

What is the Church, What is the Church of England, and How is it Governed?

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Introduction

Your clergy have given me a three-part essay question to answer this evening. I hope it's not going to be one of those modern examinations in which the examiner is looking for certain ideas, ticking them off, and awarding a points for each one that is mentioned. And I hope that the clergy won't be playing the parochial equivalent of the game of 'General Synod bingo' that General Synod members used to play in order to try and keep awake in the less scintillating debates. Before the debate, members made a list of fashionable buzzwords. In those days it was things like 'Mission Shaped Church' but now it might be 'Renewal and Reform'. If you listened to the speeches carefully, you were soon able to tick off all the latest buzzwords and quietly murmur 'house'. This isn't supposed to be an academic lecture, so I am not aiming at completeness. I hope we shall have some questions and discussion at the end, which will be an opportunity for anyone to bring up points that I have omitted.

I: What is the Church?

So, to the first part of my essay question: What is the Church? Going back a stage, where would we look to find out what the Church of England believes about the Church? The answer is: above all, in its liturgy – the Prayer Book and Common Worship. The Prayer Book is a very interesting book. When all services were taken from it, people were given a prayer book each time they came to church, and before the service (or maybe during the sermon, if it was less than scintillating) they would turn the pages and learn a great deal about the Church. Now it is, for many, a closed book, I fear, and we see the consequences of that in the great ignorance even of many leading figures in the Church. The Prayer Book is actually three different documents bound together (the three 'historic formularies', as they are called): the Book of Common Prayer, the Ordinal (ordination services) and the Thirty-Nine Articles.

Let's start with the liturgy. What is the most obvious phrase from the liturgy that tells us about the Church? It's in the Creed: 'I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church'. Fundamentally, theologically, the Church is one, so there will be some characteristics, some features, that are true of the whole Church. She is catholic – a word about which one could give a whole lecture. The other day someone said that 'catholic' means (I quote) '“universal”, “all embracing”, “tolerant”'. Well, 'universal' is right as far as it goes: the Church extends throughout the world and is bigger than any of our local fashions and prejudices, but she is not 'all embracing' (there's quite a lot that she doesn't and mustn't embrace), and while tolerance is often a good thing, it all depends what you are tolerating: 'catholic' does not mean 'tolerant'. So only one mark out of three for that particular gentleman, I'm afraid. 'Catholic' comes from the Greek '*kath holon*' (according to the whole). So we are catholic when we are looking at the whole Church, acting in accordance with the mind of the whole Church, acting 'according to the whole'. And the Church is apostolic: she proclaims the faith of the Apostles, and she engages in the mission of the Apostles ('mission', from the Latin, means sending out, and '*apostolos*' (apostle) is a Greek word meaning one who is sent).

There's also a definition of the Church in Article XVIII of the Thirty-Nine Articles:

'The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men [they meant men and women, of course] in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.'

So, the Church is visible. The Church is not just an idea, an invisible fellowship. She has the sort of corporate life that means that you can see her. Two things are essential to that life: the Word of God (pure, not diluted by our own sentiments) and the Sacraments instituted by Christ. So I think we must say that where God's word is not preached (or is diluted or distorted by contemporary fashion), and where there are no sacraments (or where the sacraments are not recognizable as those ordained by Christ), there is no church.

My third Prayer Book phrase from the Prayer of Thanksgiving after communion:

'... we most heartily thank thee, for that thou dost vouchsafe to feed us, who have duly received these holy mysteries, with the spiritual food of the most precious Body and Blood of thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ; and dost assure us thereby... that we are very members incorporate in the mystical body of thy Son, which is the blessed company of all faithful people...'

So the Church, the blessed company of the faithful, is the mystical body of Christ. And our receiving his Body and Blood in the Eucharist assures us that we are part of that body – members or limbs of it, incorporated into it. Paul tells the Corinthians, 'You are the body of Christ, and individually members of it' (1 Cor. 12. 27). St Augustine says,

'If you, therefore, are Christ's body and members, it is your own mystery that is placed on the Lord's table! It is your own mystery that you are receiving! You are saying "Amen" to what you are: your response is a personal signature, affirming your faith. When you hear "The body of Christ", you reply "Amen". Be a member of Christ's body, then, so that your "Amen" may ring true!'¹

This leads us back to the word that I missed out from the Creed: if the Church is Christ's body, she is – she must be – holy. And we, as her members, must be holy. The Eucharist is at the heart of the Church, because it is where we, as the Body of Christ, receive what we are. It is where the saints or 'holy people' (that is what the word 'saints' means) receive holy things. 'God's holy gifts for God's holy people', it says in Common Worship: '*sancta sanctis*' is the Latin translation of what they say in the Eastern liturgies: 'holy things for holy ones' – holy gifts for people who are made holy by receiving them.

And then, my fourth and last quotation from the Prayer Book, which also appears in more modern language in Common Worship: the Collect of All Saints Day:

'O God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord...'

We whom God has chosen are 'knit together' in one communion in the Church, Christ's mystical body. Cranmer never used one word where two would do: 'communion' and 'fellowship' are actually the same word (one more Latinate, one more Anglo-Saxon), translating the Greek *koinonia*, which means mutual sharing or participation. That tells us something about our life in the Church. All who are baptized share in a communion which is rooted in the life of God himself – three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, whose life is an eternal communion of love. That is an important word – love – which should characterize the

life of the Church (I say 'should', because sometimes you would never think so). The communion of the Holy Trinity, in which we share because of our baptism, is a communion of love. Therefore love (charity, to use a closer translation of the Latin word, *caritas*) should always have primacy in the Church. As we read in the Letter to the Colossians, love 'binds everything together in perfect harmony' (Col. 3.14).

So then, the Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. She is visible. She is Christ's own body, feeding on his body in the Eucharist which is at her heart. She is a communion, a sharing in the life of God the Holy Trinity, which is an eternal communion of love.

The Church becomes visible above all when the local church is gathered around its bishop for an ordination to the priesthood. The bishop is supported by his deacons, his priests share in the act of ordaining, and the people seal the ordination prayer with their loud 'Amen'. Nowhere have I seen that enacted more powerfully than in this parish, when Bishop Peter ordained new priests at St Michael's. So it is fitting that at the beginning of the Common Worship ordination service the bishop reminds us what the Church is and what she does:

'The Church is the Body of Christ, the people of God and the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit. In baptism the whole Church is summoned to witness to God's love and to work for the coming of his kingdom.'

In the Letter to the Ephesians (5. 25-27) we read that the Church is the Bride of Christ:

'Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.'

That is why in the Prayer Book marriage service we are told that matrimony 'signif[ies] unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church'. In the Revelation John sees 'the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband' (21. 2). The Church is the new Jerusalem, the holy city. She is the new Israel, the holy people of God, the twelve Apostles representing the twelve tribes of the sons of Jacob, who received the name Israel. As the Collect for the ordination of a bishop in the Prayer Book suggests, the bishops are the successors of the Apostles, successors of the Twelve on whom Christ's Church was built. That Church is Christ's bride, and the bishop is the representative of the Bridegroom. So it is no accident that in the Common Worship service for the ordination of a bishop the archbishop tells the candidate who is about to be ordained, 'Remember always with thanksgiving that God has entrusted to your care Christ's beloved bride, his own flock, bought with the shedding of his blood on the cross.'

I get a lot of my doctrine from hymns, so my last quotation is from Samuel Stone:

'The Church's one foundation / is Jesus Christ her Lord; / she is his new creation / by water and the Word: / from heaven he came and sought her / to be his holy Bride, / with his own blood he bought her, / and for her life he died.'

The Church was founded by and on Christ, formed by baptism and the apostolic preaching. She is Christ's bride, bought with the shedding of his blood on the cross, where blood and water flowed from his side, symbolizing the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist.

The Church is the bride of Christ, spotless – without sin. But the visible Church is also a human institution, and as such, she partakes of the human condition – always in need of

repentance and renewal. That paradox is going to be very important for what I want to say later on about how the Church is governed and how decisions are taken. We must always bear in mind that when we are talking about the Church we are talking both about the body of Christ and his spotless bride, and at the same time about a human institution. If we lose sight of either of those sides of the equation, as churches sometimes do, we shall go very badly wrong.

II: What is the Church of England?

So to my second exam question: What is the Church of England? That question can be answered in many ways. I am going to try to answer it historically, legally, and theologically.

As I am a church historian (or would be, if I didn't have to go to work), I'll begin with history and with law (it is actually quite difficult to separate them). The first point to underline is that the Church of England was not founded by King Henry VIII, as some suppose. It goes back to St Augustine, the first bishop of Canterbury, whom Pope Gregory sent on a mission to the English in 597. Now of course there were Christians in what is now England in Roman times, and even after the Romans left and there were missions to the North of England from Ireland via Scotland, and there were Christian bishops in the parts of what is now England that the English had yet to conquer. So I'm not saying that Christianity in England or even the Church *in* England began in 597. But the structure that we call the Church *of* England began with St Augustine's mission and eventually expanded to embrace the whole of English Christianity.

That church, of course, was in full communion with the See of Rome, and fully part of the Western Church, for the best part of a thousand years. Never forget that the Church of England has only been cut off from the rest of the Western Church for the last third of its history. But that Western Church was less monolithic than the Roman Catholic Church (the largest of the fragments into which it broke in the sixteenth century) was to become. There were national churches within the Western Church, each of which had a primate (the bishop of the first see of the nation or people concerned) – or, in the case of England and Ireland, two primates. The English Church was called '*Ecclesia Anglicana*' in Latin, and well before the Reformation that name was translated into English as 'Church of England'. It comprised two provinces – the Provinces of Canterbury and York, each with its own Archbishop.

What happened in the sixteenth century was not the creation of a new church but the separation of the Church of England from the rest of the Western Church. Henry VIII took the Church of England out of Europe, if you like. He nationalized the English branch of a multinational corporation and went on to privatize a significant proportion of its assets.

With the important exception of the monasteries, most of the collegiate churches and the chantries, which were dissolved, the internal structure of the Church of England continued through the Reformation era as before. The structure of provinces, dioceses, archdeaconries, deaneries and parishes was unchanged (except that some new dioceses were created). The judicial structure of the ecclesiastical courts was unaltered, as was the synodical structure of the Convocations or provincial synods of Canterbury and York. The only difference was that the courts and the synods were both subordinated to the Crown. The canon law – both the common law of the Western Church and the particular English canons – remained in force, unaltered (unless it had fallen into disuse or conflicted with the Royal Prerogative) – though it was subordinated to the statute law made by Parliament. Some of the canon law was codified in the seventeenth century, and more of it was put into the new Canons of the

Church of England in the 1960s, but to this day those canons only represent part of the canon law by which the Church of England is governed, and the legal advisers in Church House still quote canons of the early church councils and the pre-Reformation Church of England when they are giving legal advice. Those cathedral foundations that were not monasteries continued to be governed by their mediaeval constitutions, though the monastic cathedrals obviously had to be re-founded as non-monastic institutions. And famously, great efforts were made to ensure that the threefold ministry of bishop, priest and deacon, with bishops in the historic succession continued through the Reformation period. Of course doctrine, liturgy, worship and church buildings changed (though even here there was more continuity than in the Reformed churches), but the structure remained much the same. The Church of England was the same church, the same body, with a continuing life – not a new church camping out in old buildings. Overall, the story was one of change within a framework of continuity.

Indeed, it can be suggested that the Church of England is the most mediaeval church in Christendom. We even still have archdeacons! During the Counter-Reformation and subsequently, the structures of the Roman Catholic Church have been reformed and streamlined much more radically than those of the Church of England have ever been. Of course our church is now very different from how it was in the middle ages or even a century ago, but in the English way the changes have been more gradual and marked by much greater outward continuity than has been the case in other churches. All of this has a great impact on how the Church of England is governed, which will be our third topic.

As I indicated, the subject of law has already come up in the context of history, but I wanted to mention another fact, which is that legally the Church of England doesn't exist at all – or, to be more precise, there is no such thing as 'the Church of England'. The Church of England is not a single organization, but an interlocking system of separate bodies or corporations. A few years ago a law had to be passed saying that if someone left a legacy to 'the Church of England' it will go to the Archbishops' Council. Before that there was no legally constituted body called 'the Church of England' that could receive it, so it was pocketed by the state.

So one of the very important things to understand about the Church of England is that it is not like Sainsburys. It is not a single organization with local branches, whose branches are subject to direction by HQ. The Archbishops' Council is not the board of Church of England plc. The Archbishop of Canterbury is not the Executive Chairman. It just doesn't work like that. This means that there can't be a national policy that is rolled out in every local church or even in every diocese. Similarly, you can't run a diocese on a 'command and control' basis whereby the diocesan bishop issues detailed instructions that have to be followed to the letter in each parish. Of course bishops have influence and indeed power, but exercising it in a way that is going to produce results requires a great deal of skill. All of this leads to disappointment on the part of people who expect bishops, dioceses and even archbishops to deliver things that are simply not within their gift. It causes confusion to the secular 'man in the street' who thinks that, because we have brands and logos like modern companies, the Church of England is capable of being run like a modern company. And it causes frustration and disappointment to some bishops who understand neither the extent of their power and influence nor the limitations on it, nor the ways in which it must be exercised in order to be productive.

So if the Church of England is not a single organization like Sainsburys but much more like a constellation of different heavenly bodies – dioceses, cathedrals, parishes and so on – where is the centre of gravity? To put the question another way, what is the fundamental unit of the

Church? Theologically, legally, and also historically, the answer to that question is simple and clear: it's the diocese. Theologically, we call the diocese a 'local church'. You might have thought that your local church was this church, or perhaps the parish to which it belongs, and in one sense of course it is. But this parish is not a complete church in itself: something is lacking. The smallest unit of the Church that is in any sense complete is the diocese. That is because in the diocese you have all three orders of ministry – not just deacons and priests but also at least one bishop. The local church is a community of Christians gathered around its bishop, celebrating the eucharist under his presidency or under the presidency of a priest ordained by a bishop and presiding on the bishop's behalf. The diocese isn't self-sufficient, of course – it is a merely a part of the whole. But it is a local church, because it has within it the fullness of ministry. The dioceses are grouped together to form provinces under an archbishop, and national churches under a primate; and the diocese is sub-divided into parishes: the diocese is the fundamental unit. Parishes are, of course, the most local expressions of the Church and the place in which people experience church life. In that sense they are its basic units, but the Church of England is an episcopal not a congregational church. The diocese is not primarily a unit of administration but a portion of the people of God gathered around the diocesan see and its bishop. So theologically and legally the diocese comes first. And historically, that's what happened in England too. The oldest English dioceses date from the time of St Augustine's mission. Obviously they always had local places of worship within them, but territorial parishes were formed only in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries (between 300 and 600 years later).

For the most part, I've been speaking of history and law, so perhaps you'll welcome a return to a more theological take on the question of What is the Church of England? If you are going to answer that question theologically, you need to start with the Declaration of Assent, the affirmation that is made by everyone who is ordained deacon, priest or bishop, and by all the clergy when they take up a new appointment. Before the Declaration is made, the bishop reads a Preface which sets the Declaration in context. There is a whole chapter of my book which explains the history and content of the Preface and Declaration of Assent, so you'll be relieved to know that I want to mention this evening only the first phrase: 'The Church of England is part of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church'. The Church of England is part. We do not claim to be the whole Church, we only claim to be part of the whole Church.

That claim carries with it a responsibility. The Church of England cannot – I mean should not – take decisions that belong to the whole Church. The part must not behave as if it were the whole. That doesn't, of course, mean that it can take no decisions at all: far from it. According to the principle of 'subsidiarity', decisions can and should be taken at the lowest appropriate level. Obviously, the argument will be about what level is appropriate for what question. To take two examples on which I hope we would all be agreed, the question of what time the mass should be celebrated in this church on a Sunday morning is a decision to be taken in this parish. It might not work for that decision to be taken here, in that other churches in the parish might be affected by the decision, but the doesn't affect other parishes so it can properly be taken in this parish. To go to the other extreme, I doubt if anyone in the General Synod actually thinks that the Church of England could just delete a line from the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed belongs to the whole Church. Legally, we could alter it, but morally we can't. It isn't ours to play about with. We are only part of the Church and the Nicene Creed belongs to the whole.

And that explains one of the reasons why catholics in the Church of England cannot accept the ordination of women as bishops and priests. These Orders belong not to the Church of

England but to the whole Church (we claim to ordain them as bishops and priests of the Church of God, not just bishops and priests of the Church of England). If Holy Orders belong to the whole Church, then one part cannot alter them unilaterally. That is to behave as if we were the whole Church, when we claim only to be ‘part of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church’.

That comment about decision-making in the Church brings me neatly to my third essay question: How is the Church of England Governed?

III: How is the Church of England Governed?

At this point I want to recall the first part of my talk. The Church of England is part of the body of Christ. The Church is Christ’s ‘own creation by water and the word’. Therefore, the Church is supposed to be a theocracy not a democracy: it is to be governed by God, not by the people. If it were a club, an organization created by its members, then those members would have the right to govern it on the basis of one member one vote. But it isn’t: it’s God’s creation and should be subject to his rule. It is Christ’s body, and is therefore to be governed according to the mind of Christ. In Acts 15 we read of the Council of Jerusalem, gathered to decide whether Gentile Christians needed to be circumcised. Announcing one of its decisions, the Council said, ‘It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...’ (Acts 15.28). When a council meets, we pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We are seeking not to impose our own will, or obey the will of the majority, but to discern the mind of Christ. Some of the Church of England’s structures may make it look a bit like a democracy, but when we look at them more closely we will discover that it isn’t.

Fundamental to any discussion of church government is **the episcopate**. The 1662 service for ordaining a bishop says that the office of bishop is an office of ‘Government in the Church of Christ’. In the Common Worship rite the new bishop is told: ‘You are to govern Christ’s people in truth.’ The Church of England’s dioceses are accordingly governed by their bishops. But, bishops have never enjoyed absolute power. Since ancient times they have been bound by the canons made by the Church’s councils: they are subject to the law, not above it. Since 1969 they have been required to govern their dioceses synodically – that is to say, to consult representatives of the clergy and laity in the diocesan synod, which must meet at least twice a year.² The diocesan synod’s legal functions are chiefly to ‘consider’ matters and ‘express their opinion’ on them, and ‘to advise the bishop on any matters on which he may consult the synod’. It can ‘make provision’ and has the right to approve or disapprove the diocesan budget.³ There is also a ‘bishop’s council and standing committee of the diocesan synod’ which can discharge the synod’s advisory and consultative functions on its behalf.⁴ Democratic election is the means by which the members of the diocesan synod are chosen,⁵ but the Church is not a democracy: it is the bishop who governs the diocese, not the synod. Neither the diocesan synod nor the bishop’s council is an executive body.

Some diocesan bodies, such as the Diocesan Board of Finance (or DBF) and the Diocesan Board of Education, have powers conferred by statute, and in them laypeople and clergy play important roles. The DBF is the diocese’s financial executive and employs its staff.⁶ The clergy and in particular the laity have a right and a responsibility to play their part in decisions about the money that needs to be contributed by the parishes (and ultimately by the people) and the purposes for which that money should be spent, and to apply their expertise to those issues. Policy questions will often have financial aspects, as well as strategic,

missionary and pastoral dimensions. Often, therefore, it is desirable and indeed necessary for policy to be developed by bishops, clergy and lay representatives working together.

The diocesan bishop's powers are inherent in his office; they are not delegated by or exercised on behalf of the diocesan synod. There is mutual accountability within the body of Christ, but the bishop is not accountable to his synod in any legal sense. (It does not have any power to give the bishop directions as to how he should exercise his ministry.) The diocesan bishop is the president of the diocesan synod and he can veto its decisions.⁷ However, Canon C 18.5 enjoins that 'Where the assent of the bishop is required to a resolution of the diocesan synod it shall not lightly nor without grave cause be withheld.'

It is only against the background of the position of dioceses as the fundamental units of the Church of England, and of the responsibility of bishops to govern them synodically, that the governance of the Church of England at 'national level' can be understood.⁸ For example, it explains why certain changes to church law can only be approved by the General Synod if they have already been approved by the majority of the diocesan synods. Also, though the diocesan bishops owe 'due obedience' to their archbishop, the **Archbishops** do not 'govern' their provinces as a diocesan bishop governs a diocese. They are supervisors, not governors.⁹ But like a bishop's jurisdiction, their jurisdiction over their provinces is inherent in their office, not exercised on behalf of the General Synod: they are not answerable to the Synod.

Unlike a diocesan synod, the **General Synod**¹⁰ is a law-making body, but it is not a government or a body with executive powers. It legislates by Measure and Canon. Measures need approval by both Houses of Parliament and then Royal Assent. They become part of the statute law of the realm and they can amend acts of Parliament. Canons are part of the law of the land too. They need the Royal Assent and Licence but not parliamentary approval (though a Measure may be needed to make it lawful for the Synod to legislate by Canon about the matter concerned). The General Synod consists of three Houses: Bishops, Clergy and Laity. Each has an effective veto, in that when a vote is taken by Houses a majority in each House is required. For some questions a vote by Houses is required, but on any question twenty-five members can require one. That is just under half of the membership of the House of Bishops, so the majority of the House of Bishops can require a vote by houses on any motion and then defeat it by voting against. So the Synod can never do something against the will of the bishops, but the bishops cannot change the law unless a majority of the clergy and a majority of the laity consent. The Archbishops are the joint Presidents of the General Synod. They have a proper role of presidency and leadership, for which the Synod looks to them, but it is the House of Bishops collectively whose role in the Synod is most comparable with that of the diocesan bishop in his diocesan synod. The House of Bishops has a veto (as do the other two Houses); the Archbishops do not.

In the General Synod the three Houses now work together in a collaborative way, but the **House of Bishops** has a distinctive role and special responsibilities. It meets twice a year between the meetings of the Synod. Only the House of Bishops can introduce liturgies into the Synod for approval, and a provision concerning doctrine, liturgy or worship can only be finally approved by the Synod in terms proposed by the House of Bishops. This is because the bishops are, by virtue of their ordination, guardians and overseers of the faith, liturgy and ministry of the Church and because all worship in a diocese takes place under the authority and oversight of the diocesan bishop. Since ministry is undertaken on behalf of the diocesan bishop, who is the diocese's 'chief pastor' and 'principal minister', and it is bishops who take decisions about ordination, it is natural that the House of Bishops should oversee much of the

national work concerning selection and training for ministry. Bishops are ordained to be ‘teachers’ and ‘guardians of the faith’,¹¹ so there is an expectation that the House of Bishops will take the lead in the Synod’s consideration of doctrinal and theological issues (including issues of moral and pastoral theology) and ecumenical agreements. Any statement of the House of Bishops on such matters has an intrinsic authority which derives not from the General Synod’s Constitution but from the bishops’ role as teachers of the faith and guardians of sound doctrine, given to them in their ordination to the episcopate.

Though the diocese is the fundamental unit of the Church, much work needs to be done at the national level. The role of the **Archbishops’ Council** is to co-ordinate that work. The Archbishops of Canterbury and York are the joint presidents of the Archbishops’ Council. However, its role is quite different from that of a bishop’s council (despite the similarity of the names). A bishop’s council is an advisory body, not an executive body. The Archbishops’ Council, by contrast, is an executive body. Though it may offer advice to the archbishops (or anyone else), that is not its primary purpose, and indeed (as already mentioned) the archbishops do not in any case have a responsibility for government of the Church of England nationally that would be comparable with a diocesan bishop’s role in his diocese.

The report which recommended the creation of the Archbishops’ Council, was clear as to the limitations, in an episcopal church, of a central co-ordinating and executive body. It saw ‘leadership’ (a different thing from ‘management’) as the responsibility of the bishops:

‘The House of Bishops would exercise its leadership by developing, with the assistance of the Council, a vision for the broad direction of the Church, offering it for debate in the General Synod and the Church as a whole. This... would... influence the work of the Council, which would seek the guidance of the House of Bishops on its overall plan and strategy and then present them to the... Synod for endorsement.’¹²

The report explained, ‘It is appropriate for the House to offer such vision because it is a college of chief pastors and has the responsibility for oversight... But they would do so in consultation with the General Synod and the Council because the Church has a tradition of communal, as well as personal and collegial, [oversight or] *episcopate*.’¹³ The General Synod remains the ultimate body in which the bishops and representatives of the clergy and laity of the Church of England deliberate together and speak on behalf of the Church of England. The provision for voting by Houses makes it possible to ensure that statements enjoy the support of all three Houses and crucially (where matters for which the bishops have a particular responsibility, such as questions of faith and order, are concerned) that of the House of Bishops. The episcopate continues to have the right and the duty to lead and guide the Church, and this may be done through statements and reports of the House of Bishops.

It is often suggested that the Church of England is ‘**episcopally led and synodically governed**’, but this phrase is highly misleading – not least because laypeople also occupy leadership positions. While it is true that the Church of England’s bishops are charged with governing their dioceses synodically (that is to say, with the advice of the representatives of the clergy and laity in the diocesan synod and the bishop’s council), the Church of England is not governed by synods: synods are parliaments, not governments. At the diocesan level, bishops not only lead but also govern, and that has implications for the House of Bishops’ role at the national level. The Synod cannot usurp the responsibilities which the members of the House of Bishops have, individually and collegially, by virtue of their episcopal ordination and office. The Synod’s Constitution makes it possible to ensure that it does not pass resolutions or take decisions that do not enjoy their support, but is also intended to

ensure that they hear the views of the representatives of the clergy and laity. The House of Bishops is also expected to fulfil its individual and collegial teaching responsibility by issuing statements and teaching documents, and these have an inherent authority.

Thus the Church of England's governance embodies a delicate balance. It is not one of those churches in which bishops take the decisions without consulting the clergy and laity. But it is also not one of those churches which is structured as if the Church were a democracy, in which decisions are based on the will of the people on a basis of 'one member, one vote'. We are a church that is governed by bishops, but in which the bishops are required to seek the counsel or advice of representatives of the clergy and laity, and in which changes to legislation and liturgy require their consent.

¹ St. Augustine, Sermon 272.

² Synodical Government Measure 1969, s. 4 (3); Church Representation Rules, rule 34 (1)(c).

³ Synodical Government Measure 1969, s. 4 (2).

⁴ Synodical Government Measure 1969, s. 4(4); Church Representation Rules, rule 34(1)(k).

⁵ Election is direct in the case of the clergy but indirect in the case of the lay members of diocesan synods and the General Synod, who are elected by the lay members of the deanery synods.

⁶ In some dioceses the members of the diocesan synod or of the bishop's council are also the members or directors of the DBF, but it is a distinct body with distinct responsibilities, even though its membership may be identical with that of one of the synodical bodies.

⁷ Church Representation Rules, rule 34(1)(e)(g).

⁸ In this paper 'national' is a shorthand. The Province of York includes the Isle of Man and the Province of Canterbury some parishes in Wales. The Channel Islands are annexed to the Province of Canterbury and the Diocese in Europe is also deemed to be part of it for certain purposes.

⁹ However, the Canons also provide for a metropolitanical visitation, during which the jurisdiction of diocesan bishops is suspended and the archbishop has 'jurisdiction as Ordinary' (Canon C 17.2).

¹⁰ The General Synod, created in 1970, comprises the two provincial synods (the Convocations of Canterbury and York), assemblies of the bishops and clergy which have existed since the middle ages and continue also to meet separately on occasion, together with a House of Laity. For a survey of the history and principles, see C. J. Podmore, *Aspects of Anglican Identity* (London, 2005), ch. 7.

¹¹ *Common Worship: Ordination Services*, p. 67: 'Make him steadfast as a guardian of the faith and sacraments, wise as a teacher and faithful in presiding at the worship of your people.'

¹² *Working as One Body: The Report of the Archbishops' Commission on the Organization of the Church of England* (London, 1995), p. 40: para. 4.11.

¹³ *Working as One Body*, p. 75: para. 7.6.