

ARCIC-II

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Group A - Part II

The New Testament uses the word "church" in two ways: to refer to the particular local communities such as the church in Corinth or in Ephesus (e.g., 1 Cor.1:1; Rev. 2:1); and to signify the one and universal church (e.g., Eph. 3:10). This usage continues in the early centuries in which the local church, presided over by its bishop and college of presbyters, is seen as the Catholic Church in that place, an essential element of its catholicity consisting in the maintenance of communion with other local churches.

The supreme manifestation of communion within each local church was the celebration of the eucharist by the community under the presidency of its bishop. The communion was strengthened by the sharing of the one Bread and one Cup. (1 Cor. 10:21). In the celebration the community understood itself to be one in teaching, in prayer, in mission, and in common life. The prayers of the faithful in the liturgy were an acknowledgement of the range of communion, shown through intercession for the poor, sick and suffering, for catechumens and penitents, and for the faithful departed. Such prayer was linked with collections for the poor, support for the oppressed, visiting of prisoners and care for the dead.

The communion of the baptized was itself a communion of those called to be saints, according to New Testament usage (e.g., 1 Cor 1:2). The expression "communion of saints" came to be used of a communion wider than that of the Church on earth. It included the martyrs and all who had fallen asleep in Christ. This was seen as so important that it

found a place in the creed, where it signifies all those who are united in sharing the same holy realities.

A constitutive dimension of communion through time was the link with the faith of the apostles, particularly expressed by the preservation of lists of episcopal succession, as well as by the careful transmission of the holy scriptures.

Communion in space between local churches was maintained and fostered in a variety of ways. Mutual recognition of baptism and ordination was demonstrated by the liturgical welcome offered to visitors. The participation of bishops of neighbouring churches in episcopal ordinations demonstrated that no local church could live in self-sufficient isolation. Travellers and pilgrims carried letters of commendation. Important events such as martyrdoms and the election of bishops were communicated by letter.

Communion needed always to be nurtured, promoted and defended. It was never static. From the beginning it entailed both harmony and tension. It was complicated by factors of geography, language and cultural differences. Especially in the face of disagreement and diversity in teaching and praxis, the exchange of letters between bishops, as well as the growing practice of holding synods and councils (first local and later ecumenical), established the need and value of mutual consultation and co-operation. Differences in interpretation of scripture could also lead to schism from the main body. This was one reason why a central role of service in the preservation of communion was always exercised by the ordained ministry, especially by the bishop who was "responsible for

preserving and promoting the integrity of the koinonia in order to further the Church's response to the Lordship of Christ and its commitment to mission" (Final Report, Authority in the Church I, 5, p.54). Such ministers were commissioned to discern and express the Church's authoritative teaching of the apostolic faith and thus to foster communion within their local churches and with one another. Nevertheless, their actions and pronouncements were quite often imperfect and inadequate because "subject to the limitations and sinfulness of human nature" (Item 7, p.55). Moreover, the Christian people as a whole were not always attentive enough to the demands of unity and to the sacrifices that it entailed. Communion, therefore, although real, was always in some sense less than perfect. And even measures intended to promote unity would at times promote division.

But the ideal of unity in communion never disappeared even in times of heresy or schism. There was tension between the reality of division and faithfulness to the Gospel call to unity. The great schism itself between East and West has not been accepted by either side as definitive. Prayer and frequent initiatives have sought to heal it. Meantime both Churches have been impoverished by the separation.

Likewise in the centuries following the Reformation in England our two traditions have maintained the longing for reconciliation and have been discontented with the separation. (cf. Final Report, Introduction, 1, p.5). Indeed, in each tradition a strong sense of the value of communion has been preserved.

For Anglicans the concept of one Book of Common Prayer, the development of an Anglican Communion of Churches known by this name, and the instances of the Lambeth Quadrilateral, Conferences and Appeals for unity have all been examples of this sense of communion. For Roman Catholics the realization of one universal Church has always been strong and has focussed on the Papacy as the centre of unity and mission.

Moreover, at various times initiatives have been taken in both Churches to bring about a reconciliation. These initiatives have now been caught up in the situation of our time. "The renewal of biblical scholarship, the development of historical and theological studies, new insights gained in mission, and the growth of mutual understanding within the ecumenical movement enable us to see our divisions in a new perspective" (Salvation and the Church, 8).

In our century the discontent with the divisions in the Christian Church has taken a special shape with the modern ecumenical movement, whose best fruits are the World Council of Churches, the beginning of bilateral dialogues, and the birth of a new spirit in the relations between Christians at all levels of ecclesiastical life. Vatican II and the initiatives of the Bishops of Rome, especially of Paul VI, have enabled the Roman Catholic Church to play a significant part in this ecumenical enterprise.

~~(Treatment of the signs of communion to follow)~~

The goal of this Commission (and of the studies that we are preparing) is precisely to help our two traditions to reconcile themselves fully, to express the signs of their communion, to grow in the communion that already exists, and to find ways to remove those obstacles which still stand in the way of our full communion.

Therefore, in agreement with the growing world-wide ecumenical consensus, we seek in communion not so much a model of the Church as an underlying and all-embracing reality. It stems from participation in the life of the Trinity, whereby through baptism we become adopted children of the same Father, members of the Body of Christ, sharing in the same Spirit, destined for fulness of eternal life in the world to come. Therefore it involves among Christians a fellowship or common life which is both visible and invisible.

Since full communion is visible, it must express itself in certain signs which we can recognize. Essential among these are:-

- 1) A common submission to Jesus Christ as Lord.
- 2) A common profession and teaching of the full apostolic faith, attested in the Scriptures, proclaimed in the Creeds.
- 3) A common baptism with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
- 4) A commitment to mission, involving both evangelism and engagement in working for the liberation of the world and its transformation into the world God desires.
- 5) Mutual concern for the spiritual and material well-being of all Christian women and men.

- 6) Official recognition of each other's ministries.
- 7) Shared structures of decision-making in matters of faith and conduct.
- 8) The recognition and affirmation of each other's communities and members, together with the invitation, welcome and involvement of members of one community within another's community, without either's loss of identity.
- 9) A basic agreement about the moral values implicit in the recognition that humanity is created in the image of God.
- 10) The integration of all these signs of communion, their celebration and visible expression, in a shared eucharist.

It is important for the Churches, as they grow into fuller communion, to discover the extent to which they are in fundamental accord and where there remain substantial areas of disagreement and division. The list of signs, given above, can help in this process of discovery. For it should be borne in mind that some forms of diversity, rather than weakening communion, may be essential and vital to it.

Our fullest communion with God and with other human beings will be realized only in the Kingdom of Heaven. Within the pilgrim Church on earth Christians are obliged to seek continually deeper communion with God and with one another; but such communion can only be a provisional approximation to that which will be granted when together with all the saints, we see God face to face, and when all need for sacramental signs of God's presence has ceased. This perfect, eschatological communion is the assured hope to which we (refer our growth into full ecclesial communion from the true but incomplete communion we already share.