

UNDERSTANDING THE DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES IN THE 21st CENTURY
A STATEMENT BY THE BISHOPS OF THE REFORMED EPISCOPAL FAMILY OF CHURCHES

'Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.' (1 Peter 3:15)

Christians have always given summaries of their faith. A Rule of Faith (a basic version of the later Creeds) can be found as early as the 2nd century. Often such summaries have been in response to particular circumstances or doctrinal controversies. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, which is the most universally acknowledged summary of the Faith, came into being in the 4th century precisely in response to threats to apostolic teaching. In recent years the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) produced the Jerusalem Declaration in 2008¹ and the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) adopted a Theological Statement at its inception a year later.²

On 2nd December 1873, at the inauguration of the Reformed Episcopal Church in North America, a foundational document was adopted which was intended to address specific controverted issues of the time. The name given to this document was The Declaration of Principles.³

Contrary to all expectation, since that inaugural meeting the Reformed Episcopal Church has grown into a worldwide family of Churches, with representatives in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Venezuela, Cuba, Russia, Germany, Croatia, France and Australia. In the United Kingdom the Reformed Episcopal Church united in 1927 with The Free Church of England, an older body of Anglican heritage, to form the present day 'Free Church of England otherwise called the Reformed Episcopal Church', which adopted the Declaration of Principles, adding two further clauses (see below).⁴

Much has changed in the world and the Church since the 19th century. Old controversies have lost some of their heat, while new ones have arisen. The Anglican family of Churches is experiencing a great deal of turmoil as a result of which increasing numbers of people are looking to the Reformed Episcopal Churches as a potential new home.

However, for some people who are otherwise sympathetic to the Reformed Episcopal family the Declaration of Principles appears problematic. This is usually for two main reasons.

Firstly, the various forms of the Declaration of Principles deriving from that of 1873 contain a section (Section IV), which is stated in the negative. As such they take on a very negative tone – 'this Church CONDEMNS and REJECTS' - leading to the impression that we are essentially negative, defining ourselves by what we are *against*; people quick to condemn, but with little positive to say. We regret that this impression may have been caused, for the Gospel is about *affirming* what God in his love has done for our salvation. There are indeed teachings and practices which Reformed Episcopalians believe to be incompatible with the truth about God as revealed in Scripture and supremely in Jesus Christ, but our overall approach must be *positive* - we have, after all, *Good News* to proclaim!

¹ <https://www.gafcon.org/resources/the-complete-jerusalem-statement>

² <http://www.anglicanchurch.net/index.php/main/Theology/>

³ <http://recus.org/principles.html>.

⁴ <http://fcofe.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/declaration.pdf>.

The real problem with this section of negations is that the positives which the Reformed Episcopal Churches affirm are not stated in the document itself. At the time, given knowledge of Bishop Cummins' ecumenical commitment as well as the wider historic context, they could be assumed, but their absence has proved problematic for subsequent generations.

The correct approach is that the positives can only be supplied by *all* of the standards of the Reformed Episcopal Churches, as they have been applied throughout our history. These doctrinal standards affecting how the Declaration of Principles has been understood are: the Holy Scriptures, the Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer (not only the 1662 version, but for the REC in North America the American 1928 BCP), and other statements such as the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, the Jerusalem Declaration, and (in America) the Theological Statement of the Anglican Church in North America. In addition the Constitution and Canons have been revised in both North America and in the United Kingdom. Ecumenical doctrinal agreements (particularly in the U.S.) should be factored in. This complex of documents reflects a balanced understanding of the Declaration of Principles. The aim of this commentary is to draw attention to this fuller context and the positive affirmations which it provides, while correcting misunderstandings of what precisely was being denied.

The second reason that some people have a problem with the Declaration of Principles is that in places it seems to say *less* than historic Christianity – and the Anglican tradition of which the Reformed Episcopal Churches are part – has believed. This is especially true in Section IV. Before looking at this in more detail, it will be helpful first to explore the origins of the Declaration.

The origins of the Declaration of Principles

The Declaration of Principles arose out of the situations in North America and the United Kingdom in the 19th century. Growing industrialisation and secularism in western culture and the interference of the UK Parliament in the internal organisation of the Church of Ireland had led to a desire to re-affirm the Church's independence and spiritual authority. One aspect of this was a more sympathetic appreciation of the teachings and practices of the Church prior to its subjugation to the English Crown. This more positive re-appraisal (and the spontaneous re-introduction of a range of associated teaching and practice) produced a number of responses from Churchmen concerned that the supreme authority of God-given Scripture was being undermined and compromised. The Declaration of Principles was one such response. It was not, however, intended to say anything new, but simply to reaffirm biblical and patristic teachings, themselves reaffirmed at the Reformation, but which, it was felt at the time, were being obscured by rising trends and developments.

As a text the Declaration derives from three different sources, and these are themselves an insight into its primary concerns.

(a) The Muhlenberg Memorial

The oldest strand derives from William Augustus Muhlenberg (1796-1877). Muhlenberg was a presbyter of what was then called the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America (PECUSA, now simply called The Episcopal Church (TEC)). He was ordained deacon in 1817 to serve at Christ Church, Philadelphia, as chaplain to Bishop William White, and ordained presbyter in 1820.

Muhlenberg was a committed Evangelical, but did not believe that Evangelical faith could only be expressed in a starkly Protestant ecclesiastical culture. He believed that to be an Anglican was also to be committed to the ancient, Undivided Church, which is what he meant when he referred to himself

as not only 'evangelical' but 'catholic.' His vision was of an 'Evangelical Catholicism' that would marry the fervour of Evangelical faith to Catholic Church order. For a few years he produced a journal called *The Evangelical Catholic*. In it he defended his chosen nomenclature: 'we believe in Christianity, not as an abstraction, but as an institution – a divine institution, adapted to all mankind in all ages; in other words, the Catholic Church. This we declare in calling ourselves Catholics'.⁵ The word 'Catholic', however, had become identified with Rome: 'Speak of *Catholics*, and not one in a hundred would suppose you mean any others than members of the Roman Church. If we will have the name, and surrender it we can not, we must qualify it, we must explain it ... therefore we style ourselves Gospel, that is *Evangelical Catholics*'. This, for Muhlenberg, was the distinguishing mark of the episcopal communion he believed in – 'we go at once to the Gospel, and assert ourselves Gospel (i.e. Evangelical) Catholics'. Moreover, it was a concept with a long and distinguished history. This, argued Muhlenberg, is what the 16th century English Reformers were, Gospel Catholics, helping the Catholic Church discover its Gospel roots.

Muhlenberg passionately believed that such an Evangelical Catholicism could unite the increasingly divided Protestant denominations of North America. In October 1853, he sought to put his vision of Christian unity into effect by, along with a number of other presbyters, presenting a Memorial to the House of Bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church. The Memorial recommended making episcopal ordination available to clergy of non-episcopal Churches. This would be on the basis of a brief doctrinal test which Muhlenberg set out in 'An Exposition of the Memorial', published in November 1854 and addressed to the bishops of PECUSA, whom he addressed as 'a College of Catholic and Apostolic Bishops'⁶. The first clause of this required clergy seeking episcopal ordination to *declare their belief in the Holy Scriptures as the word of God, in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, in the divine Institution of the two sacraments, and in the 'doctrines of grace' substantially as they are set forth in the Thirty-Nine Articles*. Nothing came of this initiative, but Muhlenberg's text, virtually unaltered, forms the first clause of the Declaration of Principles.

(b) *The 1873 additions*

Muhlenberg's summary was to be taken up nearly twenty years later by a bishop for whom Muhlenberg was a beloved mentor. George David Cummins was consecrated as Assistant Bishop of Kentucky in 1866. He strongly shared Muhlenberg's vision that the Christians of North America should unite in an episcopal Church which unashamedly preached biblical doctrine, and that a shared faith in Jesus Christ itself created an essential unity among believers. In 1873 Bishop Cummins gave expression to his convictions by taking part in a service of Holy Communion in a Presbyterian Church. The strength of the criticism he received for doing this made it impossible for him to continue his ministry as a bishop in the Diocese of Kentucky. He therefore issued a rallying call for the formation of an episcopal Church which would be more open and more robustly true to 'the faith once delivered to the saints' than PECUSA had become. In December 1873 this became a reality when the Reformed Episcopal Church was formally constituted, with Cummins as its first Presiding Bishop.

⁵ Anne Ayres, *The Life and Work of William Augustus Muhlenberg*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1880, p.237ff. There are close parallels with Archbishop Michael Ramsey's definition of the 'Catholicism ... that sprang from the Gospel of God' as 'an organism that grew inevitably through Christ's death and resurrection' rather than a set of rules (Michael Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, Peabody, Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publishers, 2009, p.56).

⁶ Ayres, *Muhlenberg*, p.266.

Bishop Cummins added to Muhlenberg's Memorial a number of clauses that addressed pressing doctrinal issues of the day. These need to be seen in context and their genesis taken into account. This section did not form part of Muhlenberg's carefully crafted text with which the Declaration begins. It was drafted by Bishop Cummins in the period between his resignation from the Protestant Episcopal Church on 10th November 1873 and the inaugural meeting of the Reformed Episcopal Church on 2nd December. During that three week period Cummins shared with others his vision of a Church with 'a primitive Episcopacy, and a pure scriptural liturgy, and a fidelity to the doctrine of justification by faith alone'⁷ and, having ascertained that he would have support to bring such a vision into reality, took the necessary steps to do so. It was a period of intense activity. It is not surprising, therefore, that the five statements in Section IV are little more than short-hand responses – bullet-points in today's terminology – to matters that were foci of doctrinal controversy at the time.⁸ While they were obviously issues on which Cummins had deliberated for years, it has to be accepted that they can not be the last word on the points in question. It is impossible, for example, to say all that needs to be said on the mystery of eucharistic presence in a single negative statement of nineteen words. In today's very different context the five statements should be approached with the intention of identifying the error which each clause is intended to exclude, and of stating the *positive* doctrine which we as Reformed Episcopal Churches teach on each subject. The various statements will be referred to below.

(c) *The Church of Ireland clauses (unique to the REC in the UK)*

In 1877 a branch of the Reformed Episcopal Church was established in the British Isles (alongside the pre-existing Free Church of England). The Declaration of Principles was adopted, but additional material was added to that deriving from the work of Muhlenberg and Cummins. Most of this new material was taken from the Constitution of the Church of Ireland. The disestablishment of that Church in 1870 had required it to define itself and draw up new governing documents. As a newly 'free' episcopal Church in the British Isles the Church of Ireland was seen a model for the UK branch of the REC (itself a 'free' episcopal Church in a country with an Established Church).

When the REC in the UK and the Free Church of England united in 1927 the Declaration of Principles in its British form was adopted as the common statement of faith.

The Intention and Teaching of the Declaration

As this brief look at its origins shows, the Declaration of Principles is not an attempt to depart from historic Christian beliefs or produce a new definition of the Christian faith. Rather, like the Jerusalem Declaration, it is an expression of a desire to unite Christians around the 'old paths' of historic biblical Christianity within an episcopally-ordered community. The language reflects the era in which the Principles were composed, but their teaching is grounded in Scripture and the Fathers, and is therefore timeless. At the inauguration of the REC Bishop Cummins stressed the *continuity*: 'We have not met

⁷ From Cummins' letter of resignation to the Presiding Bishop, Boswell Smith, dated 10th November 1873. Text in Alexandrine Macomb Cummins, *A Memoir of George David Cummins: First Bishop of the Reformed Episcopal Church*, Philadelphia, E. Claxton, 1878, p.420.

⁸ Guelzo describes the Declaration, in the context of its time, as 'an unusually moderate document', with the 'bullet points' 'carefully worded to exclude only the most extreme ultras among the Anglo-Catholics' (Allen C. Guelzo, *For the Union of Evangelical Christendom: the Irony of the Reformed Episcopalians*, Pennsylvania, State University Press, 1994, p.156).

to destroy, but to restore We claim an unbroken historical connection, through the Church of England, with the Church of Christ from the earliest Christian era'.⁹

The wider context

It is important to remember that the Declaration of Principles is not the only doctrinal authority for us as Reformed Episcopalians. Article III of the Constitution of the Reformed Episcopal Church in North America states:

This Church holds the Faith as once delivered to the saints, and as transmitted through the Church of England, especially as articulated in her Reformation heritage, the range of her Anglican divines, and as deposited in the founding principles of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. Furthermore, this Church receives and affirms Holy Scripture as the Word of God. We receive and affirm the three ancient creeds, commonly known as the Nicene, Apostles' and Creed of Athanasius, and the dogmatic definitions of the first four ecumenical councils of the undivided church. It also holds the following unalterable historical documents to be a part of the received Body of its Doctrine: (1) The Thirty-nine Articles of Religion in their 1801 form (2) The Declaration of Principles of 1873, as adopted by the first General Council of this Church (3) The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1886-1888 (4) The Jerusalem Declaration of 2008.

The Reformed Episcopal Church in North America has also, as already noted, during the course of its long history, undertaken Prayer Book revision (including restoring the 1662 BCP as well as approving the American 1928 BCP), revised its Constitution and Canons (based on the 1920s Canons of the Episcopal Church), adopted other Anglican documents, and entered significant ecumenical relationships which have produced a number of doctrinal agreements, leading to intercommunion relationships with jurisdictions such as the Anglican Province of Nigeria and the Anglican Province of America. All of these developments have involved interpreting the Declaration of Principles within the wider context of historic, classical Anglicanism. They have been understood by ourselves and our partners as in no way contrary to Anglican norms and the fulsome and original 'Old Paths' vision of Bishop Cummins, extending back through the English Reformation to the Undivided Church.

This wider doctrinal heritage is also reflected in Article II of the Constitution of the Free Church of England:

The doctrine of the Free Church of England is founded in the Holy Scriptures and, following the example of the Reformers, in such teachings of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church as are agreeable to the said Scriptures.

In particular such doctrine is to be found in the Declaration of Principles, the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, and the authorised liturgies of this Church.

The first thing to be stressed is that, as members of the Reformed Episcopal family, we are committed to the supreme and unique authority of the Scriptures: only from them may we teach things as necessary for salvation; but we approach Scripture from *within* the lived continuity of the People of

⁹ Cummins, *Memoir*, p.435f.

God down the centuries, or, as the Jerusalem Declaration puts it, ‘respectful of the church’s historic and consensual reading’.¹⁰

For this reason the Declaration of Principles itself points back to and affirms (as totally subordinate to Scripture) the classic Anglican sources of doctrine and identity – the Thirty Nine Articles, the Dominical Sacraments, the Creeds, episcopacy and liturgical worship. Cummins, as we have seen, explicitly saw himself and those with him who founded the Reformed Episcopal Church as ‘restoring old paths’, not creating something new.¹¹ Not all of these sources require separate comment, but some brief statements may be helpful.

1. *The Thirty-Nine Articles*

As the Catechism of the Anglican Church in North America states, the Articles are ‘the Anglican response to certain doctrinal issues controverted at that time, as expressing fundamental principles of authentic Anglican belief, and as one of the elements characteristic of the Anglican Way.’¹² They were never intended to be a complete systematic theology. Nor were they intended to be ‘partisan’:

*To say that the Articles are a piece of Reformed theology ... is to ignore the eclectic nature of their theological pedigree. Furthermore, it is also to overlook the fact that the reason for this eclecticism is that differences between ‘Lutheran’ and ‘Reformed’ approaches to theology seem simply not to have been that important to those Reformers of the English Church who were responsible for the production of the Articles. We do not find in the writings of these Reformers the idea that there were two opposed theological blocs, Lutheran and Reformed, between which one had to choose. What we find instead is a stress on the agreement between Protestant theologians about the basic tenets of the faith and a minimising of the significance of the differences between them.*¹³

We believe that this stress on agreement rather than difference should guide our understanding of the Declaration of Principles.

2. *Episcopacy and ecclesiastical polity*

The statements about episcopacy and ecclesiastical polity were intended to express a conviction that members of Churches without bishops are nevertheless true Christians. This seems obvious today (and is formally admitted by the Roman Catholic Church, for example) but there were those in the 19th century who were prepared to deny it. The Declaration’s position is also in line with historic Anglicanism as expressed by Richard Hooker in his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* and by other English divines. As John Bramhall, Bishop of Derry in the 17th century, put it: ‘He is blind who does not see Churches without it [i.e. episcopacy]; he is hard-hearted who denieth them salvation. We are none of those hard-hearted persons’¹⁴

¹⁰ *Jerusalem Declaration*, clause 2.

¹¹ In his address at the inaugural meeting of the REC on 2nd December 1873 (Cummins, *Memoir*, p.435).

¹² ‘A Note on the Articles of Religion’, in *To Be a Christian: An Anglican Catechism*, Newport Beach, CA, Anglican House Publishers, 2014, p.147. The same phraseology is found in the Theological Statement of the ACNA.

¹³ Martin Davie, *Our Inheritance of Faith: A Commentary on the Thirty Nine Articles*, Malton, Gilead Books, 2013, p.21.

¹⁴ John Bramhall, *Works*, vol. III, (ed. Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology), p.518.

3. Liturgical Worship

In relation to liturgical worship, the Declaration gives an honoured place to the 1785 American Prayer Book. Many of the Evangelicals who joined Bishop Cummins, believed that certain words and phrases found in the PECUSA Prayer Book could be interpreted to support erroneous doctrine. For this reason, an alternative was sought and the text of 1785 chosen. This had been the book proposed at the first General Convention of the newly independent Protestant Episcopal Church (though in the end it was not adopted). The 1785 Book in fact had a number of 'liberal' features (for example it omitted the Nicene Creed and a phrase from the Apostles' Creed) but, because it had a 'Low Church' feel (for example, it used the word 'Minister' instead of 'Priest'), it was seen by many Evangelicals as a defence against 'Catholic' interpretations. Bishop Cummins believed it to be the best available (since there was obviously no time to undertake a thorough revision of the PECUSA Prayer Book in the days leading up to the formation of the Reformed Episcopal Church). In practice, soon after the REC adopted the 1785 book, some of its deficiencies were corrected, such as the restoration of the Nicene Creed in the Communion service, and it was eventually superseded in North America. It seems never to have been used in the UK, where the 1662 Book of Common Prayer (with a few alterations) has always been the norm. The Declaration also gives the Church 'full liberty to alter, abridge, enlarge and amend' its Prayer Book, 'providing that the substance of the faith be kept entire'. Liturgical revision is perfectly consistent with Reformed Episcopal principles. Most recently the Reformed Episcopal Church in North America has produced a new Book of Common Prayer (in traditional and modern English forms) and the Free Church of England has begun a process of producing new texts.

4. The offering of Christ anew to the Father.

In the 16th century there were a number of ideas associated with the Eucharist which (at least at the popular level) were distortions of the ordinance instituted by Christ. One of the chief of these was that Christ was sacrificed again in each Mass. This popular belief was condemned in Article XXXI ('Of the one Oblation of Christ finished upon the Cross'). We note that the modern Roman Catholic Church regrets any impression that may have been given of a repetition of Christ's sacrifice in the Mass,¹⁵ and that the unrepeatability of that sacrifice has been affirmed in other dialogues.¹⁶ We note, too, that despite the mediaeval errors, the concept that the Eucharist is both a memorial and a representation of Christ's sacrifice was not repudiated by Cranmer, but features in his treatise on the Lord's Supper. He quotes with approval the 12th century *Sentences* of Peter Lombard. Lombard, says Cranmer, 'judged truly in this point, saying "That which is offered and consecrated by the priest, is called a sacrifice and an oblation, because it is a memory and representation of the true sacrifice and holy oblation, made in the altar of the cross".'¹⁷ With careful provisos, Cranmer accepts that the Eucharist can be called a sacrifice: '... because it was ordained of Christ to put us in remembrance of the sacrifice

¹⁵ *The Grace Given You in Christ: Report of the International Commission for Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Church*, Lake Junaluska, World Methodist Council, 2006, p.55.

¹⁶ See, for example, the Eastern Orthodox-Roman Catholic Consultation in the United States, 'An Agreed Statement on the Lima Document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*' 1984, section II, in John Borelli and John H, Erickson (eds,) *The Quest for Unity: Orthodox and Catholics in Dialogue*, NY, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996, p.71; also that between the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Communion (see *Growing Together in Unity and Mission: An Agreed Statement of the International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission*, London, SPCK, 2007, para. 40).

¹⁷ *A Defence of the True and Catholic Doctrine of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Our Saviour Christ, ... made by the Most Reverend Father in God, Thomas, Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate of All England and Metropolitan*, Book V, chapter XIII.

made by him upon the cross. And for that reason it beareth the name of that sacrifice ...' Cranmer then goes on to quote St Augustine in support of this understanding.¹⁸

For many in the Anglican tradition such an understanding makes it legitimate to refer to the Holy Table as an altar: not an altar on which the Body and Blood of Christ are offered anew, but a different kind of altar – a memorial altar, which accompanies a memorial sacrifice. To this end, while Cranmer and the Council under King Edward VI ordered that stone altars be replaced with wooden tables, they nevertheless allowed that there was an acceptable use of the word 'altar'. Speaking of the 1549 Prayer Book they wrote: 'it calleth the table where the holy Communion is distributed, with lauds and thanksgivings unto the Lord, an altar; for that there is offered the same sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving'.¹⁹ There is evidence that the word 'altar' continued in popular use throughout Anglican history.²⁰ It is the focal point of our prayers and material offerings: the rubrics of our Prayer Books have always directed the presbyter to place the gathered offerings of the people on it and to offer the Eucharistic prayers commemorating the Lord's death there.

We stress, however, that what is clearly contrary to Scripture, is any idea that Christ can be offered *anew*. Hebrews 9:25-6 clearly rules this out: *Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again ... Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world*. We can never offer Christ *anew*, but at each Eucharist 'we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes' (I Corinthians 11:26).

5. Christian priesthood

This clause was a protest against the re-emergence of a crude concept of a self-perpetuating succession of 'sacrificing priests', endowed with powers virtually independent of the Christian community as a whole. Much confusion has been caused by the use of imprecise terminology. The English word 'priest' is derived ultimately from the Greek word *presbyteros* (elder).²¹ However, it was also used as a translation of the Hebrew *kohen*, Greek *hiereus* and Latin *sacerdos* which mean a cultic, sacrificing priest. Although the Anglican tradition has always acknowledged that 'presbyter' and 'priest' are interchangeable terms,²² the use of one word for two different concepts has led to an

¹⁸ *A Defence*, Book V, chapter XIII

¹⁹ 'The Council's Letter to Bp Ridley to take down Altars, and place Communion tables in their stead' [24 Nov. 1551], in Gervase E. Duffield (ed.), *The Work of Thomas Cranmer*, Appleford, Sutton Courtney Press, 1964, p.236.

²⁰ For example, George Whitefield, speaking of his diaconal ordination in Gloucester cathedral (wearing a surplice) says, 'When I went up to the altar, I could think of nothing but Samuel's standing before the Lord with a linen ephod' (*George Whitefield's Journals*, Edinburgh, Banner of Truth Trust, 1998, p.69).

²¹ See many online dictionary definitions, for example: 'Old English *prēost*, of Germanic origin; related to Dutch *priester*, German *Priester*, based on ecclesiastical Latin *presbyterus* 'elder' ' (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/priest>). The French *prêtre* is from the same root.

²² For example, Richard Hooker, *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book 5, 78: 'I rather term the one sort Presbyters than Priests because in a manner of so small moment I would not willingly offend their ears to whom the name of Priesthood is odious though without cause. ... Wherefore ... let them use what dialect they will, whether we call it a Priesthood, a Presbytership, or a Ministry, it skilleth not....'; Joseph Mede (1586-1638): *Diatriba: Discourses on Divers Texts of Scripture*, (1642) Book I, no.5, in *Works* (ed. J. Worthington), 1672, p.27: 'But if it be well examined, 'Priest' is the English of 'Presbyter' and not of 'Sacerdos', there being in our tongue no word in use for *Sacerdos* ...For who can deny that our word Priest is corrupted of Presbyter?' J.H. Newman's first Tract famously begins: 'I am but one of yourselves, - a Presbyter'. The current ordination rites of the Church of England include 'The Ordination of Priests, also called Presbyters' (*Common Worship: Ordination Services*, London, Church House Publishing, 2007, pp.31, 122). The REC canons state that the terms 'priest' and 'presbyter' are used interchangeably, when referring to those ordained to that office (Canon 7(8)).

imbalance in understanding the second of the three historic Orders. This was resurgent in the 19th century and called forth the correction in the Declaration of Principles.

Nevertheless, both Reformed and modern Roman Catholic teaching underline the Triple Office of Christ – as Prophet, Priest and King. These attributes belong to *all* who are in Christ, but (like other attributes of Our Lord, such as Servanthood) are expressed *ministerially* by those ordained to lifelong roles in the Church. We therefore believe that it is legitimately possible to affirm that bishops and presbyters do indeed share the *same* priesthood as all believers, namely the priesthood of Christ himself, and, in their case, in a distinctive manner and measure appropriate to their role within the Body,²³ or, as Torrance puts it, ‘in a mode appropriate to those who are but stewards and servants’.²⁴

While we do not accept all the teaching of the Roman Church in this area, we can say that we, like her, ordain a man ‘to priesthood in the presbyteral order’²⁵ in a sense that is entirely consistent with our stated sources of doctrinal authority and with the methodology of the English Reformers. The Reformed Episcopal Church has always accepted the norms of the Ordinal of the Book of Common Prayer and in particular its teaching that ‘from the Apostles’ time there have been these Orders of Ministers in Christ’s Church: Bishops, Priests and Deacons’ and that these Orders are to be ‘continued, and reverently used and esteemed’.²⁶ Laity have never been allowed to preside at the Eucharist. In this sense Reformed Episcopalians have always recognized a special aspect of the Royal Priesthood. The ordained are a specification of what all are. In this properly understood sense, there is a ministerial, servant priesthood to the priesthood of all believers.

Thus, we can restate the clause of the Declaration of Principles positively and say that we affirm that there is only one priesthood in God’s plan of salvation, namely that of Christ Himself. This priesthood Christ graciously imparts to His whole Church – ordained and lay – that together they may through Him offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God (1 Peter 2:5). The calling, equipping, authority and pattern of the ordained Ministry which serves this universal priesthood, derives directly from Christ, the Head of the Church, our Shepherd and High Priest (Hebrews 3:1, 1 Peter 2:25).²⁷

6. *Eucharistic Presence*

Probably the most problematic clause in the Declaration of Principles for many Christians is the statement that ‘this church condemns and rejects ... That the Presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper is a presence in the elements of Bread and Wine’. This appears to teach what has been called a ‘Real

²³ ‘The priestly ministry is ... a charismatic gift, enabling those who receive it to serve and build up the body of the Church’ (International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue, *The Church of the Triune God, (The Cyprus Agreed Statement)*, London, Anglican Communion Office, 2006, p.73). ‘[O]rdination is not simply the committing of authority by the Church. It is first of all an invocation to the Father asking for the gift of the Spirit to the ordinand’ (*Anglican-Reformed International Commission, God’s Reign and our Unity*, London & Edinburgh, SPCK/St Andrew’s Press, 1984, p.57).

²⁴ Thomas F. Torrance, *Royal Priesthood*, Edinburgh, Oliver & Boyd, 1955, p.81. C.f. Nazir-Ali: ‘If the office is to be understood as truly apostolic, bishops (and ministers who derive their authority from them) will be seen as representing Christ himself, in a particular way, to the people of God as well as to the world at large’, (Michael Nazir-Ali, ‘Towards a Theology of Choosing Bishops’, in *The Church Observer*, (Trinity 2011), p.14).

²⁵ *Rites of the Catholic Church*, Collegeville, Liturgical Press, (1991), II, p.40.

²⁶ Preface to the Ordinal, Book of Common Prayer, 1549, 1552 and 1662.

²⁷ Torrance: [For Calvin] ‘the priesthood of the Church [is] imaged in the midst of the community of believers in the form of a divinely instituted ministry, an episcopate held in a united capacity ...’ The comment is made in the context of Calvin’s use of Cyprian to argue against papal claims (*Royal Priesthood*, p.92).

Absence' doctrine of eucharistic Presence (commonly associated with the name of the Swiss Roman Catholic priest turned Reformer Ulrich Zwingli) according to which the communicant receives simply 'ordinary' bread and wine and any element of memorial is solely an act of memory. This is not what we believe as Reformed Episcopal bishops, nor do we believe it is the understanding intended in the Declaration of Principles. Our conviction is based on the following reasons:

- (a) As has already been stressed, Bishop Cummins' intention was to restore 'old paths'; he wished to take the Church back to the theology of the English Reformers. It was not his intention to invent a new definition of Eucharistic Presence.
- (b) To be true to Bishop Cummins' intention, therefore, the Reformed Episcopal Churches are committed to the eucharistic theology of the English Reformers. Crucially, these understood themselves to be, not innovators, but restorers of Patristic doctrine which had been obscured and corrupted in the Western Church in the three centuries immediately preceding their own time. Though often described as *Protestant* martyrs, Ridley and Cranmer died for a *Patristic* faith. Archbishop Cranmer believed passionately that 'many old authors, both Greeks and Latins, ... above a thousand years after Christ taught as I do'. He appealed to 'the old Church of Rome, [which] a thousand years together, neither believed nor used the sacrament as the Church of Rome hath done of late years'.²⁸ As the title of his book indicates, Cranmer wanted to defend 'The True and *Catholic* Doctrine of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ ... grounded and established by God's Holy Word and approved by the Consent of the Most Ancient Doctors of the Church'.²⁹ This appeal to Scripture and the Fathers was made both by the English Reformers and by their Continental contemporaries.
- (c) What did the Fathers teach? Their approach to this subject may be summarised briefly:
 - a. The earliest post-Apostolic writers continued the unselfconsciously 'realistic' language of the Gospels and St Paul. Ignatius of Antioch, at the very beginning of the second century, used the Church's belief that 'the Eucharist is the flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ' to counter those who denied the reality of the incarnation.³⁰ A few decades later Justin Martyr could write: 'we have been taught that the nourishment that has been eucharistised through the word of prayer which comes from him – nourishment by which our blood and flesh are nourished by transformation – is both the flesh and blood of the Jesus who became flesh'.³¹ This language of identity is continued by later writers.
 - b. Eucharistic presence was not the subject of controversy in the early centuries. There were debates and divisions on many issues, but the reality of Christ's presence in the Eucharist was not one of them. It was accepted by all parties.
 - c. There was no attempt to produce an official explanation of *how* bread and wine could be the Body and Blood of Christ. Different Fathers used different terms – 'image', 'type', 'likeness', etc – and sometimes the same writer could use different terminology at different places, but the identification of the elements with the Body and Blood of Christ is consistent among them.

²⁸ 'Letter to Queen Mary' [Sept. 1555], in Duffield (ed.), *The Work of Thomas Cranmer*, p.297.

²⁹ Title page.

³⁰ *Smyrneans*, 6.2.

³¹ Justin, *Apology*, 66.

- (d) Bishop Cummins' convictions on the theology of the Prayer Book were in fact broader and more generous than the brief statement in the Declaration of Principles suggests. Bishop Cummins himself wrote:

*The Prayer Book 'is committed to no human system of theology, but is broad enough and comprehensive enough to embrace men who differ widely in their interpretations and definitions of Scriptural truth. ... [T]he theology of the Prayer Book ... is not Lutheranism, nor Calvinism, nor Arminianism; but better than all, it embraces all that is precious and of vital truth in each of these systems, yet committing itself to none; and a disciple of each of these schools may find in it that which gives "rest to his soul".'*³²

Later in the same sermon Cummins lists Calvinists, Arminians, Wesleyans and Lutherans as those who may find doctrines that are precious to them enshrined in the Prayer Book. Particularly significant is the fact that the name of Zwingli does not appear on that list. Cummins did not claim that anyone who advocated a 'Real Absence' doctrine of Eucharistic Presence would find his position supported by the Prayer Book rites. In this Cummins is being true to the authentic Church of England heritage that meant so much to him. The idea of a 'Real Absence' is expressly ruled out by the Anglican formularies. The 'Homily on Worthy Receiving and Reverent Esteeming of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ' states: 'thus much [the communicant] must be sure to hold, that in the supper of the Lord there is no vain ceremony, no bare sign, no untrue figure of a thing absent, but as the Scripture saith, ... the communion of the body and blood of the Lord in a marvellous incorporation ...'³³ Moreover, while Zwingli is absent, Luther is present:

*Does the Lutheran place a high value on the worthy partaking of Christ's body and blood? Surely, the lofty, glowing language of the communion office is fitted to meet the deepest longings of the soul ...'*³⁴

Against the stark language of section IV of the Declaration of Principles must be set not only Scripture, the Fathers, the English Reformers, the Articles and the language of the Prayer Book, but Cummins' own convictions, expressed in a more measured way at a time when he was not under extreme pressure.

- (e) Further evidence of the breadth of Cummins' convictions can be found in the fact that the very first person whom he hoped to consecrate bishop in the newly-constituted Reformed Episcopal Church was his mentor Muhlenberg.³⁵ The significance of this becomes clear when it is remembered how Muhlenberg had given practical expression to his passionate commitment to the concept of Evangelical Catholicism: the dedication of the first church he built was 'The Church of the Holy Communion'; he advocated a weekly Eucharist; he had founded a Sisterhood; he used a stole; and consistently asserted that 'all true Evangelicalism must be Catholic'.³⁶ That Cummins passionately desired such a man to be his fellow-worker in the episcopate, laying the foundations of the Reformed Episcopal Church together, indicates

³² 'Bishop Cummins' Sermon In Defence of the Prayer Book', in *Four Documents*, Philadelphia, M'Calla & Stavelly, 1874, p.25f.

³³ Gerald Bray (ed.), *The Books of Homilies: A Critical Edition*, Cambridge, James Clarke & Co., 2015., p.428f.

³⁴ 'Bishop Cummins' Sermon In Defence of the Prayer Book', p.25f.

³⁵ Guelzo, *For the Union of Evangelical Christendom*, p. 212.

³⁶ Ayres, *Muhlenberg*, pp.177, 188ff, 224, 242, 505 *et passim*.

a breadth of sympathy and tolerance which needs to be taken into account when assessing the text he composed.³⁷

What are the consequences of all this for our interpretation of this ‘bullet point’? Cummins was a man of courage and vision, but he and the Principles he drafted are not infallible. In this instance they may be misunderstood if considered in isolation from the other sources for doctrine in the Reformed Episcopal Church and the Declaration of Principles itself.

Article XX of the Thirty-Nine Articles articulates the principle that it is not lawful to ‘so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another’. The same principle must surely hold here. The section IV statement must not be expounded in a way that is repugnant to the Scriptures, Fathers, Councils, Reformers and Anglican formularies, or to Cummins’ own views expressed elsewhere.³⁸ The *error* which the statement seeks to guard against – the reduction of the Eucharist to the creation of a talismanic object – is clear and its rejection legitimate. This, however, would seem to be a situation where the Principles must themselves be brought under the scrutiny of the Reformed Episcopal family’s own declared sources of doctrine, as enumerated above.

Those sources of doctrine would counsel us – indeed *require* us - to follow the example of the Fathers and permit a range of theories to be held side by side within the Church’s tolerant embrace.³⁹ That is not, however, to say that every theory is equally valid. The English Reformers had good reasons (philosophical and theological) for rejecting the concept of transubstantiation as it had come to be understood in the late Middle Ages.⁴⁰ At the same time, for us to insist on a particular theory would make us guilty of the same mistake that the Reformers and Eastern Churches accused Rome of making when she insisted on transubstantiation as the *only* legitimate means of defining the mystery. It is more honest for us to accept that the presence of Christ in the Eucharist has not been defined by any Ecumenical Council and is, indeed, beyond human comprehension or definition.

The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, for example, adopted in the first Declaration of Principles, say no less. Article XXVIII states, ‘the body of Christ is given, taken and eaten in the Supper only in a heavenly and spiritual manner’. This language was not part of the earlier Forty-Two Articles. After Cranmer’s death, however, the Church of England added this language to the final version of the Thirty-Nine Articles approved in 1571. The Article preserves the Scriptural and Ancient Church sense that the Body

³⁷ In the event Muhlenberg did not join Cummins in the Reformed Episcopal Church.

³⁸ Similarly, Cranmer’s teaching has to be judged in relation to the sources – the Scriptures, ‘the catholic Church and the most holy Fathers of old’ – that he himself acknowledged.

³⁹ Using Michael Ramsey’s phraseology (*The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, p.96).

⁴⁰ See Article XXVIII of the Articles of Religion. Article IV of the RECUSA’s constitution states, ‘Nothing calculated to teach that in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, the elements of the bread and wine are changed into the natural [i.e. physical] Flesh and Blood of Christ, shall ever be allowed in the worship or teaching of this Church.’ Note that the language of the *Articles of Religion* addresses what the doctrine of transubstantiation meant in the late Middle Ages at the time of the Reformation. *This understanding was significantly different from what Thomas Aquinas had meant by the term.* He had used the term to refer to the change in the incidence or essence of the sacrament. The accident or form, i.e. bread and wine, do not change. Effectively therefore the sacrament was mysteriously two things at once. Subsequent to Aquinas, the philosophical movement known as nominalism dramatically impacted the doctrine of transubstantiation. Nominalism among other points stated that “a thing can only be one thing.” This was not what Aquinas had stated. Contrary to Thomism, nominalism reduced the belief in transubstantiation into a view that the elements become physically the Body and Blood. The result was crass superstition, reducing the sacrament to a magical object. To be precise, it was this view of transubstantiation that the *Articles* condemned.

of Christ is clearly administered in the Supper in an undefined and mysterious manner, while only being effectual to those who receive by faith with thanksgiving.

To be a reality for the faithful, the doctrine to which the theories seek to give expression needs to be expressed in liturgy. For Cummins, the Prayer Book had the potential to be ‘the golden chain to restore the ancient unity of the kingdom of the Redeemer’ because ‘it embodies, as no other uninspired volume does, the ancient and primitive *catholic* faith of Christ’s Church’.⁴¹ It is this Catholic faith – with its unbroken conviction that the worthy recipient of the sacramental Bread and Wine truly feeds on the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist – that the Reformed Episcopal family of Churches maintains. This feeding is made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit who enables our sacramental eating and drinking ‘in an heavenly and spiritual manner’ to be a foretaste of the heavenly banquet. Beyond this we are silent before a mystery.

7. *Baptismal Regeneration*

The Reformed Episcopal Church was formed in the context of the 19th century controversy over the word ‘regenerate’ in the baptismal service. In both North America and the UK the context was one of widespread indiscriminate baptism of the infant children of parents with only the most minimal allegiance to the Church. To claim, as the Baptism Order in the Prayer Book did, that such children were ‘regenerate’ (understood as ‘saved for eternity’, irrespective of what they did in later life) as a result simply of being baptised, seemed to many to attribute to the Sacrament a mechanical efficacy at odds with the tenor of Scripture. Three broad approaches may be made:

- a. The New Testament itself shows that regeneration, if understood as inner quickening, can precede, accompany or follow the act of baptism (Acts 10:44-48; 22:16; 8:14-17). It also shows us people whose baptism does not seem to have brought about new birth (for example, Simon Magus, Acts 8:18-23, and Alexander the metal worker, 2 Timothy 4:14) and warns against the assumption that all who are baptised and eat and drink are pleasing to God (1 Corinthians 10:1-6). We therefore believe that the most honest application of the New Testament evidence is to affirm that there *is* a connection between Regeneration and Baptism, but allowing that regeneration may precede, accompany or follow baptism, or may not take place at all.⁴²
- b. There has been a tendency to equate the term regeneration with moral conversion and inner quickening. The word in its classic Prayer Book usage means a “state into which one was placed at baptism,” as in being placed in Christ and His Church, moving from one kingdom of darkness to a kingdom of light. The Collect for Christmas Day in the Book of Common Prayer uses the word regeneration in this sense: “Almighty God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin; Grant that we being regenerate, and made children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit . . .” The use of the word regenerate in this context refers to the congregation with what the prominent Evangelical leader

⁴¹ *Four Documents*, p.17. Emphasis added.

⁴² Today, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that in some baptised in infancy ‘sin prevents Baptism from bearing the fruits of salvation’ (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1272).

J.C. Ryle (first Bishop of Liverpool) called 'charitable supposition'⁴³ That is, based on the covenant of baptism, all are presumed to be regenerate. At the same time, while retaining the Collect for Christmas Day, the Reformed Episcopal Churches have always emphasized the need for evangelical faith to make the sacrament of baptism effectual.

- c. Bishop Cummins himself had no problem with the concept rightly understood. In 1873, addressing the Evangelical Alliance on the subject of 'Roman and Reformed Doctrines of Justification Contrasted', he said:

"If it be asked, What is the relation of baptism to justification according to the Reformed Church, perhaps the best reply is to be found in the Twenty-Seventh Article of the Church of England. 'Baptism is not only a sign of profession, whereby Christian men are discerned from those that be not christened; but it is also a sign of regeneration, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive baptism rightly are grafted into the Church; the promises of the forgiveness of sins and of our adoption to be the sons of God are visibly signed and sealed, faith is confirmed and grace increased by virtue of prayer to God.

To this all Protestantism agrees: Faith is the sole instrument of justification.

Baptism is:

- 1. A sign of a Christian man's profession.*
- 2. A sign of regeneration or new birth.*
- 3. An instrument, when rightly received, by which we are grafted into the Church.*
- 4. The promises of our forgiveness and adoption are visibly signed and sealed; and*
- 5. Faith is confirmed and grace increased by virtue of prayer to God.*⁴⁴

Cummins' acceptance of the concept of baptismal regeneration was consistent with that of other Evangelical leaders of the time who were prepared to defend its use in the baptismal liturgy, rightly understood.⁴⁵ In recent liturgical revision the Reformed Episcopal Church in North America has felt able to restore the term 'regenerate' to the Baptism Service, explaining its meaning in a rubric at the end of the office:

The word 'regenerate' in this office of Baptism is well meant for a signification of our grafting and incorporation into Christ's flock and a grateful acknowledgement of the benefits of Christ therein given to all that receive Baptism rightly (cf. Article xxvii). Yet, lest the same word should by any persons, out of ignorance, malice, or obstinacy, be misconstrued: It is hereby declared that the use of this word is not intended to denote an essential alteration in nature, nor a passing, as by some mysterious process, into

⁴³ *Knots Untied: being Plain Statements on Disputed Points in Religion from an Evangelical Standpoint, (condensed and revised by C. Sydney Carter), London, James Clarke & Co, 1959, pp.98-103.*

⁴⁴ Quoted in the report of the Standing Liturgical Commission to the Fiftieth General Council of the Reformed Episcopal Church (see footnote 46).

⁴⁵ See Ryle's essay, 'Prayer Book Statements about Regeneration', in *Knots Untied*, pp.94-117.

*that fullness of religious life marked by faith, repentance, incipient holiness, ardent desires after God, and elevated affections.*⁴⁶

The work of the Holy Spirit is not under our control – ‘The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit’ (John 3:8). We revere and use the ordinance that the Lord has commanded us, and leave to his gracious providence the mystery of its efficacy.

8. *The Church of Ireland clauses*

These clauses, unique to the British version of the Declaration of Principles, are non-controversial. The description of the Church as ‘Reformed and Protestant’ merely reflects the description of the Church of England as found, for example, in the Coronation oath.⁴⁷ The commitment to maintaining communion with all Christian Churches is remarkable in its 19th century pre-ecumenical context, but totally consistent with the vision of Muhlenberg and Cummins for Christian unity.

The final clause derived from the Church of Ireland’s constitution names ‘the primitive Faith’ as the norm for doctrine and worship. This is obviously in line with the respect for the Fathers and early Church noted above and reflects the Church of Ireland’s sense of its historic continuity, which as Reformed Episcopalians we share.

Conclusion

Thus, while the Declaration of Principles forms an inalienable part of the Reformed Episcopal story, caution needs to be exercised in its interpretation. As we have shown, the Principles were never intended to be a new statement of faith, but to ensure that the Church which adopted them remained within the historic Anglican patrimony from which others were departing. We believe that, rightly understood, everything they contain is consistent with mainstream Anglicanism, with much general ecumenical consensus, and, most importantly, with apostolic Christianity.

As Reformed Episcopalians we do not attempt to disguise the fact that some of our formularies were written in large measure against 19th century Roman Catholic and Anglo-Catholic teaching. We do not deny our past. Nor do we pretend that all these important issues have been resolved or do not matter. We do, however, affirm again that the Principles must themselves be brought under the scrutiny of their own declared sources of doctrine, namely the Scriptures and such Fathers and Councils as are agreeable to the Scriptures.⁴⁸ It would be a denial of everything we stand for to interpret them in a way that contradicts the apostolic Scriptures or places us outside the ‘historical and consensual reading’ of those Scriptures down through the centuries. Where there is a clash, the Declaration of Principles must yield and not the other way around. If the Declaration of Principles were to hinder the

⁴⁶ General Council of the Reformed Episcopal Church. *Journal of the Proceedings of the Fiftieth General Council of the Reformed Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia: Reformed Episcopal Church, 2002), 183-4. The revisions to the baptismal office were presented at this council for first reading and were approved for second reading, and therefore approved for incorporation into the *Book of Common Prayer*, at the 51st General Council, held in Orlando, Florida, 2005.

⁴⁷ ‘Will you to the utmost of your power maintain in the United Kingdom the Protestant Reformed Religion established by law? Will you maintain and preserve inviolably the settlement of the Church of England ...?’ (<https://www.royal.uk/coronation-oath-2-june-1953>).

⁴⁸ Article II of the Constitution of the Free Church of England and the Theological Statement of the ACNA.

union of biblically orthodox Christians, it would indeed be frustrating Muhlenberg's and Cummins' purpose.

Consistent with that purpose of uniting Christ's people, we are currently engaging with others internationally in taking a stand for the apostolic faith in the face of threats from both inside and outside the Church. Clearly, the Declaration of Principles has not constituted an obstacle to that, as our involvement in the GAFCON movement and the Reformed Episcopal Church's membership of the Anglican Church in North America shows.

As Reformed Episcopalians we have been blessed with a rich history and an exciting vision. We do not believe that the Declaration of Principles need be an obstacle to anyone who shares that vision of a Church built on the Evangelical Catholic foundations of the Anglican patrimony.

North America

The Most Rev. Ray R. Sutton
The Rt. Rev. Walter R. Banek
The Rt. Rev. David L. Hicks
The Rt. Rev. R. Charles Gillin
The Rt. Rev. Alphonza Gadsden
The Rt. Rev. William White
The Rt. Rev. Daniel R. Morse
The Rt. Rev. Peter Manto

Croatia

The Rt. Rev. Jasmin Milic

Western Canada

The Rt. Rev. Charles Dorrington

Germany

The Rt. Rev. Gerhard Meyer

Free Church/REC of England

The Most Rev. John Fenwick
The Rt. Rev. Paul Hunt

Cuba

The Rt. Rev. Willian Mendez Suarez