

**Zeitschrift:** Internationale kirchliche Zeitschrift : neue Folge der Revue internationale de théologie

**Band:** 96 (2006)

**Heft:** [4]: Towards further convergence : Anglican and Old Catholic ecclesiologies

**Artikel:** Anglicanism and Eucharistic ecclesiology

**Autor:** Avis, Paul

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-405017>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. [See Legal notice.](#)

**Download PDF:** 15.03.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

---

# Anglicanism and Eucharistic Ecclesiology

*Paul Avis*

## 1. Introduction

*The aim of this paper*

The purpose of this paper is to address the question: Is the Anglican understanding of the Church an expression of ‘eucharistic ecclesiology’? Or, to put it a little less ambitiously: Is eucharistic ecclesiology substantially present within Anglican theology, as it is within Roman Catholic and Orthodox theology? If the answer to those questions should turn out to be: ‘Yes; the Anglican understanding of the Church is indeed a form of eucharistic ecclesiology, at least to a significant extent,’ we will have an immediate rapport with modern Roman Catholic and Orthodox ecclesiologies. If we have that basic rapport, we will know that we are standing on common territory, and this will give grounds for hope that historic differences between the Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican traditions are capable of being at least partially resolved. An affirmative answer to our question will also help to further cement the relationship of communion between the Anglican Communion and the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht because we are aware that a number of Old Catholic theologians have been deeply influenced by eucharistic ecclesiology as it has been expounded by Roman Catholic and Orthodox scholars and have contributed to the development of this approach.

I am conscious that I have not yet said what ‘eucharistic ecclesiology’ means and I am going to defer that for the time being because there are some preliminaries to be considered first. The method of this paper, in approaching the question of an Anglican eucharistic ecclesiology, is to offer some commentary on the presence in Anglican ecclesiology of the related concepts of catholicity and apostolicity, and of trinitarian and eucharistic themes. Taken together these make up the substantive content of eucharistic ecclesiology. There is no need to ask *whether* these four themes are present in the Anglican tradition: an understanding of the Church that did not include these four aspects, in some way, would not be credible. You could not have an ecclesiology that had nothing positive to say about catholicity and apostolicity, or that did not ground its existence in the life of the Holy Trinity, or that did not allow itself to be shaped by reflection on

the celebration of the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist. So let us not ask such redundant questions as: Does Anglican ecclesiology have a sense of catholicity? Or: Is Anglican ecclesiology informed by the doctrine of the Holy Trinity? That goes without saying. It would be demeaning to Anglicans to ask these questions. What is needed is to ask: How are the themes of catholicity and apostolicity, of trinitarianism and the Eucharist, manifested in Anglican ecclesiology and how are they articulated?

*A preliminary comment*

This analytical exercise is not easy for Anglicans to do, because they have an innate reluctance to parade their deepest convictions of faith. Anglicans (and not only in England) are diffident about making claims for their portion of the Christian Church and its tradition. They have an aversion to asserting a distinct ecclesial identity. There has been some discussion in recent years of the question: Does Anglicanism have any special doctrines – doctrines that distinguish and differentiate it from the largest and most ancient Christian churches (the Roman Catholic and the Eastern Churches)? There has been great reluctance to claim any such special doctrines – and not merely on the part of Anglicans who are particularly sympathetic towards the Roman Catholic or Orthodox traditions.

We may agree straight away that Anglicanism does not have any *dogmas* (truths necessary to be believed for salvation) that are unique to itself. It does not have any pretensions to formulate or promulgate fresh dogmas. In fact, no church claims the authority to articulate new dogmas of the faith. For Anglicans, what is *de fide* is to be found in Scripture and has been sufficiently expressed in the Catholic Creeds (as Article VI of the Thirty-nine Articles and the Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1888 insist).

However, it seems clear to me that, in one area, Anglicanism must have a set of doctrines that are sufficiently distinctive, though not unique, and that is in its understanding of the Church, in certain aspects of its ecclesiology. While, as ecumenical dialogue shows, Anglicanism shares large areas of its ecclesiology with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox – as well as with the Lutheran, Reformed and Methodist traditions – there are (as ecumenical dialogue again shows) also certain important points where it differs from them.

Anglicanism must have a specific view of the Church that enables it to say that there are Anglican Churches in the proper sense of the word, ‘true’ churches that are duly constituted as such and enjoy a sufficiency of the

means of grace to bring the faithful within them to salvation. Anglicans assert, over against any kind of ecclesial exclusivity, that their churches belong to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church and that – though they are far from perfect – they lack nothing that is essential to their ecclesial reality: the word of God is truly preached, the sacraments of the gospel are rightly celebrated and there is an authentic ministry of oversight to provide for all this (cf. Article XIX).

We need not go into that discussion any further now,<sup>1</sup> but I mention it simply to illustrate the fact that Anglicans generally are rather allergic to making comparisons with other churches and to flaunting what they have. They find the sort of claims that are sometimes made by other churches – claims to enjoy a fullness that others lack – distasteful. Over the centuries, Anglicans (with exceptions, of course) have tended to take the line that other churches stand or fall to their own Master and do not intend to pass judgement on other churches. On the other hand, we should not overlook the fact that, when other churches have seemed to pass judgement on them, as in the papal bull *Apostolicae curae*, 1896, Anglicans have responded robustly and convincingly.

For all Christians, it is probably hard to talk up the most vital constitutive elements of your own Church. It is like being asked to describe objectively your family home – what makes home ‘home’ – or to analyse what makes your mother special. As Anglicans, we live and move and have our being in a Church whose life and worship is felt intuitively to be catholic, apostolic, trinitarian and eucharistic, even though it has many weaknesses. It is not easy to stand back and to hold up to examination a church to which we are so close.

### *Affirmation and restraint*

As the then Archbishop of York, David Hope, put it in his ‘Afterword’ to the anthology of Anglican spirituality texts *Love’s Redeeming Work*: ‘there is a holy reticence in Anglicanism’s soul which can be tantalising’.<sup>2</sup> In the Anglican psyche I too find reticence, or restraint, but I also

---

<sup>1</sup> See the discussion in Paul Avis, ‘The Churches of the Anglican Communion’, in: Paul Avis (ed.), *The Christian Church: An Introduction to the Major Traditions* (London: SPCK, 2002), pp. 132–156, at pp. 132–134.

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Rowell, Kenneth Stevenson, Rowan Williams (eds.), *Love’s Redeeming Work: The Anglican Quest for Holiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 762.

find affirmation. The two qualities of affirmation and restraint, held in combination and interaction, are typical of Anglican theology, certainly in the Church of England. They can be seen at work in the spheres of both faith and order.<sup>3</sup> In the area of faith, the historic formularies (the Book of Common Prayer, 1662, the Ordinal and the Thirty-nine Articles), which comprise the confessional trust deeds of the Anglican tradition, are not held up as the last word in Christian doctrine, but simply as ‘agreeable to the word of God’. The central truths of the Christian faith are roundly affirmed, but without going beyond what is clearly revealed in Scripture. Anglicanism is a practical and lived faith, not a speculative one; and that is both a strength and a limitation. Anglicans are invited to rehearse their faith primarily in liturgical and doxological modes. Clergy are required to adhere to the apostolic faith, as the Church of England has received it, through loyalty, respect and canonical obedience, rather than through juridical enforcement.

In the realm of Church order, Anglicans maintain that their ministries and sacraments are sufficient for the purpose for which they are given – that of nurturing the faithful in their pilgrimage towards heaven. The justification that Anglicans have for these ministries and sacraments, is not some kind of knock-down guarantee, but the assurance that they are ministries and sacraments of the Church of Christ – they are catholic and apostolic. The historic threefold ministry is affirmed in a beautifully downbeat phrase in the Church of England’s Canons as ‘not repugnant to the Word of God’. There is no officially sanctioned theory or interpretation of the ordained ministry within Anglicanism that has the effect of unchurching other ecclesial bodies.<sup>4</sup> Once again, we find a practical, not a specu-

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Paul Avis, ‘Keeping Faith with Anglicanism’, in: Robert Hannaford (ed.), *The Future of Anglicanism: Essays on Faith and Order* (Leominster: Gracewing, 1996), pp. 1–17, at pp. 15–16.

<sup>4</sup> Even among the classical Anglican divines of the seventeenth century, you can go as ‘High’ as you like without encountering an ‘unchurching’ approach towards non-episcopal ministries. See the discussions of, e.g., Andrewes, Bramhall, Laud, Hammond and Thorndike in: Paul Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church: Theological Resources in Historical Perspective*, revised and expanded edition (London: T&T Clark, 2002). A more exclusive attitude emerged with the Nonjurors towards the end of the century. There is an important difference between attitudes to the national churches of Protestant mainland Europe and attitudes towards Dissenters, who were regarded as schismatic, that is to say, as having separated from the Church of England without a justifiable cause.

lative approach to Church order, one that is attuned to the local delivery of the means of grace and of pastoral care. In their combination and balance of affirmation and restraint, the Anglican formularies reveal a communion that is quietly and humbly confident of its catholicity and apostolicity.

*The methodological problem of selectivity*

It is always problematic to claim that certain texts or writers are 'typical' or 'representative' of Anglicanism. There is a serious methodological difficulty here, one that arises from several empirical factors that relate to the intellectual richness, the historical scope and the geographical extent of Anglicanism. Some writers have taken to speaking of 'Anglicanisms', in the plural. I understand the point: there is considerable diversity in the historical scope and contemporary breadth of Anglicanism. But I would not want to adopt that slogan myself. I do not believe that Anglicanism is inherently, or in principle, more diverse than any other major Christian tradition. You would not normally speak of 'Roman Catholicisms' or 'Lutheranisms', although there is much diversity within those traditions.

(a) The first 'empirical' factor is that, in looking at Anglicanism, it is not correct to begin with the sixteenth century. Anglicans do not believe that their church originated with the Reformation and in this belief they are justified. A church would not be catholic and apostolic if it simply had been brought into being by a decision of Henry VIII or Elizabeth I! It is in the bones of Anglicans that they belong to a church that is continuous with the mediaeval church in the West and that goes back to the Apostles and early Fathers. This continuity takes various forms.

Many episcopal sees, parishes, cathedrals and colleges, especially in England, Wales and Ireland, are mediaeval in origin and some date from before the Norman Conquest. The ordained ministry of bishops, priests and deacons links the pre-Reformation and post-Reformation forms of the church. Lists of rectors and vicars in parish churches are continuous and usually give little overt sign of the Reformation changes. Much mediaeval canon law continued as the law of the reformed Church of England (including Wales). Late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century divines drew heavily and substantially on mediaeval scholastic theology and philosophy, without any conscious sense of crossing a boundary: for example,

Richard Hooker and the mid-seventeenth century Caroline moral theologians were deeply indebted to St Thomas Aquinas. In many important respects, the relationship between the Church and the State in modern England is the same as it was in mediaeval times: the establishment of the Church in England – its recognition in the law and constitution of the realm – was not an invention of the sixteenth century. The Conciliar Movement of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries profoundly influenced the English Reformers (just as it did the Continental Reformers) and Richard Hooker: its principles of political philosophy (constitutionality, representation, consent) have shaped the polities of the churches of the Anglican Communion. There is both continuity and discontinuity across the Reformation watershed.<sup>5</sup>

This is important for Anglican theological method in the sphere of ecclesiology. Anglican ecclesiology is not confessional in the way that Lutheran or even Reformed theology is. It does not consist in giving a commentary on, exposition of, or defence of Anglican authoritative texts. It is intended to be Catholic theology. To give one example: in his work on the theology of the Eucharist, more than a century ago, Charles Gore (later bishop) could write:

... the main object of this book is to set the specifically Anglican teaching of our formularies on a larger background, by going back behind the Reformation and the middle age upon the ancient catholic teaching and upon the Bible. I seek to elaborate the eucharistic doctrine in what I think is the truest and completest form. I have to admit that Anglican standards are in certain respects defective and even misleading when taken by themselves ... But after all the Anglican Church does not claim to stand by itself. It refers back behind itself to the ancient and catholic church. Thus I am most thankful to believe that it admits a great deal which it does not, in its present formularies, explicitly teach.<sup>6</sup>

(b) The second ‘empirical’ factor that contributes to the problem of selectivity in Anglicanism is that no single period of Anglican history is definitive, such as to serve as a paradigm of Anglican ecclesiology. The ‘historic formularies’ of the Church of England have shaped all churches

---

<sup>5</sup> For substantiation of these points see Paul Avis, *Beyond the Reformation? Authority, Primacy and Unity in the Conciliar Tradition* (London, New York: T&T Clark, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Charles Gore, *The Body of Christ: An Enquiry into the Institution and Doctrine of Holy Communion* (London: John Murray, 1901), p. vii.

of the Anglican Communion, while being adapted or revised in various ways by them. The Articles of Religion developed over an extended period in the sixteenth century, while the Book of Common Prayer and the Ordinal underwent a series of revisions between 1549 and 1559 and then reached their final, classical form in 1662, when the climate was rather different after first the suppression and then the restoration of the Church of England. But we cannot stop there: Anglicanism has been continuously evolving and modern Anglican theology (and specifically ecclesiology) has been shaped by a number of subsequent developments, including the eighteenth-century High Church movement, Tractarianism and Anglo-Catholicism, the Broad Church tendency stemming from S.T. Coleridge, Thomas Arnold and F.D. Maurice, Evangelicalism, the Ecumenical Movement, Protestant biblical theology and Vatican II (to name but a few). Anglicanism is a continuous story: we cannot freeze-frame it at any particular point and say, 'This is definitive Anglicanism.' It is still developing, in interaction with various cultures and with other Christian traditions.

(c) The third empirical factor is that Anglicanism is a global phenomenon, existing in every part of the world. So we cannot take the Church of England as adequately representative of Anglicanism. Of course, the historic official texts from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the writings of the British and Irish divines of the period before the emergence of the world-wide communion, constitute a common inheritance. But Anglican theology has been developing its different emphases in various parts of the Communion, with the Episcopal Church of the USA making a particularly significant contribution. The churches or provinces that make up the Communion are constitutionally self-governing (autonomous), but spiritually and pastorally interdependent. The global spread of Anglicanism, into a Communion of around 75 million persons, makes it highly tendentious to select from the Anglican tradition. But is not that precisely what catholicity, by definition, is about: you cannot have a narrow, predictable, monochrome catholicity!

## **2. Catholicity and Apostolicity**

What, then, do Anglicans mean by the Church and by its catholicity and apostolicity? 'The Church', for Anglicans, refers primarily to the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church, the Church confessed in the Nicene-



Constantinopolitan Creed.<sup>7</sup> Anglicans believe that they belong to the one Church of Christ. But they recognise that other, non-Anglican Christians, as individuals, also belong by virtue of faith and baptism to the Church. They also recognise that other Christian bodies corporately belong to that Church. They affirm that each Anglican church, subsisting within the Anglican Communion, is itself truly a church, but they do not claim that the Anglican churches comprise the Church without remainder. Anglicans have used, therefore, the terms 'part', 'portion' or 'branch' to describe both their own church and other churches.

Anglicans maintain that the doctrine, worship, ministry, sacraments and polity of their churches are those of the Church of Christ and they believe that these are blessed by the Holy Spirit. Anglican churches resolutely affirm their catholicity and apostolicity and their standing as true churches of Christ. Anglicans are deeply offended when the catholic and apostolic credentials of their church are questioned or impugned (for example by the Roman Catholic Church's condemnation of Anglican orders in 1896). They hold that the designation 'Catholic' fully belongs to their church and in the creed, of course, they affirm as an article of faith that the Church is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic.

While they resolutely uphold the ecclesial standing of their church, Anglicans confess that, like all branches of the Christian Church, without exception, Anglicanism is provisional and incomplete in the light of the Church that is confessed in the creeds as one, holy, catholic and apostolic. Anglicans believe that these credal attributes of the Church will only be fully revealed eschatologically, when God's saving purpose is revealed in the end time. This belief entails the important admission that the fragmentation of the Church into various parts or branches is not the definitive state of the Church or what God wills for it. Here Anglicans are, in effect, saying: 'We are the Church. You also are the Church. But none of us is the Church as it should be.' This acknowledgement of the incompleteness of one's own church and recognition of the ecclesial reality of other churches contributes to the commitment to the quest for Christian unity.

Anglicans believe that the Church on earth is united with the Church in heaven in the communion of the saints (*sanctorum communio*). They speak of 'the Church Militant here in earth' and the Church triumphant

---

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Paul Avis, *The Anglican Understanding of the Church: An Introduction* (London: SPCK, 2000).

in heaven. They worship God together with ‘Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven’.

Anglicans acknowledge that the Church of Christ on earth is manifested in particular contexts and at various ‘levels’, from the universal to the very local: they are all manifestations of the Church.

First, there is the universal Church, the Church Catholic. It is both one and many. It is simultaneously united and divided. Though outwardly divided in some important ways, it remains inwardly united in several crucial respects. The universal Church consists of all Christians united to Christ in the Holy Spirit, fundamentally through faith and baptism, and ordered in their various communities under the apostolic ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral oversight. Anglicans unequivocally recognise their essential fellowship with all the baptised, whatever their Christian tradition or denominational allegiance may be. The Book of Common Prayer (1662) speaks of Christians as ‘very members incorporate in the mystical body of thy Son, which is the blessed company of all faithful people [which is usually taken to mean: those who have confessed the faith in baptism]’.

Second, there are provinces (sometimes made up of more than one ‘province’!). Many provinces are national churches. The significance that Anglicans give to provinces derives from ancient Catholic usage, where dioceses are gathered into provinces under a metropolitan (usually an archbishop).

Third, there is the church of the diocese, which is often an area with a common history and sense of identity. The diocesan bishop exercises an apostolic ministry of pastoral oversight among the faithful of the diocese as their chief pastor and father in God. He usually shares his *episkope* with suffragan bishops and also consults with the clergy and representative lay people, through the diocesan synod and the bishop’s council, in his task of leading and governing the diocese. The bishop is also canonically the president of the diocese as a eucharistic community and the principal minister of the sacraments. The bishop is, therefore, the president of the eucharistic celebration of the Christian community. However, he (or she in some Anglican provinces) shares the cure of souls and eucharistic presidency with the clergy of the diocese in a collegial manner, while retaining the ultimate responsibility under God. In Anglicanism, the diocese, as the community united in its bishop and as the bishop’s sphere of ministry, is regarded ecclesologically as the

‘local church’. It is the *locus* or sphere of the bishop’s oversight and of the bishop’s collegial ministry with the presbyterate, assisted by the deacons, in every place.

Fourth, there is the parish, the most local level of the Church (though not ‘the local church’) and the smallest unit of the Church to have ecclesial significance for Anglicans. In the established, territorial Church of England it is the geographical parish, rather than the worshipping community itself, that is recognised. The church of the parish consists of a community of the baptised, together with ‘catechumens’ (enquirers receiving instruction leading to baptism and confirmation). It normally gathers in one place, the parish church, for worship, teaching and fellowship. Anglicans do not think of the gathered congregation as the fundamental unit of the Church, but of the diocese as the local church, comprising all the parishes within which the clergy exercise a ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral care that is commissioned and overseen by the bishop. The parish is authentically an expression of the Church, just as the universal, provincial/national and diocesan structures are manifestations of the Church.

However, the two most fundamental manifestations of the Church are the universal Church and the local Church (diocese): provinces and parishes are dependent on these, but are no less truly ecclesial realities. The universal and local (diocesan) expressions of the Church are essential and interdependent; the provincial and parochial expressions are in a sense contingent and not essential. The existence of the Church, at any of these levels, can be identified, as the Thirty-nine Articles suggest, wherever the Word of God is preached and the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion (Eucharist) are celebrated and administered, according to Christ’s institution, by those who are given authority to do so, for these indicate that Christ is present with his people in the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Article XIX).

### *Catholic and reformed*

The churches of the Anglican Communion regard themselves as both Catholic and reformed or as ‘reformed Catholic’. Bishop Lancelot Andrewes, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, referred to the Church of England as the ‘English Protestant Catholic Church’ and said that he regarded his own Church and the Roman Catholic Church as ‘one and

the same Church of Christ', the one reformed and the other not.<sup>8</sup> Later in that century, Bishop John Cosin described his church as 'the Protestant Reformed Catholic Church'.<sup>9</sup> Anglicans would never give up the word 'Catholic': to be a Catholic Christian is to belong to the visible community of the faithful, united in the confession of the apostolic faith and in the celebration of the sacraments and ordered under the care of its pastors, extended through history and throughout the world.

Anglicans have sometimes seen themselves as a bridge communion between Protestantism on the one hand and Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy on the other. There is an element of pretension and even of fantasy in this aspiration to be a bridge church: Anglicans are not the only Christians to see themselves in that way. But it reflects the fact that Anglicans look with a sense of recognition and of belonging both to the Roman Catholic Church and to the churches of the Reformation. Anglican ecumenical policy is twin-track. In truth, Anglicans feel pulled both ways and cannot wholly commit themselves in either direction. Perhaps they are like the donkey in the fable who, faced with two equally delicious bundles of hay, could not make up his mind which one to eat and so starved to death! (No doubt that parable does not apply only to Anglicans ...)

The relationship between Anglicanism and Protestantism is not straightforward. There is a built-in tension. On the one hand, Anglicanism was decisively shaped by the Reformation. The Anglican Reformers were strongly influenced (though not uncritically) by the Continental Reformers, who generally were more creative than they were themselves. From the mid-sixteenth century Anglicanism has been marked by the key features of the Protestant Reformation: justification by grace, received through faith; an open Bible and an emphasis on the ministry of the word; liturgy in the vernacular with the participation of the laity; a (usually) married, pastoral ministry integrated with the community; Holy Communion administered in both kinds; the involvement of the laity in church governance, whether in the form of the Sovereign, Parliament, local lay officers or (for the past century and more) various forms of representative

---

<sup>8</sup> Arnold Harris Mathew (ed.), *A True Historical Relation of the Conversion of Sir Tobie Matthew to the Holy Catholic Faith with the Antecedents and Consequences Thereof* (London: Burns & Oates, 1904), p. 99.

<sup>9</sup> John Cosin, *The Works of the Rt Reverend Father in God John Cosin, Lord Bishop of Durham*, ed. J. Sanson, 5 vols, Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology (Oxford: Parker, 1843–55), vol. 4, p. 167.

or synodical government. Calvinism (its doctrines of grace, not its Presbyterian polity) was the prevailing theology during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I (i.e. the second half of the sixteenth and the first quarter of the seventeenth centuries). After the Civil War and Commonwealth periods, in the mid-seventeenth century, Lutheranism became the most favoured Protestant communion for the next 150 years. Historically Anglicans saw the Church of England as a sister church of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches on the Continent until the late eighteenth century.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, Anglicans have always insisted on the catholicity of their church. The Anglican Reformers (like the continental Reformers) were clear that they were not setting up a new church. They were seeking to reform the one Church that went back to the Apostles, the Fathers, the early martyrs and the Celtic missionaries. The first Christians in Britain probably came with the Roman invaders. It was known that the British church was represented at early councils. The ancient structures of the Catholic Church survived the upheavals of the Reformation: the threefold ministry was maintained, with episcopal succession in the ancient sees; several medieval practices were reformed, not abolished; and traditional symbols including some vestments, the sign of the cross and the ring in marriage were retained. The High Church tradition within Anglicanism kept alive a sense of Catholic continuity – though this was not achieved at the expense of a sense of affinity with the Reformation inheritance (until the radical phase of the Oxford Movement taught Anglicans to be prejudiced against the Reformation). A series of abortive private initiatives attempted to build bridges with the Roman Catholic Church abroad. Religious orders were restored in the second half of the nineteenth century. Although in very modern times some Anglicans have become coy about the word Protestant, they have unequivocally affirmed that Anglicanism is not only Catholic but also reformed.

It has sometimes been suggested (e.g. by the historian Thomas Babington Macaulay) that the Church of England combined Calvinist Articles of Religion with a Catholic (or ‘popish’) liturgy. This antithesis is highly questionable. The Thirty-nine Articles cover a wide range of contentious issues that are not specific to Calvinism; they take a moderate, almost non-committal, position on the doctrine of predestination. Their clearest echo of a Reformation formulary is of the Lutheran Augsburg Confession

---

<sup>10</sup> See further Avis, *Anglicanism and the Christian Church*.

(on the marks of the visible Church: Article XIX; cf. *Confessio Augustana VII*). On the other hand, as we have noted, the Book of Common Prayer, 1662, is clearly shaped by Protestant sensitivities.

### 3. Eucharistic Ecclesiology in Anglicanism?

After these rather extensive preliminaries, let us turn to the question of whether Anglicanism is an instantiation of, or is at least hospitable to 'eucharistic ecclesiology'. When we think of 'eucharistic ecclesiology', we think mainly of Nikolai Afanasieff and John Zizioulas in Orthodoxy and of Henri de Lubac and the early Joseph Ratzinger in the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>11</sup> The doctrine of the mystical body of Christ is common to the Eastern and Western patristic traditions and is our shared inheritance. There are also scholars in other traditions who seem to have an affinity to eucharistic ecclesiology, though this has to be adapted, in some cases, to a non-episcopal polity: e.g. Geoffrey Wainwright among Methodists. But what about Anglicans? First a word about the Orthodox sources of eucharistic ecclesiology.

Modern Orthodox theology, within the ecumenical arena, is an expression of 'eucharistic ecclesiology', even where it does not follow Afanasieff, the pioneer of this mode of theology, into a sort of eucharistic totality (as Zizioulas calls it). Eucharistic ecclesiology brings every affirmation about the Church to the touchstone or criterion of the Divine Liturgy, where the bishop gathers the local Church (Church with a capital C) as one body, united with the universal Church and with the saints in heaven. The Eucharist is seen as the supreme manifestation of the reality of the Church. Eucharistic ecclesiology, though it privileges the mystical above the institutional reality of the Church, on the whole affirms the visibility of the Church (though this is rather tenuous in Khomiakov) and affirms the visibility of its hierarchical aspect, through the role of the bishop or priest in eucharistic presidency. In contrast to the western, Roman tendency to exalt the universal over the local, in eucharistic ecclesiology the particular, local expressions of unity and catholicity are affirmed (though in Afanasieff the

---

<sup>11</sup> My colleague on the journal *Ecclesiology*, Paul McPartlan, is a noted Roman Catholic exponent today of eucharistic ecclesiology; cf. Paul McPartlan, *The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in Dialogue* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993). A foundation text of eucharistic ecclesiology is Henri de Lubac, *Méditation sur l'Église*, *Théologie 27* (Paris: Aubier, 1953).

universal is rather downplayed, ‘universal ecclesiology’ being seen as the antithesis of eucharistic ecclesiology). It is the Eucharist that unites the Church in space and time and the Eucharist cannot happen without the bishop.<sup>12</sup>

The most impressive exposition (at least to Anglican eyes) of contemporary Orthodox eucharistic ecclesiology is found in the combination of the two seminal works by John Zizioulas: *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop during the First Three Centuries*<sup>13</sup> and *Being as Communion*.<sup>14</sup> The highly personalist and relational theology of *koinonia* in *Being as Communion*, though published after the ecclesiological spade work of *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, provides the ontological structure for Zizioulas’ synthesis. His is a confessedly holistic theology, attempting to hold together unity and multiplicity, the one and the many, the mystical and the visible, the universal and the local. The co-inherence of the one and the many, the mystical and the visible, is found in the Church that is simultaneously both local and universal. The bishop and the people, primacy and conciliarity, are held together. These are not in conflict: they are held in being by the Holy Spirit simultaneously.<sup>15</sup>

In the New Testament, Zizioulas argues, it is the coming together, the gathering, for the Eucharist that constitutes the Church – but Zizioulas demurs at what he sees as Afanasieff’s absorption of the Church into the Eucharist.<sup>16</sup> Over against eucharistic totalism Zizioulas stresses the complementary, collateral conditions for the Church: faith, love, baptism, holiness. Although these are implied in a true understanding of the Eucharist, and can be unpacked from it, they should not be taken

---

<sup>12</sup> See for an introduction Aidan Nichols, *Theology in the Russian Diaspora: Church, Fathers, Eucharist in Nikolai Afanas’ev (1893–1966)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>13</sup> John D. Zizioulas, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church: The Unity of the Church in the Divine Eucharist and the Bishop during the First Three Centuries* (Brookline MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2001). Greek original: Athens 1965.

<sup>14</sup> John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985).

<sup>15</sup> See Paul McPartlan, ‘The Local Church and the Universal Church: Zizioulas and the Ratzinger-Kasper Debate’, *Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 4 (2004), pp. 21–33.

<sup>16</sup> For Zizioulas’ criticisms of Afanasieff, see *Being as Communion*, pp. 24–25, 156 n59, 194 n83, 200–201.

for granted, but should be specifically affirmed. The institutional aspect of the Church is of little concern to Zizioulas: what excites him is its mystical nature: the 'mystical identity' between the Church on earth, gathered in the celebration of the Eucharist, and the Church in heaven, joining with angels and archangels in worship. Correspondingly, the ministries of the Church are seen as 'mystical radiations' of Christ's authority, because there is a mystical relationship between the Sender and the sent, Christ and the Apostles (Luke 10:16). Nevertheless, Zizioulas explicitly rejects the Harnackian disjunction and opposition between spirit and order, charism and structure: for Zizioulas, the hierarchy is itself charismatic.

Some twentieth-century Anglican theologians were moving along the same lines as Orthodox and Roman Catholic scholars: they were on a trajectory that pointed towards a full eucharistic ecclesiology.

(a) Charles Gore (whom I have already mentioned: bishop successively of Worcester, Birmingham and Oxford; d. 1932) was steeped in the Eastern as well as the Western Fathers: he had read his way through the lot. Gore's writings, taken together, on the Incarnation, the Eucharist and the Church<sup>17</sup> cumulatively amount to something close to eucharistic ecclesiology. The Church is the extension or continuation of the Incarnation. The order of the Church reflects its nature as a divine-human mystery. The episcopate is divinely ordained and necessary for the validity of the Church's ministry and sacraments.<sup>18</sup>

(b) Michael Ramsey (Bishop of Durham, Archbishop of York, Archbishop of Canterbury) owed an immense debt to Gore, whom he revered, but Ramsey benefited from the rediscovery of the Reformation and drew out its catholicity of intention in *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (1936) which forged a creative synthesis of biblical and patristic theology, liturgical studies, and Reformation insights. He promoted an Anglican reformed catholicism in continuity with both the Oxford Movement and the Reformers. Ramsey was not a eucharistic totalist and was, for example, critical of the parish communion movement for narrowing the Church's

---

<sup>17</sup> *The Incarnation of the Son of God*, 1891; *The Body of Christ*, 1901; *The Holy Spirit and the Church*, 1924: all published by John Murray (London).

<sup>18</sup> I wrote my doctoral dissertation on Gore; it was published in an abbreviated form as *Gore: Construction and Conflict* (Worthing: Churchman, 1988). See also, especially for these aspects of Gore's thought, James Carpenter, *Gore: A Study in Liberal Catholic Thought* (London: Faith Press, 1960).



appeal to the people. Eucharistic ecclesiology is not fully developed in Ramsey, but the foundations are there.<sup>19</sup>

(c) Lionel Thornton of the Community of the Resurrection, Mirfield, the author of *The Common Life in the Body of Christ* (1941),<sup>20</sup> was a pioneer of the theology of *koinonia*, mainly in terms of biblical theology. The fullness of Christ is received in the Church, his body. Thornton develops a realist doctrine of the mystical body: 'We are members of that body that was nailed to the Cross, laid in the tomb and raised to life on the third day' (p. 298). It is that body that we are united with in baptism and receive in Holy Communion. In *Confirmation: Its Place in the Baptismal Mystery*, Thornton developed a high view of the sacramental ministry of the bishop in Christian initiation.<sup>21</sup>

There are adherents of eucharistic ecclesiology in the Church of England today (Rowan Williams, John Hind) and, no doubt, in other provinces of the Communion. Speaking more personally, in conclusion, I have to say that I feel a strong theological affinity with Zizioulas' approach. *Being as Communion* helped to inspire my early essay in *koinonia* theology *Christians in Communion*.<sup>22</sup> The beautifully symmetrical theology of *Eucharist, Bishop, Church* is meat and drink to me and has helped to shape my recent study of conciliar ecclesiology in historical perspective.<sup>23</sup> However, in appropriating the insights of eucharistic ecclesiology, one of the most creative developments in Christian theology in the last half-century, I find myself wanting to modify it in certain, mainly complementary, ways.

My own way of appropriating eucharistic ecclesiology, in an Anglican context, would attempt to adjust its balance in two ways. First, I would seek to balance the Eucharist with baptism, setting the two dominical sacraments side by side as *twin controlling sacramental foci* of the Church.

---

<sup>19</sup> Arthur Michael Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (London: Longmans, 1936).

<sup>20</sup> Lionel S. Thornton, *The Common Life in the Body of Christ* (London: Dacre Press, 1941).

<sup>21</sup> Lionel S. Thornton, *Confirmation: Its Place in the Baptismal Mystery* (London: Dacre Press, 1954).

<sup>22</sup> Paul Avis, *Christians in Communion* (London: Geoffrey Chapman Mowbray, 1990).

<sup>23</sup> Paul Avis, *Beyond the Reformation? Authority, Primacy and Unity in the Conciliar Tradition* (London: T&T Clark, 2006).

The significance of the truth that the Eucharist presupposes baptism and that baptism contains a theological dynamic and momentum that leads to the Eucharist needs to be developed. It is generally reckoned to be underdeveloped in Orthodoxy. In official Roman Catholic theology the momentum of our common baptism is not followed through, its implications are not fully brought out and allowed to shape ecumenical policy.<sup>24</sup> Baptism is immersion into the body of Christ, in union with his death and resurrection, and it is a eucharistic body. The logic of the whole process, the *cursus*, of Christian initiation should inform and shape our ecclesiology. So I would advocate a eucharistic ecclesiology in which baptism, within the complete process of Christian initiation, has a more prominent role.

Second, I would want to balance the sacraments with the proclaimed word. I would emphasise that the Word of God, the proclamation of the biblical revelation, is integral to the sacraments. The Eucharist proclaims the Lord's death until he comes (1 Corinthians 11:26). It is the word that gives the sacraments their 'form' and makes them more than anthropological rituals, in truth constituting them as sacraments of the gospel. So I would have a more *kerygmatic eucharistic ecclesiology*.

Finally, I would want to give the whole approach more of a missiological thrust in terms of evangelisation. The eucharistically constituted Church should be outward looking and oriented towards mission. I would see baptism and Eucharist both as *instruments* of mission, as they set forth God's redemptive action in Christ, and as *goals* of mission, because evangelisation must necessarily be geared towards, and lead to, initiation into Christ, into the Church as the body of Christ. Here I believe that I would be in tune with the teachings of Vatican II and Paul VI's *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975) and I would be giving eucharistic ecclesiology more of a cutting edge.<sup>25</sup>

However, trying to adapt eucharistic ecclesiology in these ways, to help to enlarge a place and a home for it within the Anglican tradition, one that has been shaped by the Reformation in a way that Orthodoxy has not, may perhaps seem to be turning it into something rather different!<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> See House of Bishops of the Church of England, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of Unity* (London: Church House Publishing, 2001).

<sup>25</sup> See further Paul Avis, *A Ministry Shaped by Mission* (London: T&T Clark, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> A modified version of this paper was given at the Centro Pro Unione, Rome, on 17 March 2006 and was published in the *Bulletin* of the Centro, Autumn 2006.

### *Deutsche Zusammenfassung*

Es ist kennzeichnend für die anglikanische Theologie, dass sie von der Ekklesialität ihrer Kirche voll überzeugt ist, diese aber nicht in spezifischen Eigenschaften und Texten manifestiert sieht, die als Kriterien für einen wertenden Vergleich mit anderen Denominationen herangezogen werden könnten. Weder eine bestimmte Periode noch bestimmte «Richtungen» in der Geschichte der anglikanischen Kirchengemeinschaft – die ihre Wurzeln in der vorreformatorischen und patristischen Zeit sieht und nunmehr mit ihren 75 Millionen Gläubigen eine globale Grösse geworden ist – können einen exklusiven exemplarischen Rang für die Festlegung anglikanischer Identität beanspruchen.

Anglikanische Ekklesiologie sieht in jeder Kirche der *Anglican Communion* einen Teil der Einen, heiligen, katholischen und apostolischen Kirche, wie sie im Nizänum bekannt wird – einen Teil deshalb, weil sie die eigene Kirche nicht exklusiv mit der Einen Kirche so identifiziert, dass sie dadurch anderen Kirchen die Ekklesialität abspricht. Allerdings werden die Kennzeichen der Einen Kirche erst in der eschatologischen Vollendung voll manifest, was alle Kirchen in einem provisorischen Status belässt, sie aber auch zur Suche nach der Einheit verpflichtet.

Kirche manifestiert sich auf verschiedenen Ebenen – von der Universalkirche (mit ihren denominationellen Trennungen) über die Kirchenprovinz und die Ortskirche (Bistum) bis zur Pfarrgemeinde. Universal- und Ortskirche sind die ekklesiologischen fundamentalen Erscheinungsformen.

Anglikanisches Kirchentum ist zudem durch eine spezifische Spannung zwischen Kontinuität mit der westlichen katholischen Kirche vor der Reformation und Einflüssen der kontinentalen Reformation gekennzeichnet.

Auf dem eben namhaft gemachten Hintergrund kann nun die Frage angegangen werden, ob es eine anglikanische eucharistische Ekklesiologie nach dem Vorgang von N. Afanas'ev und besonders J. Zizioulas gibt – wo in den von einem Bischof geleiteten Eucharistiefeiern die himmlische und irdische Kirche sich vereint und sich als Folge ihrer Identität die weiteren Formen der überlokalen Manifestationen der Kirche mit ihren mystischen und institutionellen (synodalen und primatialen) Aspekten ergeben. Der Autor erwähnt Ch. Gore, M. Ramsey, L. Thornton, R. Williams und J. Hind als Exponenten eines durchaus vergleichbaren ekklesiologischen Ansatzes; er selbst sieht sich in derselben Linie stehend, plädiert allerdings für einige Modifikationen: Die Eucharistie ist mit der Taufe als Eingliederung in den Leib Christi zu korrelieren, sowie generell die Sakramente mit der Verkündigung, und der ganze Ansatz bedarf einer notwendigen Ausrichtung auf die Sendung der Kirche in die Welt.