

GROWTH IN COMMUNION: A SCHEMA

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1. INTRODUCTION

As the search for fuller communion between Anglicans and Roman Catholics progresses within the wider context of the search for Christian Unity, the fear has developed in some sections of both Churches that this process inevitably involves a degree of theological compromise. Indeed it is believed by some people on both sides that theological orthodoxy can best be maintained by providing a separate identity. One of the main purposes of this paper is to show that this perspective is false. Being in communion with other Christians is a vital dimension of orthodoxy. Insofar as we are not in communion with one another, we compromise the New Testament which precisely calls us to salvation within the koinonia of all those who have been reconciled to God. The gospel is precisely a gospel of reconciliation and our search for fuller communion is an essential element in our response to the call, "Be reconciled with God!" (2 Cor.5.10).

The path of reconciliation is uncomfortable and, indeed, painful. But this pain is nothing other than a sharing in that reconciling work of Christ which took him to the cross. Work for fuller communion, therefore, is an unavoidable Christian responsibility and may not be seen as marginal or optional. To avoid this responsibility is to sell the gospel short. A particular Church or communion cannot, then, regard itself as simply self-sufficient. Moreover, this is an infidelity to the Christian doctrine of atonement which manifests itself in a specific failure to respond to the gospel call to love. The New Testament understanding of

love - agape - is of concern for others which is boundless and knows no preferences. The spirit of confessional self-sufficiency inevitably has the effect of impairing the quality of Christian love.

Another anxiety about the search for fuller communion is that it may result in a stultifying uniformity such that the rich diversity of christian life will be lost. It has to be said clearly that growth in communion does not imply the loss of diversity. The scriptures and Christian tradition alike, bear witness to the way in which real diversity is possible within the koinonia. The Canon of the New Testament itself bears witness to this, since, in the New Testament we find a real theological diversity which is grounded in a common experience of reconciliation.

The purpose of this paper is to take stock of the degree of communion currently existing between Anglicans and Roman Catholics and to consider how we can progress together to a fuller experience of that diversity in unity which is Christ's will for his Church.

2. THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF KOINONIA

The themes here will include:

- (i) Koinonia as participation in the life of the Trinity, through incorporation in the crucified and risen Christ.
- (ii) The content of salvation in the koinonia which Christians receive as a gift.
- (iii) Koinonia as sharing, mutual care and support for

other Christian communities and fostering mutual relations between Churches.

(iv) Eucharist as source of koinonia and koinonia as fruit of the eucharist. (cf. "Renewing the Koinonia between our two Churches": J.M.R.Tillard - ARCIC-II 55/1(86)).

3. MARKS OF KOINONIA

To give shape and direction to our work for fuller communion, it is important to indicate those things which we agree must feature in a situation of full communion.

- (i) A common confession of the apostolic faith which is attested in the Scriptures and taught in the Creeds
- (ii) A common baptism.
- (iii) A shared commitment to mission which is also a commitment to the world.
- (iv) The recognition of each other's ministries as having the authority of the apostolic ministry.
- (v) The full recognition of each other's communities and each other's members, together with the reception and recognition of members of one community within another community.
- (vi) Mutual care not only within but also between communities.
- (vii) Shared fundamental moral values constituting an agreed understanding of the goals of human life.
- (viii) The recapitulation of all this in the eucharist which is both the source and expression of true communion.

4. THE PRESENT MANIFESTATIONS OF KOINONIA BETWEEN ANGLICANS AND ROMAN CATHOLICS

Anglicans and Roman Catholics already share in a true communion of faith. Although not yet the fuller communion we seek, this existing communion must not be ignored or theologically undervalued. Such a koinonia already makes possible a substantial degree of mutual recognition. While our koinonia falls short of the fullness which would entail the complete mutual recognition of the members and ministers of our two Churches, it must be borne in mind that the full communion of love with God and with each other which is the Christian calling is an eschatological concept. In this life, within the Pilgrim Church on earth, we shall always be seeking a fuller realization of communion in charity. Even full ecclesial communion itself can only be a provisional approximation to, not the achievement of, that perfect communion when we shall see God face to face, together with all the saints, and when the need for the sacramental sign of God's presence will have ceased. This eschatological goal of full communion is the context in which to set our growth into full ecclesial communion from the true but impaired koinonia we already share.

This existing communion includes the shared authority of Scripture on the basis of which we profess a common faith in God the Father, in the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation of the Word, and in the Mystery of the Cross and our Redemption. We confess together the reality of the Resurrection of our

Lord Jesus Christ, of the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and of our own eternal salvation to be received as a gift. We further believe that all things came to be through Christ, that he became Incarnate from God and from our humanity, and that he will be our final judge. That judgement will involve our recognition of the same Christ in our brothers and sisters who have been created in the image and likeness of God and redeemed by his blood. We look forward to the culmination of all things in Christ and our participation in the final resurrection when all that is good in this creation will be re-created in him.

We not only share a true faith in God's purposes for humanity, but also in the vocation of the Christian community. We believe that through the mystery of faith the Church is the People of the New Covenant, called and prepared by grace in continuity with God's promises to Abraham, Moses and the Prophets, and summed up in the call to repentance of John the Baptist and in the obedience of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, to God's Word. We confess together that through baptism and faith Christians are born again and enter that koinonia with God and with each other, which is the Church. We recognise that membership of the fellowship of the Church, not only brings the benefits of grace, but also imposes a responsibility for mission. We believe that re-birth in Christ is effected by the Holy Spirit, but not outside the normative framework of the Apostolic preaching and teaching found in the Scriptures, confessed in the Creeds and guarded by the

episcopal of a ministry in continuity with the apostles. We believe this ministry of episcopal serves the visible unity of the Church in space and time most characteristically in the celebration of word and Sacrament. It is in the eucharistic memorial of the Lord, the event in which the Church is most itself, that Christians meet, receive and are encountered by the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ and in which they become Christ's living and reconciling body in the world.

As well as these joint affirmations of faith, Anglicans and Roman Catholics also recognize a common Western inheritance of theological interpretation until and beyond the sixteenth century. Since then we have also shared a common intellectual culture which has presented both Churches with serious questions concerning faith and history.

5. THE LIVING-OUT OF OUR PRESENT KOINONIA

(Here would follow a list of various kinds of co-operation and collaboration. It would no doubt include:

Joint theological teaching

Joint theological resources in increasingly integrated biblical and patristic scholarship

Shares Churches

Joint Schools

Joint Missionary projects

Joint Statements on Social, Moral and Justice Issues

Joint meetings of Bishops - at local, regional and national levels

Joint meetings of religious, clergy and laity

Common experience of Religious Orders and informal communities

Co-operation between Episcopal Conference and Synodical Offices

Co-operation within Councils of Churches

Local co-operation and shared worship in parishes

Growth of spiritual unity within Inter-Church Marriages

Mutual prayer by laity, clergy and religious

Shared spirituality and liturgical piety

Meetings of Heads of Churches and greater co-operation between International Secretariats

All the above would seem to be justified by the true koinonia spoken of in 4. Such a living-out of our present communion leads in many instances to a sharp desire for further growth in communion and an expectation of the wider Church's reception and appropriation of the unity really experienced in these ecumenical contexts).

6. FACTORS IMPEDING FULLER KOINONIA

Not all differences between us are obstacles to fuller communion. Many are instances of the diversity that must always characterise koinonia. However, there are factors of different kinds which effectively act as blocks to fuller communion and it is important to identify them as clearly as possible and to see them in relation to one another. These differ in kind and in importance but would include the following:

- (i) Specific dogmatic differences as most obviously exemplified in the two modern Marian dogmas.
- (ii) Difficulties occasioned by specific positions adopted by one Church or the other, such as the Bull Apostolicae Curae.

- (iii) Differences relating to the institutional structures of our Churches, such as the role of the crown and parliament in the Church of England.
- (iv) Differences in Church discipline, for example, with regard to marriage and marriage breakdown.
- (v) Differences in practice that have major theological implications, especially the ordination of women in the Anglican Communion.
- (vi) Difficulties of Anglicans about the wider theological implications of certain Catholic dogmas and devotional practices.
- (vii) Catholic difficulties with the extent of comprehensiveness in the Anglican Communion which can seem to go beyond the legitimate limits of diversity in the koinonia.
- (viii) Differences relating to the nature and exercise of authority in the Church. From the Catholic point of view, there are difficulties with Anglican structures of decision-making. On the Anglican side, difficulties with the claims and the exercise of authority by the Bishop of Rome and with the place of the laity in church decision-making. These differences involve a difference in how the two sides understand the process of "reception" of doctrine; a process in which we have agreed that both the bishops of the Church and the whole People of God have an active part to play.
- (ix) There are substantial differences in the whole

area of morality. These differences bear both on how we see the relationship between faith and morals and on the way we approach specific moral issues.

Related to all the above are differences of culture or ethos that result from our having lived separately for several hundred years, despite our both belonging to the Western cultural tradition. This has bred mutual mistrust and suspicion between us which is in itself a major block to fuller communion. Differences in devotional practices (e.g., pilgrimages and processions) are, partly, attributable to cultural differences. A central feature of cultural difference, of difference of ethos, is a divergence in the way we understand human freedom in the total context of the life of faith. This difference underlies differences in specific areas, most notably morality. Church discipline and Church authority. It seems clear that differences of this order can only stop being obstacles to fuller communion when our two Churches have begun to live together much more closely. Nor can growth to fuller communion be achieved without the recognition that this also involves a process of growth and change within each of our Communion. Inner conversion is necessarily required for ecumenical advance.

7. GROWTH TO FULLER KOINONIA

To enable this closer relationship to take place, the two Churches will need to establish what can be done to remove the hindrances to a fuller communion. Any steps would need to be compatible and commensurate with the growing koinonia between the two Churches, both at the level of faith (in the

work of ARCIC and its official reception by the two Churches) and at the level of the experience of the two Churches where they are side by side in many parts of the world (as instanced in 5). Such steps would require the resolution of some of the hindrances to fuller communion listed in 6. or the mutual assurance that they would be resolvable within a changed relationship. Such steps would clearly mark definite progress in the official relationship between the two Communion. Should both Churches be convinced that real agreement in faith had been achieved in the doctrine of the eucharist and ordained ministry, there would be renewed impetus to seek a resolution to the longstanding difficulty between the two Churches over the theological status of Anglican Ministry. While this would be complicated by the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood (and episcopate) in some Provinces of the Anglican Communion, it is clear that the ability of the Roman Catholic Church to recognize the authenticity of Anglican eucharistic faith would have far reaching consequences. In spite of the difficulties of both Apostolicae Curae and the ordination of women, a reconciliation of ministries - and thus of Churches - must be the intention of the two Churches as they come to recognize the increasing communion of faith they already share. Anglicans and Roman Catholics already experience a real degree of communion in life. As this is received by the official Church, unity will become more visible. Growth in ecclesial communion will reflect the growth in actual unity between the two Churches.

8. DIVERSITY IN COMMUNION

Unity and diversity are complementary aspects of life in the koinonia. The Church must be comprehensive in the sense that it must be able to embrace a rich diversity of theological and liturgical expression of a common faith. Christians enjoy a real freedom in the way they understand, appropriate and live out their shared faith. It is the exercise of this freedom that creates diversity. Yet there are limits to diversity which reflect the specific character of Christian freedom. The freedom of the gospel is not libertarianism: it is lived out in obedience to God within the koinonia. We may identify four principles that govern the exercise of freedom in the koinonia and indicate the limits of diversity. The episcopal authority of the Church has the responsibility for preserving and promoting the unity of the koinonia in fidelity to the apostolic tradition which is especially threatened by:

- (i) Affirming or doing anything which threatens to break down the koinonia.
- (ii) Affirmations of a kind that deny the truth about the Trinity and about the person and work of Christ.
- (iii) Anything which impairs or hinders mission.
- (iv) Affirmations that deny the transcendental character of human destiny.

9. KOINONIA AS THE FRAMEWORK FOR FUTURE WORK

Growth in communion is thus theologically based on the fact of the existing communion between our two Churches - a

communion of faith and life which is steadily increasing through theological dialogue, pastoral collaboration and prayer. For the next steps along the road to that fuller communion, which is a Gospel imperative, the dialogue between our Churches must build upon what has been so far achieved, so that a changed relationship between our Communion can be effected. This will require of the Commission major theological work on issues relating to the reception of ARCIC-I, not least a continuation of the exploration of authority in the Church that Commission so fruitfully began; on moral and ethical issues which ostensibly appear to divide our Churches so sharply; on the reconciliation of ministries on the basis of agreement in faith on the doctrine of the eucharist and the ordained ministry; and on the theological question and actual fact of the ordination of women to the presbyterate in some Provinces of the Anglican Communion. These four areas of work must, however, be set in a coherent overall framework. We believe that an ecclesiology of koinonia provides the necessary perspective from which work on these subjects can be pursued and developed in an integrated and systematic way.