is rather sober, hardly resembling the unmistakable symphonic Catholic way of theologizing. On these doctrines, the *magisterium* usually echoes a scripture-borrowed language and quotes long passages reflecting early church tradition. What seems to be lacking—this is a first, perhaps misleading impression—is the attempt to construe a typically catholic piece of doctrine with all its consolidated features.

In the 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*,[1] the somewhat 'low-key' treatment of the atonement is consistently pursued in line with the above mentioned theological moderation. From a merely quantitative point of view, this scant approach is shown, firstly, by the rather hurried exposition of the significance of Christ's death which covers less than 30 paragraphs (595–623)—approximately 1% of the whole *Catechism*.[2] Secondly, the *Catechism*'s discourse on the atonement adopts a merely descriptive line in dealing with the variety of ways in which the Bible speaks of the cross of Christ. In the text promulgated by pope John Paul II, different biblical images and models of the atonement are evoked in order to present its multifaceted meaning. According to a Catholic commentator, Robert Murray, this descriptive way of presenting the atonement stands in continuity with 'a wise tradition in the Church' whereby no model of the atonement is given 'dogmatic status'.[3] In this respect, it is interesting to note that Murray contrasts the alleged *super-partes* position endorsed by Catholic teaching with the marked evangelical tendency to favour the 'penal substitution theory' as the chief soteriological paradigm for coming to grips with Christ's saving work on the cross. The *Catechism* does not espouse any image of the atonement as the controlling-principle nor does it elevate any image to play the role of hermeneutical regulator of the doctrine itself. Therefore, in expounding magisterial teaching on the atonement, the *Catechism* is said to have simply restated 'the common themes which have always stimulated the Church's prayerful reflection'.[4]

These rather hasty considerations are sufficient to provide a general introduction to the understanding of the atonement as it is articulated in the *Catechism*. To deepen our appreciation of it, it seems necessary to explore the dynamics of the doctrinal exposition which entail the historical events related to Calvary and the sacramental corollary attached to the offering of the cross.

1. The sacrifice of Christ and its historico-salvific significance

The catholic view of the atonement is presented in the context of the exposition of the Fourth Article of the Profession of the Christian Faith (i.e. the Apostles' Creed) which states: 'Jesus Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried'. The magisterial comment can be found in paragraphs 595–623.

In the first part of the section, after recalling the trials of Jesus, attention is given to the fact that the responsibility for Jesus' death is not attributable to the Jews as a specific ethnic group, but to all

sinners as the whole of the human race (595–598). That is to say, on the one hand, Jews are not collectively responsible for Jesus' death and, on the other, all sinners were the authors of Christ's passion and death.

Subsequently, the *Catechism* unfolds the redemptive significance of the events related to the cross in God's plan of salvation. Christ's death was in accordance to God's will to make His love effective in that way (599–600); it was also the fulfilment of the Scriptures' foretelling which prefigured what was to happen, and, in this context, Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering Servant is mentioned (601). Moreover, it was 'for our sake' that Christ died, that is He experienced reprobation not because He himself had sinned but because God 'established him in solidarity with us sinners' (602–603). The reference to the clause 'for our sake' is explained in terms of Jesus assuming us in the state of our waywardness of sin thus establishing a solidarity with sinners. In line with the sobriety of the catholic treatment of the atonement already referred to, no further hints are given as to the way the nature of this 'solidarity' should be understood. To widen the picture, it should be noted that the substitutionary language is also evoked when, in the context of a reference to Isaiah 53,10–12, Jesus is said to have 'accomplished the substitution of the suffering Servant' (615) and thus 'atoned for our faults and made satisfaction for our sin' (615). Solidarity and substitution appear to be the two relevant hermeneutical keys to substantiate theologically the biblical expression 'for our sake'. What seems to be prevalent, however, is an interpretation of the 'for our sake' clause whereby Christ is thought of choosing to be near to sinners, alongside them, beside them. 'For our sake' takes a nuance of meaning underlining the fact of Jesus sympathizing with the fallen human race.

On the whole, these paragraphs stand out for their concentration on the salvific significance of Jesus' life and ministry which finds its climax at Calvary. The full story of Jesus is the core of the presentation as well as the proper context for understanding the events related to the cross. According to Wolfhart Pannenberg, this particular section 'forms a high point of the entire work because here finally attention is paid to modern exegesis in that the sacrifice of Jesus is not presented as an appeasement of the Father nor is it limited to the crucifixion'. In Pannenberg's opinion, the proper focus of this part of the *Catechism* is instead, and rightly so in his view, 'Jesus' entire life of commitment to the mission he received from his Father for the salvation of humanity'.[5]

This is not to say that there is no attempt to provide soteriological insights as far as the atoning meaning of the cross is concerned. As mentioned in the introduction to this paper, the *Catechism*, in its rather descriptive vein, employs different formulae and definitions with reference to Christ's death. The cross is seen, first, in the context of the relationship between the Son and the Father, then in relation to the Paschal theme and, lastly, in terms of what it accomplished redemptively. More specifically, Christ's death is referred to as a 'voluntary offering to the Father for the salvation of men' (610); 'an act of complete and free submission to the Father's will' (1008); 'the Paschal sacrifice that accomplishes the definitive redemption of men' (616); a 'redemptive sacrifice for all' (616); 'a mystery of universal redemption' (601). In an encompassing clause, the salvific apprehension of Christ's sacrifice is specified in terms of 'reconciliation' (613, 614), 'redemption and reparation', 'atonement and satisfaction' (616) but no further elucidation of these terms is provided. Their theological meaning is left loosely undefined and this semantic imprecision should be seen in relation to the rather descriptive purpose already referred to.

Concerning the nature of the sacrifice of Christ, the *Catechism* specifies that it is 'unique' in the sense that 'it completes and surpasses all other sacrifices' (614), that is Old Testament sacrifices. It is therefore a retroactive and retrospective uniqueness, a uniqueness in comparison with the sacrifices of the old covenant

which have ceased in the new dispensation. Whether or not the new covenant demands that the sacrifice of Christ be made present again and again is not mentioned at this point. It is true that earlier on the *Catechism* says that Christ's was a 'perfect and unique oblation on the cross' (529), even though the semantic contours of this perfection and uniqueness are not spelt out. As we will see later, the understanding of the finality of the cross is dealt with in the *Catechism* by inserting it in the wider sacramental system which calls for re-presentation and actualization of the sacrifice of Christ and participation in it.

One aspect which perhaps deserves consideration is related to the *vexata quaestio* concerning the extension of the atonement. In this respect, the *Catechism* espouses the universal, unlimited thrust of the atonement in line with the well-established tridentine tradition. Added to that, as we have seen from the paragraphs already quoted, in the *Catechism* there are numerous texts which point to a universal application of salvation without, of course, explicitly affirming it.

The statement 'Christ died for all men without exception' in his 'universal redeeming love' (605) epitomizes very clearly the catholic position on the matter. Later (616), we read that 'the existence in Christ of the divine person of the Son, who at once surpasses and embraces all human persons, and constitutes himself as the Head of all mankind, makes possible his redemptive sacrifice *for all*'. In order to support the unlimited interpretation of the death of Christ, the *Catechism* quotes the Council of Quiercy (853 AD), which in turn affirms that 'there is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer' (605). This alleged conciliar confirmation of the view of a universal extension of the redemption achieved by the cross appears to be, to say the least, rather inappropriate. In actual fact, the full quotation of the Council of Quiercy is the following: 'as there is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being whose nature has not been assumed by Jesus Christ, our Lord, so there is not, never has been, and never will be a single human being for whom Christ did not suffer; however, not all are redeemed by the mystery of his suffering'.[6]

The appeal to this Council is not convincing for a number of reasons. Firstly, it should be recalled that Quiercy refers to Christ's *suffering*, not to his death as the context of paragraph 605 would instead clearly imply. Moreover, Quiercy thinks of Christ's suffering in analogy with the incarnation, not with his death as the *Catechism* maintains. Finally, whereas Quiercy upholds the reality of reprobation, paragraph 605 uses the quotation from the Council to stress God's universal redeeming love. As a matter of historical fact, the purpose and the focus of the council of Quiercy was the rejection of double predestination and not the endorsement of an unlimited view of the extension of the atonement. Perhaps, it is not unfair to say that, in this respect, the *Catechism* has made an unfortunate choice of a historic magisterial text which, though not incompatible with the general thrust of this section, does not in fact directly back up what has been argued in it.

On the whole, then, it is a concise exposition of the fourth article of the Creed which underlines the importance of Jesus' entire life on earth and recapitulates a wide range of fundamental images of the atonement without providing a distinct theological framework with regard to the shaping of an overall doctrinal interpretation. In the final paragraph of the section (618), however, a typically Catholic appreciation of the sacrifice of Christ begins to emerge when 'our participation in Christ's sacrifice' is evoked and the possibility 'of being made partners in the paschal mistery' is envisaged. This is just the anticipation of what constitutes a foundational tenet of the Catholic dogmatic system which is developed later in the *Catechism*.

2. The eucharist as the sacramental re-presentation of the sacrifice of Christ

The brief exposition of the soteriological significance of the passion and death of Jesus Christ does not represent all that the *Catechism* teaches on the accomplishment and application of redemption. It simply opens the door to the specifically Catholic understanding of the sacraments in general and of the eucharist in particular.

Even a quick perusal of the contents of the *Catechism* will show a striking contrast between a briefly sketched theology of the cross and a fully developed sacramentology. On the one hand, a sober presentation of the atonement of Christ and, on the other, a majestic depiction of the sacrament of the eucharist. This is evident even from a quantitative point of view: there is an outstanding disproportion in the economy of the whole *Catechism* between the brief way in which Christ's death is treated (less than 30 paragraphs), and the detailed exposition of the sacrament of the eucharist which covers almost 100 paragraphs (1322–1419). Theologically, this quantitative disproportion involves a shift of attributed importance from the definitive significance of Christ's sacrifice at Calvary to the eucharistic re-presentation of that sacrifice.

We are confronted here with a crucial point in Catholic magisterial teaching: the *Catechism* is far more interested in presenting the eucharistic re-presentation and the sacramental actualization of the atonement than in presenting its once and for all historical occurrence and salvific achievement. Of course, Catholicism does not perceive the distinction between the cross-offering and the mass-offering as a polarization or contraposition between two conflicting elements, as if one would imply the exclusion of the other and viceversa. The Catholic mindset is able to coniugate the two offerings so as to overcome their reciprocal exclusiveness. Having said that, the lasting impression is that the 'whenever' of the eucharist supersedes the 'once only' of Calvary, the altar absorbes the cross and the sacramental system encapsulates the redemptive event. In the light of this sustained emphasis, it is not at all surprising to read the *Catechism* stating in a rather doxological vein that 'the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life' (which is actually a quotation from LG 11). No parallel statements, or at least comparable ones, are referred to the cross.

We are not interested here to follow the *Catechism* on the *why*, *how*, *when*, *where* and *by whom* the eucharist is celebrated, nor is this the occasion to formulate a theological analysis of the eucharist within the Catholic doctrinal system;[7] rather, we are concerned with the *what* is celebrated in the eucharist in terms of the nexus between the once-for-all event of Calvary and the continuing celebration of the sacrament.

First of all, it is important to highlight the language employed by the *Catechism* with regard to the relation between the eucharist and the cross. In providing a sort of basic definition, it argues that the eucharist 're-presents (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross, because it is its memorial and because it applies its fruit' (1366). Other expressions include the following: the eucharist 'perpetuates the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages' (1323), it is the perpetuation of Jesus' offering (611), it 'makes present the one sacrifice of Christ the Saviour' (1330), it 'is the memorial of Christ's Passover, the making present and the sacramental offering of his unique sacrifice' (1362), in it (i.e. the eucharist) 'the sacrifice of Christ offered once for all on the cross remains ever present' (1364). If we widen the scope of the magisterial teaching to earlier documents, the eucharistic vocabulary becomes even richer. In the encyclical *Mediator Dei* (1947), for instance, pope Pius XII wrote that the eucharist 'represents', 're-enacts', 'symbolises', 'renews' and 'shows forth' the sacrifice of the cross.[8] Apart from the complex terminology adopted, here once again the *Catechism* does not fully delineate the

theological connotation of eucharistic vocabulary.

What is all-together clear is that, in the catholic understanding of the connection between Calvary and the eucharist, the cross-offering is inextricably related to the mass-offering. The latter is to be understood as a renewal and perpetuation of the former and is essentially linked to it. The eucharist 'is a memorial filled with the reality of that which it commemorates'[9] and, therefore, it 'neither merely recalls nor actually repeats the sacrifice of the cross, but renders it sacramentally present'.[10] In the eucharist, the reality signified—i.e. the body and blood of the Lord Jesus—which has its proper mode of existence elsewhere, is truly contained in its symbolic re-presentation. The eucharist is thought of not as being the completion nor the reduplication of the cross but its sacramental re-enactment within the liturgical gathering of the church. In this respect, it should be pointed out that the popular evangelical critique of Roman eucharistic teaching is simply wrong when attributes to Catholicism the view according to which the eucharist is a mere *repetition* of the cross. It is not a repetition, but something subtley different!

So interwoven is the eucharist with the cross that the two sacrifices are considered as 'one single sacrifice' (1367), though as we have already seen, the cross is also said to be a 'unique' sacrifice. Apparently, the *tetelestai* of John 19,30 ('it is finished') and the *ephapax* theme of the letters to the Hebrews and Jude ('once for all') are understood dynamically so as to include subsequent enactments of the same sacrifice. The Catholic concept of time allows such an elastic interpretation.[11]

Coming back to the relationship between the cross and the eucharist, the victim of the sacrifice is the same whereas the manner is different, bloody as for the former, unbloody as for the latter (1367). The unbloody sacrifice of the eucharist is the bloody sacrifice of Calvary made present in the mysterious presence of Christ in the consacrated host, in virtue of the heavenly priestly ministry of Jesus, and as a pledge of the Church's union with Him as His body. To show the continuity of the Catholic Church's teaching in this respect, the *Catechism* extensively quotes the Council of Trent[12] and various Vatican II documents.[13] It is throughout apparent that the axis Trent-Vatican II forms the strong backbone of the *Catechism* on the eucharist. The two councils which are considered so different in many respects stand nonetheless in linear continuity on this doctrine.

The eucharist is also a sacrifice, states paragraph 1365, not just an oblation. It is a sacrifice *because* it is the memorial of Christ's passover. The sacrifice of Christ is made present in the eucharist so that the sacramental act which makes it present shares the same sacrificial nature of the cross. In other words, the eucharist is a sacrifice *as* the cross is a sacrifice and *because* the cross is a sacrifice.

Because it is a single sacrifice with the cross, the eucharist has also redemptive value and effects. In fact, the *Catechism* maintains that 'as often as the sacrifice of the Cross by which "Christ our Pasch has been sacrificed" is celebrated on the altar, the work of redemption is carried out' (1364 quoting LG 3). The council of Trent spoke of the eucharist as being also 'truly propitiatory';[14] in the *Catechism*, this propitiatory connotation of the eucharist has been dropped out in the sense that it is not repeated explicitly. However, the tridentine theology of eucharistic propitiation remains basically unaltered in that the eucharist is recognised as having both a sacrificial status and a redemptive function.

3. The eucharist as the sacrifice of the body of Christ, the church

So far, we have seen that the *Catechism* focuses on the historical event of the atonement and, with a much more detailed theological construction, on the sacramental events which re-enact it. The link between the cross-offering and the eucharistic offering is one of the major tenets of the whole Catholic understanding of the nature of the atonement

and the way in which its redemptive achievements are communicated to mankind. There is yet another key element of extraordinary dogmatic weight which stems from the teaching of the *Catechism* and which belongs to the essential core of the Roman Catholic faith.

As already indicated, at the end of the section on the passion and death of Jesus Christ, the *Catechism* makes reference to 'our participation in Christ's sacrifice' (618), where 'our' stands for the collective participation of all who, by means of the incarnation, are somehow united with Christ (cf. GS 22,2). It should be noted that, for Catholicism, 'our participation' has a distinct ecclesial significance, meaning the church's participation. This clause—'our participation in Christ's sacrifice'—immediately sounds an alarm bell in Protestant ears inasmuch as the uniqueness, sufficiency, completeness and finality of the cross would not contemplate any sort of addition, supplementation or contribution on our part as individuals or as a church. If it is Christ's, it is not ours in the sense that we do not actively participate in it but only thankfully and undeservedly receive its gracious benefits by faith. Of course, the church's actual taking part in the sacrifice of Christ is instead perfectly legitimate, indeed a sheer truism, within the Catholic dogmatic framework. Where a Protestant sensitivity perceives an incompatibility, indeed an impossibility of any form of synergism between the perfect work of Christ and our response to it, the Catholic mindset allows, indeed requires that what is attributable to Christ somehow pertains to the church as well. According to the *Catechism* (which at this point quotes GS 22,5), the possibility of being partners in the paschal mystery is offered to everybody (618). This rather cryptic expression is not spelt out in this paragraph but is instead inserted prolectically anticipating what will follow in another section.

In order to receive clarification on the matter, we have to refer to the section on the ecclesial aspects of the eucharist, where the teaching on the way in which this participation in Christ's sacrifice is to be apprehended is unfolded. The *Catechism* envisages an ecclesial active participation in the sacramental enactment of the eucharist. Not only is the eucharist the sacramental re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice but it is also the sacramental enactment of the sacrifice of the church. The church's involvement is so prominent that the eucharist itself is said to be the 'memorial of the sacrifice of Christ and his body, the church' (1362). In the eucharist, 'the sacrifice of Christ becomes also the sacrifice of the members of the body' (1368) and therefore it 'includes the Church's offering' (1330). In the sacramental act, the church is the recipient of the benefits of the eucharist but it is also the active agent, the offering party and, because she is the body of Christ, the church is the content of the offering itself. The eucharist is something offered *for* the church but also *from* the church and *by* the church (1118). The church is so directly involved in what happens in the eucharist than what is offered in the eucharist is *her* offering, *her* sacrifice. It is also true that, according to the *Catechism*, the church's sacrifice is never isolated from its Head, as if it were *another* sacrifice, but, on the contrary, the church offers it *in* Christ, *with* Christ and *through* Christ (1368), thus it is the one and same sacrifice of Christ (1367).

Here, the Catholic understanding of the *unio mystica* between Christ and the church is fully in view and forms the theological background against which the whole discourse of the *Catechism* on the participation of the church in the sacrifice of Christ needs to be considered. In the eucharist, Christ and the church are so closely intertwined that, as Raymond Moloney has maintained, 'the one who offers is the one who is offered, namely the body of Christ, Head and members, now united in one great communion of worship'.[15] In the eucharist, the relationship between Christ and church is thought of as belonging to the categories of head and members forming together the whole Christ, the *totus Christus* (795). Head and members are united in the offering of the eucharist.

So, the mode of participation of the church in the sacrifice of Christ is sacramental; the sacramental event in which the participation takes place is the eucharist; the theological rationale which warrants participation is the mystical union between Christ and the church, head and members, who form one body (1119, 793); the content of the sacrifice includes the church herself in that the church, as the members of the mystical body, cannot be separated from the Head which is offered.

4. A brief and provisional evangelical evaluation

A brief summary of some of the prominent aspects of what the *Catechism* teaches on the cross and the eucharist could be helpful at this point. First, the sacrifice of Christ has to be made present and actualized in order for its benefits to be applied. Second, its re-enactment occurs in the eucharist. Third, the eucharist is the sacrament from the church and by the church. Lastly, the church is mystically united with Christ, forming a single body with Him.

If we look carefully at what is explicitly affirmed or implicitly assumed in the *Catechism* as far as the work of redemption is concerned, it becomes clear that the fundamental Catholic framework of thought is at stake in what we have briefly overviewed.

The theology of sacramental re-presentation of the sacrifice of Christ combined with the theology of ecclesial participation in the sacrifice of Christ go to the very heart of Catholicism. On the one hand, we are confronted with the sacramental principle of Catholic theology whereby divine grace, in order to be mediated to created nature, needs *ever-enacted provisions* (instantiations) *of grace* beyond the unique event of Calvary, even though not without Calvary, and passes through the *ecclesial apparatus and procedures as means of grace* beyond the sovereignty of grace and beyond the reception by faith, even though not without faith. On the other, the incarnational principle of Catholic theology whereby the church is seen as the *extension of the incarnation* of Christ, forming with Him a mystical body, and, by way of this mystical union, exchanging properties with Him and taking an active part in His redemptive work.

What is more foundational to Roman Catholicism than its over-arching sacramental structure and its magnificient ecclesiological self-apprehension? Having said that, there is perhaps the possibility of pushing the analysis further by underlining the typically Catholic epistemological framework in which these sacramental and incarnational principles operate and which governs them. I mean the kind of (theo-)logic which functions beneath the surface of the Catholic dogmatic discourse, i.e. the *both-and approach*, the *et-et*. In the Catholic *Catechism*, we have the cross *and* the eucharist, the once-for-all event *and* the sacramental re-presentation, the sacrifice of Christ *and* the sacrifice of the church, etc. This kind of stereoscopic epistemology enables Catholicism to join together two elements so as to form an integrated whole. According to it, maintaining something does not necessarily mean negating something else; on the contrary, two contrasting perspectives may bring different light to the same truth, the comprehensive truth, the Catholic truth.[16] As everybody knows, the Reformation endorsed a totally different mindset stemming from a radically different epistemology, the so-called *aut-aut* approach, the *either-or*. Not by chance, the Reformers saw that it was necessary to make fundamental choices involving not only the affirmation of the truth but also the rejection of what was perceived as incompatible with biblical teaching. Therefore, expressions like *solo Christo*, *sola gratia* and *sola fide* express very clearly the need for theological rigour and integrity. In the light of what has been said concerning the teaching of the *Catechism*, one wonders whether the old epistemological issue between Catholicism and Protestantism is still a neuralgic, strategic point of differentiation which impinges on many areas of their respective theological orientations.

In its dealing with the whole issue of the cross and the eucharist, the *Catechism* simply reiterates the bulk of the tridentine teaching as re-expressed by Vatican II, without breaking any new ground as to a possible rapprochement with a more evangelically shaped theology of the atonement. In this respect, I must confess that I find the recent document *The Gift of Salvation* released in the USA at the end of 1997 and subscribed to by some evangelicals and Catholics, at the very least puzzling if not misleading.[17] More than that, the possibility of engaging in constructive dialogue on the doctrine of the atonement is not promising, given the centrality within the Catholic framework of the related issues of the sacraments and the church which, in the *Catechism* at least, appear to be unquestioned and unquestionable.

Don Carson has recently written that 'at the risk of oversimplification, Catholicism elevates ecclesiology over soteriology' whereas 'evangelicalism does the reverse'.[18] I would rather prefer to say that Catholicism, unlike Evangelicalism, sacramentalizes and ecclesiasticizes soteriology. In fact, the acknowledgement that ecclesiology is elevated above soteriology actually means that, in Catholic theology, ecclesiology and sacramentology determine the doctrinal profile of soteriology. In the end, the sacramental and ecclesial attachments to the work of Christ, as found in the *Catechism*, deprive the atoning death of Christ of its finality because, though considered as paramount, the cross is not appreciated as efficacious *per se*. By ascribing to the eucharist the possibility of applying the fruits of the cross to man, the *Catechism* makes the response of faith necessary but not sufficient in order to be saved. Moreover, by assigning to the church a highly-christological status with *quasi*-ontological overtones, the *Catechism* makes it possible for the church to play a co-operative role in salvation. These are all controversial issues that Evangelicals have traditionally and critically dealt with in their attempts to evaluate Roman Catholic doctrine.[19] The difference on these constitutive matters is still with us and is as wide and fundamental as ever.

In closing, I find no more adequate words than those used by the World Evangelical Fellowship in its 1986 *Perspective on Roman Catholicism*. Chronologically, they were written prior to the publication of the *Catechism* but, nonetheless, they can be referred to the thrust of this new magisterial document: 'At bottom, our evangelical critique of Roman Catholic sacramentology points up the conflict between two opposing views of the Christian faith. Rome sees itself as an extension of the incarnation, thus divinizing human beings as they cooperate with God's grace that is conferred by the church. Over against this view stands our evangelical commitment to the free gift of righteousness, imputed solely by the grace of God, received by a true faith that answers to God's Word, and based fully upon the once-for-all expiation of guilt through the finished sacrifice of the perfect Substitute, Christ Jesus. This confession is for us the gospel'.[20]

Bibliography

John Armstrong (ed.), *Roman Catholicism. Evangelical Protestants Analyze What Divides and Unites Us* (Chicago: Moody Press 1994)

Gerrit C. Berkouwer, *De Sacramenten* (E.t.: *The Sacraments*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 1969)

Henri Blocher, 'Scripture and Tradition: an Evangelical Response', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 21:2 (1997), 121–127

Gerald L. Bray, *Sacraments & Ministry in Ecumenical Perspective* (Oxford: Latimer Studies n. 18, 1984)

Donald A. Carson, 'Reflections on Salvation and Justification in the New Testament', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40:4 (1997) 591–608

Herbert M. Carson, *The Faith of the Vatican. A Fresh Look at Roman Catholicism* (Darlington: Evangelical Press 1996)

Catechism of the Catholic Church (London: Geoffrey Chapman 1994)

Norman L. Geisler—Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals. Agreements and Differences* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1995)

E. J. Kilmartin, 'Eucharist' in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 5 (1967) 608–615
Hywel R. Jones, *Gospel & Church. An Evangelical Evaluation of Ecumenical Documents on Church Unity* (Bridgend: Evangelical Press of Wales 1989)
Berard L. Marthaler (ed.), *Introducing the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: SPCK 1994)
Michael J. McClymond, 'Further Along the Way: A Review of *Catechism of the Catholic Church*—A Review Essay', *Christian Scholar's Review (1996) 113–118*
Alister E. McGrath, 'Do We Still Need the Reformation? A review of the new Catholic catechism', *Christianity Today* (Dec 12, 1994) 28–33
Raymond Moloney SJ, *The Eucharist* (London: Geoffrey Chapman 1995)
Aidan Nichols, *The Splendour of Doctrine. The Catechism of the Catholic Church on Christian Believing* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1995)
Wolfhart Pannenberg, *'Catechism of the Catholic Church*. An Evangelical Viewpoint', *Pro Ecclesia* IV:1 (1995) 49–58
Leo Scheffczyk, 'Eucharist' in K. Rahner (ed.), *Sacramentum Mundi. An Encyclopedia of Theology*, vol. 2 (London: Burns & Oates 1968) 273–276
Paul G. Schrotenboer (ed.), *Roman Catholicism. A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1988)
Alan M. Stibbs, *The Finished Work of Christ* (London: Tyndale Press 1954).
John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester: IVP 1986)
Vittorio Subilia, *Il problema del cattolicesimo* (E.t.: *The Problem of Catholicism*, London: SCM 1964)
Vittorio Subilia, *La nuova cattolicità del Cattolicesimo* (Torino: Claudiana 1967)
Michael J. Walsh (ed.), *Commentary on the Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman 1994)

Notes

1 The *Catechism* was launched on October 11th 1992, though the English official translation was published only in 1994. Introductory reviews and commentaries on the *Catechism* are Walsh (1994), Marthaler (1994), McGrath (1994), Nichols (1995) and McClymond (1996). Evangelical works dealing with it are Geisler-MacKenzie (1995), H. Carson (1996) and occasionally Armstrong (1994).
2 The *Catechism* contains 2,865 paragraphs.
3 Robert Murray SJ, 'The Human Capacity for God, and God's initiative' in M. Walsh (1994) 6–33 (the quotation is from p. 31).
4 John McDade SJ, 'The Death of Christ, his Descent among the Dead, and his Resurrection' in M. Walsh (1994) 143–161 (the quotation is from p. 143).
5 Pannenberg (1995) 55–56.
6 Denz. 621–624.
7 In this respect, valuable material can be found in Kilmartin (1967), Scheffczyk (1968) and Moloney (1995).
8 Denz. 3840–3855. Cf. Stott (1986) 264–267.
9 Raymond Maloney SJ, 'The doctrine of the Eucharist' in M. Walsh (1994) 259–273 (the quotation is from p. 265).
10 Kilmartin (1967) 613.
11 I owe this point to Blocher (1997) 126.
12 1366: '. . . the bloody sacrifice which he (Christ) was to accomplish once for all on the cross would be re-presented, its memory perpetuated until the end of the world, and its salutary power be applied to the forgiveness of the sins we daily commit'. Other references to Trent are in §§ 1337, 1367, 1371, 1374, 1376, 1377, 1394.
13 e.g. §§ 1323, 1324, 1344, 1346, 1364, 1369, 1373, 1388, 1392, 1399, 1405.
14 Denz. 1743, 1753.
15 R. Moloney, 'The doctrine of the Eucharist' in M. Walsh (1994) 267.
16 These constitutive aspects of Catholic epistemology have been masterfully studied, though from a neo-orthodox point of view, in the works by Subilia (1964, 1967).
17 The text can be found in *Christianity Today* (Dec. 8, 1997) 34.
18 D. Carson (1997) 606.
19 Cf. Stibbs (1954), Berkouwer (1968) *passim*, Bray (1984), Stott (1986) 255–273, Jones (1989) 55–83 and H. Carson (1996) 151–168.
20 Schrotenboer (1988) 74.