

9th September 1987

### INTRODUCTION

'Communion' is one of the most expressive themes underlying the New Testament's description of God's purpose in salvation; it comprehends our relationship both with God and with one another in Christ (e.g. 1 John 1:3). Moreover communion involves movement and growth reaching its fulfilment finally when God becomes everything to everyone (1 Cor. 15:28). Although the Greek word koinonia and its cognates occur only infrequently in the New Testament, and not always with precisely the same meaning, and is never used explicitly as a definition of the Church, the general idea of 'communion' is echoed in many other ways. Significantly this theme was a thread running through all the Statements of ARCIC-I's Final Report (vid. Introduction para.6) and was of fundamental importance to the agreement achieved. "It is the term that most aptly expresses the mystery underlying the various New Testament images of the church" (Introduction, para. 4). ARCIC-II's Statement on Salvation and the Church concluded with a section that elaborated the way in which "the doctrine of salvation is intimately associated with the doctrine of the Church which is the community of those reconciled with God and with each other" (Salvation and the Church para. 25 cf. Final Report; para. 8). Communion with God through Christ's work of reconciliation involves communion with the community of the reconciled, who are entrusted as Christ's ambassadors with a mission of reconciliation for the world. Unless the Church is a true expression of this new communion with God and with one another, it will be failing in its task to draw all humanity into this communion of grace. That is why our Church divisions are a scandal.

It is our conviction that communion in the fullest sense is the heart and goal of the gospel, and that for this reason the outstanding difficulties between our two churches will best be resolved in this context of communion. Growing understanding of the essential nature of communion has been further enhanced by our increasing shared <sup>experience</sup>~~expression~~ of its reality. In this context of communion the difficulties that still divide us will be discerned in their true perspective: only then may sufficient light be shed upon them to find a way forward.

It is clear, therefore, that the concept of communion embraces more than institutional relationships between churches or even Eucharistic communion. It expresses the central concern of God for his whole creation. It denotes the fundamental nature of the Church which calls for visible expression.

(Shape of document to be drafted later)

I Communion

Christians believe that human beings are created in order to live in communion with God and with one another and in harmonious relationship with the whole of creation. God's purpose in salvation, through the work of Christ and of the Holy Spirit, is to heal the effects of the disruption of this communion caused by sin. This restoration and renewal of communion involves not only individuals but also groups who are alienated from each other, indeed 'to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth', (Eph. 1:10 cf. Col. 1:19-20). God's purpose is 'to draw humanity into communion with himself and with one another, so as to share his life, the life of the Holy Trinity' (Salvation and the Church para 29) and thus to reflect the mutual love of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

According to the Scriptures the significance of creation is this, that everything is made in and for communion. All creation stems from the love of God, exists through that love of God and finds its fulfilment in that love. The drama of humanity, as unfolded in Scripture, is of the breakdown and renewal of communion. In Genesis Adam and Eve are created to find fulfilment in each other in communion with God. Their disobedience undermines their mutual relationship, causes them to hide from God and also disturbs their relationship with the natural order. The unfolding account in Genesis indicates that this is the way of all humanity. Cain murders his brother Abel: the sinfulness of humanity incurs the judgement of the Flood. Nevertheless, in faithfulness to his eternal purpose, God continues to will the harmony and communion of all his creation.

The story of Babel illustrates the self-destructive character of human attempts to build a community without God and the inability of humanity to remain in harmony and communion apart from God. The barriers of incomprehension and the consequent scattering of the peoples at Babel show that this estrangement is not limited to individuals but involves whole communities. God's commitment to communion in the created world is re-affirmed in the call to Abraham and his descendants that through the blessing they receive they may bring blessing to the nations (Gen. 12:2-3). God's covenant with his people through Moses establishes a special relationship of communion, 'You shall be my own possession among all peoples: for all the earth is mine and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation' (Ex. 19:5-6). For maintaining and strengthening communion between God and his people God provides in his law what is necessary for the relationship of his people with him and with one another. This includes patterns of worship, the sacrificial system, structures of ministry and the moral instruction of the law. The law shows special concern for the poor, the oppressed and the stranger. God calls kings to maintain justice and peace and prophets to recall the people to loyalty to their covenant relationship with himself. The people's lack of fidelity to the God who called them, their failure to care for the needy, their abuse of the cult,<sup>all</sup> constantly denounced by the prophets, rupture God's gift of communion, even leading to division of the Kingdom and exile. Nevertheless, God's fidelity to his covenant of love remains constant. God promises repeatedly that the divine purpose of communion will be accomplished in spite of the failures of his chosen people. Reconciliation of the

scattered people of God, of Judah and Israel together, will spring from the deeper change promised within a new covenant, whereby all will be given a new heart, with God's law written upon it (Jer. 31:31; Ez 36:26-27 cf 37:15ff). The nation will thus be fit to be God's servant: 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified'. 'I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth' (Is.49:3 and 6).

The Old Testament Scriptures look forward to a messianic age of peace and righteousness when God will dwell among his people and all the ends of the earth will worship him. Then will God's purpose of communion be fulfilled (Is.11:1-9; Mic.4:1-4; Is.11:1-9; Is.25:2-8; Zech.2:10-13).

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According to the Gospel proclaimed by the Apostles all God's promises find their fulfilment in Christ. The promises given by God in his covenant with Abraham, reaffirmed and clarified by God through the prophets, were thus accomplished. The Church recognised that through the cross of Christ and the Spirit of the risen Lord the barriers dividing humanity were broken down. Through faith and repentance, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, believers are drawn into communion with God and one another. 'Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised, and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, freeman, but Christ is all, and in all' (Col. 3:11). Thus they enter into the salvation promised within the New Covenant. This salvation is far more than the restoration of a broken relationship. In Christ we are brought into the family of God and, as adopted children, share in his own communion with the Father. On the

return of the Prodigal to the father's house, he discovered and experienced a depth of the father's love that far exceeded anything he had known before, a welcome and honour that was wholly undeserved: such is the welcome that our heavenly Father offers to the redeemed. Moreover, through the victory of the cross Christ who is our peace has not only reconciled us to the God from whom we were estranged : he has also broken down all human divisions. The barriers of culture, class, sex and privilege are all overcome (Eph. 2:13-18; Gal. 3:27-29). Moreover, because our Saviour is the one in and through whom all things were created and are reconciled, our proper relationship within the whole created order is re-affirmed.

Through the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the victory of the cross begins to be realised in the life and experience of the Christian Church. Pentecost is the reversal of Babel : in place of division 'the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul and ..... they had everything in common' (Acts 4:32). The dawn of the Church makes a reality what the First Epistle of Peter describes as the new humanity, 'a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God' (cf. 1 Peter 2:9, 10). The people embody the gift of communion between God and themselves: this is the mystery of the Church. By declaring the marvellous deeds of God in its life and proclamation the Church is the sign and instrument of God for calling the whole of humanity into this communion. The death of Christ on the cross was for everyone: 'I, when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all people to myself' (Jn 12:32). The Church is that part of humanity which accepts through the Holy Spirit this call

to become the new humanity.

The Church's vocation in its life and mission is the recovery and renewal of our human responsibility through communion with the living Christ. We are to share his commitment to the Father, his suffering for the sake of the gospel, and his compassion for the world. That is why love, which is the very nature of God, is the fulfilment of his law. Such love is not in word only but is expressed in the sharing of all that we possess and all that we are. We are to persevere in the service of the Lord 'knowing that in the Lord our labour is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58). Our assurance is that in the final resurrection we shall share in Christ's victory over all the powers of death and decay, for he is Lord of all creation. In the new heaven and new earth God will dwell with his people in perfect communion, making all things new (Rev. 21:1-5).

The unity and communion of the Church is maintained by the confession of 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism' (Eph.4:5). This communion is expressed and sustained in the eucharist: because there is one bread we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the same bread' (1 Cor 10:17). It was practically demonstrated for instance by the sharing of goods and by collections for the poor. Nevertheless, from the beginning divisions and misunderstandings threatened to disrupt the communion. The concern of the Apostles to maintain 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' necessitated the gift of discernment. Certain <sup>u</sup>fundamental matters of faith and morals inevitably damaged the Church's mission (2 Jn vv 2-7; Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Cor.5). The Council of Jerusalem was the

apostolic means of resolving an issue of such severity that the Church's unity was in peril (Acts 15). While communion is impaired by the differences which lead to division it is enriched by proper diversity to which the variety of writings in the New Testament itself bears witness. Some differences inevitably result in division, a proper diversity enriches communion, indeed is integral to it.



In the new Testament the idea of communion is profound and all embracing. The basic pattern is seen in Jesus' own relation to his Father: in complete conformity of mind, will and life. This is the pattern of our communion with God and with one another. Jesus prays 'that they may all be one; even as thou, Father art in me, and I in thee that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me' (Jn. 17:20). That which Christians have in common is their participation in the life of Christ: they are "called into the fellowship (Koinonia) of his [God's] son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor.1:9). Sharing in his life, they also have a share in the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14). They are united with Christ in his sufferings now, in order that they may be united with him in glory (Rom. 8:17). Their union with Christ in his death to sin and in the hope of resurrection has its sacramental expression in baptism (Rom. 6:4ff.) and in the eucharist (1 Cor.10:16-17). This koinonia (in the sense of "participation" in the life of Christ) is the basis of the koinonia (in the sense of "fellowship" or "common life") which Christians share with one another. Nowhere is this better expressed than in the First Epistle of John: "that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship (koinonia) with us; and our fellowship (koinonia) is with the Father and the Son" (1 John 1:3).

No one image on its own can adequately illustrate the concept of communion. God's call is not into a collection of individuals but into a unified community: salvation is never in isolation. The New Testament speaks of the disciples of Christ as being the sheep with the shepherd, the temple with the indwelling Spirit of the Lord, the bride with the Bridegroom. It also speaks of the living stones with the foundation indicating the need for the closest bonding with Christ. It speaks also of the branches with the vine with the expectation that they will be fruitful for the glory of the Father. In a more specific way the Pauline imagery of the Church as the body

of Christ elucidates the way in which the inner life of the redeemed community is essentially a life of communion: communion of all the members with the Head and of all the members together in mutual interdependence. God provides special gifts of ministry to build up the body. Only as the body is built up in true communion with the will of God can it fulfill its mission in the world. In all these New Testament images our vocation for service cannot be fulfilled unless our relationship with God is preserved.

Our communion with God, and with one another, is a gift of grace which calls forth our thankfulness. Furthermore, the call to share in the mission of Christ is a privilege of grace and our path to glory. For the sake of that mission and for the glory of God growth in our communion with God and one another and between divided churches is a divine imperative that rests on us all.

Communion sums up the blessing we experience in our obedience to the Gospel. The blessing is for the whole of humanity.