I’m delighted to be with you. The fact that God is calling so many from within the catholic tradition to serve him and us as deacons and priests in the Church of England, and that so many are responding to that vocation, is a great sign of hope for the future.

Fr Brownsell has asked me to talk from an historical point of view about the Church of England’s identity as ‘part of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church’. He also asked me to comment on how we can function within the Church of England as she is, so I’ll preface my talk with some brief comments about that. One thing that depresses me about some of our clergy and ordinands (and it is not their fault but the fault of those who teach and guide them) is that they have a remarkable degree of familiarity with the liturgy, rubrics, canons and conciliar documents of another church (fine in itself), but combined with a remarkable ignorance of the liturgy, rubrics, canons and other fundamental documents of our own church. What is worse, such people have a tendency to identify what is Roman as ‘catholic’ and what is Anglican as ‘protestant’. If we regard our own church and tradition as protestant, we have no business as catholics to be in it; if we portray the Church of England as such, we can hardly complain if she behaves accordingly. Our vocation is to recall the Church of England to her true identity as part of the one, holy catholic and apostolic Church, and to promote her catholic identity. We can do that by working with the grain of the Anglican tradition, by being visibly and audibly Anglican. That gives us permission to reproach others when they pursue innovations which conflict with the catholic identity of our church and its tradition.

What’s in a name?

Names are often central to the identity of people and groups, so it is perhaps with our names that the search for Anglican identity should begin. Many churches have a name that contains within it a theological programme – a denomination. ‘Lutheran’ and ‘Wesleyan’ refer to the teachings of individuals, while ‘Baptist’ highlights a belief and practice. Even the name we use for the Roman Catholic Church highlights the role within it of the Bishop of Rome. But though Thomas Cranmer played an important part in the Reformation of the English Church and Richard Hooker was one of its first defenders against those who wanted to overthrow its structure and tradition, we are not Cranmerians or Hookerites. Our church is not named after an individual, a belief or a practice. ‘Church of England’ and ‘Anglican’ tell us nothing about doctrine: neither of them is a denominational name at all.

So where does our name come from? The Church of England’s separate identity as an autonomous church began in the 1530s, when Henry VIII took the Church of England out of Europe. (In modern terms, it was like withdrawing from the European Union.) To change the metaphor, Henry VIII was Clement Attlee and Margaret Thatcher rolled into one. He first nationalized the English branch of a multinational corporation, the Western Catholic Church, and then proceeded to privatize significant parts of it – in particular the monasteries and their lands, which he passed on to his supporters. Our separate identity begins from that point, but that wasn’t when the Church of England began, and its name didn’t begin then either. In the

References for many of the facts and quotations that are not specifically attributed in these addresses may be found in my book: C. J. Podmore, Aspects of Anglican Identity (Church House Publishing: London, 2005).
middle ages the English Church had its own identity as a national church within the wider western Church, in communion with the see of Rome. In Latin, it was called *Ecclesia Anglicana*, which simply means ‘the English Church’. Long before the Reformation (from the fourteenth century onwards) *Ecclesia Anglicana* was commonly translated ‘Church of England’. That name was not invented by Henry VIII. Indeed, his whole point was that he was not founding a new church but rather detaching the existing English Church from Rome. ‘Anglican’ is just a churchy way of translating the Latin word ‘*Anglicana*’. It simply means ‘English’. Unlike the names of other churches it doesn’t tell you anything about theology at all.

So much for the name ‘Anglican’, but what about ‘Anglicanism’? That term was first used in 1837, by John Henry Newman. Just ten years later, in 1847 the name ‘Anglican Communion’ was first used to identify the family of churches that had come to be associated by then with the Church of England. I don’t think it’s an accident that the terms ‘Anglican Communion’ and ‘Anglicanism’ came into use at around the same time. The Church of England’s name is its programme – simply to be the church of and for the English nation. It’s the church to which every baptized person in England has the right to belong and from which everyone in England has a right to seek pastoral care. But that definition wasn’t sufficient when the Church of England was extended throughout the world. A different name was needed – one that referred to the overseas churches’ English origins without actually describing them as ‘English’. The name ‘Anglican’ tells us something about those churches (where their tradition came from), but it tells us nothing about the Church of England – beyond the tautology or truism that the English Church embodies and reflects the English religious tradition.

**The ‘Historic Formularies of the Church of England’**

If our names don’t help us very much, what of our formularies? When Lutheran and Reformed Christians encounter the Church of England they tend to look for a ‘confession’ (comparable with the Augsburg Confession for example) – a statement of beliefs offering a doctrinal or confessional basis for the Church of England. They open the Prayer Book and find the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, which are printed there with our other two ‘historic formularies’, the Book of Common Prayer itself and the Ordinal (ordination services). ‘Aha,’ they say, ‘there is your confession.’ But the Thirty-nine Articles don’t play the same part in the Church of England’s life as the confessions still do in many Lutheran and Reformed churches, and arguably they never had quite the same role.

The Canons of 1604 required the clergy not only to declare their assent to the Thirty-nine Articles but also to acknowledge that the Book of Common Prayer and the Ordinal contained nothing contrary to the word of God, and to promise to use the Prayer Book exclusively in public worship. That is very significant. The Prayer Book and the Ordinal thereby became associated with the Articles as part of what Continental Protestants would call the ‘confessional basis’ of the Church of England. *Lex orandi, lex credendi* (the idea that the way we worship expresses what we believe) was to become and remain the classical Anglican approach. So it’s important always to look at the three ‘historic formularies’ together; on their own, the Articles can give only a partial impression of what Anglicans believe.

The Articles are moderately Calvinist in their theology, but when the phrasing is examined it becomes apparent time and time again that they were designed not to tie things down with tight definitions but rather to include as broad a range of people as possible. That has remained a typically Anglican approach. The *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* puts it thus:
‘Though not ostensibly vague, they avoid unduly narrow definition. Much variety of interpretation has been put upon many of them without improperly straining the text, and probably this licence was deliberately intended by their framers.’

But the Articles do exclude Roman Catholics on the one side and Puritans on the other, and the policy of ‘comprehension’ (we would call it ‘inclusion’ in modern English) that they reflect was ‘“comprehension” of a (limited) variety of views’. It would be quite wrong and unhistorical to project back onto the sixteenth-century Church of England a sort of ‘anything goes’ diversity that some believe the Church of England should now embody.

Unlike some Reformed confessions of faith, the Thirty-nine Articles begin with five articles on God and Christ taken straight from the Early Church. Oliver O’Donovan has commented, ‘We must not miss the significance of the fact that they are the first five articles. Even if the English Reformers had nothing new to say about God and Christ, they were not to be discouraged from saying something old.’ The Church of England exists not in order to say something new or different, but to say what the Church has always said.

Today, the Church of England’s attitude to all three ‘historic formularies’ is somewhat more nuanced than it once was. The doctrine of the Church of England is identified in Canon A 5:

‘The doctrine of the Church of England is grounded in the Holy Scriptures, and in such teachings of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church as are agreeable to the said Scriptures. In particular such doctrine is to be found in the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordinal.’

The primary reference points are not a sixteenth-century document but in the first place the Holy Scriptures and then secondly ‘such teachings of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church as are agreeable to the said Scriptures’. Scripture is primary. (It is sometimes claimed that Richard Hooker spoke of Scripture, Tradition and Reason forming a ‘three-legged stool’, but such a stool could not exist in the Anglican tradition, because the Scripture leg would have to be longer than the others. Tradition and reason are tools for interpreting Scripture, not independent authorities of equal standing with Scripture. Accordingly, you will search Hooker’s Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity in vain for any reference to such a piece of furniture.)

The primary reference points are the first the Bible and then the faith and order of the primitive Church, contained in the teachings of ‘the ancient Fathers and Councils’. The ‘historic formularies’ are then identified, in a second sentence, as a place in which ‘in particular such doctrine is to be found’.

The Declaration of Assent

The classic modern statement of the Church of England’s identity and beliefs is the Declaration of Assent. It’s the declaration that you will have to make if and when you are ordained. It dates from 1975 and is the successor of the 1604 declaration that I mentioned before. The declaration

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2 B. Sixtus, ‘Authority to Teach in Classical Anglicanism’, Ecclesiology, 3 (2007), 296-322, p. 299f, n. 11. Dr Bernhard Sixtus has described the Articles as ‘perhaps primarily not a confessional document at all, but instead the foundation of a comprehensive Church…’: ‘The Articles as they stand can be said to betray the fact that they are perhaps primarily not a confessional document at all, but instead the foundation of the vision of a comprehensive Church, “National Church” of England.’ (ibid., p. 299f).

3 Bishop N. T. Wright: ‘The Articles as they stand can be said to betray the fact that they are perhaps primarily not a confessional document at all, but instead the foundation of the vision of a comprehensive Church, the “National Church” of England’, Report of Proceedings, 38 (2007), p. 191.


5 Canon C 15; Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England, p. xi.
is set in context by a fuller preface. Notice first that the Church of England is given no denominational or confessional description. The term ‘Anglican’ doesn’t appear. (As I have explained, it wouldn’t add anything.) The words ‘Protestant’ or ‘Reformed’ don’t appear either (whereas ‘catholic’ appears three times, referring to the whole Church and to the creeds which the whole Church has in common). The only name given to our church is a purely geographical one – ‘of England’.

Is the Pope a Catholic?

May I just interject a comment about that word ‘catholic’? In translating the creeds, many of the Continental Protestant churches substituted another word, such as ‘Christian’ or ‘general’. But in the Prayer Book the word ‘catholic’ was deliberately retained, not only in the Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds but also, for example, in the Prayer for all Conditions of Men, in which we pray ‘for the good estate of the Catholick Church’, and in the Athanasian Creed, with its ringing declaration ‘This is the Catholick Faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.’ (‘Catholic’, of course, means ‘according to the whole’, so the catholic faith is the faith of the whole Church – not the idiosyncratic beliefs or practices of part of it, be it a small part like the Church of England or a large part like the Church of Rome.) The English Reformers were not going to have anyone tell them that they weren’t proper catholics. Indeed, the whole point of the English Reformation could be summed up in the question ‘Is the Pope a Catholic?’, to which the English Reformers’ answer was a resounding ‘No!’. In their view they were indeed more catholic than the Pope. As Bishop John Jewel of Salisbury stressed in his Apology of the Church of England (published in 1562), the aim of the English Reformation was not to promote a new faith or a new church but to get back to the faith of the primitive Church: ‘We have... returned again unto the primitive Church of the ancient fathers and Apostles’. Queen Elizabeth I wrote to Roman Catholic rulers on the Continent that ‘there was no new faith propagated in England, no new religion set up but that which was commanded by our Saviour, practised by the primitive Church and approved by the Fathers of the best antiquity’.\(^6\) In the Church of England’s view it was the Roman Church had added to that faith by requiring its members to believe things that could not be proved from Scripture, added to what had been commonly agreed by all. (Incidentally, the two sides in that dispute seem now to have swapped their positions. Commenting on the ordination of women to the priesthood, Pope John Paul II said that the Church has ‘no authority whatsoever’ to change the essentials of what is revealed in Scripture and affirmed by tradition – implying that that is just what protestants had now done.\(^7\) Of course Anglicans now accept that the Pope is a catholic, but we obviously still believe (perhaps only just) that we are more catholic than the Pope – otherwise we would join him today! Sadly, some differences remain.

The Declaration of Assent (continued)

Returning to the Declaration of Assent, note how the Preface begins: ‘The Church of England is part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church’. Now of course all churches could say that: that statement is not distinctive of the Church of England. But that’s the point. In defining itself, the Church of England refers first not to what is distinctive but to what it holds in common with the rest of the Church. That sense of being ‘part’ of something bigger, of not being

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7 Cf. Apostolic Letter ‘Ordinatio Sacerdotalis’ of John Paul II to the bishops of the Catholic Church on reserving priestly ordination to men alone (22 May 1994).
complete in itself has been very strong. At best, this perspective places the Church of England on the widest canvas, stressing not its allegiance to a particular family of churches but its being ‘part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church’ and, as a mere part, its incompleteness. The Church of England is thus defined first and foremost as a national part of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

Then look at the second phrase. After saying what the Church of England is, the Preface says that it worships. That too, I suggest, is a typically Anglican emphasis. The Church exists primarily not to proclaim the Gospel, not as a mission agency (important as mission is), not in order to promote or defend some particular doctrine, but for the worship of God. The point of proclaiming the Gospel, the point of mission, is to bring people to the worship of God, which is the Church’s primary purpose. The Church of England’s identity is found and expressed in the way we worship, and that is why the Book of Common Prayer is not just a book of services but also one of three historic formularies in which our doctrine is ‘in particular… to be found’.

Next we have the theological statement that God is one God in three persons. We are a Trinitarian church. And after that, a statement about the faith. Again, we stress the Scriptures, as the place where the faith is uniquely revealed, and the creeds of the undivided Church as the place where the faith is set forth. Next comes an important new emphasis, proposed by a lay member of the General Synod during the revision process: ‘which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation’. The faith of Anglicans is the unchanging faith of the catholic Church, revealed in the Scriptures and set forth in the Creeds, but the Church is called upon to proclaim that faith ‘afresh’ in each generation. It is not to proclaim a new faith, but to proclaim that same faith in a fresh way – a way appropriate to each generation. So there is a dynamic quality to our proclamation, which is always changing in line with the culture, even though the faith itself is unchanging.

Only in the third of the four sentences do we come to anything specific to the Church of England: The historic formularies are mentioned, but as a way in which the Church of England has borne witness to Christian truth in the past. Finally, in the fourth sentence, there is the requirement of loyalty to the faith, the missionary task and pastoral responsibility.

The Declaration itself is much more tightly drawn. The minister declares belief not in any specifically Anglican formulation but in the Christian faith of the catholic Church. And it is here that we find a very precise formulation of the relationship between faith, Scriptures, creeds and formularies: it is ‘the faith which is revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds and to which the historic formularies of the Church of England bear witness’. Thus there is no requirement to assent to every detail of the historic formularies. Loyalty to the general ‘inheritance of faith’, of which those formularies form part, is required, and the person making the Declaration agrees that the formularies bear witness to the faith, but it is the faith revealed in the Scriptures and set forth in the creeds in which he or she is required to believe. The Declaration concludes not, as one might expect in a Continental Protestant declaration, with a promise to preach in accordance with a confession of faith, but

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8 And perhaps it is also significant that that ‘something bigger’ is not the Anglican Communion but the catholic Church as a whole. There is no reference to the Anglican Communion in the Church of England’s statement of its identity. One reason may be that it was from the Western Church that the Church of England became independent. England’s most ancient Christian communities were in communion with Rome for the greater part of their history; by contrast, all of the American Episcopal Church’s congregations were founded after the Church of England’s separation from Rome. Looking to Rome as the ‘mother church’ which sent St Augustine to Canterbury leads to the Church of England being defined not primarily as a church of the Anglican Communion but as two provinces of the Western Church, to which they were linked for almost 950 years – twice as long as the subsequent period of separation.
with a promise that ‘in public prayer and administration of the sacraments, I will use only the forms of service which are authorised or allowed by Canon’. For the Church of England it is common prayer, the use of the liturgies authorized or allowed by the Canons of the Church of England, which defines a loyal Anglican. In the end, as the old adage would have it, *lex orandi* is indeed *lex credendi*: for Anglicans, it is how the Church prays and worships which tells us what it believes.

**The Lambeth Quadrilateral**

Unlike the Church of England, the Anglican Communion as a whole has as yet no authoritative statement of its identity or beliefs. That makes it unusual among the Christian world communions, and the Anglican Covenant was intended to fill that gap – not before time, one might say. There is already one text which the Anglican churches affirm, the so-called Lambeth Quadrilateral, originally approved by the Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops in 1888:

(A) The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as “containing all things necessary to salvation,” and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.

(B) The Apostles’ Creed, as the Baptismal Symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith.

(C) The two Sacraments ordained by Christ Himself – Baptism and the Supper of the Lord – ministered with unfailing use of Christ’s words of Institution, and of the elements ordained by Him.

(D) The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the Unity of His Church.

However, it contains nothing at all that is distinctively Anglican. Arguably, that is what makes it distinctly Anglican! In any case, it is not an expression of Anglican identity but a statement of the minimum necessary for unity with other churches. There is nothing distinctively Anglican that the Anglican churches believe that other churches must adopt.

**No special Anglican doctrines or system of beliefs**

The Church of England in particular has been reluctant to view itself as a denomination with a particular (‘Anglican’) denominational identity, preferring instead to see itself as – historically at least – simply the English Church or the English way of being Christian. This ‘non-denominational’ understanding of Anglican identity is bolstered by the fact that the name ‘Anglican’ merely makes a geographical reference, rather than alluding to a belief or practice or to the doctrines promoted by an individual, and it has been shared by some non-English Anglicans at least. It is expressed in this comment by Bishop Stephen Neill:

‘There are no special Anglican doctrines, there is no particular Anglican theology. The Church of England is the Catholic Church in England. It teaches all the doctrines of the Catholic Faith, as these are found in Holy Scripture, as they are summarized in the Apostles’, the Nicene, and the Athanasian Creeds, and set forth in the dogmatic decisions of the first four General Councils of the undivided Church.’

On this understanding there is in fact no such thing as ‘Anglicanism’, if the ending ‘-ism’ implies (as it otherwise generally does) a distinctive system of beliefs. Archbishop Henry McAdoo of Dublin wrote: ‘There is a distinctively Anglican theological ethos, and that
distinctiveness lies in method rather than in content’, but ‘There is no specifically Anglican
corpus of doctrine.’ This view has been contested – by Bishop Stephen Sykes and to an
extent by my former colleague Paul Avis. They are partly right. The way our church is
structured and governed (its ecclesiology) has acquired some distinctive features, but in my
view that doesn’t amount to a ‘specifically Anglican corpus of doctrine’. Michael Ramsey
said that there is no Anglican ‘system or confession’, and I think that is broadly true.\(^9\) Looked
at in that way, the distinctiveness of Anglican ecclesiology is the exception that proves the
rule that Ramsey and McAdoo were at pains to uphold – as indeed was that archetypal
middle-of-the-road member of the Church of England, Ramsey’s predecessor as Archbishop
of Canterbury, Geoffrey Francis Fisher:

> ‘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’.

### Church of England Identity and Anglican Provisionality

Many members of the Church of England, strongly conscious that our church consists of two
separated provinces of the Western Church, long for the visible unity of the whole Church to
be recovered. This, combined with the fact that the Anglican Communion does not exist to
promote any particular doctrine or way of being the Church, but is simply a family of
churches with common or related origins and history, and hence similar identity, leads to the
Communion’s structures being seen as provisional and thus of secondary importance. This
understanding of Anglican provisionality was well expressed by the American Bishop
Stephen Bayne (later the Anglican Communion’s first Executive Officer) in 1954:

> ‘The “vocation of Anglicanism is, ultimately, to disappear.”... because Anglicanism
does not believe in itself but believes only in the Catholic Church of Christ; therefore
it is forever restless until it finds its place in that one Body.’

David Paton pithily summed up both the ‘non-denominational’ identity and the provisionality
of ‘Anglicanism’, and hinted at the causal link between them, as follows: ‘Anglicanism is not
a confession: and it is not permanently interested in Anglicanism’. In his presidential address
to the 1988 Lambeth Conference, Archbishop Robert Runcie said:

> ‘We must never make the survival of the Anglican Communion an end in itself. The
Churches of the Anglican Communion have never claimed to be more than a part of
the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. Anglicanism has a radically provisional
character which we must never allow to be obscured.’

We must always view Anglican structures in the light of the greater whole of which we long
to be part. Entering into such a greater whole, we would want to bring with us the riches of
our distinctive traditions and share them with others. But we would not want to perpetuate
our separate Anglican structures for their own sake. In this we would differ from many
Lutherans, who believe that there must always be a Lutheran Church as a distinct entity in
order that it might preach the doctrine of justification by faith. There is no distinctive doctrine
that Anglicans preach, for the preservation of which the Anglican Communion might need to
remain a separate body in perpetuity. This radically provisional character of the Anglican

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\(^9\) ‘The Anglican will not suppose that he has a system or a Confession that can be defined and commended side
by side with those of others; indeed, the use of the word “Anglicanism” can be very misleading. Rather will he
claim that his tasks look beyond “isms” to the Gospel of God and to the Catholic Church.’
Communion means that developments within it must always be tested against the question, does this take us closer to or further away from that wider unity to which we are called?

It was Michael Ramsey who perhaps best expressed the Anglican sense of incompleteness and provisionality, of a church looking beyond itself to the greater whole of which it is part:

‘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.’

**A non-denominational church within the Western Catholic tradition**

I have emphasized that the Anglican tradition is non-denominational, but that mustn’t be misunderstood. To say that there is not much, doctrinally speaking, that is distinctive of the Church of England is far from saying that anything goes. There are, and always have been, very clear boundaries. Doctrinally, those boundaries are the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy. So it can be said that if you’re not orthodox, you’re not Anglican. Furthermore, the Anglican tradition can be said to be ‘non-denominational’ only within the context of the Western Catholic tradition. That tradition we share of course with the Roman Catholics, and also (with regard to doctrine if not to church order) with the Lutheran churches and the traditional Reformed churches. Within that family we do not have distinctive doctrinal teachings. But we have very little in common indeed with another sort of ‘non-denominational’ Protestant church that has sprung up in modern times.

I mentioned that the English Reformers defined themselves over against the Roman Church and the papacy as they then were. But soon there was another flank against which the English Church had to defend itself – those who wanted not to get back to what was commonly agreed by the Fathers and Councils of the early Church, but instead to overturn the order of the primitive Church. These were the Puritans, who rose up in the later sixteenth century. Richard Hooker’s defence of what we anachronistically call the Anglican tradition was developed at that time in opposition to Puritanism. The imposition of the 1662 Prayer Book and episcopal ordination after the interregnum marked the definitive drawing of a line in the sand, and the Puritans’ successors left to form the Presbyterian, Congregational and Baptist churches. It may sometimes be difficult to say what is distinctively Anglican, but it is very easy to identify what is un-Anglican. Basically, that which departs from and lacks continuity with the pre-Reformation Western Catholic tradition, and which seeks to overturn the faith and order affirmed by the Fathers and Councils of the Early Church, is most definitely un-Anglican.

I have been speaking of ‘faith and order’. That phrase is typically Anglican: we have always denied that you could separate the faith of the primitive Church (the Church of the Fathers and the ancient Councils) from the order of the primitive Church. Faith and Order is, of course, the name of a movement, now within the World Council of Churches, that Anglicans (American Episcopalians in particular) were instrumental in founding. Its English name (unlike the French and German translations\(^{10}\)) captures the theological sense of ‘order’ with its link to ‘orders’ and ‘ordination’ – all ways in which the Spirit orders the Church.

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\(^{10}\) *Foi et Constitution, Glaube und Kirchenverfassung.*
What is it that holds such a doctrinally broad church as the Church of England together? Two things, I want to suggest: the ordered structure of the Church and the worship of the Church. These two are closely linked, because our tradition of worship is of ordered, structured worship. In the time that is left it is only possible to do justice to one of those two, so I am going to concentrate on church order – being an ordered church.

**Order in the Church**

The Collect of Michaelmas Day says that God has ‘ordained and constituted the services of Angels and men in a wonderful order’. Some seek to contrast order with the freedom of the Spirit, but that is a false dichotomy. In Scripture the Spirit does not just represent principles of freedom. The Holy Spirit is not only like the wind, which ‘blows where it wills’ (John 3. 8); he is also the Spirit of order. In the beginning God, whose Spirit ‘was moving over the face of the waters’ (Genesis 1. 2) brought order out of chaos. Wisdom may be seen as another manifestation of the Holy Spirit: the Book of Wisdom says that Wisdom ‘is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty’ (Wisdom 7. 25). Here too, the Spirit is the Spirit of order: Wisdom ‘reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well’ (Wisdom 8. 1). In the Nicene Creed, the one holy catholic and apostolic Church is mentioned as part of our confession of belief in the Holy Spirit. Order in the Church is a gift of the Spirit. At ordinations we call down the Holy Spirit, singing ‘Come, Holy Ghost’, praying him to bestow holy order on the Church. In Paul’s first Letter to the Corinthians, we see him trying to sort out disorder in a local congregation, ‘For’, as he wrote, ‘God is not a God of confusion but of peace’ (1 Corinthians 14. 32). Rejection of order in the Church is certainly un-Anglican and as far as I can see it is also unscriptural.

One of the fundamental differences between the Anglican tradition and what I will call the Puritan opposition to it is that Anglicans believe in a Church which is a visible and ordered entity extending beyond the local congregation. Cranmer believed deeply in the authority of the Church. For him, it was the national church that was paramount. Today we would give more emphasis to the diocese, but all were and are clear that an individual congregation is not complete in itself. So one of the boundary posts that marks out the Anglican tradition is that if you are a congregationalist and think that the local congregation is basically self-sufficient and a law unto itself, you are not an Anglican. That’s not a distinctively Anglican position. It’s something we share with the Roman Catholics, the Lutherans, the Methodists and indeed the Presbyterian part of the Reformed tradition. But it is something that very clearly separates us from other Protestant free churches.

**Episcopal government**

What strikes me in reading the first Letter to the Corinthians is that Paul wasn’t a congregationalist either. As someone outside and above the local congregation he gives instructions about how it should order its life, and does so in no uncertain terms. He even promises, ‘About the other things I will give directions when I come’ (1 Cor. 11. 34) – an apostolic visitation, no less. He brooks no opposition to his authority: ‘If any one thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. If any one does not recognize this, he is not recognized’ (1 Cor. 14. 37). Paul, of course, was an Apostle. You might say, we haven’t got Apostles any more, so each local congregation will have to do what’s right in its own eyes and become a law unto itself.

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Well, many churches are built on that principle, but it’s not what our formularies teach. The 1662 Ordinal draws a direct parallel between the Apostles and bishops:

‘Almighty God, who by thy Son Jesus Christ didst give to thy holy Apostles many excellent gifts, and didst charge them to feed thy flock; Give grace, we beseech thee, to all Bishops, the Pastors of thy Church, that they may diligently preach thy Word, and duly administer the godly Discipline thereof; and grant to the people, that they may obediently follow the same; that all may receive the crown of everlasting glory.

In the Common Worship rite for the Ordination and Consecration of a Bishop (which I would encourage you to study, along with the other Ordination Services), the Archbishop prays ‘Fill this your servant with the grace and power which you gave to your apostles, that as a true shepherd he may feed and govern your flock.’ The 1662 Ordinal similarly speaks of ordination to the episcopate as ‘admitting’ the person so ordained ‘to Government in the Church of Christ’. Bishops, in our Anglican understanding, are the successors of the Apostles, and they are charged with administering discipline – ensuring that there is good order – in the Church, and indeed with governing it. Again, there is nothing distinctively Anglican about this view – it is a fundamental part of the tradition that is reflected in the writings of the earliest Fathers of the Church – but rejection of it is certainly un-Anglican.

Many mid-sixteenth-century Anglicans saw episcopal church government as ‘a matter indifferent’. It had existed always and everywhere throughout the Church, and we had retained it, but it could be regarded as a human institution, established by man. In the later sixteenth-century, however, a consensus developed that episcopacy was of divine institution – the will of God for his Church, part of the way in which the Holy Spirit had guided the Church and led it into all truth. By the reign of James I that had become an established orthodoxy. In 1662 the Preface to the Ordinal was amended to make it crystal clear that episcopal ordination is required for ministry as a deacon, priest or bishop in the Church of England (before that date there seem to have been a few isolated exceptions, though the bishops concerned were usually uneasy about them). However, that requirement of episcopal ordination has generally been combined with charity towards other churches that had not been able to discern what Anglicans have regarded as God’s will. Anglicans have often not been clear that episcopacy was so necessary for the existence of a church that you could say that where there was no bishop there was no church. From the seventeenth century onwards some have taken that view, but most have been reluctant to unchurch others in that way. We have been clear, however, that whether or not episcopacy is necessary for the existence of a church, it is necessary for the unity of the Church. That’s why we include episcopacy in the Lambeth Quadrilateral, alongside the Scriptures, the Sacraments and the Creeds.

It is sometimes claimed that the Church of England is ‘episcopally led and synodically governed’. That is, I am afraid, pure nonsense. ‘Synodal’ is not the opposite of ‘episcopal’; synods are first and foremost gatherings of bishops or at least assemblies in which bishops take part and over which they preside. Furthermore, our formularies and canons are quite clear that the Church of England is governed by bishops not by synods. Synods are parliaments not governments. The thing which makes the Anglican way of ordering the

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Church distinctive is the fact that in our tradition bishops govern not arbitrarily or apart from the whole community of the Church, but synodically – that is, in consultation with their clergy and with the representatives of the laity. What that phrase ‘episcopally led and synodically governed’ ought to say is ‘led by bishops who govern in a synodical way’. That is the distinctive Anglican synthesis in the ordering of the Church.

**Continuity**

Like history in general, church history is subject to fashions and trends. At present it is fashionable to emphasise the discontinuity of the English Reformation. That is an important corrective to an earlier Anglo-Catholic view which played the English Reformation down to such an extent that you could be forgiven for wondering whether it really happened at all. The English Reformation was indeed marked by radical discontinuities – the dissolution of the monasteries and chantries, the removal of stone altars and statues, as well as doctrinal change. But it is important not to forget that those very significant changes took place within a framework of continuity with the pre-Reformation Church. The Church of England famously retained the threefold ministry of bishops, priests and deacons and the Preface to the Ordinal expressed the intention ‘that these Orders may be continued, and reverently used and esteemed’. Rejecting the threefold ministry has, from the beginning, been un-Anglican. Furthermore, when the Reformation was re-introduced after Queen Mary’s reign, great efforts were made to ensure that Archbishop Parker was consecrated by bishops in the historic episcopal succession. But the continuity was much more than just the continuity of the ministry and of the succession in the laying on of hands, important as that was and is. Rather, it was a complete continuity of structure. The English Church was separated from Rome and placed under the authority of the Crown, but neither Henry VIII nor his successors altered its internal structures. The ordering of the two English provinces – dioceses, archdeaconries and deaneries – was unaffected by the Reformation as such (though some new dioceses were created). Much of the mediaeval canon law remained in force, administered by church courts which continued unaltered. As Eamon Duffy has said, the Church of England ‘retained totally unchanged the full medieval framework of episcopal church government’.¹³ Ecclesiologically, I would argue, the continuity of the body is of more fundamental significance than the shifting patterns of its liturgy, devotion and thought, important as these unquestionably are. As Hooker pointed out,¹⁴ there is nothing distinctively Anglican in upholding episcopal government of the Church. That was common to the whole universal Church for fourteen or fifteen hundred years – from the immediate post-apostolic period until the sixteenth century. But it is distinctly un-Anglican to reject it.

The ministerial priesthood was also retained. It was never part of the Anglican tradition to claim that laypeople could preside at the Lord’s Supper. That was and is something for which you have to be commissioned by the Church. That commissioning is called ordination and as I have said it is about order in the Church. In the Anglican understanding the local Church is not the individual congregation but the diocese, not least because only the diocese is

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¹⁴ On the question of the episcopal government of the Church Richard Hooker (writing under Elizabeth I) had some fun with his Puritan opponents, who at that time argued for government of the Church by presbyters or elders rather than bishops: ‘A very strange thing sure it were, that such a discipline as ye speak of [that is, presbyterian government] should be taught by Christ and his Apostles in the word of God and no church ever have found it out, nor received it till this present time; contrariwise, the government against which ye bend yourselves [that is, episcopal government] be observed everywhere throughout all generations and ages of the Christian world, no church ever perceiving the word of God to be against it.’ (Quoted by A. Bartlett, A Passionate Balance: The Anglican Tradition (London, 2007), p. 49.)
complete in terms of ministry, because only the diocese has a bishop as well as priests and deacons. And therefore it is only the diocese – through its bishop – that can set people apart for that ministry of presiding at the Lord’s Supper. Again, there is nothing distinctively Anglican about these views. But denying them is completely foreign to the Anglican tradition. (The only thing I would add is that the Church of England now allows clergy and people to gather themselves around a bishop other than the diocesan bishop – in future it will be a bishop of the Society – and ecclesiologically that gathering of the people of God around a catholic bishop is a local church.)

**Canon Law**

The Church of England, then, is part of the body of Christ. What is it that binds the limbs of that body together and prevents its parts from flying off in different directions? One of the answers to that, to my mind, is canon law. I realize that I am being brave in saying that. Canon law often doesn’t have a good reputation. But perhaps as a non-lawyer I may be allowed to defend it, just as being a layman has enabled me to defend episcopacy in a way that bishops might be shy of doing. When canon law is mentioned people immediately think of men in tights, powdered wigs and quill pens. All of that may appeal to some but not to others, but none of it is a necessary concomitant of canon law. Canons existed for hundreds of years before the invention of the wig. Older clergy, when they hear mention of canons, still think of the Canons of 1604. By the mid-twentieth century they had become so out of date as to be virtually unusable and indeed laughable – regulating, as they did, the nightcaps that the clergy were supposed to wear in bed and other such matters. Archbishop Geoffrey Fisher is much maligned for causing the Church of England to spend much time in the 1950s replacing the Canons of 1604 with modern canons that were finally promulgated in 1964 and 1969. I make no apology for saying that that was one of many excellent things that that rather underrated archbishop did. Where would we be now, in this litigious and increasingly legally regulated age and world, without a proper legal framework for the life of the Church?

The term ‘canon law’ also prompts thoughts about the dichotomy between law and Gospel. But canon law is not some unchangeable law imposed on the Church from outside. Canons are simply the decisions that Christians have made over the centuries when they or their representatives have gathered in councils and synods to seek the mind of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the life of the Church. Some theologians appear to have a remarkably untheological view of ecclesiastical law, rejecting it as dry legalism, but rightly understood it is nothing less than the expression of the mind of the Church; it realizes ecclesiology in practical, concrete form. It cannot and should not be a barrier to the promptings of the Spirit or to change, for if the mind of the Church changes in matters which admit of change, its law must be changed to reflect that. (What it is, however, is a brake on change which has not been thought and argued through and cannot be said to represent the Church’s settled mind). The Church’s canons are the sinews which hold the body together and prevent individual parts from flying off on their own. Canon law is one of the ways in which the Spirit orders the Church. Canons can be changed, but there is a proper reluctance to set aside canons that were made by the earliest councils of the Church, such as those of Nicaea and Chalcedon, and which have been upheld since then by the catholic Church to which the Church of England claims to belong. It’s interesting to note that in the Ordinal Cranmer referred not only to the authority of Scripture but also to that of the ancient canons of the Church.¹⁵

¹⁵ ‘Brother, forasmuch as the holy Scripture and the ancient Canons command, that we should not be hasty in laying on hands...’: The language was updated in 1662 but the sentiment was Cranmer’s.
My plea for the importance of canons is not a defence of barrack-room lawyers or of legalism. The purpose of the law must never be lost sight of in a myopic concentration on its details. We shouldn’t adhere to the letter of the law in such a way as to ignore its spirit. It is true that ‘the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life’ (2 Corinthians 3. 6) – though Paul was talking about the law of Moses, written in tablets of stone, not the changeable decisions arrived at by the councils of the Church under the guidance of that life-giving Spirit. But all of that said, I am depressed by the way in which some in the Church of England seem to believe that they are entitled to ignore the canons that have been agreed by the synods of the Church and instead do what is right in their own eyes. (Incidentally, bishops are bound by the canons that have been agreed together in Synod, just as everyone else is. We do not believe in arbitrary government by bishops who think that they are a law unto themselves.) When people ignore what has been commonly agreed – whether locally, nationally or internationally – and do what is right in their own eyes, that is disorder, and disorder is most definitely not what God wills for his Church, and not what Paul advocates in his letters. Disorder is unhealthy for the body and contrary to the will of him who has ordained and constituted the services of Angels and men in a wonderful order.