



The Society

under the patronage of Saint Wilfrid and Saint Hilda

Communion and Catholicity in the Church of England

A Statement of Principles by the Council of Bishops of The Society

Introduction

*It is not organisation but the eucharist which is always creating the church to **be** the Body of Christ; to do His will, and work His works, and adore His Father ‘in His Name’, and in Him to be made one, and by Him in them to be made one with God. That is the consummation of human living and the end of man.*

Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy*¹

Following the Church of England’s decision to ordain women as well as men to the episcopate, we are, together, now seeking to shape understanding and custom that will engender trust within our household of faith. The House of Bishops’ Declaration, and the Five Guiding Principles within it, indicate a commitment to sustaining the breadth of the Church of England’s theological inheritance.

We believe, humbly and with hope and trust for the future, that the tradition of Anglican identity exemplified by The Society has a distinctive contribution to make to our common life in the Church of England and to its mission. We venture to maintain that this mission would be diminished in its resourcing by the erosion of our contribution. We also recognize that we ourselves would be diminished by withdrawal from engagement with the life, work and witness of the Church of England, ensuring that our participation enriches others and that it also enriches us.

The context in which the Council of Bishops of The Society makes this statement is one that challenges us all, irrespective of our theological viewpoint. We are confronted by conflicting developments that seem on the one hand to urge for the consignment of all religion to oblivion, but on the other hand seem to be caught in the grip of religious fundamentalism that places faith firmly on the global agenda.

In many parts of the world Christians are now facing persecution on a scale that is unprecedented in modern times. Solidarity with the persecuted Church brings to us a new and urgent sense of the universal Church. Not only within the Anglican Communion, but also in our ecumenical bonds with the ancient churches of East and West, we live out our faith and witness in the bright light of those who do so through the shedding of their blood.

¹ G. Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (2nd edn, London: Dacre Press, 1945), p. 734.

Communion with them is not theoretical; it is vocational, going to the heart of our baptismal calling to die to self and live in Christ.

This statement and the accompanying statement of policy and pastoral guidance seek to articulate our focus on the ways in which this sense of communion expresses itself in sacramental life and practice. We commit ourselves to this discipline because we find within it a mark of Christian life that enriches the local with the suffering and glory of the universal, and is intrinsic to the seed planted in the soil of faith in this land.

The Eucharist is not an end in itself, determined by who ministers and serves at the altar where it is celebrated. Rather, as Dix observes in the passage quoted above, it is the means we have been given for doing the Father's will and giving glory to him. Therein lies our complete fulfilment.

We hope that these statements will contribute to the care, imagination and understanding with which we live this eucharistic life and thereby become instrumental in bringing to reality the coming kingdom of God.

1 The Life of God and the Church as Communion

Summary

The life of God the Holy Trinity is an eternal communion of love. All who are baptized in the name of the Trinity and profess the apostolic faith share in this communion. Because it is rooted in baptism, we can call it ‘baptismal communion’.

The Church gives visible expression to this communion. ‘Ecclesial communion’ (the communion of the Church) involves confession of the one faith, celebration of one Eucharist and leadership by an apostolic ministry.

Because the communion of the Holy Trinity is a communion of love, the communion of the Church must be marked by charity (love).

This life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us – we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have communion with us; and truly our communion is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1.2–3)

- 1.1 The Holy Scriptures and the preaching of the Apostles have revealed to us that the life of God the Holy Trinity is an eternal communion of love. Through that apostolic preaching God has called us ‘into the communion of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord’ (1 Cor. 1.9). This communion is a gift of God, not something that we have earned or constructed.
- 1.2 The Church is a communion because it participates in the eternal communion of the Son with the Father in the Holy Spirit.² We share in this eternal communion by virtue of our common profession of the apostolic faith and our common baptism in the name of the Trinity, which is our response to the apostolic preaching.³ Our sharing in it may therefore be called ‘baptismal communion’.
- 1.3 As the ARCIC Statement *Church as Communion* affirms, the profound communion fashioned by the Spirit requires visible expression.⁴ The Church is the visible sign which both witnesses to and embodies our communion with God and with one another.⁵ As the instrument through which God calls us into communion, and as the

² See *Growing Together in Unity and Mission: Building on 40 Years of Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue. An Agreed Statement of the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission* (London: SPCK, 2007), p. 14, paras 15–16.

³ ‘Through baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other and with the Church of every time and place’ (*Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry. Faith and Order Paper No. 111* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), p. 3: Baptism, para. 6. ‘Communion, whose source is the very life of the Holy Trinity, is both the gift by which the Church lives and, at the same time, the gift that God calls the Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity in the hope of reconciliation and healing’ (*The Church: Towards a Common Vision. Faith and Order Paper No. 214* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2013), p. 5, para. 1).

⁴ *Church as Communion. An Agreed Statement by the Second Anglican–Roman Catholic Commission (ARCIC II)* (London: Church House Publishing/Catholic Truth Society, 1991), p. 28, para. 43.

⁵ Cf. *The Church of The Triune God: The Cyprus Statement agreed by the International Commission for Anglican–Orthodox Theological Dialogue* (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2006), p. 15, section 1, para.

foretaste of its fullness, the Church is, as the Second Vatican Council teaches, ‘the universal sacrament of salvation’.⁶

1.4 For the Church to be a communion locally means that it is a gathering of the baptized, brought together by the Apostles’ preaching, confessing the one faith, celebrating the one Eucharist and led by an apostolic ministry. For the communion between the local churches to be visible, all the essential constitutive elements of ecclesial communion must be present and mutually recognized in each of them. These elements are derived from and subordinate to the common confession of Jesus Christ as Lord.⁷ Because the eternal communion of the Holy Trinity is a communion of love, the communion of the Church must always be marked by the ‘charity which binds everything together in perfect harmony’ (Col. 3.14).

1.5 ARCIC describes what constitutes ecclesial communion as follows.⁸ It is:

- rooted in the confession of one apostolic faith, revealed in the Scriptures and set forth in the creeds;⁹
- founded on one baptism;
- expressed and focused in one celebration of the Eucharist;
- expressed in shared commitment to the mission entrusted by Christ to his Church;
- a life of shared concern for one another in mutual forbearance and love;
- shown in solidarity with the poor and the powerless;
- shown also in the sharing of gifts both material and spiritual;
- marked by the acceptance of the same basic moral values, the sharing of the same vision of humanity created in the image of God and recreated in Christ, and the common confession of one hope in the final consummation of the Kingdom of God.

The Anglican Communion’s Five Marks of Mission also express some of these elements of ecclesial communion.¹⁰

12: ‘The Church as an institution should always be a visible sign of her inner reality as the mystery of communion with and in the Blessed Trinity.’

⁶ Cf. *Church as Communion*, p. 16: para. 17; *Lumen Gentium*, 48; *Gaudium et Spes*, 45. See also *Bishops in Communion: Collegiality in the Service of the Koinonia of the Church. An Occasional Paper of the House of Bishops of the Church of England* (GS Misc 580) (London: Church House Publishing, 2000), p. 3: ‘As a sign and foretaste of the kingdom, the Church already enjoys the communion of heaven: as an instrument of God’s mission, the Church remains in solidarity with fragmented earthly “community”...’

⁷ Cf. *Church as Communion*, p. 28, paras 43–44.

⁸ Cf. *Church as Communion*, p. 29, para. 45.

⁹ Cf. The Declaration of Assent (*Canons of the Church of England*, Canon C 15): ‘I ... declare my belief in the faith which is revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds.’

¹⁰ The Five Marks of Mission are: To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom; to teach, baptize and nurture new believers; to respond to human need by loving service; to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation; to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

(www.churchofengland.org/media/1918854/the%20five%20marks%20of%20mission.pdf).

1.6 For the nurture, growth and flourishing of this ecclesial communion, Christ the Lord has provided a ministry of oversight, entrusted to the episcopate to share and nurture in apostolic growth, with the responsibility of maintaining and expressing the unity of the churches.¹¹ Of the episcopate the Common Worship Ordinal declares:

Bishops are ordained to be shepherds of Christ's flock and guardians of the faith of the apostles, proclaiming the gospel of God's kingdom and leading his people in mission. Obedient to the call of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, they are to gather God's people and celebrate with them the sacraments of the new covenant. Thus formed into a single communion of faith and love, the Church in each place and time is united with the Church in every place and time.¹²

¹¹ Cf. *Church as Communion*, p. 29, para. 45.

¹² *The Ordination and Consecration of a Bishop: Common Worship: Ordination Services. Study Edition* (London: Church House Publishing, 2007), p. 55.

2 The Society as an Expression of Full Communion

Summary

The Society seeks to be an expression of full, visible communion. It is a communion of communities that celebrate the Eucharist, with teaching and ministry that can be recognized as catholic and apostolic. Its parishes enjoy full communion not just with the Society bishop who has oversight over them (because they can receive the ministry of all whom he ordains) but also with the other Bishops of The Society and all parishes of The Society.

The House of Bishops' Declaration and The Society, which builds on its provisions, enable us to live a catholic life in the Church of England.

- 2.1 Under the patronage of St Wilfrid and St Hilda, The Society seeks to be an expression of full, visible ecclesial communion – a communion of eucharistic communities with teaching and ministry that can be recognized as catholic and apostolic.
- 2.2 The Society is an ecclesial community established by the traditional catholic bishops of the Church of England to address the new situation created by the ordination of women to the episcopate as well as to the priesthood.
 - It promotes and maintains catholic teaching and practice within the Church of England.
 - It offers a ministry in the historic, apostolic succession, and continuing sacramental assurance in the Church of England, by commending Priests of The Society whose ministry can be received with confidence.
 - It provides episcopal oversight for clergy of The Society and for parishes that affiliate to The Society.
 - It is led by a Council of Bishops.
- 2.3 The parishes of The Society enjoy a relationship of full ecclesial communion not only with the Society bishop under whose oversight they have been placed, but also with the other Bishops of The Society and with all the parishes of The Society.
- 2.4 The House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests provides for parishes to receive oversight from bishops with whom they are in full communion, and provides for the ordination of bishops, priests and deacons who are able to provide the sacramental and pastoral ministry that is needed.¹³ The Society builds on this provision.
- 2.5 Taken together, the House of Bishops' Declaration and The Society make it possible for us to live a catholic life within the Church of England. As catholic Christians living in full communion with catholic bishops and with each other, those who belong to The Society participate in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

¹³ The House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests, paras 22, 26, 28–9, 30, 15.

3 The Communion of the Church of England

Summary

Because we are unable to recognize some of those whom the Church of England has ordained as bishops and priests as standing within the historic succession of apostolic ministry, visible communion is diminished. But it is not non-existent: it is torn, not torn apart. Christians who are separated with regard to the Eucharist, apostolic succession and ordained ministry nonetheless share a high degree of communion by virtue of their common baptism and profession of the apostolic faith. This helps us to understand the sense in which we are in communion with those who ordain women as bishops and priests, the women so ordained, and those whom they will ordain – despite our differences of conviction.

Although ecclesial communion is diminished, we continue to share a common life with other members of the Church of England. We are inheritors of the same Anglican tradition and part of the same canonical structure, the same Christian family, sharing in mission to the communities we seek to serve. The fifth Guiding Principle implies that *full* communion is not possible, but it challenges us to identify the highest *degree* of communion that will be possible.

- 3.1 We believe that the aspiration of The Society to be an expression of full, visible ecclesial communion represents a goal that we must seek to recover within the Church of England as a whole and in our relationships with the ecclesial communions from which we are separated. Nurtured by the tradition as we have received it, and mindful of the judgement of the greater part of the universal Church, we are unable, for theological reasons, to recognize some of those whom the Church of England has ordained as bishops and priests as standing within the historic succession of apostolic ministry as it is held within the ancient churches of East and West. This means that the Church of England no longer celebrates in every place one Eucharist in which all can share, and there is no longer a perfect fit between the canonical structures of the Church of England and our sacramental life within it. As a result, visible ecclesial communion is diminished. To use another metaphor, there is a tear in the fabric of our common life and in our communion.
- 3.2 But although the visibility of ecclesial communion is diminished, this does not mean that communion is non-existent. It is torn, not torn apart; ruptured, not fractured. With all members of the Church of England who profess the faith that is revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, ‘and intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking in his holy ways’, we continue to participate in the eternal communion of the Son with the Father in the Holy Spirit by virtue of our common baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity.
- 3.3 Christians of different traditions who are separated with regard to the Eucharist, apostolic succession and ordained ministry are nonetheless said to share a high *degree* of communion by virtue of their common baptism and profession of the apostolic faith. Such language has been especially prominent in the Anglican–Roman Catholic

dialogue because of teaching formalized at the Second Vatican Council.¹⁴ In 2001 the House of Bishops, responding to *One Bread, One Body* (a teaching document of the English and Welsh Roman Catholic bishops), noted that ‘there are degrees to which communion is realized or expressed’ and commented that ‘the Second Vatican Council’s teaching about “a real, though imperfect communion” finds an echo in Anglican ecumenical theology’.¹⁵ This helps us to understand the sense in which we are in communion with those who ordain women as bishops and priests, the women so ordained, and those bishops and priests whom they will ordain, despite our differences of conviction.

- 3.4 Despite the diminution of ecclesial communion, our relationship with others in the Church of England involves a higher degree of communion, and a more intensive common life, than is experienced in most ecumenical relationships. We are inheritors of the same Anglican tradition of Western Catholicism; we form part of the same canonical structure, the same Christian family; and we share in mission to the national, regional and local communities that we seek to serve. In the words of the fourth of the Five Guiding Principles enshrined in the House of Bishops’ Declaration, we ‘continue to be within the spectrum of teaching and tradition of the Anglican Communion’.
- 3.5 The fifth Guiding Principle calls on all in the Church of England to live in ‘the highest possible degree of communion’.¹⁶ The clear implication is that ecclesial communion is diminished and *full* communion will not be possible. But the challenge to identify the highest degree of communion that will be possible remains. So does the imperative to pray for the restoration of full sacramental communion – the repairing of the tear. This cannot be achieved by our efforts alone, but only by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁴ ‘Those who believe in Christ and have been truly baptized are in communion with the Catholic Church even though this communion is imperfect’ (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 3). In 1989 Archbishop Robert Runcie and Pope St John Paul II spoke in a Common Declaration of ‘that certain yet imperfect communion we already share’; in 2006 Pope Benedict and Archbishop Rowan Williams spoke of ‘the real but incomplete communion we share’.

¹⁵ *The Eucharist: Sacrament of Unity. An Occasional Paper of the House of Bishops of the Church of England* (GS Misc 632) (London: Church House Publishing, 2001), p. 7, para. 13.

¹⁶ The House of Bishops’ Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests, para. 5.

4 Our Vocation as Catholic Christians in the Church of England

Summary

After a time of disagreement and tension, the recovery of love involves a recollection of common identity and mutual belonging.

We are Anglicans because this is where God has placed us, but also because we rejoice in the catholic tradition that we have inherited as Anglicans. An important feature of that tradition is that the Church of England modestly claims only to be 'part' of the one Church. The third Guiding Principle acknowledges this.

The statement enumerates the contributions to the life of the Church of England that we can make. We also see ourselves as called to assist the Church of England in fulfilling its ecumenical commitment.

- 4.1 Though ecclesial communion is diminished, we continue in a relationship of communion with other members of the Church of England which flows from our common profession of the apostolic faith, our common baptism and our common vocation, received in baptism, to a life of Christian discipleship. Just as the life of the Trinity is an eternal communion of love, our communion with all other members of the Church of England must be characterized by the love (charity) that arises from our common life in Christ: our love for the Church of England, for its people and for its life, structures and mission. As in any family, after a time of disagreement and tension the recovery of love involves a recollection of common identity and mutual belonging.
- 4.2 We remain in the Church of England in part simply because it is where God has placed us – in John Keble's words, our position in the Church is one which 'God Almighty has assigned to us'.¹ The Five Guiding Principles enable us to remain in this our home. The life of Catholic Anglicans within the Church of England involves a degree of compromise, as it always has. The same is true for many members of other churches.
- 4.3 Furthermore, as Anglicans we rejoice in the patristic and Western Catholic tradition we have inherited. That tradition is embodied in *The Book of Common Prayer*, in the work of Richard Hooker, and in the writings of the Anglican divines of the seventeenth and earlier eighteenth centuries. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

¹ J. Keble, *On Eucharistical Adoration* (2nd edn, Oxford: J. H. and J. Parker, 1859), pp. 177–8: 'Many a devout and loving heart, I well know, will rise up against this view of our case. To be on this conditional, temporary footing, will strike them as something so unsatisfactory, so miserably poor and meagre, so unlike the glorious vision which they have been used to gaze on of the one Catholic Apostolic Church. And poor, indeed, and disappointing it undoubtedly is, but not otherwise than as the aspect of Christianity itself in the world is poor and disappointing, compared with what we read of it in the Gospel. Men will not escape from this state of decay by going elsewhere, though they may shut their eyes to the reality of it. Rather, whatever our position be in the Church, since God Almighty has assigned it to us for our trial, shall we not accept it and make the best of it, in humble confidence that according to our faith it will be to us?'

it was further developed by the Oxford Movement and by later theologians, liturgists, spiritual writers and canonists who were influenced by that movement.

4.4 Important features of the Anglican tradition have been the modesty of its claims and the fact that its formularies have always pointed to the greater catholic whole.² In the Preface to the Declaration of Assent the Church of England claims only to be ‘part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church’,³ and in *The Book of Common Prayer* we pray for ‘the good estate of the Catholick Church’.⁴ In *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (1936) Michael Ramsey wrote:

While the Anglican church is vindicated by its place in history, with a strikingly balanced witness to Gospel and Church and sound learning, its greater vindication lies in its pointing through its own history to something of which it is a fragment. Its credentials are its incompleteness, with the tension and the travail in its soul. It is clumsy and untidy, it baffles neatness and logic. For it is sent not to commend itself as ‘the best type of Christianity’, but by its very brokenness to point to the universal Church wherein all have died.⁵

4.5 Although, more recently, certain churches of the Anglican Communion have espoused doctrines and developments that lack catholic consent,⁶ the Church of England has retained, to some degree at least, a sense of modesty and reserve about the extent of its competence, as part of the catholic Church, to take decisions on things that belong to the whole Church. The third of the Five Guiding Principles includes the statement that ‘the Church of England acknowledges that its own clear decision on ministry and gender is set within a broader process of discernment within the Anglican Communion and the whole Church of God’.⁷

4.6 Now, as catholics seeking to flourish within the life and structures of the Church of England, we are called to make a positive contribution to mission and growth. Drawing from our tradition and attentive to today’s needs, we will continue:

- to place worship at the centre of our life, as the fundamental purpose of the Church, the Eucharist being its supreme expression;
- to foster habits of prayer and holiness of life as the character of our apostolic life, and so to equip all the baptized to tell the story of Jesus Christ;
- to sustain and revitalize local communities – particularly in inner cities and areas of deprivation – and to speak up for them in the forums of the Church and in the public square;
- to nurture young people through education and Christian formation;
- to be committed to discerning and fostering vocations to the priesthood, especially among young Christians;

² In 1951 Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher declared, ‘We have no doctrine of our own – we only possess the Catholic doctrine of the Catholic Church enshrined in the Catholic creeds, and those creeds we hold without addition or diminution’ (quoted in *Church Times*, 2 Feb. 1951, p. 1).

³ *Canons of the Church of England*, Canon C 15.

⁴ Prayer and Thanksgivings upon Several Occasions: A Collect or Prayer for all Conditions of Men.

⁵ A. M. Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (London: Longmans Green, 1936), p. 220.

⁶ In many cases these developments continue to be contested.

⁷ The House of Bishops’ Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests, para. 5.

- to emphasize the Church of England's rootedness in the tradition of the universal Church in East and West.

4.7 We see ourselves as called to assist the Church of England in fulfilling its commitment to the full, visible unity of the one Church of Jesus Christ.⁸

⁸ This commitment has been affirmed repeatedly by the General Synod, for example on 13 February 2004: 'That this Synod reaffirm the Church of England's commitment to work with all its ecumenical partners towards the full visible unity of the Church of Christ' (General Synod, *Report of Proceedings*, vol. 35, no. 1 (Feb. 2004), p. 469).

5 An Outward-Looking Communion

Summary

Communion demands that we look outwards – to the universal Church and to the wider community, with a concern for mission and commitment to the poor and powerless.

Our hearts and minds should be open to the Spirit, who fosters unity, who constantly renews the Church, and whose greatest gift is love.

- 5.1 Communion demands that we are outward-looking, attentive to the mind of the universal Church and the needs of the wider community. Communion fosters mission and commitment to the poor and the powerless – compelling evidence, for those who have not yet embraced the Christian faith, of how the Eucharist transforms the worshipping community so that it becomes a living sign of the kingdom of God.¹
- 5.2 Our hearts and minds should be open to the Spirit, who fosters unity, who constantly renews the Church, and whose greatest gift is love:

*O Lord, who hast taught us that all our doings without charity are nothing worth; Send thy Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee.*²

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people and kindle in them the fire of your love.

¹ St John Chrysostom links honouring Christ's eucharistic presence with honouring his presence among the poor (*Homilies on Matthew*, 50, 4). E. B. Pusey reflected in a Christmas sermon: 'If we would see Him in His Sacraments, we must see Him also, wherever He has declared Himself to be, and especially in His poor' (E. B. Pusey, *Sermons during the Season from Advent to Whitsuntide* (2nd edn, Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1848), p. 58). For him, poverty was 'the livery of Christ, which He glorified, which He endows with an almost sacramental virtue' (unpublished sermon: Pusey House, Oxford: PH 74138).

² *The Book of Common Prayer*: Collect for Quinquagesima.