

REFLECTIONS ON THE ‘SAINT ANDREW DECLARATION’

The Revd. David Todd

The Saint Andrew Declaration was signed by the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, Lord Wallace of Tankerness and the Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, The Most Reverend Mark Strange in St Mary’s Episcopal Cathedral, Edinburgh on St Andrew’s Day 2021. It is the result of a number of years work by a group comprising clergy and members Church of Scotland and Scottish Episcopal Church and is really just the start of even more work by this group – Our Common Calling Working Group – to bring the two denominations together.

The Declaration is in three parts. The first section – the Preamble – sets out some of the history of the two denominations in Scotland and names some of the problems and divisions that have existed in the past. This is not unlike the start of a counselling session or therapy where problems are named to allow the parties to move on! There is then a section on ‘Acknowledgements’. The first and perhaps the most important is:

We acknowledge one another’s churches as churches belonging to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ and truly participating in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God.

It goes on to acknowledge our common confession of the Apostolic Faith; that the Word of God is authentically preached and the sacraments are faithfully administered; that our ordained ministries are called by the Holy Spirit, commissioned by Christ and given by God; that personal, collegial and communal oversight is exercised in a variety of forms; and that our unity is as yet imperfect. The third section lists the commitments of both churches to work together in prayer, in new partnerships, in one another’s congregations, through theological discussion and in practical ways in every level of our church life.

Thus the Declaration does not, in a sense, say anything new about links between the two denominations or where the work of the ‘Our Common

Calling Working Group' might end up but rather states where we both are in this journey. It is more of a start than a finish but it is a very helpful summary of where we both are and it names issues from the past and issues in the present and issues that need to be addressed in the future if we are to come closer together.

My own experience of ecumenical relations began when my father (Rev'd A. Stewart Todd, D.D. – President of the Church Service Society 1980-82) was called to St Machar's Cathedral, Aberdeen in 1967. In the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity the three Cathedrals in Aberdeen (St Machar's Church of Scotland, St Andrew's Scottish Episcopal and St Mary's Roman Catholic) came together for choral services in each other's cathedrals. During the rest of the year the two Bishops and my father would occasionally swap pulpits. St Machar's, as the medieval cathedral, had the distinction of having been Roman Catholic before the Reformation and a mixture of Episcopal and Presbyterian immediately after the Reformation for longer than many cathedrals in Scotland. Most people appreciated these services with the notable exception of the late Pastor Jack Glass. He brought a mini-bus load of likeminded men to disrupt one of the services. The anti-popery group were forcibly ejected by feisty elders and admonished by Grampian Police. Out of these relatively uncontroversial gatherings eventually came St Columba's Church in Bridge of Don. The former farmland had been developed as housing for those attracted by the burgeoning oil industry in Aberdeen and the church had a separate Roman Catholic Chapel and a Church of Scotland Church but shared kitchen and toilet facilities – facilities that did not require denominational distinction!

My parents sent me to a boarding school with a Scottish Episcopal foundation and it never occurred to me that there was anything odd about this. I did not qualify for a 'Filius Clerici Scholarship' reserved for the sons of (Scottish Episcopal) clergy but I did get a music scholarship which had no denominational requirement! By the time I moved to Edinburgh to start a career in Arts Management and joined the choir of St Giles' Cathedral in 1978 it was the norm for leaders of the Roman Catholic Church and the Scottish Episcopal Church to be at any civic or national service in St Giles' – something that had not happened when the three cathedrals in Edinburgh became cathedrals (or, in the case of St Giles' known as a cathedral) between 1878 and 1883. My research in this area shows that in the late nineteenth century the Church of

Scotland was more concerned about repairing the schism of 1843 than getting together with the (tiny) Scottish Episcopal Church or the recently restored Roman Catholic Church.

Since then I have been involved in a variety of ecumenical partnerships – some organised formally like the Murrayfield Churches Together in Edinburgh set up in 1987 bringing together Church of Scotland, Scottish Episcopal Church and United Reformed Church and Edinburgh City Centre Churches Together established in 2008 bringing together Church of Scotland and Scottish Episcopal Church. In these two organisations it is clear who can do what, where and when and the clergy are pretty much interchangeable. The Declaration does not go as far as these two established groups but Our Common Calling Working Group could potentially lay the foundations for this in the wider churches.

I have also been involved in less formal ecumenical partnerships: on the Isle of Cumbrae where the Church of Scotland Parish Church, the Cathedral of The Isles (Scottish Episcopal Church) and Roman Catholic Church did services together in Holy Week; at Old Saint Paul's Episcopal Church, Edinburgh where we had breakfast with the clergy of Canongate Kirk and St Patrick's Roman Catholic Church once a month and welcomed each other's congregations to services in Holy Week and Advent; and at St Mark's Episcopal Church, Portobello where the clergy of the Portobello and Joppa Parish Church, the Roman Catholic Church and the Baptist Church meet once a month and do services together in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Holy Week and Advent.

Both these formal arrangements and the latter, less formal arrangements, demonstrate that there is much that the different denominations share and much that can be done together without going into the nitty gritty of who believes what. The Declaration recognises that there are differences in emphasis and practice between the Church of Scotland and the Scottish Episcopal Church. The emphasis in the Scottish Episcopal Church is for eucharistic worship whereas for most of the Church of Scotland Holy Communion is more occasional. Perhaps the Our Common Calling Working Group will look at theological differences around the two churches' understanding of the theology of Holy Communion but I suspect that there is as much diversity within the

two denominations about what people think is happening at Holy Communion as there is disparity between the two denominations.

Interestingly both of our eucharistic liturgies draw on Eastern Rites in a way that the Church of England does not. In Common Order there is a Lesser and a Greater Entrance for the word and sacraments being brought in and there is an Epiclesis and words of Oblation. These are also found in the eucharistic liturgies of the Scottish Episcopal Church and, indeed, comparison of the 1982 Scottish Liturgy with the 1994 Common Order shows that ministers in either denomination could (and can) swap without much worry. I wonder if, after the Reformation, the Church in Scotland was looking for traditions to follow that were distinct from the Western (Roman) traditions.

I also suspect that one of the biggest issues will be in resolving church order. The Declaration acknowledges:

that personal, collegial and communal oversight (episkope) is embodied and exercised in our churches in a variety of forms

and it could be argued that both churches have Deacons and Presbyters and that the Presbytery has a similar function to a Bishop. However, notwithstanding the humour behind Probationers in the Church of Scotland calling their Training Incumbent their 'Bishop', my understanding is that a Parish Minister has the same 'power' as a Bishop and I also suspect that any Parish Minister would be loath to give up that 'power'!

There was a moment in the 1950s when the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland commissioned a report on supervision of ministers – an area in which they felt there could be improvement. Professor T.F. Torrance led the report and suggested that there should be more supervision and that the supervisors might be called something like 'bishops'. The Scottish Daily Record got hold of the story and once it was published there was such an outcry that the whole report was dropped completely and never got to the Assembly. That was not, however, to do with ecumenical relations whereas the work of the Scottish Churches Initiative for Union was rejected by the General Assembly in 2003 and I understand the only positive outcome of that work was the uniting of the Scottish Congregational Church with the United Reformed Church in

the United Kingdom to form the United Reformed Church. With hindsight one might say that Scottish Churches Initiative for Union was over-ambitious and moved too quickly towards full union. The Declaration is not moving anywhere very quickly and one hopes that this may be a good thing. Things that are created in an instant often vanish in an instant; things that are created slowly often have more lasting qualities.

Nevertheless there is much that we could share without looking for full unity. The Declaration is committed to:

work towards the fuller sharing of ministry, and of spiritual, human, financial and physical resources

The Presbytery Plan for Edinburgh has just been announced as I write and churches in the Presbytery have been paired. It is not clear how these pairings will work but if the plan is successful whatever ‘sharing of ministry, and of spiritual, human, financial and physical resources’ is achieved this may well lay the foundations and provide a blueprint for wider sharing between the two denominations and others.

The Saint Andrew Declaration is a hopeful document. It sets out the history of the two denominations and names some of the issues of the past. It acknowledges the current situation and mentions areas in which we could come together more and commits both churches to action in the future. I pray that these commitments, in the words of the last commitment of the Declaration, are followed through at every level of our church life; that resources are allocated to joint initiatives; and that we will hold one another to account on what we have agreed to do.

David Todd

was brought up in the Church of Scotland as a son of the manse but became a Scottish Episcopalian in 2009. He joined the Church Service Society as the Scottish Episcopal Church’s Liturgy Committee representative but is now a Council Member in his own right. Prior to his ordination as priest to the clergy team at St Mark’s Portobello, David had a career in theatre and orchestral management. He was largely responsible for the design and detail of the Study Day at Dunblane Cathedral in 2018 on ‘Staging the Sunday Service’. The views expressed in this article are his own and not necessarily the views of the Scottish Episcopal Church.