

Diocese of the United Kingdom

Catholic Faith † Orthodox Worship † Apostolic Order

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Statement on Church Unity

The following statement was adopted as official policy by the College of Bishops of the Original Province of the Anglican Catholic Church, meeting on the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul, Jan. 25, 1995, at St. Stephen's Church, Athens, Georgia.

Preamble: The Gospel Imperative

The Church of Jesus Christ is “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic.” Whilst on earth its unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity are imperfect, all ecclesiastical jurisdictions within the Apostolic Tradition acknowledge the Gospel imperative towards unity which springs from our Lord's High Priestly Prayer recorded in St. John's Gospel, in particular: “I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them, and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me.” (John 17:20-23). The bishops of the Anglican Catholic Church and its related jurisdictions (namely the Province of Christ the King and the United Episcopal Church of North America) from time to time receive comments from persons within or beyond our communion who point to the scandalous multiplicity of some 20 or more recently founded bodies, especially in the United States but also in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and India, which claim to be “Continuing Anglican” Churches. Those offering such comments sometimes express or imply the view that immediate action should be taken to bring all or most of these bodies into one fold. Such a view is naive: it presupposes that Christian unity and mere *organizational* unity are the same thing. They are not. In his great commentary on our Lord's High Priestly Prayer the late Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. William Temple, warns:

Once again we are reminded how transcendent is that theme which alone deserves the name of Christian unity. We meet in committees and construct. Our schemes of union; in face of the hideous fact of Christian divisions we are driven to this; but how paltry are our efforts compared with the call of God! The way to the union of Christendom does not lie through committee rooms, though there is a task of formulation to be done there. It lies through personal union with the Lord so deep and real as to be comparable with His union with the Father... If we are in the Father and the Son, we shall certainly be one, and our unity will increase our effective influence in the world. But it is not our unity as such that has converting power; it is our incorporation into the *true Vine* as branches in which the divine life is flowing!¹

As bishops, we certainly acknowledge our duty to promote the unity of Christ's Church. In approaching this task we are mindful of the injunction of Scripture: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but lest the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world."²

1. The disintegration of Anglicanism

The "Anglican Communion" is the name by which that association of some 30 national and regional Church derived from the Church of England and its sister Churches, and maintaining some sort of relationship with the See of Canterbury, describes itself. At the 1988 Lambeth Conference its bishops declared formally that only "impaired communion" remained among them. As its member Churches are no longer all in full communion with each other or even with the See of Canterbury, and as some of them have ceased to be recognizably Anglican, it can no longer legitimately claim to be wither entirely Anglican or a Communion. It might more accurately be known as the "Lambeth Association." In addition there are now more than 20 Churches and other ecclesial bodies around the world which claim to be "Continuing Anglican" Churches. Most of these are in North America and were founded during the past 15 years. There are ill-informed persons who point to this multiplicity of quasi-Anglican bodies as proof that *all* "Continuing Anglicanism" lacks coherence, integrity and discipline. There are others, within one or another of these newly formed bodies, and sometimes within our own communion, who are justifiably distressed by the appearance of disunity, and who appeal to their bishops to take whatever steps may be necessary to bring about unity amongst "Continuing Anglicans." There are still others who cannot understand, and are even offended by, the claims of the Anglican Catholic Church (with its related jurisdictions, namely the Province of Christ the King and the United Episcopal Church of North America) to be the sole legitimate successor to the Anglican Church of Canada and the Episcopal Church in the USA, and to similarly apostate Churches in other countries where its jurisdiction has been sought and accepted. Before addressing those claims and the question of how Anglican unity may be recovered, we should first examine the underlying causes of the disintegration of the "Anglican Communion." It may then be possible to discern whether similar forces are at work to bring about the fragmentation of "Continuing Anglicanism."

2. Underlying causes

It is popularly supposed that the matter which has brought the former Anglican Communion into such division and disarray is the ordination of women. That is not the case. The ordination of women has been merely the occasion, not the cause, of most of the splits within Anglicanism: the straw that broke the camel's back. The fundamental cause has been a crisis of authority within Anglicanism, having its origins in the Protestant Reformation of the 16th Century and the tensions of the Elizabethan "Church Settlement." Formed a thousand years earlier, the Church of England emerged from the Protestant Reformation as a "Continuing Catholic" Church, not as a Protestant sect. However under the terms of the Elizabethan "Settlement" the Church of England, whilst maintaining all the essentials of Catholic Faith and Apostolic Order, was required by State Law to accommodate all the Queen's subjects within it, whether Catholic or Protestant or both. From this tenuous arrangement, wrought in the religious and political crises of the time, was developed a "comprehensive" church polity. There are those who refer to this characteristic as "the glorious comprehensiveness of Anglicanism," sometimes adding: "As long as you believe in

God, we have room for you.” Recent events in England have shown that today not even belief in God is required of all the clergy in that Church, but in the days of Elizabeth I the Church Settlement provoked deep crises of conscience. The Church of England may have been *both* “Catholic” and “Protestant,” but the consciences of many Englishmen remained offended to a point where large numbers of English Roman Catholic and Protestant families fled to Europe or the North American colonies (notably Maryland and Massachusetts) to escape the Church Settlement. A mere generation after Elizabeth's death Oliver Cromwell abolished both the Monarchy and Anglicanism, and for 11 years the Church was forced to go underground. Its restoration (with the Crown) in 1660 was accompanied by the flowering of some of the finest Anglican scholarship the world has ever seen. Soon afterwards a gradual expansion of religious liberty in England saw the opening of the first chapels of Protestant dissenters. From 1778 Parliament began to remove restrictions on Roman Catholics, although it was not until 1850 that Roman Catholic bishoprics were established in England — an event which scandalized both Anglican Catholics (for theological reasons) and Protestants (for political reasons), but was eventually accepted by Gladstone's government. It may therefore be said that the Church Settlement did not really work in England even under Elizabeth, and it certainly does not work in England or anywhere else today. The 20th Century has seen remarkable advances in science and technology, and philosophers of the so-called “Enlightenment” have had a profound impact on the social sciences and humanities. The Churches have needed all their scholarly resources to respond to the challenges imposed by rapid change, but, sadly, since World War II most theological writing has emerged not from within the Churches’ communities of faith but from the academic departments of secular universities. Produced by scholars caught in the same “publish or perish” syndrome affecting so many modern academics, the emphasis, even the aim, of much of this writing has been towards stimulating controversy — and income from book royalties. Orthodoxy (being of little commercial interest) has flown out the window, and the Church generally has looked to her professional theologians in vain. When some of these academic theologians became bishops, matters rapidly became worse. Thus orthodox bishops have had little support or guidance as the hitherto cosmetic appearance of Anglican unity has become fractured by the convergence of four separate but related social forces: a rising to the surface of historic differences of theological conviction, compounded from external sources by a chauvinistic nationalism and internally by local Congregationalism; and the ascendancy of persons of a “liberal” political persuasion to positions of leadership. In the days of Elizabeth I, Anglicanism remained Catholic, but was required to tolerate Protestants within it. In our own day, “liberal” Protestants have risen to ascendancy, and forced the Catholics out. Viewed objectively, it is an extraordinary chapter in the history of religious toleration (or lack of it).

Moreover, for the past 50 years the Church of England has been racked by liturgical anarchy, resulting not only in litigation in the secular courts over trivial matters of ceremonial and in Parliament's refusal in 1928 to authorize a revision of *The Book of Common Prayer*, but since 1960 in the same variety of “experimental” rites which Anglicans elsewhere have suffered. This liturgical anarchy has been reflected in most of the Churches of the Anglican Communion throughout the world, and in urban areas at least has generated an insidious Congregationalism. For generations now, Anglicans have forsaken their own parish churches at whim, to seek out churches where they felt more at home — selected sometimes on the basis of theological conviction but more often on the basis of aesthetic taste or cultural

prejudice. This process has been exacerbated by the almost universal ownership of motor cars.

Parishes have therefore been forced to *compete* against each other for parishioners. In many places they have generated a parochial loyalty so intense that modern Anglicans generally have forgotten that they sink or swim with their bishop, not their parish priest. They have also forgotten (if they ever knew and understood it) that the Church is not and cannot be a “democracy”: it is constituted by Christ himself as an *aristocracy*, in the Greek sense of that word, governed by bishops in the Apostolic Succession.

Given the ease with which the decision-making processes of some local church vestries and modern synods may be manipulated, it is not surprising that those with political agendas reflecting the “popular” liberal social mores of the day, and even personal political ambitions, have risen to positions of leadership in the Church, and foisted upon the faithful at large a series of radical “reforms” which, no matter how popular, stand at variance with orthodox Christianity. In consequence, Christianity has popularly come to be thought of not so much as a religion revealed by God, entrusted to the Apostles and their successors for its guardianship and teaching, and expressed in the divinely inspired Scriptures and the doctrines and discipline of the whole Church, but as a set of social and cultural values inherited, but subject to amendment by, the local parish, diocese or national Church. Thus the fundamental question which is bringing about the disintegration of the Anglican Communion, and profoundly disturbing other Churches also, is this: Is Christianity a *divinely revealed* religion, of which the Church is merely the custodian; or is it a man-made religion, based on ancient myths and legends, and in essence a cultural rather than a spiritual phenomenon, which the Church is free “democratically” to alter and amend? St. Paul faced a similar question, and the response in his letter to the Galatians (1:9) was uncompromising: “If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.”

3. The 19th Century crisis of authority and the origins of the ‘Lambeth Conferences’

In 1863 world Anglicanism faced a major crisis of authority when the Metropolitan Bishop of Cape Town, Robert Gray, deposed the Bishop of Natal, John Colenso, for heresy. Colenso appealed for protection to the Privy Council of England, which on a legal technicality found in his favor. Gray thereupon excommunicated him altogether. Ignoring the excommunication, Colenso continued to function as a bishop, gathering around him a schismatic body known today as the “Church of England in South Africa.”

However, the Privy Council raised doubts about the validity of the Royal Letters Patent under which a number of bishops in Australia and Canada had been appointed. The Canadian bishops pressed the Archbishop of Canterbury to convene a conference of all the world's Anglican bishops, and the first “Lambeth Conference” met in 1867. A proposal that a Council of Bishops be established, with central authority over the whole Anglican Communion and particular responsibility for the discipline of bishops angered nationalistic sensitivities (especially among the American bishops then embroiled in the “centralist” and other issues of the Civil War) and was firmly rejected. Thus in 1873, when the Assistant Bishop of Kentucky, Dr. George Cummins (like Colenso an anti-Tractarian) led a schism out of the Episcopal Church to establish the Reformed Episcopal Church, both the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion were left to cope as best they might.

Despite these crises, over a century later the Anglican Communion still has no central authority, constitution or common canon law, nor even any firm rules governing the

admission or exclusion of member Churches. The member Churches are entirely independent and autonomous national or regional bodies, subject to no external authority whatever. The Anglican Communion has no effective international mechanism to deal with any violation of Faith and Order, no matter how grave, on the part of a single bishop, let alone a whole national Church.

Thus, unlike the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox communions, the Anglican Communion has had no effective international authority to which orthodox Anglicans could appeal, to deal with the crisis arising from the unilateral decisions of the Canadian and American Churches 20 years ago to “ordain” women. Therefore when the Congress of St. Louis met in 1977, the appeal was made not to any specifically Anglican international authority (for none existed), but to the canons of the Ecumenical Councils, and the judgment of the wider Catholic Church, under God, in the course of time.

4. The Congress of St. Louis

An order of ministry to which women may be admitted is, by Catholic definition, an order other than the Apostolic Ministry with which the Church was endowed by Christ and the Apostles. Consequently ordinations of both women and men to such an androgynous order are canonically invalid, no matter how “efficacious” their subsequent ministries may be. Moreover, the introduction of such an order *necessarily* supplants the Apostolic Order in the jurisdiction concerned, thereby rendering that jurisdiction in its entirety both heretical and schismatic, with consequent loss of validity of all its sacraments, Baptism possibly excepted. Such a jurisdiction can no longer claim to possess all four elements of unity of the undivided Church and despite certain difficulties continued in both East and West: common Scriptures, Creeds, Sacraments and Apostolic Ministry. Indeed, as such an aberration can be achieved only in defiance of the Faith expressed in the Scriptures and the Creeds, such a jurisdiction may be said to have breached all four elements of Christian unity and departed into apostasy.

Therefore, when the Congress of St. Louis met in September 1977, at stake was not merely the continuation of traditional Anglicanism in a cultural sense, but access to valid sacraments, upon which (*ceteris paribus*) the assurance of salvation itself depends. It was most careful to proceed canonically — i.e., pursuant to the canons and precepts of the seven Ecumenical Councils of the undivided Church and the canonical tradition derived there from — in taking those actions necessary to preserve the Catholic Faith and Apostolic Order as received by and from the Church of England in the days of its orthodoxy, including the question of legitimate episcopal jurisdiction. Pre-eminent among the canonical principles relied upon was that inherent in Canon 111 of the Council of Ephesus,³ which, although enacted with specific reference to the crisis generated by the followers of Nestorius, the apostate Bishop of Constantinople, establishes as a *general principle* that those of the clergy and faithful who inadvertently find themselves under the jurisdiction of an heretical and schismatic or apostate bishop, should repudiate the jurisdiction of that bishop and place themselves under the protective jurisdiction of the nearest available orthodox bishop.

In essence, what occurred in 1977 was that those who adopted *The Affirmation of St. Louis*, acting in accordance with the principles inherent in Canon 111 of the Council of Ephesus, repudiated the jurisdiction of certain bishops in the Anglican Church of Canada and the Episcopal Church in the USA, and placed themselves under the personal jurisdiction of Bishop Albert Chambers, sometime Bishop of Springfield, Illinois. Bishop Chambers, an

elderly man, then expanded that jurisdiction and devolved it upon others, by taking order for the consecration of four more bishops. That consecration took place in Denver, Colorado, in January 1978. As *The Affirmation of St. Louis* indicates, the jurisdiction so formed was known initially as the “Anglican Church of North America.” At its first synod, held in Dallas, Texas, in October 1978, a Constitution and Canons were adopted whereby that name was changed to “Anglican Catholic Church.”

To the extent necessary, the actions of the Congress of St. Louis and Bishop Chambers also relied upon the Catholic doctrine of economy, whereby in a grave emergency making strict compliance with the letter of the law is impossible, the validity of otherwise possibly irregular actions is not impugned as long as there is every effort and a demonstrable intention so to comply, as far as circumstances permit. This aspect is important because once an episcopate is established to which orthodox Anglicans could appeal for jurisdiction, the emergency was over and no further such application of the doctrine of economy could be claimed. However, the Congress of St. Louis and the Denver consecrations appear to have produced a most unfortunate (to say the least) “copycat” or “bandwagon” effect, whereby various groups of disaffected Episcopalians and others have sought to emulate those events, and establish a multiplicity of rival jurisdictions. Behind their actions would seem to be those same forces of freewheeling Congregationalism which have brought disintegration to the Anglican Communion. To the extent that their origins are Anglican at all, these purported jurisdictions are products of the Anglican Communion, not the Continuing Anglican Church.

We repeat that the Anglican Catholic Church is an integral part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ, and with its two related jurisdictions remains, in its claims to the loyalty of orthodox Anglicans, the sole legitimate successor to the Anglican Church of Canada, the Episcopal Church in the USA and certain other apostate Churches of the “Anglican Communion.” It is not a congregationalist sect and still less an *ad hoc* “movement” or part of such a movement. Accordingly, we must say in all humility that no matter how sincere their founders, that the multiplicity of other bodies claiming to be “Continuing Anglican Churches” established apart from the Anglican Catholic Church has arisen in grave violation of those canons of the ancient Church which declare it a sin to establish an altar in rivalry to that of one’s legitimate bishop,⁴ and entirely without the benefit of the Catholic doctrine of economy. The onus is upon them to prove otherwise.

5. 'Testing the spirits'

In surveying the multiplicity of purported “Continuing Anglican” bodies established apart from the Congress of St. Louis, we must be mindful of the injunction of St. John: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world.”⁵ This injunction requires that questions of faith and order, doctrine and discipline be subjected to the scrutiny of the whole Church, Compliance with this principle was exhibited by the Apostles at the Council of Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15, and in the undivided Church by the Fathers of the seven Ecumenical Councils. In the Anglican Catholic Church we stand firmly in that tradition, as *The Affirmation of St. Louis*, as our Constitution, Canons and history make clear.

Its tripartite jurisdictions notwithstanding, it is to be emphasized that one of the most important characteristics distinguishing the Continuing Anglican Church formed at the Congress of St. Louis from all other bodies in North America which claim to be “Continuing Anglican” Churches, is that it was formed from within the Anglican Church of Canada and

the Episcopal Church in the USA at the time of their apostasy. It became separate from those Churches in a *de jure* sense only following the establishment of its episcopate, and as the apostasy of those former jurisdictions caused them to fall away from the Apostolic rock upon which we continue to stand. It is upon this fact of history, together with the canonical principles cited above, that the Continuing Church formed at St. Louis asserts its claim to be the sole legitimate successor to the apostate Anglican Church of Canada and the Episcopal Church in the USA.

Furthermore, as far as the Anglican Catholic Church is concerned, it is to be noted that the oldest part of this Church is not the Original Province, but the Second Province — viz., the Church of India (Anglican). Formed from British chaplaincies and missions dating back to the 17th Century, until 1927 it was the Third Province of the Church of England, with its Metropolitan See established at Calcutta. Subsequently it became a Province of the Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon, which Church has since developed into four separate, autonomous Churches. Three of those Churches remain in the Anglican Communion, but that remnant of the Church of India which survived the pan-Protestant unions of the Church of South India (1947) and the Church of North India (1970) was received as a body into the Anglican Catholic Church in 1984. Being some 300 years old it is not a continuing Church in the ordinarily accepted sense of that term, but is the *original* Anglican Church in India, and shares its antiquity with the rest of the Anglican Catholic Church.

By contrast, certain other bodies were formed by persons who had first separated from the Anglican Church of Canada and the Episcopal Church in the USA, and then sought to establish an episcopate from whatever source might make itself available. It may be said quite fairly that, almost without exception, those sources were neither Anglican nor reputable. Their use of the term “Traditional Anglican” generally refers not to Holy Tradition, stemming from the Scriptures, the Fathers and the great Ecumenical Councils, but seems usually to be merely an expression of nostalgia for 19th Century styles of church architecture and worship.

Other new bodies have been formed by persons who have never been members of any recognized Anglican Church, but appear to be little more than ecclesiastical entrepreneurs who have perceived a “market” to exist for churches using Anglican liturgical styles. What they are selling, however, is not the product but merely the packaging.

Leaders of some of these quasi-Anglican bodies sometimes claim in the Name of Almighty God to be seeking to repair this alleged disunity by proposing “concordats of intercommunion” [*sic*] between their respective bodies and the Anglican Catholic Church. In response to such approaches we must ask, “Upon what basis can such unity be established?” In our experience, without exception, the reply is made on the basis of what is claimed to be a common Faith and Order demonstrated by a purportedly common allegiance to *The Book of Common Prayer*. Those responsible for such approaches, however, invariably reveal that what they seek ultimately is not organic church unity, but merely recognition for the legitimacy of their separate institutions.

If leaders of such bodies are genuine in their claims to adhere to the same Faith and Order, sufficiently to seek a relationship of *communio in sacris* with the Anglican Catholic Church, then the question arises as to why they established separate jurisdictions in the first place, contrary to that Faith and Order. In the absence of any satisfactory response to that question, there is little point in proceeding further. We cannot see any justification for asking our synods to furnish funds, nor our scholars to sacrifice the huge allocations of time

and energy required, to establish formal negotiations with any body of demonstrably illicit jurisdiction, congregationalist polity, and/or doubtful Orders and Sacraments.

6. Towards Anglican unity

Our position is that, in North America at least, and elsewhere where its jurisdiction is available, there is not, nor can there be, any legitimate “Continuing Anglican Church” beyond that formed pursuant to the determinations of the Congress of St. Louis, endowed with the Apostolic episcopate of Bishop Chambers and others in 1978, and which subsists today in the tripartite communion of the Anglican Catholic Church, the Province of Christ the King and the United Episcopal Church of North America. No Church beyond these three has any legitimate claim to be derived from the Congress of St. Louis, or to possess episcopal jurisdiction (as distinct from mere episcopal Orders) extending from the 1978 Denver consecrations. We agree with the dictum of Archbishop Robert Morse of the Province of Christ the King: “There is no ‘Continuing Church’ outside the ‘Chambers Succession’.”⁶ That principle was endorsed by a resolution of the X Provincial Synod of the Anglican Catholic Church at Kansas City in 1993.

As bishops in the Anglican Catholic Church we believe that our immediate duty lies towards promoting the ultimate recovery of full organic unity amongst the tripartite jurisdictions derived from the Congress of St. Louis. We are aware that even this may be a long and costly process, requiring not only the greatest theological competence, sensitivity and patience, but possibly some repentance for past misunderstandings. Further, effective dialogue leading eventually to formal negotiations will require the allocation of scarce resources of manpower and money. Nevertheless we declare our willingness to address any further problems which may be identified, and to engage in whatever processes may be required, as resources permit.

Beyond this, we see our duty as lying towards the retention and maintenance of communion with those Churches, Provinces and Dioceses of the Anglican Communion which have remained faithful to their Apostolic foundations. Moreover, we see this duty as lying within the wider context of the recovery of unity in the Catholic Church generally, which has been so grievously fractured since 1054. On a world scale we are a tiny and some would say insignificant Church; this does not preclude us from the duty of such constant prayer, scholarly research, local cooperation and other endeavors as may enable us to offer our mite. It does preclude us from diverting our tiny resources towards endeavors that are likely to be fruitless, or inimical to the fulfillment of our immediate obligations.

The Church is the divinely appointed agent for the salvation of the world. Her disunity is indeed a scandal, grievously inhibiting her mission. Yet we do well to heed Archbishop Temple's warning: “It is not our unity as such which has converting power; it is our incorporation into the *true Vine* as branches in which the divine life is flowing.” As evidence of incorporation into the *true Vine*, the Church in both East and West has always sought visible continuity in that Faith revealed in Jesus Christ, proclaimed by the Apostles, recorded in the Scriptures, taught by the early Fathers, defended by the seven Ecumenical Councils of the undivided Church and expressed in the historic Creeds.

As criteria for engaging in formal dialogue with other Churches aimed at achieving full communion or ultimately organic unity, we would see their possession of historic continuity in Catholic Faith and Apostolic Order, including doctrine and discipline faithfully reflecting the canons and decrees of the seven Ecumenical Councils, with recognizably common Scriptures, Creeds, Sacraments and Ministry, as the *starting point*, not the conclusion, of

such endeavors. These are the minimum requirements for the recovery of authentic Christian unity, and we have no authority to alter or reduce them. To those who embrace them we will gladly extend the right hand of fellowship.⁷

¹ Temple, William: *Readings in St. John's Gospel* (Macmillan, London, 1959). p. 327.

² I John 4:1.

³ *Council of Ephesus (AD 341), Canon III*: "...And in general we forbid all the clergy who adhere to the Orthodox and Ecumenical Synod in any way to submit to the bishops who have aposatized or shall hereafter apostatize."

⁴ e.g., Synod of Antioch in Encaniis (AD 341), Canon V; Apostolic Canon XXXI.

⁵ I John 4:1.

⁶ This *dictum* was offered during a meeting between Archbishop Morse and Bishop (then Archdeacon) Bromley in San Francisco in January 1992.

⁷ Galatians 2:9.

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