

COLUMNISTS

Anglicans see intercommunion as step to unity

The House of Bishops of the Church of England has responded to "One Bread One Body," a document by the Roman Catholic bishops of England and Wales, Ireland, and Scotland. That document contained a synthesis of Roman Catholic eucharistic doctrines and a set of norms for applying those doctrines to eucharistic sharing, or intercommunion.

The Anglican bishops' response, "The Eucharist: Sacrament of Unity," generally endorses the eucharistic principles in "One Bread One Body," but disagrees with their application to intercommunion and disputes some of the Catholic bishops' perceptions of Anglicanism. It is the reservations expressed by the Anglican bishops that shall concern us here.

The Anglican bishops point out that, while there is no fundamental disagreement on the doctrine of the Real Presence, the Catholic document is "rather specific and tightly drawn" when it defines the mode of Christ's presence in the Eucharist.

And, taking exception to their church being viewed as one of those "Christian communities rooted in the Reformation," they insist that it "traces its origins back to the beginnings of Christianity in England and is continuous with the Church of the Apostles and Fathers."



BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

essays in theology

The bishops also disagree that Anglican orders are "defective" because they lack "validity." "We believe that the term 'validity' needs considerable unpacking."

But the main point of disagreement concerns the Roman Catholic bishops' understanding of the Eucharist as a sacrament of unity. For them, intercommunion can only occur when there is "full" sacramental communion between the churches. For the Anglican bishops, intercommunion may also be a means towards the realization of full communion.

The Anglican bishops cite the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on baptism as the basis of our union in Christ, and on intercommunion as both a sign of unity and as a means of achieving it (Decree on Ecumenism, n. 8).

"We do not believe," they write, "that

eucharistic communion should be reserved for the end point of unity already achieved between separated churches," nor "be reserved for full ecclesial communion, visibly and structurally expressed."

They support the "more flexible approach" of the Decree on Ecumenism and seeking full visible unity "by clearly defined and mutually agreed stages," rather than an all-or-nothing approach.

Regarding unity as a precondition of intercommunion, the Anglican bishops point out that there is a broader view of Catholic unity than is provided in "One Bread One Body."

"For Anglicans, the Catholic Church consists of all those local churches throughout the world who share the Catholic faith (understood as grounded in the Scriptures and expressed in the ecumenical creeds) and the Catholic sacraments (understood as primarily the dominical sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist), served by the apostolic ministry of 'episkope' or oversight."

Is it not enough, they ask, that Anglicans who participate in a Roman Catholic Eucharist are able to recite the Nicene Creed and make the various responses, including the grand "Amen" at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer?

Is it not enough that Anglicans "rejoice that in the Eucharist they are brought into closer communion, not only with the Lord and with fellow worshippers, but with the whole Church, made up on earth of local churches, those that are episcopally ordered (as Anglicans believe all churches should be), being led by their bishops?"

Why are non-Roman Catholics allowed to receive Communion on special occasions, such as weddings, but not thereafter? Why are the criteria applied to the Anglican churches not applied to the separated churches of the East, "in spite of the latter not being in communion with the Pope and not accepting the doctrine of transubstantiation?"

When Edward Yarnold, distinguished Jesuit theologian, was asked by *The Tablet* of London to comment on the Anglican response, he did not defend "One Bread One Body." Instead, he urged that Roman Catholics "should not require too high a level of assimilation before admitting others to communion," concluding that "we must say 'Thank you, listen, and examine our consciences.'"

And so we should.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Unity is the mark of God's presence in the church

7th Sunday of Easter (May 27): (R3) John 17:20-26; (R1) Acts 7:55-60; (R2) Revelation 22:12-14, 16-17, 20.

After the Last Supper, Jesus prayed for himself, then for his disciples. In Sunday's Gospel, he prays for all those in far-off ages who will become his followers through the words of the Apostles and their successors.

It was a prayer for unity, a unity of love — "that all may be one" as he and his Father are one.

Only when the church is a community of loving persons will it show God's presence among mankind. It was the love of the early Christians that drew pagans into the church: "See how these Christians love one another." Such love drew them to the church, because they knew such love was not natural. It had to come from above. And they were right. All love comes from God.

The sacramental grace of every Mass is unity and the bond of unity is love. Thus after the consecration of the Mass, the priest prays: "May all of us who share in the body and blood of Christ be brought together in unity by the Holy Spirit" (Eucharistic Prayer II).

Unity results from love and love results from receiving the sacrament of



BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

a word for sunday

love, holy Communion, and the God of love, the Holy Spirit. And that is the great sacramental grace of every Mass. As St. Augustine said, "The Church makes the Eucharist and the Eucharist makes the Church," by celebrating Mass and by pouring love into our heart by holy Communion and the Holy Spirit.

The church of Christ must be one. It should have one head, for a normal body has only one head. It should have only one teaching for truth is one. It should have unity of worship, for worship is but the expression of the truth of faith.

Only the Catholic Church has one head, the pope, the bishop of Rome. The Catholic Church also has only one teaching set forth in Scripture, the Apostles' Creed, the seven sacraments, the Ten

Commandments, conciliar decrees, papal definitions and so on. And it has only one worship — the Mass.

In 1881 the first International Eucharistic Congress was organized. Since then there have been 38. An International Eucharistic Congress is a periodic gathering of peoples of all nations to proclaim the centrality of the Eucharist in the life of the church. Those gathered together may not even speak the same language, yet they all profess the same faith in the Eucharist.

A multiplicity of different churches is not a sign of life, but of death. In autumn, the variety of colors is only a sign that the hand of death has touched them. Only when the trees of the forest are one green are they alive and well.

The Second Vatican Council said that the existence of many Christian churches "openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block to the world (John 17:21), and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the Good News to every creature" (Decree on Ecumenism, n. 1).

Each person is so unique, so different, so opinionated, that unity on the human level is well-nigh impossible. People cannot agree even on politics. Yet the

church has millions agreeing on the most difficult thing in the world: religion. She has millions accepting difficult truths, like going to confession, like her teachings on sexuality. Such religious unity is in itself a miracle, a mark of God's presence.

The church's unity commands assent, not dissent.

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, May 28
Acts 19:1-8; John 16:29-33.
Tuesday, May 29
Acts 20:17-27; John 17:1-11A
Wednesday, May 30
Acts 20:28-38; John 17:11B-19
Thursday, May 31
Zephaniah 3:14-18 or Romans 12:9-16B; Luke 1:39-56
Friday, June 1
Acts 25:13B-21; John 21:15-19
Saturday, June 2
Acts 28:16-20, 30-31;
John 21:20-25

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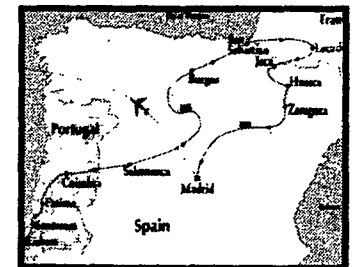
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