INTERCOMMUNION
The Road Slowed by Obstacles

By RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE

Intercommunion, the sharing of the Eucharist by followers of Christ, has once again become a focus of attention in the movement for Christian unity.

As Roman Catholics and various Protestant traditions have found agreement on such major doctrinal matters as the nature of the ministry and the meaning of the sacraments, ecumenists have suggested that exploration of intercommunion is the next logical step.

But while many Protestants feel a shared Eucharist can be a move on the road to eventual unity, most Catholic theologians stress that it must come only as the culmination of such a process. The same viewpoint is shared among Eastern Orthodox Christians.

In 1972, the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity issued an "instruction" on the subject which said that "admission to Catholic Eucharistic Communion is confined to cases of those Christians who have a faith in the sacraments in conformity with that of the Church, who experience a serious need for the Eucharistic sustenance, who for a prolonged period are unable to have recourse to a minister of their own community, and who ask for the sacrament of their own accord."

David Perman, a layman of the Church of England, has written in his book, Change & the Churches: An Anatomy of Religion in Britain, that "the Vatican's rule is clear, but the practice is certainly not. There have been spectacular transgressions of the rule at ecumenical gatherings in Europe and America since the Second Vatican Council and on a less noticeable level intercommunion by individuals and small groups, especially of charismatic Christians, is going on despite the rule."

In Perman's view, "the objections to intercommunion are not theological so much as psychological." By the same token it can be argued that psychological factors have been at work in those situations where restrictions against intercommunion have been ignored by zealous people seeking to advance Christian unity in local situations.

An unusually hard-hitting statement by participants in the U.S. Roman Catholic/Presbyterian-Reformed Consultation last year referred to fellings of "insult and fear" that have arisen because of official prohibitions of intercommunion.

They declared that "Presbyterian-Reformed Christians feel insulted by Roman Catholic suspicion of the authenticity and integrity of their Reformed Holy Communion: Roman Catholic Christians fear that Reformed eucharistic doctrine underplays important themes and that, consequently, Reformed discipline is too liberal in its admission to the Lord's Supper and too casual in its treatment of the elements used in the celebration. These festering feelings of insult and of fear threaten to poison ecumenical relations."

Yet participants in a similar dialogue on the international level took a more cautious approach on the matter. A co-chairman of the dialogue between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Vatican Secretariat for Christisn Unity recently said that although they reached common understandings about the meaning, purpose and basic doctrine of the Lord's Supper, the two groups "cannot envisage an immediate possibility of intercommunion."

Dr. E. David Willis, professor of theology at San Francisco Theological Seminary, noted that agreements reached during the dialogues "reverse misunderstandings about the Eucharist that have helped to keep Roman Catholic and Reformed Churches separated and often antagonistic for 400 years." But he also pointed out that there are disagreements on what is required for ordination of ministers and priests to make eucharistic fellowship possible.

In 1974, a report on the U.S. dialogues between Roman Catholic and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) theologians urged that intercommunion be explored "as soon as possible." But although the Catholic-Disciples dialogues recently began a new round, intercommunion was not a specific item on the agenda.

Anglican Archbishop Donald Coggan of Canterbury has expressed impatience at the "slow pace" which he feels has marked progress in Anglican-Catholic relations in the past decade. Preaching at an ecumenical service during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in January, he said, "We recognize our unity in baptism. We persist in disunity at the Eucharist. So we go to our mission weak, where we should be strong and invigorated."

In response to the Anglican Primate's plea, Cardinal George Basil Hume, OSB, Archbishop of Westminster, told the General Synod of the Church of England a week later that "sharing in communion at the altar" must be the "sign and expression of full unity." He stressed that "there are other questions to be resolved before we can, as Churches, approach the altar of the Lord together."

The Long Island Catholic, newsweekly of the Rockville Centre diocese, commented editorially that the word "intercommunion" denotes an understanding of the Eucharist "not shared by the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches, fully two-thirds of the Christian world. These Churches seek not intercommunion among Churches but full communion — a full sharing in a common progession of faith . . . in the one Church."

Its editorial was in response to Dr. Coggan's call for intercommunion, and echoed a similar editorial it had published in 1977 in response to comments by Lutheran pastor-editor Richard John Neuhaus, who had said in St. Louis that "the immediate ecumenical task of Lutherans is the resumption of eucharistic fellowship with the bishop of Rome and with those who are in fellowship with him."

Despite the reluctance of Catholic authorities to approve intercommunion on an official basis with other denominations, U.S. dioceses have begun issuing guidelines, based on the 1972 Vatican instruction, setting forth conditions under which non-Catholics may receive Communion in Catholic churches.

The Newark archdiocese is believed to be the first in the nation authorizing priests to admit non-Catholics to the Eucharist without first checking with the bishop. Guidelines adopted by the Louisville archdiocese require priests to request episcopal approval before administering the sacrament to non-Catholics.

Jewish Center Showing Russian Dissidents' Art

Photographs of an "underground" art show in Leningrad are on display at the Jewish Community Center, 1200 Edgewood. They picture paintings and sculpture by 12 Russian Jews, who labelled "dissidents," were denied membership in the artists' union, and therefore could not show their work publicly. Their exhibition in a private apartment, advertised solely by word of mouth, reportedly drew 4,000 visitors.

The photo-documentary was brought to Rochester by the center and the Jewish Community Federation, which supplied the following information:

The underground exhibition took place in November 1975. Photographs, and later, some of the original works of art, were smuggled out of the Soviet Union. Critical acclaim and general publicity have worked as a lever, and four of the artists have been given permission to emigrate. Three of the artists have gone to Israel and one awaits entry to the United States. The purpose of circulating the show in cities with large Jewish populations is to sustain the pressure until the release of the other eight artists.

HUMAN RIGHTS

President Carter meets in Rio De Janeiro with Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns, OFM, Archbishop of Sao Paulo, left, and Cardinal Eugenio De Araujo Sales, Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro. The leaders met March 31 to discuss Brazil's human rights policies, which both prelates oppose. (Photo by Religious News Service)

RSPCC MOVES

The Rochester Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children has moved its headquarters to 49 South Fitzhugh from 156 North Plymouth. The 103-year-old agency, second oldest of its kind in the United States, runs a homemaker-health aide program that, in the words of its president, Donald P. Berens Jr., makes an immeasurable contribution to the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

Sister Ann Takes Post At Hospital

Sister Ann William Bradley DC, acting executive director of St. Mary's Hospital, has been appointed chairman of the Board of Trustees of the institution. Her position was announced last week. She assumed the chair at the same time.

Most recently she has served as associate executive director with Sister DeChantal LaRow who has taken another assignment with her order.

Sister Ann is a graduate of Boston's Catherine Laboure School of Nursing, earned a bachelor's degree at St. Joseph's College in Maryland, and holds a master's degree in Hospital Administration from St. Louis University.

She is a member of the governing boards of Carney Hospital in Boston, Lourdes Hospital in Binghamton, N.Y., and the diocesan DePaul Mental Health Clinic. Sister also serves as secretary of the Bull's Head/Southwest Development Corp. and is a member of the Nineteenth Ward Association.

SISTER ANN

Mental Health Talk Slated

Molly Brown of the Genesee Mental Health Clinic will speak on Issues, Problems and Adaptations of Institutional Living, as Relates to the Resident, at 1:30 p.m., Wednesday, April 19 at St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Winton Road and Highland Avenue.

The talk is open to all volunteers and people interested in health care at no charge. Any questions may be directed to Barry O'Sullivan at 473-4080 Ext. 313.