

## **STATEMENTS OF THEOLOGY OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH and THE CATECHISM**

The theology of the Episcopal Church can be identified in several places, including the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds. The former is the ecumenical symbol of the faith adopted by the 4<sup>th</sup> century Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople. The latter is proclaimed as our statement of faith at baptism, renewed in confirmation and again each year in the Great Vigil of Easter.

In addition to the Creeds, we find historical documents contained in the Book of Common Prayer that include the Articles of Religion that are designed to articulate belief in contrast to differences of belief developed in the medieval Latin Church as well as the Anabaptists. These Articles "do not claim any doctrines as necessary to salvation except those which may be proved and established by the Holy Scriptures" and also "do not reject the developed traditions of the undivided Church of the early centuries that are in accord with the mind of Scripture." (Massey Shepherd, *Oxford Prayer Book Commentary*)

Our theology is also stated in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral that was adopted by the bishops of the Episcopal Church in 1886 and restated by the bishops of the Anglican Communion in 1888. It includes four foundational points:

1. The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the revealed word of God.
2. The Nicene Creed is the sufficient statement of the Christian Faith.
3. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are to be shared using Jesus' words of institution and the elements He identified.
4. The historic episcopate, locally adapted in how it is administered so that the needs of the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of His Church may be met.

The Outline of the Faith, commonly called *The Catechism* uses a question-answer format to systematically present the basic theology of our faith. For each of the sections there is a summary below that can lead to individual reflection on the most beloved or confusing Question/Answer in the section (BCP 845-862.)

## Session 1

### Human Nature

We believe that God created human nature in God's own image and that God shared this with us in the Incarnation. This creation includes endowing humanity with memory, reason, and skill, and giving to it the rule of the created world. As humanity abused this gift and rebelled we fell into the power of death. This all is contained in the first few chapters of Genesis, and we recite along with how God helped us in the Great Thanksgiving of the eucharist.

Human nature is characterized by dignity, being gifted in the image of God, and suffering the rebellion of sin. In the same breath we also celebrate how God has and continues to redeem humanity through the covenant with Israel, ministry of the prophets, and ultimately through Jesus Christ.

### God the Father

The opening words of the Lord's Prayer ground our understanding of God as Father. In the Great Thanksgiving of the eucharist we name that God is living, true, and dwells for ever. We also proclaim that God the Father is also the source of all life and goodness, filling all things created with blessing to rejoice in God's splendor. We note that Creation and our redemption are both reflections of the goodness and love of God the Father; God the Father is more than Creator only.

Available pronouns and nouns in language fail us when speaking of God because while God is alive (therefore cannot be referred to as "it") God is also more than what we think of using the words "he" or "father", as these are parts of the reflection of God's image.

### The Old Covenant

The Old Testament is read in both the office and the eucharist, and plays a significant role in our salvation history. It is the first part of the Story of God's People that continues in the New Testament.

### The Ten Commandments (the decalogue)

The decalogue is used as a standard for self-examination (BCP 317), particularly for receiving Communion and rites of penitence. While the decalogue is the

beginning of understanding our moral and ethical standards in sin and repentance, it continues with the Gospel.

### Sin and Redemption

Human sin and our need for repentance and salvation is at the core of Christian understanding. The awareness that we are blessed with “the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ” (BCP 58) is throughout our faith and worship. The redeeming work of Christ begins with the Annunciation and continues all the way through to the arrival of the Holy Spirit. This Truth is proclaimed in the sacraments and prayers, as God’s response to human sin is a key motivation for our worship. As Leonel Mitchell says, “The Paschal Mystery is the mystery of redemption” (L. Mitchell, *Praying Shapes Believing*)

### Session 2

#### God the Son

Decisive statements about God the Son are found in both the “Definition of the Union of the Divine and Human Natures in the Person of Christ” (BCP 864) from the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D., as well as the Nicene Creed that we use on Sundays and Holy Days. The eucharistic prayers in particular articulate our theology of God the Son.

#### The New Covenant

This is the new relationship of reconciliation with God given by Jesus Christ to all who believe in Him. At the Last Supper, Jesus named that this is found in His blood. Christ’s death and resurrection inaugurated the New Covenant that we are connected to through baptism and participate in in the eucharist.

#### The Creeds

The Apostles’ Creed is an integral part of the baptismal liturgy. It is also used in the daily offices as a means of regularly grounding our prayer and praise in our baptismal faith.

The Nicene Creed is used at the Sunday eucharist, as well as the ordination of a bishop (who is defined as a guardian of the Church’s faith.)

The Athanasian Creed (*Quicumque Vult*) is in the Book of Common Prayer (864-865) and proclaims the nature of the Incarnation and of God as Trinity. Efforts to remove it from our list of affirmed creeds has been ongoing since 1867, primarily because of its damnatory clauses at the beginning and end.

### The Holy Spirit

The Spirit of God sanctifies us to be the people of God, most notably in calling on the Holy Spirit in the epiclesis of the Great Thanksgiving of the eucharist when the Spirit also sanctifies the bread and wine to be the Body and Blood of Christ. Similarly, the Spirit sanctifies the water of baptism and then seals the baptized as we make the sign of the cross with the chrism oil. The Holy Spirit strengthens confirmands, absolves the penitent, anoints the sick, and blesses persons in marriage and ordination.

The Holy Spirit was who made Christ human by the flesh of His mother, Mary, at the Incarnation, gathers the Church together in unity and also sends us out to do God's work in the world.

### Session 3

#### The Holy Scriptures

Belief in the Bible is communicated by regularly reading Scripture in our worship. In ordinations the ordinands declare their belief that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God and contain all things necessary to salvation.

We believe that God did not dictate the Bible, but rather inspired human authors to write the text and did not overrule the authors' human limitations. We believe that God still speaks to us through Scripture, read, heard, and interpreted by the Church, acting by the Holy Spirit.

#### The Church

The Body of Christ, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the worshipping community both as a whole as well as in local time/place. We are grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and united in our call to carry on His Mission of pointing to and ushering in the expanding Reign of God. The Church is

empowered by the Spirit of God to reach all people, engaging each in their giftedness to live into their call from God. The Church is the reconciling community healing divisions and distance between people with each other as well as with God, and while fallible is also guided into all truth by the Holy Spirit. As such, the Church is the sacramental representation of the Presence of God in the world, known through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

### The Ministry

Our primary ministry as the Church is to live out our baptismal life as witnesses to our faith and hope in Jesus Christ. Each of us is blessed with one or more gifts from God, while none of us has them all; we need one another to live out the fulness of ministry in the world. Our ministries are organized into different “Orders” within the Church, together witnessing to an interdependent wholeness of who the Body of Christ is and can be.

### Prayer and Worship

The Book of Common Prayer contains both individual (private) and corporate prayer, which are different ways to express our prayer. Traditional Anglican spirituality is centered around liturgical prayer (prayer within our worship.) The Lord’s Prayer is at the heart of all prayer and serves as a model for us to know how to pray. The structure of the Lord’s Prayer begins with praise and adoration of God, continues with petition and oblation (offering), is followed by penitence and petition (again), and concludes with further praise and adoration.

### The Sacraments

As humans created in the image and likeness of God, we express what is going on inside us with actions of our bodies. When God chose to reveal more of God’s Self to the world it was through a human body in Jesus. Along with the Incarnation we find God doing this through the Church, the Body of Christ. This visible expression of interior states, gifts, and blessings is the definition of a sacrament.

The sacraments of the Church are often divided into major (baptism and eucharist) and minor (confirmation, matrimony, ordination, reconciliation, and unction.) These sacraments are a significant way that God makes God’s Self known to us, i.e. how we are connected more to God.

## Session 4

### Holy Baptism

Baptism, with the eucharist, unites us directly to the Paschal Mystery (the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.) The Christian life is the life of the resurrection, beginning with baptism when we die in the waters with Christ and rise with Him, being sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Through baptism, nothing can separate us from God.

### The Holy Eucharist

In the eucharist God's Spirit blesses the bread and wine we offer so that it becomes also the Body and Blood of Christ, the Presence of God shared with us in blessed elements of our meal together.

### Other Sacramental Rites

The rites of confirmation, matrimony, ordination, reconciliation, and unction (for healing and at the time of death) all connect us to our life as Christians in an earthly progression toward the nearer Presence of God. All are grounded in our baptism and nurtured through our lives in the eucharist: holy communion with God and with one another.

### The Christian Hope

Our Christian hope lies in God's never-ending love for us and the promise of everlasting life into which we were initiated in the waters of baptism. Our life does not end at the death of our bodies, but continues with God and the saints in the resurrected life.