

IMPERFECT REALITY: OUR URGENT HUNGER FOR EUCHARISTIC SHARING

A Statement by the Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation in the United States

I. Introduction

This statement has been prepared for leaders in the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion as they "consult...about how the relationship between the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church is to progress."¹ As members of the official dialogue in the United States, we recognize the need to review the road we have travelled together and to prepare clear plans for the journey ahead. Prompted by our communities' desire for full visible unity and hunger for sharing the eucharist, we propose that there is a special urgency to include the question of eucharistic sharing in any plans for the future of Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue.

Members of our churches in the United States have had positive experiences of shared prayer in a variety of contexts. But, this kind of shared prayer is only a first step. At what point can eucharistic sharing manifest our "real though imperfect communion"? In this document, we will probe the issue of eucharistic sharing in light of areas of current agreement and common discipline, and we will recommend some specific directions for future work. We are encouraged by the unique relationship that exists between us, reflected in the statement of the Second Vatican Council that "among those [separated communions] in which Catholic traditions and institutions in part continue to exist, the Anglican Communion occupies a special place."²

II. Areas of Agreement to Date on Eucharist and Ministry

In the thirty-five years since official dialogues have been established,³ both ARCIC and ARC-USA have made progress in examining the theological issues which since the sixteenth century have impeded dialogue and shared communion between Anglicans and Roman Catholics. ARCIC and ARC-USA have reached agreement on a number of these issues. A brief review will highlight the remarkable degree of consensus on eucharist and ministry already achieved and recognized by our two churches. This review will help to clear the way for articulating other areas which remain obstacles to eucharistic sharing.

The clearest summary of the many basic issues can be found in ARCIC's *Final Report* (1981), which draws upon the concept of *koinonia* to underpin its statements on both the eucharist and ministry.⁴ The essential points of agreement are rooted in "biblical teaching, and ... the traditions of our common inheritance."⁵ ARCIC recognized substantial agreement between the two churches that the eucharist, properly understood

in the context of baptism, is simultaneously memorial (*anamnesis*), gift and sacrifice, in which Christ is really, sacramentally, present.⁶ ARCIC also reached agreement that the three-fold ordained ministry is properly centered on *koinonia*, and so is integrally connected with the priesthood of the people of God; yet because the ministerial priesthood stands in "sacramental relation" to the sacrifice of Christ, it "belongs to another realm of the gifts of the Spirit." Ministerial priesthood is thus entered into through the sacramental act of ordination.⁷

Both of our churches recognized the agreements on eucharist and ministry in *The Final Report* to be significant. Lambeth 1988 recognized these statements as "consonant in substance with the faith of Anglicans."⁸ The Holy See's Response (1991), while noting that the Report "constitutes a significant milestone,"⁹ requested several clarifications in the areas of eucharist and ministry. ARCIC responded (1993) that the eucharist (as memorial [*anamnesis*]) is fundamentally linked with the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, and thus has a propitiatory nature. In the eucharist, Christ is "truly and really" present in the elements. Instituted by Christ, ordination confers on the priestly minister a unique role in the eucharist as "the minister of the sacramental self-offering of Christ."¹⁰ In reply, Cardinal Cassidy's letter to ARCIC II (1994) states that "The agreement reached on eucharist and ministry by ARCIC I is thus greatly strengthened and *no further study would seem to be required at this stage* [italics added]."¹¹

ARC-USA also took note of the Vatican's request for clarification, and in response issued a groundbreaking set of five agreed statements (1994) on the eucharist as sacrifice. In light of these affirmations, as well as the consensus set forth in *The Final Report* and recognized by both of our churches, ARC-USA concluded "that the eucharist as sacrifice is not an issue that divides our two Churches."¹²

These areas of agreement on the eucharist and ordained ministry provide a significant foundation for eucharistic sharing between Anglicans and Roman Catholics, especially since ARCIC and ARC-USA function as officially appointed representative voices of our two churches, on both the international and national levels. However, some matters continue to preclude immediate sharing, as can be seen in an examination of the actual guidelines for each communion.

III. Present Guidelines for Eucharistic Sharing

The guidelines for eucharistic sharing currently in place for both of our churches in the United States have much in common.¹³ Neither of our churches authorizes what is called "open communion," in which any baptized Christian is welcomed to the communion table, but both permit access under certain conditions.

Baptism with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is the sacramental prerequisite for admission to communion in both our churches and thus is required for a member of another church to receive communion in either of our churches. In addition, both disciplines require what the Roman Catholic Church calls

"proper disposition," which entails self-examination and repentance of sin.¹⁴ Both churches require of the communicant a belief in the real presence of Christ in the eucharist. Finally, both churches set spiritual or pastoral need as the context in which eucharistic sharing may take place, either for members of other churches to receive communion there, or for members of their own church to receive communion elsewhere.

There are, however, significant differences in our respective disciplines. In the Episcopal Church, the definition of spiritual or pastoral need has not been spelled out. When members of other denominations are invited to receive in the Episcopal Church, the invitation "should not be in any way coercive, nor should it be in terms of an 'open Communion' applied indiscriminately to anyone desiring to receive Communion." A member of the Episcopal Church desiring to receive communion in another church should be guided by "an intentional decision for the unity of Christ's Body as well as a response to personal spiritual need."¹⁵

The Roman Catholic guidelines (*normae*) distinguish between members of the Eastern churches that do not have full communion with the Roman Catholic Church, and other Christians who are not in full communion. To receive communion in the Roman Catholic Church, members of these Eastern churches must "ask ...of their own free will" and be "properly disposed."¹⁶ For other Christians not in communion with the Roman Catholic Church, "in certain circumstances, by way of exception, and under certain conditions, access to [the] sacraments may be permitted, or even commended."¹⁷ Episcopal conferences are to set norms after "consultation with at least the local competent authority of the other interested Church or ecclesial Community."¹⁸ Christians "in case of danger of death" or other "situations of grave and pressing need" may receive communion if they are "unable to have recourse...to a minister of [their] own Church or ecclesial Community," if they "ask...of [their] own initiative," if they "manifest Catholic faith in this sacrament," and if they are "properly disposed."¹⁹

Conversely, Roman Catholics in similar circumstances may "ask for these sacraments [i.e., Eucharist, penance, and anointing of the sick] only from a minister in whose Church these sacraments are valid or from one who is known to be validly ordained according to the Catholic teaching on ordination."²⁰ Episcopal Church guidelines permit Roman Catholics to receive, but do not encourage Roman Catholics to disregard the guidelines of their own church. However, Roman Catholic guidelines require valid ordination or valid sacraments, and the Roman Catholic Church does not currently recognize the validity of Anglican orders. Hence, Roman Catholics may not receive communion in the Episcopal Church.

While Roman Catholic guidelines permit Episcopalians to receive in some instances, one instance does not create a general practice. Each case requires a pastoral judgement by the minister of the sacrament in keeping with norms which may have been adopted by the diocesan bishop in consultation with the corresponding bishop of the Episcopal Church.²¹ Episcopal Church guidelines allow Episcopalians to receive in Roman Catholic churches, but only in a manner that respects Roman Catholic norms.

In the view of many, the modes of expressing our "real though imperfect communion" which are presently allowed do not adequately address certain pastoral needs of our members and communities. There are numerous situations where shared communion is not only pastorally desirable but seems theologically warranted. Examples include baptisms, weddings, funerals, and celebrations of first communion, as well as other occasions when families gather for worship; instances of interchurch activities when worship is a component; and worship in institutional communities such as schools, colleges and hospitals. In these places and circumstances, the inability to share communion causes pain. Shared communion is an urgent pastoral need, and to this end, we offer the following recommendations.

IV. Recommendations

At the beginning of the twentieth century, it seemed as if the sixteenth-century differences on eucharistic sacrifice and presence were significant obstacles to shared communion. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, based on the theological reflection of the latter part of the century, we reached common ground in our agreements on eucharist, including the questions of sacrifice and real presence. We have recognized that our common baptism is a principal foundation of the Church's eucharistic identity and ministry, as expressed in the ARCIC statement *Church as Communion* (1991): "Visibly, this communion is entered through baptism and nourished and expressed in the celebration of the eucharist. All who are baptized in the one Spirit into one body are united in the eucharist by this sacramental participation in this same one body."²²

We, the members of ARC-USA, believe that this substantial level of agreement is sufficient to warrant greater eucharistic sharing, even as the dialogue continues to address other issues. Therefore, we place these recommendations before the leaders of our churches as they consult about our relationship.

A. Pastoral Recommendation

It is clear that the sharing of the eucharist between Anglicans and Roman Catholics cannot become reciprocal as long as the Roman Catholic Church does not recognize the validity of Anglican orders. However, it seems to us that the agreement which has been reached between Anglicans and Roman Catholics on eucharist and ministry could be recognized as sufficient to justify permitting Anglicans to receive the eucharist from a Roman Catholic minister under the conditions which presently apply to members of the Eastern churches not in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church.²³

B. Recommendations for Further Dialogue

Broadening the current discipline under which Anglicans may receive communion in Roman Catholic churches would address one aspect of the urgent pastoral need. It is equally important to remove the barriers to Roman Catholics receiving communion in Anglican churches. Acknowledging that the major barrier is the fact that the Roman Catholic Church does not recognize Anglican orders to be valid, we recommend the following avenues of dialogue.

1. In 1985 Cardinal Willebrands expressed to the co-chairmen of ARCIC-II the opinion that there was now a new context in which to re-examine the 1896 judgment of the Roman Catholic Church upon the validity of Anglican orders. We suggest that the various aspects of this "new context" be vigorously explored, with a view to seeing how the progress that has been made in more than thirty years of dialogue can bear fruit in our common quest for unity.²⁴ ARC-USA has already begun this important work.²⁵

2. The Second Vatican Council, in its Decree on Ecumenism, has clearly recognized that the sacramental ministry in churches such as those of the Anglican Communion has been fruitful of grace and salvation: "these [sacred] actions can truly engender a life of grace and can be rightly described as capable of providing access to the community of salvation."²⁶ Mindful that the Second Vatican Council also acknowledged that the Anglican Communion occupies a "special place" among those separated communions in which some Catholic traditions and institutions continue to exist, we propose that the dialogue explore the theological implications of the evident fruitfulness of Anglican eucharistic ministry. Such an exploration may enable a fresh understanding of the validity of Anglican orders.²⁷

V. Conclusion

The issue of eucharistic sharing is both crucial and painful. The Roman Catholic bishops of the United Kingdom and Ireland, in their thoughtful statement on the eucharist and eucharistic sharing, emphasize this eloquently: "The question of sacramental sharing is a serious one, and a proper understanding of the issues involved is a matter of urgency....[which] now often takes centre stage in our meetings and gatherings together."²⁸ As our communities enter the twenty-first century, we are even more keenly aware of Christ's prayer to the Father: "that they may be one, as we are one" (John 17: 11). Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue has achieved agreement on eucharist and ministry, including the questions of sacrifice and real presence. It is time for this consensus to be reflected more fully in our lives of prayer together.

Notes

1. Common Declaration of John Paul II and Archbishop George Carey (1996).
2. *Unitatis Redintegratio* (1964), 13.
3. The Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation in the USA (ARC-USA) was planned jointly in 1965 and first met in 1966.
4. *Final Report*, Introduction, 4-9.
5. FR, *Eucharistic Doctrine* (1971), 1, and *Ministry and Ordination* (1973), 1.
6. FR, *Eucharistic Doctrine*, 2-12, and *Elucidation* (1979), 1-7. ARCIC also recognized substantial agreement on eucharistic reservation and adoration (*Elucidation* 8-9), further underscoring our agreement on eucharistic presence.
7. FR, *Ministry and Ordination* (1973), 3-17, and *Elucidation* (1979), 2-3.
8. Resolution 8: Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission, Lambeth 1988.
9. "The Official Roman Catholic Response to the Final Report of ARCIC I" (1991).
10. *Requested Clarifications on Eucharist and Ministry* (1993).
11. Letter by Cardinal E. Cassidy to the Co-chairmen of ARCIC II (1994).
12. *Five Affirmations on the Eucharist as Sacrifice* (ARC-USA, 1994). The five affirmations are:
 1. We affirm that in the eucharist the Church, doing what Christ commanded his apostles to do at the Last Supper, makes present the sacrifice of Calvary. We understand this to mean that when the Church is gathered in worship, it is empowered by the Holy Spirit to make Christ present and to receive all the benefits of his sacrifice.
 2. We affirm that God has given the eucharist to the Church as a means through which all the atoning work of Christ on the cross is proclaimed and made present with all its effect in the life of the Church. His work includes "that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction, for all the sins of the whole world" (cf Art. 31, BCP [USA], p. 874). Thus the propitiatory effect of Christ's one sacrifice applies in the eucharistic celebration to both the living and the dead, including a particular dead person.
 3. We affirm that Christ in the eucharist makes himself present sacramentally and truly when under the species of bread and wine these earthly realities are changed into the reality of his body and blood. In English the terms *substance*, *substantial*, and *substantially* have such physical and material overtones that we, adhering to *The Final Report*, have substituted the word *truly* for the word *substantially* in the clarification requested by the *Vatican Response*. However, we affirm the reality of the change by consecration as being independent of the

subjective disposition of the worshippers.

4. Both our Churches affirm that after the eucharistic celebration the body and blood of Christ may be reserved for the communion of the sick, "or of others who for weighty cause could not be present at the celebration" (BCP, pp. 408-409). Although the *American Book of Common Prayer* directs that any consecrated bread and wine not reserved for this purpose should be consumed at the end of the service, American Episcopalians recognize that many of their own Church members practice the adoration of Christ in the reserved sacrament. We acknowledge this practice as an extension of the worship of Jesus Christ present at the eucharistic celebration.
5. We affirm that only a validly ordained priest can be the minister who, in the person of Christ, brings into being the sacrament of the eucharist and offers sacramentally the redemptive sacrifice of Christ which God offers us.

13. In November 1996, in light of the *Code of Canon Law* (1983), the *Directory For the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (1993), and the encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (1995), the U.S. Roman Catholic bishops approved the following guidelines on eucharistic sharing to be printed in all parish missalettes:

[for most non-Eastern Christians] "We welcome our fellow Christians to this celebration of the eucharist as our brothers and sisters. We pray that our common baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit in this eucharist will draw us closer to one another and begin to dispel the sad divisions that separate us. We pray that these will lessen and finally disappear, in keeping with Christ's prayer for us 'that they may all be one' (Jn 17: 21).

"Because Catholics believe that the celebration of the eucharist is a sign of the reality of the oneness of faith, life and worship, members of those churches with whom we are not yet fully united are ordinarily not admitted to holy communion. Eucharistic sharing in exceptional circumstances by other Christians requires permission according to the directives of the diocesan bishop and the provisions of canon law (Canon 844.4)."

The 1979 General Convention of the Episcopal Church approved the following "standards of eucharistic sharing" for members of other churches who on occasion wish to receive communion in the Episcopal Church:

- a) They shall have been baptized with water in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and shall have previously been admitted to the Holy Communion within the Church to which they belong.
- b) They shall examine their lives, repent of their sins, and be in love and charity with all people, as this Church in its catechism (BCP, p. 860) says is required of all those who come to the Eucharist.
- c) They shall approach the Holy Communion as an expression of the Real Presence of Jesus Christ whose sacrifice once upon the cross was sufficient for all mankind.
- d) They shall find in this Communion the means to strengthen their life within the Christian family "through the forgiveness of [their] sins, the strengthening of [their]

union with Christ and one another, and the foretaste of the heavenly banquet..." (BCP, pp. 859-60).

- e) Their own consciences must always be respected as must the right of their own Church membership to determine the sacramental discipline of those who, by their own choice, make that their spiritual home.

Journal of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church, 1979, p. C-50. The standards are pastorally interpreted by the accompanying "Commentary on Eucharistic Sharing" (pp. AA-80-82).

14. For Roman Catholics, this is stipulated in Canon 916, which requires prior sacramental reconciliation if the person is conscious of grave sin. Other conditions are stipulated in the surrounding canons, e.g., the case of public sinners who are officially excluded, or the eucharistic fast. For Episcopalians, the Catechism states "it is required that we should examine our lives, repent of our sins, and be in love and charity with all people" (BCP 1979, p. 860).

15. "Commentary on Eucharistic Sharing," *Journal of the General Convention*, 1979, AA-81.

16. *Directory on Ecumenism* (1993), no. 125, and Canon 844.3.

17. *Directory on Ecumenism*, no. 129; see also Canon 844.4.

18. *Directory on Ecumenism*, no. 130; see also Canon 844.5.

19. *Directory on Ecumenism*, no. 131; see also Canon 844.4.

20. *Directory on Ecumenism*, no. 132; see also Canon 844.2.

21. *Directory on Ecumenism*, nos. 130-131

22. *Church as Communion*, 15.

23. *Directory on Ecumenism*, no. 125. Members of Eastern churches who ask for the eucharist of their own free will and are properly disposed may receive. The *Directory* also urges due consideration of the discipline of the Eastern churches and avoidance of any suggestion of proselytism.

24. The Cardinal's letter to the Co-Presidents of ARCIC-II, July 13, 1985, published in *Information Service* 60 (1986) I-II, pp. 23ff. This "new context," established in part by the discovery of common language that transcends the polemical language of the past, is evident in other dialogues and relationships with the Roman Catholic Church. See, for example, the agreements on Christological doctrine with certain Eastern churches and the agreement on justification with Lutherans: the Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Mar Ignatius Jacob (October 27, 1971); the Common Declaration of Pope Paul VI and

the Common Christological Declaration of Pope John Paul II and Mar Dinkha IV (November 11, 1994); the Common Declaration of Pope John Paul II and Catholicos Karekin I (December 13, 1996); the Catholic-Lutheran Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (October 31, 1999).

25. *Anglican Orders: A Report on the Evolving Context of Their Evaluation in the Roman Catholic Church*, (ARC-USA 1990); cf. George H. Tavard, *A Review of Anglican Orders. The Problem and the Solution* (Liturgical Press, 1990); see also Christopher Hill and Edward Yarnold, S.J., eds., *Anglican Orders. The Documents in the Debate* (Canterbury Press, 1997) and R. William Franklin, ed., *Anglican Orders: Essays on the Centenary of Apostolicae Curiae* (Mowbray, 1996).

26. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3.

27. One fruitful element of this exploration might be the implications of a baptismal ecclesiology, not only for eucharistic sharing, but also for understandings of ministry and ordination. As sacraments of initiation, baptism and eucharist are two moments of our incorporation into the Paschal Mystery. The affirmation of our common initiation into the Body of Christ allows us to probe more deeply the mystery of baptism as the foundation for our identity as Church. This provides an ecclesiological framework for considering the nature of Holy Orders in the community of the baptized.

A second element might be a more intensive examination of our understanding of the mission of the Holy Spirit in the theology of the Church and in the process of tradition. This might provide a new lens through which to view the work of the Spirit in the way each of our churches interprets and lives out the Tradition, a unity in the Spirit that may permit a greater degree of diversity in structure and discipline.

28. Catholic Bishops' Conferences of England & Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, *One Bread One Body: A Teaching Document on the Eucharist in the life of the Church, and the establishment of general norms on sacramental sharing* (London: Catholic Truth Society; Dublin: Veritas Publications, 1998), n. 97.