

## **A Paper presented to English ARC by Canon Bruce Ruddock.**

### **How has your experience of spiritual communion with Christians of other churches/denominations affected your own perception of Eucharistic communion?**

In order to place my answer to this question in some context, I want to begin by saying that the subject of Anglican-Roman Catholic relations has, in one way or another, been part of my life for as long as I can remember. One of the reasons for this is that I come from a large Irish family of whom three of my uncles (and one cousin- by-marriage) are Church of Ireland clergy.

However, the experience of real spiritual communion with Christians of other churches/denominations didn't really enter my life until about my late thirties and early forties. When it did, it was more meaningful to me with Roman Catholics than with anyone else, not least because, early in their marriage my parents moved to England and I was brought up in an Anglican tradition that was far nearer to Catholicism than the Church of my family, back in Ireland.

This was reinforced for me again recently, when I preached in Portadown for a Harvest Festival. Although I was in an Anglican Church, it all felt culturally alien to me in a way that Roman Catholicism never has, wherever I have been in the world.

Nevertheless, church life in Ireland today reminds us of just how far things have moved ecumenically in recent years. I remember visiting my grandmother in Dublin when I was a child and noticing that she had build a high fence on top of her already substantial garden wall. When I asked her why she felt that this "extension" was necessary, she replied; *"I don't want that R.C. cat getting in to my garden!"* I like to think that such anti-ecumenical sentiment is now only confined to small parts of the Christian world.

"Spiritual communion" is a phrase that can mean many things. For me it is, above all, a sense that through the power of the Holy Spirit, believers feel *moved* in the same direction and feel the mystery of God at a greater depth than they do simply by sharing the same views. I hope that I will show how this has been a powerful reality in my own life.

I have a great love and respect for the Roman Catholic Church based on a lifetime of contact with it, and my experience of what I would call spiritual communion with Roman Catholics, although fairly recent, has been profound. It has led me to agree very strongly with words from the final paragraph of the ARCIC 11 statement "Church as Communion": *"Paradoxically, the closer we draw together the more acutely we feel those differences which remain."* (¶158).

Of course I am aware that large numbers of people within our churches do not feel any differences acutely, let alone feel any real pain because of them. When a Roman Catholic priest in the USA said to me *"Thank God you have ordained women. now we don't have to grow any closer to you"* I knew he was speaking for many others, and that within my own communion there were those who delighted in this development in our Church for the

same sort of reason. We have to acknowledge that within the hearts of some people there is no *will* to move forward.

But during the four years that I was Director of the Anglican Centre in Rome and the Archbishop of Canterbury's Representative to the Holy See, I not only experienced and enjoyed spiritual communion of enormous depth, but also the corresponding pain which "Church as Communion" is alluding to. I could list dozens of occasions when this was the case, but I want to mention just three: all very different.

The first was the visit that the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, made to Pope John Paul II in 1996. I was part of the planning process and a member of the Archbishop's delegation for the visit. What struck me, quite apart from the formal events, the meetings and the liturgy, was that the relationship between the See of Canterbury and the Papacy has now matured to the extent that there is nothing extraordinary or unusual about a visit by an Archbishop to a Pope or vice versa. Mr Paisley and his colleagues no longer make the journey to Rome to protest, and after the Press Conference held at the English College after the 1996 visit, one member of the British press corps said to me that he had a problem with this visit, because there was no bad news!

But the reality of spiritual communion was most pronounced when we all sat together with the Pope and the Archbishop and met him individually. There was a sense in which as both Vatican and Lambeth staff, we had not only become good friends, but had also deepened our common commitment to the cause of unity and each other by working on this project. The warmth and affection between the Pope and the Archbishop — and indeed the sense of fun — rubbed off on us and created a feeling that we had all been on this journey for a very long time, and were already very much "in communion" at an important level. This was undoubtedly the fruit of the Spirit.

We were very definitely not strangers, but pilgrims and certainly in spiritual communion, along the lines that I have already defined it. But then, of course, we Anglicans celebrated the Eucharist in what I call (slightly cynically) "Chapel B" in the English College, which reminded us that we still had far to go before full Eucharistic communion would be possible.

That occasion was an example of how spiritual communion has its highs and lows, its crests and its troughs, and the second one I want to mention had the same effect, but throws into relief the accompanying pain that can also be felt, as a result of it.

As I am sure you know, every year on the concluding day of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the Pope celebrates Mass for the Diocese of Rome in the Basilica of St Paul-without-the-Walls. It is enormous event to which a number of ecumenical representatives are invited and given special seats very close to the altar. The liturgy of the modern Roman Mass is, in many ways, familiar in shape and content to that which one would find in a well organised Anglican parish church. Particularly because of the Pope's disability, many people don't realise how essentially simple the papal liturgy is at its heart and even the music is accessible, and it is easy to join in with the singing.

At one of these masses, myself and the Swedish Lutheran pastor in Rome were invited to lead the intercessions, which I felt was a wonderful privilege, It not only felt true spiritual

communion, but also the nearest one could possibly hope to be on the road to Eucharistic Communion with the Roman Catholic Church, at present.

But then, our mood changed quite dramatically, as it did every year on that occasion. Having been a participant for most of the service, one suddenly became almost an observer at the moment of administration. I honestly felt that my Lord was calling me to him in that liturgy, and I could not go to him. And it wasn't him that was saying *No* to me either. Put more prosaically, it was like being invited to a dinner party and then being told you couldn't have the main course. I found myself asking what St Paul, who is said to be buried beneath the altar of that basilica, would now write to the Church in Rome, were he with us today?

The third and final occasion of spiritual communion that I want to mention today was very different again.

Several years ago I was asked to speak about Anglican liturgy and doctrine as part of a Conference at the Abbey of Maguzzano, near Lake Garda. There were about 150 participants — all Italian Roman Catholics, except for half a dozen ex-patriot English Anglicans who had come over from Venice.

As well as asking me to speak, the organisers also invited me if I would conclude the conference by celebrating an Anglican Eucharist in the monastery chapel, which everyone would attend but at which the Roman Catholics would not, of course, receive communion. Indeed at the end of our final session and just before the Eucharist, the convenor stood up and politely reminded the Italians that they were not permitted to do so.

I duly celebrated in the beautiful chapel, having found an Italian translation of Rite A (which was what we used in those days) that was authorised by the Bishop in Europe. The chapel was packed and everyone reverently took part in the Liturgy of the Word. When it came to the administration of communion, I communicated myself in the usual way and then the Anglicans from Venice. However, to my surprise, other members of the congregations then started coming forward to receive the sacrament. One after another they came — except clergy — and we ended up having 90 communicants at that Eucharist: people who had spent two days praying together, learning together, and eating together. To me, in some form or other, spiritual communion had become Eucharistic communion on that occasion.

I know that there are no short cuts to full Eucharistic Communion and that the structures and Canon Laws make the boundaries quite clear. I am familiar with the language of "obstacles" and "impairment", but what we did that day seemed entirely natural and unforced.

All of this and so many other experiences both here and abroad, have inevitably affected my perception of Eucharistic communion and I am well aware that one can be guided too much by the heart than the head and that there are well documented and clear reasons why we are still some distance from sharing it together.

But I would say this: I believe that the day will come when we will share Eucharistic communion because it is God's will that we do so and that with Him all things are possible.

Sometimes we can forget that God is bigger than his Church and that he works on many levels in order to bring about change.

Secondly, I return to the issue of *will*, which, for a number of reasons (not least historical) is absent from the heart of many people. I want to celebrate the unity we already share in Christ. I want to celebrate the wonderful spiritual communion that I and others enjoy with those of other churches/denominations, but I also think there is a place for what I would call "the grace of impatience". I understand what the Pope is saying in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* when he speaks of it not being possible to celebrate the same Eucharistic liturgy together until there is 'full communion in the bonds of the profession of faith, the sacraments and ecclesial governance' (§44), but I also share what, in *Ut Unum Sint*, he calls his "burning desire to join in celebrating the one Eucharist of the Lord" (§45).

I have come to see that where Christians of different churches /denominations decide that they *need each other* then they grow close together and the Eucharist can be factor in the process. This is evident in those parts of the world where Eucharistic Communion is already taking place across ecclesiastical boundaries, simply because the alternative is to have no sacrament to receive at all.

As I have said at a previous meeting of English ARC, I have also found that, because of our history, the atmosphere in England is very different than it is in some other countries, and that ecumenical relations in the Republic of Ireland could hardly be more different now than they were in my childhood. The President herself has, of course, shown something of "the grace of impatience". I am not saying that we should be kicking over the traces and risking the agreement we have reached, but simply that the situation these days seems to depend on where you go and who you talk to.

Finally, whilst I can't speak for the Roman Catholic Church, I do believe that Eucharistic Communion would be a closer reality if more Anglicans had read, learnt and inwardly digested the ARCIC agreed statements, not least on the Eucharist itself and not least those ratified by the Lambeth Conference in 1988.

Anglicans can be very selective about which Lambeth Conference resolutions they like to focus on. Our discussion last night and this morning, and the emergence of the *Windsor Report* in the first place, has illustrated how God can bring about fruitful dialogue (and indeed spiritual communion) from *need*. In this case, the need for us all to seriously address the issue of human sexuality.

Back in the 1980's the *Final Report* of ARCIC threw into relief the *need* to work together for full visible unity and it has spawned the great work that we discuss at these meetings. But I pray that the momentum will not be lost, and that so much else that is being discussed and worked at *within* and *between* our churches will complement and not eclipse the work of ARCIC. We can only imagine what our churches would look like now if Resolution 8 from the 1988 Lambeth Conference had received as much energy and attention as Resolution 1.10 in 1998!

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