

CATHOLICITY AND COMMUNION

A Report of the Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission

Introduction

1. In 2014 the Synod of the Diocese of Sydney passed the following resolution:

25/14: Theology of Communion and Catholicity

In the light of the Primate's Address at the 16th General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia in Adelaide and recent comments by the Archbishop of Canterbury on what constitutes membership of the Anglican Communion (in an interview with the editor of the *Church of Ireland Gazette*), this Synod requests the Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission to prepare a report on the theology of communion and catholicity with special reference to contemporary Anglicanism in Australia and to report back to the next session of this Synod.

2. Relevant comments from the Presidential Address of the Most Reverend Dr Phillip Aspinall, delivered on Monday 30 June 2014, include the following:

Over time increasing diversity has diminished and weakened our internal sense of coherence and belonging together ... That is, the character of the Church as catholic has found only the most muted expression in Australia. Local autonomy has trumped catholicity. (Proceedings of the Sixteenth General Synod, p. 22)

And so, at the international level, catholicity struggles with the autonomy of individual member churches and similar sorts of strengths and weaknesses of that arrangement are apparent internationally. (Proceedings, p. 23)

Reflecting on this situation some years ago, Ephraim Radner (2007) argued that local autonomy always seems to trump any notion of catholicity because the local is well defined legally and so is readily asserted. So the Anglican world has allowed political and legal considerations to displace serious thinking about belonging together.

In Radner's view, legal autonomy and juridical independence are stumbling blocks to the theological and scriptural notion of communion. Related to the metaphor of the body, communion requires much more serious thought than has yet occurred. A single member of the body is never autonomous (Radner, 2007, 3). The body metaphor means the members of the body are necessarily related. It implies the integration of the parts and that all sorts of things are common. Where communion is held as ideal, autonomy cannot be.

Radner (2007, 4 – emphasis in original) goes on to insist that 'communion is a **mission**, and not a static essence or characteristic of the Church.' Communion, he says, is 'an historical task that must define the shape of our conversion.' The mission of God is the Father sending the Son to die in love for the world and so to bring reconciliation. And the Son said to the infant church 'as the Father has sent me, even so I send you' (John 20.21). So communion is an immensely difficult vocation precisely because it involves dying for one another.

The burdens of the theological and scriptural idea of communion do not fit with the political idea of autonomy. Communion anticipates us bending our wills and giving up our lives for others beyond our local church; autonomy, on the other hand, involves us asserting ourselves over against the other.

We must give much more serious thought to communion, to catholicity, if we are to progress the mission which is our vocation. Unpacking the meaning and significance of communion might just give rise to legal and political possibilities for church life not previously entertained. (Proceedings, p. 23)

3. The comments of the Archbishop of Canterbury in his interview with Canon Ian Ellis of the *Church of Ireland Gazette* on Friday 3 October 2014 were:

... virtually everywhere I've gone the analysis is that the definition of being part of the Anglican Communion is being in communion with Canterbury. (Audio interview at 00:22–00:35. Online at <http://www.coigazette.net/buy-a-subscription-2/audio-interviews/interview-53-archbishop-justin-welby/>)

ACNA [Anglican Church in North America] is a separate church. It is not part of the Anglican Communion. (Audio interview at 03:04–03:08)

4. This report is in part a response to the former Primate's challenge to 'give much more serious thought to communion, to catholicity.' A response to the Archbishop of Canterbury's observations and comments is also provided. However, the report is first and foremost an attempt to do the constructive task of exploring a biblical and theological approach to catholicity and communion with due recognition of the historical factors which inform any such exploration at this point in our history. Following a definition of terms, the report proceeds in three major parts:

Part I: Catholicity and Communion in Historical Perspective

Part II: A Theological Outline of Catholicity and Communion

Part III: Contemporary Application of this understanding of Catholicity and Communion

Definition of Terms

5. **Catholicity** is an attribute, or quality, of God's Church. It can be used to describe:
1. the *fundamental truth* that there is one Church gathered by God from every nation and culture (universality or geographical extension);
 2. the *practical expression* of that universality in terms of a set of common beliefs (orthodoxy or doctrinal purity);
 3. a *derivative institutional application*, i.e., a structure for representing the universal nature of the Church (e.g., the Roman Catholic Church).
6. **Communion** is something the members of God's Church possess. It can be used to describe:
1. the *fundamental truth* of our fellowship in the Spirit of Christ;
 2. the *practical expression* of that fellowship among a group or groups of believers in terms of a gospel-shaped common life;
 3. a *derivative institutional application*: structures for representing that fellowship between groups of believers (e.g., the Anglican Communion).
7. For both sets of definitions, the first sense is strongly grounded in Scripture; the second follows naturally (and strongly in the case of communion); the third, however, is an extension of the biblical sense into a particular historical and

institutional context. Extending these theological ideas from persons to institutions may create a theological foundation for extending authority from the spiritual to the institutional sphere. One purpose of this report is to find a way of thinking theologically about institutional communion and catholicity without distorting the biblical witness to these ideas. But we must not lose sight of the core truth that our fellowship is in Christ and his gospel alone, and institutional bonds, effective as they may be for creating relationships, generating action and fostering culture and identity, are ‘Christian’ bonds only to the extent that they embody Christ and his gospel. As far as its structures are concerned (6.3 above), the benefit of practical arrangements is measured solely by the gospel fruits they bear.

Part I: Catholicity and Communion in Historical Perspective

8. Contemporary Anglican discussions of catholicity and communion occur within an ongoing discussion of this and related issues that goes back to the early church and continues on a wider front today. While only the biblical teaching is normative and theological reflection upon that teaching is the critical way forward in any discussion, that reflection is in various ways conditioned by the wider historical discussion and so it is important to outline this context rather than leave it as an unexamined background.

The Early Church

9. The original idea of the word ‘catholic’ (Gk. *katholikos*) was that of geographical extension and diffusion – i.e., universality. This appears to be the meaning of the term as it first appears in chapter VIII of Ignatius’ *Epistle to the Smyrnians*: ‘Wherever the bishop appears, there let the people be; as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.’ By ‘the Catholic Church’, Ignatius evidently means the aggregate of all the Christian congregations. Just as he sees the bishop as the centre of each individual church, so he sees Jesus Christ as the centre of the ‘Catholic’ (i.e., universal) Church. The word, therefore, highlights the scope of God’s gospel purposes (i.e., the salvation of the world) and, by implication, the primary calling of his people (i.e., to make disciples of all nations).
10. While the word ‘catholic’ never lost this original sense, in the latter part of the 2nd century it began to include the sense of ‘orthodox’, as opposed to ‘heterodox.’ This was a natural development of the original meaning inasmuch as the Greek term *katholou* meant ‘according to the whole’ or ‘all embracing.’ The Catholic Church thus taught the ‘whole’ truth (the Catholic faith), whereas heresy was inevitably partial and local, exaggerating some aspect(s) at the expense of others. Consequently, the thought of *doctrinal purity and apostolic fullness* came to be seen as a mark of true Christian catholicity. This is the sense in which the term is used in the Muratorian fragment (c. 190-210 A.D.), which refers to certain heretical writings as ‘not received in the Catholic Church.’
11. This dual sense of geographical extension and diffusion (on the one hand) and doctrinal purity and fullness (on the other) came naturally to refer to those who in every place named the name of Christ and adhered to ‘the Catholic faith’ – hence the rise of the expression ‘the Catholic Church.’ So, in the 4th century, for example,

Cyril of Jerusalem wrote as follows: ‘The Church is called catholic or universal because it has spread throughout the entire world, from one end of the earth to the other. Again, it is called catholic because it teaches fully and unfailingly all the doctrines which ought to be brought to men’s knowledge, whether concerned with visible or invisible things, with the realities of heaven or the things of earth’ (*Catechesis* 18:23). The two senses had become inseparable by the middle of the fourth century. Nevertheless, the catholicity of the church did not determine the structural form of its unity; this varied from place to place and developed over time.

12. Alongside these developments, the writings of the early church fathers (i.e., from Ignatius to Augustine) reveal that the notion of ‘the communion of the saints’ (Lat. *communio sanctorum*) was understood as a way of expressing the Pauline concept of *koinonia*. In particular, it sought to capture the spiritual union of all who are ‘in Christ’, living or dead. Not surprisingly, in later thought, this communion was understood to comprise the church *militant* (on earth), the church *penitent* (in purgatory), and the church *triumphant* (in heaven). Consequently, both eastern and western churches have sometimes pointed to this doctrine in support of the practice of both praying *for the dead* (i.e., interceding for those in purgatory) and praying *to the dead* (i.e., asking the saints in heaven to intercede for us). Historically speaking, though, the key notion embedded in the idea of ‘communion’, has always been one of ‘spiritual unity.’
13. Critical issues surrounding the nature of catholicity and the extent and boundaries of communion came to the fore in the Donatist controversy of the 4th and 5th centuries. At the heart of the controversy was the Donatists’ belief that, because of compromises made by many clergy and laity during the Diocletian persecution, they alone were the ‘pure remnant’ of an apostate church. Those who had surrendered the Scriptures or in some other way denied the faith in order to avoid persecution were labeled *traditores* (Latin for ‘the ones who had handed over’) and any subsequent ministry undertaken by these people, after they had returned to the church, was considered invalid by the Donatists. Repentance alone was not considered sufficient to restore them to the Catholic Church. So, significantly, as well as rebaptising those who had lapsed in the face of persecution, they also rejected the ministry of anyone who had been ordained or consecrated by a *traditor*. Ultimately this resulted in a schism with two parallel Churches in North Africa.
14. The Donatist issue raised questions about what constituted sufficient grounds for excommunication and when schism was justified. Conversely, what was sufficient to enable restoration of one who has fallen from faith in one way or another? More particularly, the question of how sinful behaviour impacts the subsequent ministry of a person lay at the very heart of the controversy. Augustine’s theological response to the Donatists was threefold: First, he argued that the unworthiness of a minister does not invalidate the sacraments he ministers, since their true minister is Christ. Second, using the metaphor of grain and chaff, he argued that the visible church contains both the saved and the unsaved and the final separation of these was reserved to the angels on the Last Day. With regard to the validity of ministry, this meant that ‘[s]ometimes he who is baptized by the grain is chaff, and he who is baptized by the chaff is grain’ (*Tractate* VI:12). Third, Augustine argued that to rebaptise is not only to exorcise the Spirit and blaspheme the sacraments, but to

break the unity of the Church and destroy its catholicity. He thus concluded that the schismatic claims of the Donatists should be regarded as a great evil.

15. What is critical to realise, however, is that both ‘Catholics’ and ‘Donatists’ agreed that unrepentant sin and a departure from biblical teaching remained appropriate grounds for separation. The repentant *traditores* should be welcomed back, argued the Catholics, but this did not mean that the church should tolerate false teaching or persistence in sin with a refusal to repent. This was a different matter.

The Medieval Church

16. The emergence of Christendom following the conversion of Constantine and the increasing prestige of the bishop of Rome contributed to a more institutional approach to catholicity in the centuries that followed. The papal office began to determine who was to be considered inside and outside the church. The maxim ‘outside the church there is no salvation’ came to mean ‘outside communion with the bishop of Rome there is no salvation’, as evidenced by the excommunication and anathematization of the Patriarch of Constantinople by a legate of Pope Leo IX in 1054. Excommunications were issued by Popes throughout the medieval period, many of them motivated by political factors. Though opposed by some, including William of Ockham, John Wycliffe and Jan Hus, this institutional approach to communion and catholicity stood without serious challenge until the time of the Reformation.
17. At various points during the Medieval Period, orthodox individuals and groups (as well as heretics) were declared excommunicate because their teaching challenged the prevailing institutional consensus. Peter Waldo and the Waldensians were excommunicated in the twelfth century for advocating translation of the Scriptures, preaching in vernacular languages, a universal priesthood which fostered lay preaching, and voluntary poverty in the face of the ostentatious wealth of the Church of Rome. Two centuries later, John Wycliffe and the Lollards were similarly treated for teaching a universal priesthood, championing a vernacular Bible, and challenging the use of images, compulsory clerical celibacy and the recently propounded teaching of transubstantiation. Jan Hus and the Hussites in Bohemia also found themselves declared outside the sphere of salvation for their challenge, on biblical grounds, to the prevailing teaching of the church.
18. The issue raised by these movements was whether an individual or group teaching orthodox biblical doctrine could be removed from communion and considered to have breached the catholicity of the church by a decision of the institutional authorities. Who has the right to determine when communion has been severed and catholicity has been compromised? When the institution and its structures have departed from the faith of the New Testament and yet retain the levers of ecclesiastical and political power, who is to arbitrate between claims of the pontiff and the reformer?
19. The excommunication of Martin Luther in 1520 and his condemnation by the Imperial Diet in 1521 brought these questions into sharp relief. Luther at first appealed from ‘the Pope ill-informed’ to ‘the Pope better informed’, then to a General Council of the Church, and finally to Scripture as the sole arbiter of his

claim to be teaching the catholic faith and to remain in fellowship with Christ and all true believers everywhere. Luther never considered himself to have separated from the church brought into being by the sacrifice of Christ, his resurrection and the donation of the Spirit at Pentecost. He believed instead that a corrupt institution had separated itself from the gospel and so was rightly challenged by those who remained ‘captive to the word of God’. Believers were bound together by a common faith in Christ and a shared commitment to live under the impress of his word. All other bonds are incidental and when an institution demands a higher loyalty than that which is given to Christ and his teaching, it has ceased to be a true church.

The Church of England

20. At the time of the Reformation, the Church of England adopted a position, more or less identical to that of the Eastern Church, which insisted upon the right of separate churches, whether national or otherwise, to be autonomous, while preserving the essentials of the Catholic faith of Christendom – geographical diffusion, doctrinal purity and the fellowship or communion that exists between all true believers. This is reflected in the *Book of Common Prayer* in such expressions as ‘the Catholic Faith’, ‘the good estate of the Catholic Church’, ‘all who profess and call themselves Christians’, ‘all them that do confess Thy Holy Name’, ‘Thine elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of Thy Son’, and ‘the holy Catholic Church.’ It is also found in the 1604 Canon regarding ‘*The Form of a Prayer to be used by all Preachers before their Sermons*’: ‘Ye shall pray for Christ’s holy Catholick Church; that is, for the whole Congregation of Christian People dispersed throughout the whole World’ (LV).
21. The theological foundation of the Church of England’s understanding of catholicity is the doctrine of the triune Godhead as it is expressed in the three Creeds and in Articles I-V of the *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion*. This foundation necessarily includes the doctrines of Christ’s incarnation, atoning death, resurrection from the dead, ascension, current reign and coming return. This foundation also includes the formal and material principles of the Reformation: the supreme authority of Holy Scripture and the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Insistence upon these truths was hardly a departure from true catholicity. Rather, as the 19th century Bishop of Lincoln, Christopher Wordsworth, once wrote: ‘The Church of England ... reformed herself in order to become again *more* truly and soundly *Catholic*, both in doctrine and discipline’ (*Theophilus Anglicanus*, 1850, p. 236).
22. This is further indicated by Cranmer’s initial dream of a pan-European reformed confession that would improve on the Augsburg Confession and provide a more effective counter to the pronouncements being issued by the Council of Trent. As late as March 1552, Cranmer had written to Calvin proposing just such a confession, expressing their common cause and brotherhood. It was only after it proved too difficult to produce a common statement across the reformed churches that Cranmer pursued the only feasible alternative: an official doctrinal statement of what the Church of England believed. This led to the drafting of the Forty-two Articles, which would eventually become the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion.
23. The basis of all fellowship or communion both within and between churches is spelled out in Article XIX with its definition of the visible Church of Christ as ‘a

congregation of faithful men’, and its two ‘marks’: the pure preaching of the word of God and the proper administration of the sacraments. Interestingly, the episcopal form of the Church and its ministry is not regarded as the only valid form of church government, but simply as an allowable form that, like *The Ordinal* itself (which ‘contain all things necessary to such consecration and ordering’), does not contain ‘anything that of itself is superstitious or ungodly’ (Article XXXVI). According to the Anglican formularies, then, the episcopal form of the church was not understood to be an essential element of the Church’s catholicity. This reflects the teaching of the New Testament, where there is no single divinely authorised form of church government.

24. It was for this reason that the English Reformers believed they were at liberty to sever ties with churches, like the Church of Rome, that ‘have erred’ in either their ‘manner of ceremonies’ or, most especially, in ‘matters of faith’ (Art. XIX). The reason for this was that the ultimate test of *catholicity* was *apostolicity* – that is, acceptance of and adherence to the teaching of the New Testament. In addition, the Church of England has also employed a *corroborative* test, that of *antiquity*. According to the Canons of 1571, for example, clergy are not to teach anything ‘except it be agreeable to the doctrines of the Old or New Testaments, and whatever the Catholic Fathers and ancient Bishops have collected out of that very doctrine.’ This does not mean that everything found in the Church Fathers is truly ‘catholic’ (i.e., orthodox), but simply that anything that is *not* found in them cannot be regarded as properly ‘catholic’ (i.e., universal). The corroborative test of antiquity has also proved useful in making distinctions between things *essential* (i.e., ‘That which has been believed always, everywhere, and by all’) and things *non-essential*. However, such a test is not infallible and needs to be subordinated to the supreme authority of Holy Scripture.
25. Ever since the Elizabethan Settlement, Puritans in the Church of England had been calling for further reform. While there was general agreement on the doctrines of authority and salvation (the ‘Calvinist consensus’), many continued to dispute details of clerical vesture or various phrases in the *Book of Common Prayer* and protested the constraints imposed by *Act of Uniformity* (1558). By the early seventeenth century there were distinct groups within the Church of England, but rather than arguing for ‘comprehensiveness’, High Church Laudians, the Puritans, the Durham House faction and the Latitudinarians all sought to advance their own positions. The triumph of the Puritans, as a result of Cromwell’s victory in the English Civil War, did not lead to comprehensiveness and toleration any more than the Anglicanism that preceded it. After the restoration of the English monarchy (1660), a new *Act of Uniformity* was introduced, and in a desire to produce outward conformity, Puritan dissenters were required to give ‘unfeigned assent and consent to all and everything contained and prescribed’ in the new *Book of Common Prayer*. Those who would not comply were thrown out of their vicarages, barred from any position in either church or state, forbidden to preach or teach by law and even from meeting in small groups in their homes. Rather than perjure themselves, over 1800 ministers (approximately 20 per cent of the English clergy) were forced to leave the Church of England on St Bartholomew’s Day, 24 August, 1662. Comprehensiveness has always been a fraught concept in the Church of England.

Formation of an ‘Anglican Communion’

26. The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion did not envisage a global phenomenon of Anglicanism. Indeed, the Articles themselves insisted that ‘It is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one, or utterly like; for at all times they have been divers, and may be changed according to the diversities of countries, times, and men’s manners, so that nothing be ordained against God’s Word’ (Article XXXIV). However, as England’s (and then Great Britain’s) worldwide colonial empire grew, it took with it the shape and essential character of the English church. In this sense, the idea of an Anglican communion arose *incidentally*. However, it also developed *intentionally* as societies began to be formed within the Church of England with a particular concern for not only the pastoral care of British colonists but also the evangelization of people in other lands — e.g., the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (1698), the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (1701) and the Church Missionary Society (1799). The churches which grew in these colonies were bound by historical association, a common creed and more or less common liturgical practices. In their formative years, leadership was provided by the church in England. So, for example, it was the authorities in England who decided when the colony of New South Wales needed its own bishop and who that bishop would be.
27. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the emergence of local leadership and the development of diocesan structures in many colonies and former colonies led to a further shift that raised very significant questions. What would the relationship of these churches be with the Church of England in the future? How would they continue to relate to the royal supremacy over the English church? How could an Anglican identity develop that was not quintessentially English? How would the various colonial churches relate to each other? Furthermore, growth towards a more local expression of a common faith and heritage was not uniform across the various spheres of British influence. The American episcopal churches soon sought their own identity in tandem with the new political realities following the War of Independence. Yet the Diocese of Sydney was technically part of the Church of England until 1961 and still looked to England to provide its archbishops right up until the mid 1960s. Different theological trajectories were taken, sometimes within the same national body (witness the different theological complexions of dioceses within Australia), certainly when different parts of the world are compared (compare The Episcopal Church in America with the Anglican Church in Australia).
28. In 1865, fearful that recent decisions in the Privy Council would lead to different laws being in force in the Church of England than were in force in the Canadian Church, the Synod of the Church of Canada petitioned the Archbishop of Canterbury to convene ‘a national synod of the bishops of the Anglican Church at home and abroad.’ The request and the concern that gave rise to it, both revealed the continuing sense of connection with, and to some extent dependence upon, the Church of England. The Archbishop of Canterbury did call the bishops together in 1867, but not before he stressed that this would be a consultation, not a synod, and it could not presume to make laws for all the churches. This first Lambeth Conference saw Anglican bishops from around the world consider how they might best maintain the faith and unity of this Anglican communion and then address the situation that had arisen surrounding the deposition and excommunication of

Bishop John Colenso of Natal, who, unsurprisingly, was an Englishman. Though motions were put forward, in keeping with the Archbishop's instructions prior to the conference, they were not resolutions binding on all the member churches. Nevertheless, a sense of fellowship, a common mission, and close ties in particular with the Archbishop of Canterbury, were strengthened by the conference.

29. To date there have been fourteen Lambeth Conferences, which bishops attend at the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury and which, while providing a means of expressing the mind of Anglican leadership worldwide, continue to have no legal or binding authority. The Lambeth Conference continues as an *expression* of connection and a means of mutual encouragement and advice, and is now treated as an *instrument* of unity (alongside the Archbishop of Canterbury himself and the Anglican Consultative Council). However, in recent decades the conference has been overshadowed by considerable disagreement on ethical and theological issues. The idea of a common mission has been put under considerable strain. In the past decade in particular it has become clear that resolutions of the Lambeth Conference can and will be totally disregarded by those national churches who disagree. The 1998 Lambeth Resolution 1.10, which affirmed (526 in favour, 70 against) that homosexual behaviour is incompatible with the teaching of Scripture, did not prevent The Episcopal Church of America from consecrating a practising homosexual man in 2003 and a practising homosexual woman in 2010.
30. In 2008, the stresses within the Anglican Communion came to a head. In the face of the behavior of The Episcopal Church, and the decision of the Church of Canada to bless same-sex unions, invitations to the 2008 Lambeth Conference were issued, not to the homosexual bishop at the centre of the controversy, but to all other bishops, including those who had participated in the confirmation and subsequent consecration of the Bishop of New Hampshire. Invitations were not issued, either, to those bishops who had been consecrated in response to the crisis in order to provide oversight and spiritual refuge to parishes and ministries alienated by the developments in America and Canada. Consequently, a group of Primates and others convened their own conference in Jerusalem, the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON), just a month before the Lambeth Conference, in order to strengthen each other for ministry and to stand with those who were suffering because of their stand for biblical truth and godly behavior. The GAFCON Primates reissued an earlier observation made by the Primates of the Anglican Communion that the Communion had been 'torn at the deepest level.' Nonetheless, the institutional structures of the Communion remained in place, though there was no longer a common mission nor a common understanding of the gospel at its heart. There was no willingness to be held accountable to the teaching of Scripture. The behaviour of the American and Canadian bishops, in defiance of warnings given from all around the rest of the world, raised again the question of the limits of fellowship, the meaning of catholicity and true nature of communion.
31. Many of the concerns that arise in the contemporary discussion of catholicity and communion echo those at various points in this complex history. Conversely, this history, and the way in which theological and ecclesiastical concerns have been addressed in this history, may well provide resources for the contemporary discussion. At the very least it provides the background against which our biblical study of these topics, and the theological reflection that emerges from that study,

takes place.

Part II: A Theological Outline of Catholicity and Communion

The Catholic Church: God's Scattered and Gathered People through History

32. God created humans to be his image in the world; however, without the life and wisdom that flows out from the presence of God in their midst (Gen 2) they can neither relate to each other nor rule in a God-glorifying way. God made humanity to be in his presence and to be channels of God's life and love to the rest of his creation, but this purpose was blighted by human rebellion. The road to the fulfilment of God's creative purpose must now pass through the fires of judgment (Gen 3:24).
33. After the flood God scattered his rebellious human creatures both for blessing (Gen 10) and for judgment (Gen 11), but God's intention was always to regather them around himself, beginning with Abraham and his seed (Gen 12). God's redemption of Israel from slavery was, in this sense, an act of new creation. At Sinai a nation was born, representing a new humanity, gathered around the mountain of God's presence. The divine gift of the tabernacle enabled Israel to continue living as a people gathered around God while they journeyed to the Promised Land (Exod 40). Their mission was to be a kingdom of priests (Exod 19), a channel of divine blessing to the nations.
34. The era of Israel's nationhood brought with it the divine gift of an anointed king, a human mediator of the rule of God over the nations (Ps 2), but through a gross failure of kingship the nation found itself scattered, exiled among the nations (as predicted in Deut 4:27). Faithless kings and false prophets led the people away from following the Lord, and the people eagerly followed, led by the sin engraved on their heart (Jer 17:1).
35. This dispersal was both for the judgment of Israel and for the blessing of the world, as the scattered people of God carried his word to the ends of the earth (Isa 66). But any future regathering would always be doomed to failure until the problem of sin-engraved hearts could be dealt with. The New Covenant, promised by the prophets and established at the ultimate cost of Jesus' shed blood (Matt 26:28), brought into existence a new people of God. This people would be transformed inwardly and individually by an act of forgiveness that cleansed the conscience from acts that lead to death (Heb 9:14). God's exalted Messiah would thus come to rule an eternal kingdom of the faithful; God's Second Adam would be the first member of a new humanity.
36. What is only hinted at in the Old Testament is made clear on the Day of Pentecost, as the risen Christ pours out his Spirit on the New Covenant people (Acts 2), and scatters them so they may gather a harvest for God from every nation. Just as a mixed multitude came out of Egypt with Israel (Exod 12:38), so the church God gathered around the Lamb will be drawn from every tribe and tongue and nation (Rev 5). At the consummation of God's original creation purpose, the nations, healed from the curse, will need no temple in which to serve the Lamb, for they will

see the face of God (Rev 21-22). The Church already participates in this glorious future through the high priestly work of Jesus, who has gone ahead of us to the right hand of God (Heb 6:20; 12:2). We have already come to ‘the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven’ (Heb 12:18–24).

37. The Church of God is manifest on earth today as a ‘diaspora’ of churches comprised of those born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In trials and grief God’s power guards us through faith, stamps our common life with love and joy as we await our inheritance, the salvation to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet 1), and impels us into the world with a mission to reach the nations. There is but one Church, universal, militant, suffering and triumphant. Its God-graced unity is not dissolved by the reality of multiple congregations and denominations scattered across the globe. It is, after all, the Church of the risen Christ, gathered around him by God, not men, and united in the Spirit. Its members are known not by their nationality or language or denomination, but by their declaration that Jesus is Lord, and the belief in their hearts that God raised him from the dead (Rom 10:9).
38. Each individual gathering of Christ’s people is a local expression of this one, universal Church, now gathered in heaven around its Lord (Eph 2:6). As the Spirit enables each member to show Christ’s love, the Church – not one unit of some greater this-worldly collective, but something whole in itself – is manifest in that time and space. The frequent reference in the New Testament to ‘the churches’ underscores the significance of local gatherings as true expressions of the universal Church. As Paul says to the church in Corinth, ‘you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it’ (1 Cor 12:27).

Church Unity in New Testament Thought: The Communion of the Saints

39. Several metaphors are used in the New Testament to express the unity of the Church: the branching vine (John 15, cf. Isa 5), the temple (Eph 2:19-22), the body (Eph 4:15-16). In each case Christ is pictured as the piece that holds the whole together: the vine, the cornerstone, the head.
40. The unity Christ forges in his Church goes deeper than simply a shared faith. Believers are made members of Christ and of one another by ‘being made to drink of one Spirit’ (1 Cor 12:13). To be in Christ is to be brought back from death by the breath of God’s own life: ‘although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness’ (Rom 8:10). Moreover, our spiritual union with Christ mediates to us the trinitarian life of Father, Son and Spirit (John 16:13-15; 17:23).
41. The agent of our unity is the Spirit, who binds us together in Christ (John 14:23). The instrument the Spirit uses to join us to Christ is the prophetic word, now preserved for us as Scripture (1 Pet 1:12; 2 Pet 1:19-21). It is the Christ we meet in Scripture, and no other Christ, to whom the Spirit joins us, and in whom we find our unity (Gal 3:28). Yet this unity also needs to be maintained by ‘walking in a manner worthy of your calling’ (Eph 4:1). Having exhorted the Ephesians to ‘guard the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’, Paul is quick to stress that this unity is essentially unbreakable, being grounded in God, not in humans: ‘there is one body and one Spirit ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all’ (Eph 4:3-6).

42. ‘Maintaining our unity’ thus refers to acting in a way that faithfully expresses what we are in Christ. In the first instance this means showing the fruit of the Spirit, such as humility, patience, love (Eph 4:2). Then, a person expresses Christ-like love by giving to others the particular gift with which they are endowed, so that we may grow up together into the fullness of Christ (4:7-16). The result of these varied gifts is always the same: equipping people to know Christ (4:12-13), confident of the truth, and lovingly speaking it (4:14-15). In short, we maintain the unity we have in Christ by ‘learning Christ’ in the context of our common life (Eph 4:20-24). Our fellowship is created by the gospel and maintained by the gospel. True communion is always and only gospel-communion.

Church Unity in New Testament Thought: The Limits of Communion

43. Since our unity is grounded outside us, it cannot be broken by our failure to maintain it in love, by divisions cultural distinctions or even by some differences of theological opinion. Nevertheless, it is not inviolable. Communion is lost when the gospel is lost, when a person or a church ‘deserts the one who called you by the grace of Christ’ (Gal 1:6). The divine grace Paul warns the Galatians they are in danger of abandoning is described in his preceding statement:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself on account of our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Gal 1:4-5)

44. By the gift of himself, and because of the sin within us, God in Christ rescued us from the sin around us, that is, from the world. To embrace a gospel where what we do, or even think, justifies us (Gal 3:10-14) is to abandon Christ’s gospel; it is to embrace a Christ who gave himself to help us rescue ourselves, so that we might share the glory with God. This ‘turning to a different gospel’ (Gal 1:6) is what it takes to lose gospel communion, for a different gospel means a different Christ. As John writes, ‘whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son does not have life’ (1 John 5:12).
45. Careful discernment is required, that we neither embrace those who are not in Christ, nor reject those with whom we are one in Christ. Galatians 1:4-5 suggests three questions that may be used to test whether a group calling itself Christian shares membership in Christ.
1. *What is taught concerning Christ and his gift of himself?* Is what he achieved in his life, death and resurrection our only hope of rescue? Is there confidence in his power to set us free from the present age? Such confidence is grounded in the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord of all creation (Col 1:15-17), fully God and fully man (John 5:26; 20:28; Heb 1:3), the one and only way to the Father (John 14:6). To receive Christ is to receive the triune God: ‘because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father”’ (Gal 4:6).
 2. *What is taught concerning sin?* Is it beyond any human remedy? Does it

render us liable to judgment and wrath? Is it clear that it is God, not the present age, who determines what it means to fall short? Rejection of our accountability to God at every level leads to depraved minds, ungodly behaviour and disqualification from the faith (2 Tim 3:1-9). Correct doctrine is inescapably embodied in correct practice. The stark truth is that ‘anyone who does what is good is from God. Anyone who does what is evil has not seen God’ (3 John 11f.).

3. *What is taught concerning Scripture?* It is significant that the two previous tests result from treating Scripture as normative for matters of faith. Because sinful appetites distort human reason, and the present evil age darkens human tradition, we are utterly dependent on God’s self-revelation through the Prophets and Apostles, preserved in Scripture (2 Tim 3:10-17; 2 Pet 1:19-21; 1 John 4:6). The Church is after all a product of the word. In short, the extent of our sin means that we must confess the sufficiency and perfection of Scripture as the authority that norms human tradition and reason. Scripture is the written word of God, the means by which we are made ‘wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus’ (2 Tim 3:15). It fulfils its function by speaking as a coherent whole, canonical Old and New Testaments with one voice proclaiming Jesus as the Christ, the only saviour of the world (1 Jn 4:14).
46. Those who affirm, teach and practise the first two truths on the basis of the third, share in the communion of the saints, other differences notwithstanding. The boundaries of true catholicity lie within the lines determined by Scripture’s account of Christ, of human sin and of itself. To be catholic a church must be orthodox at these foundational points.

Order and Polity: The Church as a natural human institution

47. The Church’s gospel shape is also seen through its earthly existence as a human society. Luke recognised that the ideal shape of Israelite society under the Mosaic law was brought to fulfilment in the primitive church (Acts 4:32-34, echoing Deut 15:4-11).
48. Most of what the New Testament has to say about church order focuses on the way local churches were internally organised. Because ‘God is not a God of confusion’, the church should ‘do all things decently and in order’ (1 Cor 14:33, 40). As with a human family, love expresses itself in the church most effectively through structures that reflect its nature and purpose. The Pastoral Epistles depict a church that governed its affairs through a series of offices, including overseers, elders and ‘deacons’ (i.e., servants). It is important to recognise how these offices differ from those by which Israel’s life was regulated under the Old Covenant.
49. Aaron and his sons were anointed, ordained, and set apart for life (Exod 29; cf. 28:41). Kings were anointed by prophets at God’s command, a sign that God had set them apart for life (2 Sam 12:7). Like priests, their office was passed down from father to son. Prophets were called by God directly, with no human intermediary. All these offices were fulfilled in Christ. It is his prophetic Spirit we all share (Acts 2), his priestly sacrifice by which we all draw near to God (Heb 10), his kingship by which we shall all reign (Rev 5).

50. In stark contrast to the Old Testament offices, all of which speak to us of the Christ to come, the first Christians borrowed everyday titles from the surrounding culture which best described the sorts of functions the church needs its leaders to perform. Neither office nor office-bearer was ‘ordained by God’ in the sense that priests and kings were; instead, the church organised itself as any village or family of the time might do, around ‘overseer’, ‘elder’ and ‘servant’.
1. The gospel and the church of God is always under attack by a hard-hearted generation, and must be guarded (Acts 20:28; Tit 1:9-11). *An overseer* is required to keep the church standing firm against attacks from without and within.
 2. A church is an extended family, a household, and as such needs *an elder* to serve as head of the family – this is the normal way that family groups functioned in Near Eastern society (cf. 1 Tim 5:17). Those with natural authority and wisdom must use their position to keep the faith lodged in the family’s collective memory (cf. Jer 26:17-19), and to pass on true religion to the next generation. They ought to do so as a group, pooling their wisdom and being held accountable to one another. They will need to make key decisions (Acts 15:6; 16:4), and many of them will teach and preach (1 Tim 5:17).
 3. Without exception every follower of Christ must put on our Lord’s *servant* nature, and especially those who would lead (Mark 9:35). When the church is filled with servants of Christ, agents of the gospel who hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience (1 Tim 3:9), then it will bear living witness to the incalculable riches of Christ (Eph 3:7-10). Of this army of servants it is wise and good to recognise some gifted individuals so that we can hold them up as examples to follow, free them to use their gifts of service and equip them to take up the mantle of eldership when the time comes.
51. It is natural that the Pastoral Epistles should focus so many words on those with these particular responsibilities, because it is on them, humanly speaking, that the survival of the church into the next generation depends. Their task is to guard the gospel, to keep the catholic faith true as it passes to the next generation, and to maintain the unity of the Spirit by words and works of Christ-like service. Each of these offices shares this task in one form or another, and indeed in the Pastoral Epistles it would appear that ‘overseer’ and ‘elder’ are overlapping, if not synonymous, terms.
52. While it is true that church officers are not New Testament’s equivalents of kings and priests, neither are they *mere* community leaders, because the gifts they exercise are given by the Spirit ‘so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith’ (Eph 4:13). The first church officers were appointed by the apostles. As such the gifts and qualifications of the first church officers were recognised and nurtured by the apostles (2 Tim 1:6) and their delegates (Tit 1:5), who appointed them to leadership.

The traditional labels of bishop, priest and deacon are a later historical development of these roles, as the oversight exercised by the elder over a single church in the

New Testament era (Tit 1:5-7) came to be exercised by a ‘bishop’ over a region of churches.

The Church and the Churches

53. As the Church spread out from Jerusalem, countless local congregations sprang up, and the question of their relationship to each other needed to be addressed. While much of the focus of the New Testament’s discussion of church unity focuses either on relationships within individual congregations, or on the unity of all God’s people in his Son, there are also numerous references to relationships between ‘the churches’ (Gk. *ekklēsiai*). From these references, it is evident that a significant fellowship existed between the congregations that were planted by the apostolic preaching of the gospel. They shared news and encouragement (2 Cor 8:1, 18; 2 Thess 1:4). They sent greetings and messengers to one another (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Cor 8:19, 23), and gave thanks for one another (Rom 16:4). They shared in suffering together (1 Thess 2:14; 2 Thess 1:4), and provided financial support for one another (1 Cor 16:1; 2 Cor 11:8). Perhaps most significantly, they shared not only in the apostolic gospel of God’s grace, but in standards of godly behaviour that were binding in ‘all the churches’ (1 Cor 7:17; 14:33-34; cf. 1 Cor 11:6).

54. In this sense, local congregations were by no means independent of others, either in the obligations of mutual love or in deciding for themselves what constituted right doctrine and behaviour. As Paul says quite strongly to the self-assured Corinthians (1 Cor 14:36-38):

Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command. If anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored.

55. For the first generation of the Church’s existence it was the apostles who personally exercised the foundational role of authenticating new churches. The risen Lord Jesus had commissioned them to witness to his ministry ‘in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’ (Acts 1:8). Any of the disciples could be involved in planting new churches, but the authenticity of such gatherings was confirmed by apostolic acknowledgment. So Philip ‘proclaimed the Messiah’ to the Samaritans, even performing signs and baptising, but the church did not receive the Spirit until Peter and John ‘laid hands upon them’ (Acts 8:17). As those who had seen, heard and touched the incarnate Word (2 Pet 1:16; 1 John 1:1), the apostles authenticated the gospel through their personal presence and witness, and underwrote the tradition handed down before the completion of the New Testament.

56. However, with the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 11) a parting of the ways among the churches was foreshadowed. The paradox of Gentile inclusion among the people of God through faith in Christ was forced upon the Church in the first instance by the visible work of the Spirit (Acts 15:8). Next, the Jerusalem Council, having come to see that God had always held the Gentiles within his salvific purposes, exerted its apostolic authority to ensure the full acceptance of Gentile believers, as Gentiles, within the New Covenant people (Acts 15:23-29). Did this amount to a centralising authority in the Jerusalem church? Galatians 2 provides an

important corollary to this view, in that it demonstrates that the ministries of Paul and the Jerusalem church are independent and interdependent at the same time. They are independent, in that there are two distinct apostolic spheres of activity: Peter, apostle to the circumcised, and Paul, apostle to the uncircumcised (Gal 2:7-8). But they are also interdependent, in that the gospel preached by each is the same apostolic message (Gal 2:2). The type of bond that existed between these church networks is exemplified in the collection for the saints in Jerusalem (Gal 2:10; 2 Cor 8-9).

57. With the passing of the apostolic generation there arose the need to pass on the 'pattern of sound teaching' they laid down (2 Tim 1:13; 2:2), and as had been the practice since Moses' day, the tradition was secured for future generations by means of inscription (2 Pet 1:16-21; 3:16). To this day, a church is apostolic when it preserves the tradition of faith authorised by those who knew Jesus, a tradition preserved in the Old and New Testament Scriptures. Tradition remains important, even vital, but apostolicity comes not through a succession of ministries but through Scripture. The God-breathed Scripture has a final authority among the followers of Christ.

Part III: Catholicity and Communion Today

58. The analysis of this report suggests that the unity or communion that arises as a fruit of the gospel ought to be highly valued. It is a God-given, Christ-created, Spirit-empowered, Scripture-shaped reality with a missional dimension.

Gospel Communion

59. Communion, at whatever level it is to be experienced, is to be pursued and maintained in humility and forbearance, in mutual love and support, in ministry and shared mission, in thanksgiving and prayer for one another, and in mutual admonition, rebuke and even repentance-oriented excommunication where there is serious error in either doctrine or life.
60. This reality can be expressed on a range of levels: between individuals, within and between congregations, across and within dioceses, both nationally and internationally, and across the boundaries of denominational and missional organisations, both locally and worldwide. Precisely what is involved in the expression of unity, or the sharing of communion, will look different at each level.
61. It is relatively straightforward to see how the principles that order relationships operate at a personal level between brothers and sisters, despite the challenges of practice. Christians may find themselves united in gospel communion, and in full accord on matters of faith and obedience. Their relationship will then be one of *mutual encouragement*. Alternatively, they may affirm a true spiritual union, but be in discord over some aspect of what it means to 'walk in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ' (Phil. 1:27). When Christians are in communion but not in accord, their relationship will be one of *exhortation, debate, and limited cooperation*. These activities count as true expressions of Christian love, and in their own way model to the world the unity that marks out Christ's disciples. Finally, there may be a lack

of gospel communion or even an ex-communication, as a result, for example, of persistent and explicit turning to another gospel or a refusal (either explicit or implicit) to discipline their teaching and behaviour by the written word of God (see 1 Cor 5:3-13; Tit 3:10-11; cf. §§43-46). To the extent to which a person adheres to an impaired understanding of the gospel, the communion they share with others will be impaired, and the resulting relationship will be one of *rebuke, withdrawal of fellowship, prayer and evangelism*.

Institutional Communion

62. It is less straightforward but still conceivable to envisage how these principles can map onto relationships between organisations. How can a congregation, diocese or denomination be ‘in communion’ with another such organisation, given that they are not persons? The answer lies in recognising the multiple levels of interpersonal relationships of which institutions consist. For example, if the official statements of each diocese or denomination accord with true teaching, then personal representatives may meet in full accord and for mutual encouragement. However, it is also possible that the official teachings of one diocese or denomination, as conveyed through authorised representatives, could place it out of gospel communion with other dioceses or denominations. Yet, at the same time, a congregational priest or elder in that same diocese or denomination could be a faithful steward of the gospel, and in the face of discouragement from his own overseers find encouragement from communion with the elders of another congregation in his diocese or beyond. Communion can even be shared between individual believers who meet for mutual encouragement as they struggle to be faithful within churches, dioceses or denominations that teach a false gospel. As Augustine’s response to the Donatists suggests (§§13-15), broken communion between churches does not necessarily mean broken communion among all of their members.
63. The expression of communion between separate churches and church networks begins with shared expressions of faith, but it does not end there, as the pattern of the New Testament Church makes clear (§§53-56). Communion extends to activities that create and nurture personal relationships, such as the exchange of news and visitors, and the encouragement of mutual intercession and thanksgiving. In times of crisis communion brings forth sacrificial love, perhaps in the form of material aid, or perhaps even at the cost of standing with imperilled brothers and sisters in some more direct way. When necessary, communion will entail hard words of admonition in the face of departures from godliness and, perhaps for a time, the pain of impaired or broken fellowship. None of these disciplinary measures need be organisation-wide. There may be individual congregations that nature and history have brought together for some reason – for example, a migrant group spread between two regions, or common circumstances that create natural mission partners – and they might share rich expressions of communion outside the structures of their parent dioceses. The institutional machinery of the organisation may sometimes be brought into play, but even then it would be a mistake to speak of institutional communion as if it were an independent reality; it is the people involved who are exercising spiritual gifts for the building up of the body of Christ.

Implications

64. What are the implications of institutional communion for the Anglican Communion? The notion of an Anglican Communion has arisen as a product of historical development, not by divine mandate (see §§23-24, 26-29). This is not to say that it is unimportant. But we need to be clear that precisely because it is an historical and organisational structure, there is a danger of overreach in the claim to ‘communion’ in the use of the title ‘the Anglican Communion.’ That is, it runs the risk of having the theological freight of the concepts of catholicity and communion loaded into it unreasonably.
65. Institutional approaches to communion, such as that in the quote from the Archbishop of Canterbury in October 2014, may have their own legal validity in terms of ‘the Anglican Communion’, but they cannot determine the reality of either Anglican identity or Christian fellowship (gospel communion in the terminology of this paper). To the extent that statements like the Archbishop’s serve to blur the distinction between these two senses, they are inadequate because they fail to give due weight to this unity in the gospel, in mission and in a common heritage. Continued variety within a shared catholicity, either within or across denominations, is not necessarily a breach of unity. Not all disagreement need harden into division.
66. Likewise, while the call of the Primate for Christian men and women to care for each other is welcome, his use of the language of catholicity and communion to argue for a particular form of structural or political unity is problematic. Our commitment to each other arises from the gospel of grace. It is this gospel that calls on us to refrain from asserting ourselves against the other (Phil 2:3). Furthermore, our shared commitment to gospel communion may in fact lead us to dispute particular institutional and political structures. Legal and juridical independence are not necessarily the enemies of a biblical and theological notion of communion.
67. Because unity and gospel communion are highly valued, ‘members’, through their authorised representatives, ought to try as best they can to work within those structures that they find themselves inhabiting, by dint of historical development, voluntary association, and divine providence. Where possible and desirable, this means engaging in mutual ministry and mission with others in the institutional communion, encouraging, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness as the word of Christ dwells richly among us. As we have noted, it also means that there will be times when, because of issues of either life or doctrine, fellowship will be broken when it is recognized that essential elements grounding the communion are not held in common. This is not to be done lightly and may operate at different levels: dissociation may be at the level of congregations, groups of congregations, or perhaps even entire denominations based on either explicit statements of doctrine or severe, clear and publically endorsed breaches of lifestyle contrary to Scriptural practice. Because unity is so highly valued, any process entertained in this respect will be of necessity careful, transparent, evidence-based, documented and, to some eyes, protracted; always holding out the possibility of repentance, mutual agreement and reconciliation.
68. The Anglican Communion is an attempt to model global gospel partnership through a wise and godly ordering of our common heritage and theological, ecclesiological

and liturgical commitments. Institutional communion remains of value whenever it serves to give further expression to the gospel communion shared by the members of its constituent churches. Likewise, Anglican polity remains of value whenever the structures it generates continue to facilitate the defence and proclamation of the gospel into the next generation. To be in communion with an international fraternity of churches whose apostolic character consists in the faithful handing down of the traditions about Jesus preserved in Scripture is a blessing from God, and there is no greater privilege than to give extravagantly of one's resources for the welfare of such churches to the glory of God (2 Cor 9:12-15).

M. D. Thompson (Chair)

For and on behalf of the Sydney Diocesan Doctrine Commission

4 April, 2017