

The Ecclesiology of Reconciliation

2) STEPS TOWARDS FULL COMMUNION: GROUP D

1. The Decree on Ecumenism of Vatican II (21st Nov. 1964) affirmed that believing and baptized Christians, even though in communions that have become separated from the Catholic Church, are "in some communion with the Catholic Church, even if not perfect communion", and are acknowledged as "brothers in the Lord" (Fratres in Domino).

2. We are not entirely clear what imperfect or partial Communion is, but with Vatican II affirm that we are both in it, and believe the recognition of this is a crucial step to the full communion we seek. Perhaps the term means that in all substantial matters in word and Sacrament we know ourselves to share a common faith but not eucharistic Communion, the fullness of which mystery is in the judgement of Vatican II lacking "because of a 'defect' in the sacrament of order". In any event, we believe it certain that our two Churches are in a greater degree of communion than present practice demonstrates.

3. The Malta Report (January 1968, but published substantially later, the text being reprinted with the ARCIC Final Report), records our common faith in God our Father, in our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit; our common baptism in the one Church of God; our sharing of the holy Scriptures, of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, the Chalcedonian definition, and the teaching of the Fathers; our common Christian inheritance for many centuries with its living tradition of liturgy, theology, spirituality, Church order, and mission. It further recommended a common declaration that the Church is founded upon the revelation of God the Father, made known to us in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who is present through the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures and his Church and is the only Mediator between God and Man. It noted that "neither Communion should be tied to

a positive acceptance of all the beliefs and devotional practices of the other", and declared that, while doctrinal comprehensiveness has limits, diversity has an intrinsic value when used creatively rather than destructively.

4. The Malta Report's recommendations included:

- (a) Constant consultation on pastoral and evangelistic problems, with joint committees;
- (b) Joint use of buildings;
- (c) Some shared theological education;
- (d) Collaboration in theological scholarship;
- (e) Prayers and retreats in common;
- (f) Exchange of preachers for the eucharistic homily;
- (g) Collaboration, and not unilateral action, in determining major feasts in the Calendar, a common eucharistic lectionary, and shared forms of vernacular prayers;
- (h) The establishment of ARCIC to examine Eucharist, Ministerial Order and Authority, and questions of moral theology.

5. We recommend:

- (a) An updating of the Malta Report expounding how it has been fulfilled and how much has been neglected and unrealised.
- (b) The exploration of differences in practices and discipline (e.g. the use of the Sacraments, penance, anointing, devotional aids), where we think it probable that developments in both Churches have brought us much closer than was once the case.
- (c) That reflection be given to the meaning and experience of sharing communion in the one holy catholic and apostolic Church and of entering into filial obedience to the 'Mother of us all', 'the pillar and ground of the truth'.