

Fel Na Choller Dim ✕ That Nothing Be Lost

A Conversation to Preserve the Breadth of Welsh Anglicanism

21-22 September 2016

Ecclesiological Issues: The Experience in England

Address by the Rt Revd Jonathan Goodall, Bishop of Ebbsfleet

1. ‘This world will one day pass away and the ecclesiastical structures on which we expend so much time and energy, important though they are, will pass away with it. In the light of this fact, we need to give the highest priority to deepening the quality of our love for the other members of the Body of Christ, perhaps especially those with whom we most strongly disagree on issues such as the ordination of women to the episcopate. All else may pass away, but love we have shown to our sisters and brothers will remain and will bear fruit in eternity.’

Perhaps the source for those words won’t be immediately obvious, but they’re from the final paragraph of the *Rochester Report*, the main theological investigation during the Church of England’s consideration of the ordination of women as bishops; and they are, it seems to me, a good point for beginning what I want to say this morning. It is because ‘decisions about the episcopate affect our *fundamental identity* as part of the Church’, as the Archbishops of Canterbury and York reminded the General Synod in 2006 (GS 1605A, 14), that ‘they need to be taken in the context of sustained and prayerful reflection’, and in the spirit of charity.

And it is also in that spirit that I want to offer my comments this morning. I offer them simply as a testimony, a witness to friends in what I consider to be the same body, as to where we now find ourselves in the Church of England in the wake of – or, perhaps more positively, in the light of – the conception and approval of the Five Guiding Principles and the House of Bishops Declaration that enshrines them.

2. The Declaration does not resolve every presenting dogmatic and practical question. Very far from it. Indeed the Principles themselves must, it is said, be ‘held in tension’, and much in the Declaration is a *future-oriented* pastoral programme rather than a legal framework. But it is providing for all of us a real and increasingly credible framework for ‘mutual flourishing across the whole Church of England’, as I hope my friends here from the Church of England will ready attest.
3. As all that implies, although the Declaration is firmly in place and ten female bishops are in office (six of them as my local colleagues in the dioceses in which I serve), the theological exploration *continues*; stimulated and enlarged and enriched by the actual process of discovering precisely what it is that we want to do and precisely how we want to do it. Theology is not something that can be ‘got out of the way’ before we turn to the ‘real’ business of politics and horse-trading. Theology *is* the business; and the ‘how’ of proceeding is as much a theological question as the ‘whether’ or the

‘when’.¹ Although the agenda is bulging with ecclesiastical and social issues demanding attention, on the whole, the mutual listening and theological hard work needed to *implement* the Declaration is continuing in parishes and dioceses, between bishops and among many of the clergy at large.

4. Various moments have been significant in the long journey in the Church of England story. As I look back, one particular moment stands out, in 2006, by which time I think it was already clear that there was ‘no option for not changing’. There was one of those profoundly important moments, when an impasse was breached, and things really seemed to move forward. The Archbishop of Canterbury, replying to a debate, remarked,

‘People have talked at times about differences of *opinion* and how the Church can live with differences of *opinion*. I think that the problem is for those who are not content with the idea that we should go forward along the line of ordaining women as bishops, the problem is not one of *opinion*, it’s rather of *obedience*. It’s one of obedience to scripture, or obedience to the consensus of the Church Catholic. And, while that’s not a view I wholly share, I think we ought to recognise that *that’s where it comes from*, that those who hold that are *not* just thinking this is a matter of opinion, and therefore it is rightly and understandably a lot harder to deal with dissent if you’re talking what fundamentally comes down to a question of whether you obey God or human authority. That’s why it’s serious, that’s why it’s difficult. More than opinion.’

That intervention was clear counsel from the archbishop to recognize *seriousness* on both sides of the debate. The minority view was not a minority *opinion*, but an obedient response to the authority of the living tradition and *sensus fidei* of the Church; and the majority view was not just a majority *vote*, but a response to a ‘deep sense of calling, and appropriateness and justice’ (something which ten years earlier Stephen Sykes had said would come to be recognised in due course as an ‘eschatological obedience’²).

5. For Anglican Catholics that sense of ‘obedience’ (to scripture, and to the Catholic consensus) has curled up inside it, of course, not only obedience to historical Anglican commitments³ and to the theological consensus of the great traditions of

¹ Archbishop of Canterbury, 9 February 2006, General Synod debate on the House of Bishops’ findings on women bishops. Later in his speech the Archbishop went on,

‘Great disruptions are tempting, seductive, dramatic, and not actually very useful for the Kingdom of God. And sooner or later they have to be undisrupted. I hope that we can think of those possible risks and losses and ask what it is, in love, which might be done to carry us *forward together, rather than apart*. Even if that togetherness is more fractured and more untidy than many might like.’

² ‘Foundations of an Anglican Ecclesiology’, reprinted in *Unashamed Anglicanism* (London: DLT, 1995).

³ When the Tractarians had appealed to antiquity they knew they were not innovating, but simply continuing a long Anglican tradition: for example, Bishop Lancelot Andrewes teaching:

‘One canon reduced to writing by God himself, two testaments, three creeds, four general councils, five centuries, and the series of Fathers in that period – the centuries, that is, before Constantine, and two after, determine the boundary of our faith’.

And Bishop Van Mildert (Regius Professor of Divinity in the University of Oxford and later Bishop of Durham):

‘While our Church is thus careful not to set up her authority as an unerring standard of truth, she omits not to testify her deference for the judgement of the Church Catholic, when it can be duly obtained. She everywhere shows her readiness to abide by that judgement, and to reverence it in proportion to the evidence of its antiquity and uninterrupted continuance. She assumes to herself no more than to be regarded as a true branch of the Universal Church.’ (1814, Bampton Lectures)

Orthodox east and Latin west. But also instinctive loyalties to more recent ecumenical commitments. One of the causes of the present ecumenical distress of Anglican Catholics lies precisely in the energetic role played by Anglicans of all shades in the modern ecumenical movement from its beginnings until the late twentieth century. It was a part they could never have played without the success of the Tractarians in restoring ecclesiology to heart of Anglican theology.

6. These commitments found what we might call their ‘theological tonality’ in the early years of ARCIC and the ecumenical consensus around κοινωνία (communion),⁴ which since ARCIC’s agreed statement *Church as Communion* in 1991 had entered the bloodstream. It is that same tonality that colours one very significant part of the post-Declaration theological and pastoral landscape, namely the booklet prepared by the Council of Bishops of The Society, *Communion, Catholicity and a Catholic Life*. It’s two statements in one: first a statement of principles and second a statement of policy and pastoral guidance. I’ll say more on The Society in due course. But this modest document seems to have found a wide and sympathetic readership far beyond those parishes and clergy for whom it was prepared as guidance for the new landscape, and also to have given a good deal of helpful vocabulary for filling out and implementing the Declaration. My task is not to summarize it here, but I believe it to be a rich (though no doubt imperfect) document, very much worth studying.
7. It pivots around three theological ideas, each of which have in the course of the last half-century been studied and developed not only ecumenically but also within many of the historic Christian communions:
 1. An ecumenical stress on the fundamental *baptismal* basis of *koinonia*: that is, baptismal communion
 2. An ecumenical consensus on what constitutes full *visible, ecclesial* communion between particular churches, including the ministry of oversight: that is, full communion
 3. An ecumenically useful, if not always straightforward, concept of ‘degrees of communion’ filling in the range between those two.

These three dimensions of communion (I’ve deliberately not said ‘levels’) have significantly shaped the bishops’ statements, and are profoundly underpinning the pastoral, missional and ecumenical aspirations of The Society.

8. Before I can say more on that score, I should say a bit more about The Society itself.

First, The Society is not mentioned in the House of Bishops’ Declaration; it is not even imagined by the Declaration; but it is something which exists as a *consequence* of the operation of the Declaration.

What the Declaration actually provides is

- a set of *five guiding principles* (supplemented by what we might call *three ecclesial virtues* – simplicity, mutuality and reciprocity),

⁴ This mutual sharing in holy things (*communio in sacris, communio sanctorum*) characterises the Church at every level. It is what binds Christians, who have sacramentally died and risen with Christ, into one in His Body; it is therefore the mark of each particular Christian community and of the Universal Church. It must therefore be visible at every level.

- a *decision-making mechanism* and process for PCCs and other communities and places of worship,
- a *grievance and mediation procedure*,
- recognition for certain interests of the clergy and ordinands,
- and, at paragraph 30, ‘The House affirms the importance of there continuing to be consecrations of bishops within the Church of England to enable such ministry to be provided.’⁵ That paragraph goes on to name the three sees that already existed and form part of that provision, of which mine is one.

This last point, modestly phrased, is critical to the parishes who might make pass a resolution.

On the basis of an expressed theological conviction, every PCC is authorized, should it so decide by due process, to ask the diocesan ordinary to entrust its oversight, and its sacramental and pastoral care, to a bishop who does not ordain women. In catholic-tradition parishes that conviction is most frequently expressed, not primarily in terms of gender, but in terms of full sacramental communion.

This is not a conviction that moves *against* others. The validity of the orders of male bishops in the historic male succession, who nonetheless ordain women, is understood; female bishops are respected and valued as the true and lawful holders of their sees. The *issue* is how to secure for the parishes, clergy and people concerned that which every other person and parish who accepts the sacramental ministry of female bishops and priests *already* has, namely a relationship of oversight with a bishop with whom they, and the priests and deacons who serve them, are in ‘full communion’. The ‘test’ of course, the revealing thing, is that they can receive with confidence everyone whom that bishop does and would ordain. The formal PCC request is most often ‘that episcopal sacramental and pastoral ministry in this parish be entrusted to a bishop who ordains only men to the priesthood’.

It rests on a catholic vision of the church’s unity *constituted by the Eucharist*, of which of course, the bishop, priest and deacon are the ministers. Every local celebration testifies to unity as Christ’s people gathered round the altar with their priest, who is himself in communion with his bishop, and who acts on his behalf,⁶ while the validity of the bishop’s eucharist in turn depends on his communion with the other bishops.

9. So then, when the diocesan bishop, following any necessary clarification with representatives of the PCC, assigns the parish to one such bishop (who must be a serving bishop in office, *not retired*) two relationships immediately come into play: *first* and crucially between the two bishops themselves (the diocesan bishop and the bishop

⁵ It continues:

‘The fact that the sees of Ebbsfleet and Richborough in the diocese of Canterbury and Beverley in the diocese of York remain in existence will provide one of a range of means by which the Archbishops will ensure that a suitable supply of bishops continues where it would not be secured in other ways. The House also accepts that the presence in the College of Bishops of at least one bishop who takes the Conservative Evangelical view on headship is important for sustaining the necessary climate of trust.’

⁶ Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Smyrneans, 8.2-3:

‘Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist, which is [administered] either by the bishop, or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude [of the people] also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.’

to whom he or she has *entrusted* oversight of a parish), and *second* between the nominated bishop and the parish. (Of course *nothing* can alienate the parish and its clergy from the juridical oversight of the diocesan bishop or from the organs of the diocese, so a formal relationship remains there also.) There are a whole set of formal relationships that remain in place.

10. This is the point where The Society arises by *implication*, even had it not been named and organized, because of the reality of a third and a fourth kind of communion relationship: that is, *third*, the bishop is axiomatically the focus and means of the communion of all the local worshipping communities who look to his oversight. And *fourth* through *his* ministry, they all enjoy the same relationship with communities entrusted to the care of other bishops with whom their bishop is in full communion. Thus an ecclesial network is beginning to form across the Church of England. While we seek to build the highest possible degree of fellowship with everyone across the fractured Church of England, this network (The Society) can also give its parishes a real foretaste of a deeper and wider communion. It's *not* of course a church, except that *through the bishops* it draws into sacramental and missionary unity all the communities served by those bishops and so it has a certain ecclesial pattern. But, despite this *ecclesial* character, it cannot easily be accused of being a 'church within a church' because each parish maintains relationships simultaneously:

- with the diocesan bishop as ordinary,
- with the nominated bishop as father in God,
- with their neighbouring parishes in the life and structures of the deanery and diocese,
- with all the parishes who share the oversight of the same bishop,
- with all other parishes across the CofE with whom their bishop is in communion.

Speaking personally, the commission I have in many dioceses as an assistant bishop also goes a very long way to cement new and different relationships of collaboration not only with the diocesan bishop but all those who share in the structures of his or her oversight.

11. Now of course the emerging network has got a name – 'The Society'; and it is well known to be under the prayerful patronage of two early English saints, the rather thin-skinned Bishop Wilfrid and the definitely thick-skinned Abbess Hild, great missionaries from the time when the *political* unity of England was emerging from the deepening unity of the Church itself. In practical terms, individual parishes affiliate to The Society and share in its activities, which are all the activities, inward- and outward-looking, that you'd expect in the Church as such. Lay people are members simply by their *parish* having affiliated; but clergy register *individually*, first as a matter of principle because of their individual relation to the bishop as priests and deacons (even ordinands), and second as a matter of pastoral importance so that their ministry can be commended especially to the laity (for example especially during vacancies). I should add here that, for the clergy, enrolment implies no specific rule of life or special charism except that they are Anglicans and loyal to the faith and order of the living catholic tradition.

12. In shorthand, to recap, The Society is the union of *worshipping communities* in the Church of England that have been entrusted to a bishop who is a member of the Society's Council of Bishops, and which on that basis have chosen to affiliate to it. Its administration and practical support is provided for by the staff and members of Forward in Faith, a *membership organization* whose constitution gives it the power 'to support The Society, as an ecclesial structure which continues the orders of bishop and priest as the Church has received them and which guarantees a true sacramental life'.
13. So then, when parishes of the Society look to their brothers and sisters in the Church of England under the oversight of bishops who ordain both men and women, what do they see?
14. First, they see brothers and sisters with whom they share *koinonia* (communion) on the fundamental basis of *baptism*. The Second Vatican Council's teaching about 'a *real*, though *imperfect* communion', which found an echo in Anglican *ecumenical* theology, is now paradoxically helping us make sense of our relationships and their development within the Church of England. Baptism is the unshakeable *basis* of our life in Christ, and is the only sure *visible* boundary of the Church. A degree of sacramental impairment with their brothers and sisters in the eucharist and ministry is but one (perhaps stark and certainly unwelcome) version of the impairment of our communion in other ways, through other sorts of merely human division; it's neither to be accepted complacently, nor should it be ignored or made light of. However, we rejoice in our common baptism and do not cease to pray that that *latent* unity will one day be *patent* – restored in full and visible eucharistic communion. The important thing is that relationships and mission do happen on that basis.
15. Second, they see a whole range of new possibilities that can flesh out what the fifth Guiding Principle calls the '*highest possible* degree of communion'. Again, there's a certain irony that a tear in the fabric of communion that affects the eucharist and ministry is serving to *highlight* how much we share and what other possibilities exist in other ways, on the basis of a still recognizably common heritage, formation and mission as Anglicans.
16. There is, I think, a growing sense in England that the battle for purist uniformity about the acceptance in every way of women's ordained ministry is simply not as hot as it was. And I find it very encouraging to see the extent to which genuine missional energy is being freed across the Church of England, but certainly among Anglican Catholics, now this isn't so dominating an issue. Signals of this are an increased hunger for the formation and resourcing of the laity for their mission and service, and growing confidence that catholic parishes have a distinct and timely sacramental approach to evangelism, catechesis and mentoring of the young. And one the clearest signs of new and gathering hope for the future is the steadily growing number of young, prayerful, dedicated, theologically able vocations.
17. While Anglican Catholics feel the of the Church of England is much diminished with the recent changes, they are also recognising that there are circumstances where integrity needn't mean absolute division; it can mean a process of undeniably painful, often disorderly, but finally deeply evangelical self-discovery, the discovery of what it is that God purposes for us.

- 18 Throughout this talk I've had in mind a prayer by Fr Sergei Bulgakov. Although it was drafted with the separations between Orthodox and Anglicans in mind, it goes some way to being a prayer we can use as Anglicans:

O Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, thou didst promise to abide with us always. Thou dost call all Christians to draw near and partake of Thy Body and Blood, But our sin has divided us and we have no power to partake of Thy Holy Eucharist together. We confess this our sin and we pray Thee, forgive us and help us to serve the ways of reconciliation, according to Thy Will. Kindle our hearts with the fire of the Holy Spirit, give us the spirit of Wisdom and faith, of daring and of patience, of humility and firmness, of love and of repentance, through the prayers of the most blessed Mother of God and of all the saints. Amen.