

## **The Moscow Agreed Statement 1976**

### **I The Knowledge of God**

1. God is both immanent and transcendent. By virtue of the divine self-revelation, man experiences personal communion with God. By faith and through obedience he shares truly in the divine life and is united with God the Holy Trinity. By grace he enjoys the pledge and first-fruits of eternal glory. But, however close this union may be, there remains always an all-important distinction between God and man, Creator and creature, infinite and finite.
2. To safeguard both the transcendence of God and the possibility of man's true union with him the Orthodox Church draws a distinction between the divine essence, which remains for ever beyond man's comprehension and knowledge, and the divine energies, by participation in which man participates in God. The divine energies are God himself in his self-manifestation. This distinction is not normally used by Anglicans, but in various ways they also seek to express the belief that God is at once incomprehensible, yet truly knowable by man.
3. To describe the fullness of man's sanctification and the way in which he shares in the life of God, the Orthodox Church uses the Patristic term *theosis kata charin* (divinization by grace). Once again such language is not normally used by Anglicans, some of whom regard it as misleading and dangerous. At the same time Anglicans recognize that, when Orthodox speak in this manner, they do so only with the most careful safeguards. Anglicans do not reject the underlying doctrine which this language seeks to express; indeed, such teaching is to be found in their own liturgies and hymnody.

### **II The Inspiration and Authority of Holy Scripture**

4. The Scriptures constitute a coherent whole. They are at once divinely inspired and humanly expressed. They bear authoritative witness to God's revelation of himself in creation, in the Incarnation of the Word and in the whole history of salvation, and as such express the Word of God in human language.
5. We know, receive, and interpret Scripture through the Church and in the Church. Our approach to the Bible is one of obedience so that we may hear the revelation of himself that God gives through it.
6. The books of Scripture contained in the Canon, are authoritative because they truly convey the authentic revelation of God, which the Church recognizes in them. Their authority is not determined by any particular theories concerning the authorship of these books or the historical circumstances in which they were written. The Church gives attention to the results of scholarly research concerning the Bible from whatever quarter they come, but it tests them in the light of its experience and understanding of the faith as a whole.
7. The Church believes in the apostolic origin of the New Testament, as containing the witness of those who had seen the Lord.

8. Both the Orthodox and the Anglican Churches make a distinction between the canonical books of the Old Testament and the deuterocanonical books (otherwise called the *Anagino-skomena*) although the Orthodox Churches have not pronounced officially on the nature of the distinction, as is done in the Anglican Articles. Both Communion are agreed in regarding the deuterocanonical books as edifying and both, and in particular the Orthodox Church, make liturgical use of them.

### **III Scripture and Tradition**

9. Any disjunction between Scripture and Tradition such as would treat them as two separate 'sources of revelation' must be rejected. The two are correlative. We affirm (i) that Scripture is the main criterion whereby the Church tests traditions to determine whether they are truly part of Holy Tradition or not; (ii) that Holy Tradition completes Holy Scripture in the sense that it safeguards the integrity of the biblical message.
10. (i) By the term Holy Tradition we understand the entire life of the Church in the Holy Spirit. This tradition expresses itself in dogmatic teaching, in liturgical worship, in canonical discipline, and in spiritual life. These elements together manifest the single and indivisible life of the Church.  
  
(ii) Of supreme importance is the dogmatic tradition, which in substance is unchangeable. In seeking to communicate the saving truth to mankind, the Church in every generation makes use of contemporary language and therefore of contemporary modes of thought; but this usage must always be tested by the standard of Scripture and of the dogmatic definitions of the Ecumenical Councils. The mind (*phronema*) of the Fathers, their theological method, their terminology and modes of expression have a lasting importance in both the Orthodox and the Anglican Churches.  
  
(iii) The liturgical and canonical expressions of Tradition can differ, in that they are concerned with varying situations of the people of God in different historical periods and in different places. The liturgical and canonical traditions remain unchangeable to the extent that they embody the unchangeable truth of divine revelation and respond to the unchanging needs of mankind.
11. The Church cannot define dogmas which are not grounded both in Holy Scripture and in Holy Tradition, but has the power, particularly in Ecumenical Councils, to formulate the truths of the faith more exactly and precisely when the needs of the Church require it.
12. The understanding of Scripture and Tradition embodied in paragraphs 4 to 11 offers to our Churches a solid basis for closer rapprochement.

### **IV The Authority of the Council**

13. We are agreed that the notions of Church and Scripture are inseparable. The Scriptures contain the witness of the prophets and apostles to the revelation of

himself which God the Father made to man through his Son in his Holy Spirit. The Councils maintain this witness and provide an authoritative interpretation of it. We recognize the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church not only in the Scriptures, but also in the Councils, and in the whole process whereby Scriptures and Councils have been received as authoritative. At the same time we confess that the tradition of the Church is a living one in which the Spirit continues his work of maintaining the true witness to the Revelation of God, the faith once delivered to the saints.

14. We note that Anglican members, while accepting the dogmatic decrees of the fifth, sixth, and seventh Councils, have long been accustomed to lay more emphasis on the first four, and believe that the concept of 'an order or "hierarchy" of truths' can usefully be applied to the decisions of the Councils. The Orthodox members find this concept to be in conflict with the unity of the faith as a whole, though they recognize gradations of importance in matters of practice.
15. The Orthodox regard the Seventh Council as of equal importance with the other Ecumenical Councils. They understand its positive injunctions about the veneration of icons as an expression of faith in the Incarnation.

The Anglican tradition places a similarly positive value on the created order, and on the place of the body and material things in worship. Like the Orthodox, Anglicans see this as a necessary corollary of the doctrine of the Incarnation. They welcome the decisions of the Seventh Council in so far as they constitute a defence of the doctrine of the Incarnation. They agree that the veneration of icons as practised in the East is not to be rejected, but do not believe that it can be required of all Christians.

It is quite clear that further discussion of the Seventh Council and of icons is necessary in the dialogue between Orthodox and Anglicans, as also of Western three-dimensional images and religious paintings which we have not adequately discussed.

16. We are agreed that according to the Scriptures and the Fathers the fullness of saving truth has been given to the Church. She is the Temple of God, in which God's Spirit dwells, the Pillar and the Ground of truth. Christ has promised that he will be with her until the End of the Age and the Holy Spirit will guide her into all truth (1 Cor. 3.16; 1 Tim. 3.15; Matt. 28.20; John 16.13).
17. Both Anglican and Orthodox agree that infallibility is not the property of any particular institution or person in the Church, but that the promises of Christ are made to the whole Church. The ecumenicity of Councils is manifested through their acceptance by the Church. For the Orthodox, the Ecumenical Council is not an institution but a charismatic event in the life of the Church and is the highest expression of the Church's inerrancy.
18. It is clear that further exploration and discussion of this and kindred questions will be needed. Among the points to be taken into account are:

(a) The use of the words 'infallible' and 'indefectible' in discussion of ecclesiology is of medieval and modern Western origin.

(b) For Anglicans, the concept of infallibility has acquired unfortunate associations by reason of the definition of the First Vatican Council, and of the manner in which papal authority has been exercised. For the Orthodox, the concept of indefectibility has ambiguous associations on account of the way in which it has been used in modern theology.

(c) A theological evaluation is required of processes whereby the teaching of Councils has been recognized and received.

## **V The *Filioque* Clause**

19. The question of the *Filioque* is in the first instance a question of the content of the Creed, i.e. the summary of the articles of faith which are to be confessed by all. In the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed (commonly called the Nicene Creed) of 381 the words 'proceeding from the Father' are an assertion of the divine origin and nature of the Holy Spirit, parallel to the assertion of the divine origin and nature of the Son contained in the words 'begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father'. The word *ekporeuomenon* (proceeding), as used in the Creed, denotes the incomprehensible mode of the Spirit's origin from the Father, employing the language of Scripture (John 15.26). It asserts that the Spirit comes from the Father in a manner which is not that of generation.

20. The question of the origin of the Holy Spirit is to be distinguished from that of his mission to the world. It is with reference to the mission of the Spirit that we are to understand the biblical texts which speak both of the Father (John 14.26) and of the Son (John 15.26) as sending (*pempein*) the Holy Spirit.

21. The Anglican members therefore agree that:

(a) because the original form of the Creed referred to the origin of the Holy Spirit from the Father,

(b) because the *Filioque* clause was introduced into this Creed without the authority of an Ecumenical Council and without due regard for Catholic consent, and

(c) because this Creed constitutes the public confession of faith by the People of God in the Eucharist, the *Filioque* clause should not be included in this Creed.

## **VI The Church as the Eucharistic Community**

22. The eucharistic teaching and practice of the Churches, mutually confessed, constitutes an essential factor for the understanding which can lead to reunion between the Orthodox and Anglican Churches. This understanding commits both our Churches to a close relationship which can provide the basis for

further steps on the way to reconciliation and union. Already in the past there has been considerable agreement between representatives of our two Churches regarding the doctrine of the Eucharist. We note particularly the six points of the Bucharest Conference of 1935. We now report the following points of agreement:

23. The eucharistic understanding of the Church affirms the presence of Jesus Christ in the Church, which is his Body, and in the Eucharist. Through the action of the Holy Spirit, all faithful communicants share in the one Body of Christ, and become one body in him.
24. The Eucharist actualizes the Church. The Christian community has a basic sacramental character. The Church can be described as a *synaxis* or an *ecclesia*, which is, in its essence, a worshipping and eucharistic assembly. The Church is not only built up by the Eucharist, but is also a condition for it. Therefore one must be a believing member of the Church in order to receive the Holy Communion. The Church celebrating the Eucharist becomes fully itself; that is *koinonia*, fellowship - communion. The Church celebrates the Eucharist as the central act of its existence, in which the ecclesial community, as a living reality confessing its faith, receives its realization.
25. Through the consecratory prayer, addressed to the Father, the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of the glorified Christ by the action of the Holy Spirit in such a way that the faithful people of God receiving Christ may feed upon him in the sacrament (1 Cor. 10.16). Thus the Church depends upon the action of the Holy Spirit and is the visible community in which the Spirit is known.
26. The eucharistic action of the Church is the Passover from the old to the new. It anticipates and really shares in the eternal Rule and Glory of God. Following the Apostolic and Patristic teaching, we affirm that the eucharistic elements become, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Body and Blood of Christ, the bread of immortality, to give to us the forgiveness of sins, the new creation, and eternal life. The celebration of the Church in liturgy carries with it the sense of the eternal reality which precedes it, abides in it, and is still to come.
27. In the Eucharist the eternal priesthood of Christ is constantly manifested in time. The celebrant, in his liturgical action, has a twofold ministry: as an icon of Christ, acting in the name of Christ, towards the community and also as a representative of the community expressing the priesthood of the faithful. In each local eucharistic celebration the visible unity and catholicity of the Church is manifested fully. The question of the relationship between the celebrant and his bishop and that among bishops themselves requires further study.
28. The Eucharist impels the believers to specific action in mission and service to the world. In the eucharistic celebration the Church is a confessing community which witnesses to the cosmic transfiguration. Thus God enters into a personal historic situation as the Lord of creation and of history. In the Eucharist the End breaks into our midst, bringing the judgement and hope of the New Age.

The final dismissal or benediction in the liturgy is not an end to worship but a call to prayer and witness so that in the power of the Holy Spirit the believers may announce and convey to the world that which they have seen and received in the Eucharist.

## VII The Invocation of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist

29. The Eucharist is the action of the Holy Trinity. The Father gives the Body and the Blood of Christ by the descent of the Holy Spirit to the Church in response to the Church's prayer. The Liturgy is this prayer for the eucharistic gifts to be given. It is in this context that the invocation of the Holy Spirit should be understood. The operation of the Holy Spirit is essential to the Eucharist whether it is explicitly expressed or not. When it is articulated, the 'Epiclesis' voices the work of the Spirit with the Father in the consecration of the elements as the Body and Blood of Christ.
30. The consecration of the bread and the wine results from the whole sacramental liturgy. The act of consecration includes certain proper and appropriate moments - thanksgiving, anamnesis, *Epiclesis*. The deepest understanding of the hallowing of the elements rejects any theory of consecration by formula - whether by Words of Institution or *Epiclesis*.<sup>1</sup> For the Orthodox the culminating and decisive moment in the consecration is the *Epiclesis*.
31. The unity of the members of the Church is renewed by the Spirit in the eucharistic act. The Spirit comes not only upon the elements, but upon the community. The *Epiclesis* is a double invocation: by the invocation of the Spirit, the members of Christ are fed by his Body and Blood so that they may grow in holiness and may be strong to manifest Christ to the world and to do his work in the power of the Spirit. 'We hold this treasure in earthen vessels.' The reception of the Holy Gifts calls for repentance and obedience. Christ judges the sinful members of the Church. The time is always at hand when judgement must begin at the household of God (2 Cor. 4.7; 1 Pet. 4.17).
32. Although *Epiclesis* has a special meaning in the Eucharist, we must not restrict the concept to the Eucharist alone. In every sacrament, prayer and blessing the Church invokes the Holy Spirit and in all these various ways calls upon him to sanctify the whole creation. The Church is that Community which lives by continually invoking the Holy Spirit.

### NOTE

At their meeting in Thessaloniki in April 1977 the Orthodox members asked that it should be pointed out that, in regard to the words in paragraph 30 of the Moscow Agreed Statement it is inexact to call the *Epiclesis* a 'formula' since the Orthodox Church does not regard it as such.

