

PEP Argument Briefing Paper

Title: An “Un-Anglican” Statement
Applicable to: Confession and Calling of the Network of Anglican Diocese and Parishes
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Summary

The theological statement of the Network of Anglican Diocese and Parishes (NADP) contains propositions and assumptions that would radically change the nature of the Anglican Communion and the Episcopal Church, and are destructive of the via media.

Argument

- Confessional statements are not a part of the Anglican tradition. Although we ask the newly baptized to “Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood,” other statements of belief are not required. Anglicans confess sins, not beliefs, and have built that form of confession into our liturgies. Confessions are individual and communal acts of worship, which bind the community together as a communion. They are not statements of positive or negative belief to which people must claim they adhere prior to being admitted to the community. Anglican traditions define a powerful, but minimal, core of doctrine. The idea that Anglican doctrine exists in time without change is contrary to the historic faith and order (and the contemporary experience) of Anglicans throughout the world. The purpose of the church is to be faithful not to Scripture or to tradition, but to God. This cannot be done by “confession” alone. It requires the prior support and guiding context of the community of faith that gives meaning to and defines the role of Christian confessions.
- The Anglican tradition is to keep core doctrine to a minimum. The Articles of Religion, for example, were an historical, political, and theological compromise, embracing beliefs and communities ranging from Puritan/Calvinist to Catholic. As Queen Elizabeth supposedly said, she had no wish to try to judge men’s souls. The compromise articulated in the Articles of Religion allowed most English people to participate in a single church despite greatly varying understandings of scripture, tradition, and the rites and rituals of the church. It successfully defined a limited protestant revolution by distinguishing the church catholic from the (newly-christened Roman) Catholic Church. For nearly three generations in England, it prevented the outbreak of religiously-inspired civil war. More of the Articles of Religion treat the legitimacy of ecclesial and civil authority than specify what people are to believe. (Articles 1-5 deal with the nature of the Trinity and the resurrection; 6-8 and 35 with scripture and creeds and the Book of Homilies; 9-18 and 22 with basic doctrines about salvation; 19-21 and 34 with the church as an institution, 23-24, 26, 32, 36 with ministry; 27-31 with sacraments; 33 with excommunication; 37-39 with civil authorities and law.)
- Similarly, in the 1880s when Anglicans began serious ecumenical discussions, the bishops of the church met at the first Lambeth Conference and agreed on a statement outlining only four core non-negotiable things: Holy Scripture as containing all things

necessary to salvation and as being the revealed Word of God, the Nicene Creed as an adequate statement of belief (and the Apostle's Creed as a symbol of the baptismal covenant), episcopacy, and two sacraments (Eucharist and Baptism). Specific readings of scripture beyond those parts of scripture providing support for the Creed are not a part of core belief. Compare this with the 19 pages and 29 subsections of the NACP Confession and Calling.

- The Confession and Calling demands that signers accept a particular interpretation of marriage and accuses those who do not accept this interpretation as being schismatic and thus “represent[ing] an attack on the very mysteries of God” The Confession and Calling proposes that if Christ praised one form of relationship, but said nothing about others, then Christ's silence has condemned these other relationships. This is at best creative interpretation and at its worst a logical fallacy. Even more tenuous are the claims that since the creation includes the making of male and female, heterosexual monogamous marriage is the only approved sexual relationship. Creating two sexes does not require that they relate to each other in any particular manner. In addition, marriage as a relationship and institution has changed greatly over time. Old Testament marital practices are a far cry from those held up as a model in the modern world.
- Many of the passages about marriage cited in the Confession and Calling are actually metaphorical uses of marriage to describe the relationship of the Church to God. Talking about marriage in this context is simply a communication tool. It says nothing about marriage itself. Using marriage in a metaphorical sense does not mean that other relationships (not mentioned in metaphors) are condemned. Jesus used farming, fishing, soldiery and shepherding as a basis of many of his parables, yet we do not conclude that other occupations lack God's blessing. See C & C II.4
- The Confession commits signers to believing that Holy Scripture has a “clear explication” and “perspicuous meaning.” Such a confession is at odds with the history of the church, and demeans the richness and complexity of holy texts which Biblical scholars and other people of faith have read in multiple ways for over two millennia. It also minimizes the problems of translation and changing meaning of words over time. After all, as it says in I Corinthians 13:9-12 “For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” This, clearly and plainly, means that no single reading or interpretation of scripture can have a monopoly on understanding, and that no interpretation may be expected to last forever, or even throughout a single lifetime. See C & C II.7.2
- The Confession and Calling distorts Anglican governance and belief by making the episcopate “the primary organ of stewardship within the Church of Christ.” It also commits to healing breaches through “apostolic authority.” This lends itself to a glorification of the primates as some form of governing body over the communion. This is a radical reorganization of the Anglican Communion, contrary to its historic principles and the primates' own intentions. A regular meeting of the primates is a recent development and the group has only the power to reason with one another and to issue advice through pastoral letters.
- The Confession and Calling rejects “the patterns of autonomous and sectarian self-rule that characterize the present age.” This is a rejection of the traditional organization of the Anglican Communion in which individual, autonomous national churches

voluntarily come together to consult with one another as independent churches recognized by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. It is also a rejection of democracy, and fundamental American and European values that have become the desire of many around the world. It elevates the episcopate at the expense of traditional church governance that includes an important voice for laity. From its first constitution in 1789 on, ECUSA vested General Convention (where laity, clergy and bishops share authority through their respective houses and votes by orders) with all authority over doctrine, worship, and polity. ECUSA in its beginning recognized only a limited spiritual authority of bishops. Their primary charge was to ordain and confirm. Even the disciplining of clergy was a shared responsibility between bishops and the other orders. Lay ministry has always been recognized and validated in ECUSA. See C & C II.8.i, II.8.iii, and II.8.v.

- The Confession and Calling claims to support restoring the unity of the church, but at a terrible price – uniformity of belief. It commits its signers to a “unity of belief and practice” and to an obedience to God requiring “not pluriformity of truth and practice, but that we be of one mind” This is not only contrary to Anglican and Episcopal traditions allowing variance in ritual, but destroys the traditional position of the church as a “via media” meeting ground for faithful Christians to discern their own understanding of how to answer God’s call to act on one’s faith in everyday living. It is also contrary to Article 34 of the Articles of Religion, which begins “It is not necessary that Traditions and Ceremonies be in all places one, or utterly alike;” See C & C III.1.4 and II.2
- The Confession and Calling privileges the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in deciding what is the proper reading of scripture and Anglican theology. This thus eliminates the entire development of the Episcopal church in the U.S. (including ALL of its versions of the Book of Common Prayer), ignores two hundred years of scholarship on the development of Scripture, and denies the church the ability to grow in discernment and understanding over time. See C & C 1.5
- In short, The Confession and Calling is unfitting for those who respect Anglican traditions, Christian faith, the good news of the gospel, or the rights and responsibilities of intelligent adults in a free society.

Supporting Information

Pertinent passages from the “Confession and Calling”

II.2 “We are called because of this to found our communion in Christ on common obedience to God’s word which requires of us not pluriformity of truth and practice, but that we be of one mind and follow the pattern of holiness [sic] marked out for us by our Lord and his Apostles.”

II.4 “We are called in our day and place, to oppose all those actions of synods, conventions, individual bishops and priests, that contradict the apostolic and the Church’s commonly accepted scriptural teaching on marriage between man and woman as the divinely ordained, holy, and exclusive context of human sexual activity, as the privileged social sacrament of God’s covenant of faithfulness for and figure of human redemption (Hosea 2:16-21; Mark 10:5-9; Eph. 5:29-32; Rev. 19: 7, -9), and on chastity outside of marriage as a holy and worthy calling (Matt. 19:12; I Cor. 7:32). Such contradictions of Christian teaching subvert the communion of our churches within the Anglican Communion and rend relationships within the larger Church. In doing this, they represent an attack on the very mysteries of God, the evangelical trust of which we are the stewards.”

I.5 We confess, hold and bear witness, in particular therefore, that this trust is given to us in the Holy Scripture's received authority: the "Word of God" making known the "mysteries" of God through the prophets and apostles by the Holy Spirit (*Col 1:25ff.; Rom. 16:25f.; Eph. 3:5; Nicene Creed*). This Word is made known and rightly apprehended, furthermore, in the Church's life as it is bound in the unity of love and truth before the eyes of the world (*Jn. 17:20-26; Col 2:1-6*), expressed in the common Creeds and Canons of the Christian churches, as they have been led in recognized council across the ages. Within the Anglican Church of which we are a part, this means that Scripture's meaning is rightly discerned in addition through the theological ordering of our common historic formularies, including the sixteenth and seventeenth century authorized Books of Common Prayer and the Thirty-Nine Articles which ground the belief and practices of our Communion's life. "In this way the authorities, which the church needs for her mission, are defined and limited." (*Barmen Declaration Article 1*).

II.7.ii *"We commit ourselves to the clear explication of scripture's full and perspicuous meaning as apprehended within the common witness of the Church, in our preaching, writing, and witness."*

II.8.i. *"We commit ourselves to the primary organ of stewardship within the Church of Christ, that is, an episcopate rooted in holiness, knowledge of Scripture, and apostolic faithfulness."*

II.8.iii. *"We commit ourselves to conciliar discussion and decision-making, and reject the patterns of autonomous and sectarian self-rule that characterize the present age."*

II.8.v. *"We commit ourselves to the work of healing schism and estangement [sic] within the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 1:10), through truth-telling, testing of the faith, repentance, humility, apostolic authority and building each other up (2 Cor. 13:5-11)."*

III.1.iv *They seek reconciliation in God's Church "through a unity of belief and practice that serves to expose the individualism and congregationalism that is now regnant within the Church at large and that denies the Name of Jesus"*