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ARCIC 250/Introduction/2

INTRODUCTION

1. Our two communions have been separated for over 400 years. This separation, involving serious doctrinal differences, has been aggravated by theological polemics and mutual intolerance, which have reached into and affected many departments of life. Nevertheless, although our unity has been impaired through separation, it has not been destroyed. Many bonds still unite us: we confess the same faith in the one true God; we have received the same Spirit; we have been baptised with the same baptism; and we preach the same Christ.
2. Controversy between our two communions has centred on the eucharist, on the meaning and function of ordained ministry, and on the nature and exercise of authority in the Church. Although we are not yet in full communion, what the Commission has done has convinced us that substantial agreement on these divisive issues is now possible.
3. In producing these Statements, we have been concerned, not to evade the difficulties, but rather to avoid the controversial language in which they have often been discussed. We have taken seriously the issues that have divided us, and have sought solutions by re-examining our common inheritance, particularly the Scriptures.
4. The subjects which we were required to consider as a result of the report of the Joint Preparatory Commission all relate to the true nature of the Church. Fundamental to ^{all} our Statements is the concept of koinonia (communion). In the early Christian tradition, reflection on the experience of koinonia opened the way to the understanding of the mystery of the Church. Although 'koinonia' is never equated with 'Church' in the New Testament, it is the term that most aptly expresses the mystery underlying the various New Testament images of the Church. When, for example, the Church is called the people of the new covenant or the bride of Christ, the context is

primarily that of communion. Although such images as the Temple, the new Jerusalem, or the royal priesthood may carry institutional overtones, their primary purpose is to depict the Church's experience as a partaking in the salvation of Christ. When the Church is described as the body of Christ, the household of God, or the holy nation, the emphasis is upon the relationships among its members as well as upon their relationship with Christ the Head.

5. Union with God in Christ Jesus through the Spirit is the heart of Christian koinonia. Among the various ways in which the term koinonia is used in different New Testament contexts, we concentrate on that which signifies a relation between persons resulting from their participation in one and the same reality (cf. I John 1:3). The Son of God has taken to himself our human nature, and he has sent upon us his Spirit, who makes us so truly members of the body of Christ that we too are able to call God 'Abba, Father' (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Moreover, sharing in the same Holy Spirit, whereby we become members of the same body of Christ and adopted children of the same Father, we are also bound to one another in a completely new relationship. Koinonia with one another is entailed by our koinonia with God in Christ. This is the mystery of the Church.

6. This theme of koinonia runs through our Statements. In them we present the eucharist as the effectual sign of koinonia, episcopate as serving the koinonia, and primacy as a visible link and focus of koinonia.

In the Statement on eucharistic doctrine the eucharist is seen as the sacrament of Christ, by which he builds up and nurtures his people in the koinonia of his body. By the eucharist all the baptized are brought into communion with the source of koinonia. He is the one who destroyed the walls dividing humanity (Eph. 2:14); he is the one who died to gather into unity all the children of God his Father (cf. John 11:52; 17:20ff).

In the Statement on ministry and ordination it is made clear that episcopate exists only to serve koinonia. The ordained minister presiding

at the eucharist is a sign of Christ gathering his people and giving them his body and blood. The Gospel he preaches is the Gospel of unity. Through the ministry of word and sacrament the Holy Spirit is given for the building up of the body of Christ. It is the responsibility of those exercising episcopate to enable all the people to use the gifts of the Spirit which they have received for the enrichment of the Church's common life. It is also their responsibility to keep the community under the law of Christ in mutual love and in concern for others; for the reconciled community of the Church has been given the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor.5:18).

In the Statements on authority in the Church the Commission, discussing primacy, sees it as a necessary link between all those exercising episcopate within the koinonia. All ministers of the Gospel need to be in communion with one another, for the one Church is a communion of local churches. They also need to be united in the apostolic faith. Primacy, as a focus within the koinonia, is an assurance that what they teach and do is in accord with the faith of the apostles.

7. The Church as koinonia requires visible expression because it is intended to be the 'sacrament' of God's saving work. A sacrament is both sign and instrument. The koinonia is a sign that God's purpose in Christ is being realised in the world by grace. It is also an instrument for the accomplishment of this purpose, inasmuch as it proclaims the truth of the Gospel and witnesses to it by its life, thus entering more deeply into the mystery of the Kingdom. The community thus announces what it is called to become.

8. The koinonia is grounded in the word of God preached, believed and obeyed. Through this word the saving work of God is proclaimed. In the fullness of time this salvation was realised in the person of Jesus, the Word of God incarnate. Jesus prepared his followers to receive through the Holy Spirit the fruit of his death and resurrection, the

culmination of his life of obedience, and to become the heralds of salvation. In the New Testament it is clear that the community is established by a baptism inseparable from faith and conversion, that its mission is to proclaim the Gospel of God, and that its common life is sustained by the eucharist. This remains the pattern for the Christian Church. The Church is the community of those reconciled with God and with each other because it is the community of those who believe in Jesus Christ and are justified through God's grace. It is also the reconciling community because it has been called to bring to all mankind, through the preaching of the Gospel, God's gracious offer of redemption.

9. Christ's will and prayer are that his disciples should be one. Those who have received the same word of God and have been baptised in the same Spirit cannot, without disobedience, acquiesce in a state of separation. Unity is of the essence of the Church, and since the Church is visible its unity also must be visible. Full visible communion between our two churches cannot be achieved without mutual recognition of sacraments and ministry, together with the common acceptance of a universal primacy, at one with the episcopal college in the service of the koinonia.