

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND'S DECLARATION OF ASSENT

COLIN PODMORE

Administrative Secretary, Central Secretariat, Church House

1. INTRODUCTION

Canon C 15 of the Church of England requires all those about to be ordained, admitted to any benefice or preferment, or licensed, to make the following Declaration of Assent, after the Preface has been spoken:

'PREFACE

The Church of England is part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church worshipping the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation. Led by the Holy Spirit, it has borne witness to Christian truth in its historic formularies, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons. In the declaration you are about to make will you affirm your loyalty to this inheritance of faith as your inspiration and guidance under God in bringing the grace and truth of Christ to this generation and making Him known to those in your care?

DECLARATION OF ASSENT

I, A B, do so affirm, and accordingly declare my belief in the faith which is revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds and to which the historic formularies of the Church of England bear witness; and in public prayer and administration of the sacraments, I will use only the forms of service which are authorised or allowed by Canon.'

Since 1 September 1975, when Canon C 15 came into force, the Declaration of Assent and its Preface have become a fixed part of the Church of England's title deeds. When representatives of the Church of England are asked in ecumenical discussions for a definition of the Church of England's position, it is to the Declaration of Assent and its Preface that they increasingly turn. To cite only the most recent example, the response of the English House of Bishops to the Papal Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* refers to this document no fewer than three times. In paragraph 58 it highlights the Church of England's description of itself in the Preface as 'part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church', while in earlier paragraphs it describes the Christian faith as being 'uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds', and speaks of the Church proclaiming that faith 'afresh in each generation'.¹

A quarter of a century having now passed since Canon C 15 went through its synodical process, the events are sufficiently distant for memories as to the precise origins of the Declaration of Assent and its Preface to have become hazy, but not yet remote enough for reference books to make up the deficiency. This article seeks both to fill that gap by outlining how the Church of England got its Declaration of Assent, and in doing so to give the document its due honour as a defining text for the Church

¹ *May They All Be One. Response of the House of Bishops of the Church of England to Ut Unum Sint* (GS Misc 495, 1997), paras 58, 28, 17.

of England's identity.

2. SUBSCRIPTION AND ASSENT, 1571–1968

The requirement of assent to the Church of England's doctrinal position dates from 1571, the year in which the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion reached their final form.² The Convocation of Canterbury stipulated that those about to be ordained or presented to a benefice should subscribe to all thirty-nine articles, even though Parliament, out of concern for Puritan sensibilities, had ordered subscription only to those articles 'which... concern the confession of the true Christian faith and the doctrine of the Sacraments'.

No form of subscription was laid down in 1571, but this was done by Canon 36 of the Canons of 1604, which required subscription to three articles composed by Archbishop Whitgift in 1583 and set out (after slight alteration) in the Canon.³ The first of these affirmed the Royal Supremacy. The second asserted that the Book of Common Prayer and the Ordinal contained nothing contrary to the word of God and that in public prayer and administration of the sacraments the person subscribing the article would use the form prescribed in the Prayer Book 'et non aliam'. The third gave assent to the Thirty-nine Articles and acknowledged them to be agreeable to the Word of God. The form of subscription was 'Ego N. N. tribus his praefixis articulis, omnibusque in eisdem contentis, lubens et ex animo subscribo'. Eventually this became: 'I ... do willingly and from my heart subscribe to the 39 Articles of Religion of the United Church of England and Ireland, and to the three articles in the thirty-sixth Canon, and to all things therein contained.' It is significant that from 1604 onwards Anglican clergy were thus required not only to declare their assent to the Thirty-nine Articles, but also to acknowledge that the Book of Common Prayer and the Ordinal, with its threefold ministry, contained nothing contrary to the word of God, and to promise to use the Prayer Book exclusively in public worship. The Prayer Book and the Ordinal thereby became associated, to an extent at least, with the Articles as part of what Continental Protestants would call the 'confessional basis' of the Church of England. *Lex orandi, lex credendi* was to remain the classical Anglican approach.

In 1865, section 1 of the Clerical Subscription Act replaced the form of subscription with the following declaration:

I, A. B., do solemnly make the following declaration: I assent to the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, and to the Book of Common Prayer and of the ordering of bishops, priests, and deacons. I believe the doctrine of the [United] Church of England [and Ireland] as therein set forth, to be agreeable to the Word of God; and in public prayer and administration of the sacraments I will use the form in the said book prescribed, and none other, except so far as shall be ordered by lawful authority.

New incumbents were also required to read the Thirty-nine Articles and repeat the declaration before the congregation on their first Sunday in office.

At the time, it was thought by some (including speakers in the parliamentary debates) that the replacement of subscription 'willingly and from the heart' with 'assent' somehow made the assent required only 'general'. However, against this view it was held, both in 1865 and subsequently, that 'in law, "assent" must be taken to mean "complete legal acceptance"'.⁴ Perhaps the most significant feature of the declaration is its statement that 'the doctrine of the Church of England' is set forth in the Articles, the Prayer Book and the Ordinal collectively, rather than just in the

² For what follows, see *Subscription and Assent to the Thirty-nine Articles* (London, 1968), paras 1–7.

³ E. J. Bicknell, *A Theological Introduction to the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England* (London, 1947), p. 26.

⁴ *Subscription and Assent*, para 8.

Articles.

3. DOCTRINE COMMISSION REPORT, 1968

By the later 1960s, there was growing anxiety within the Church of England about the requirement of assent to the Thirty-nine Articles. In 1967 the Archbishops of Canterbury and York appointed a Commission on Christian Doctrine, and it was asked, as its first task, to consider 'the place of the Articles in the Anglican tradition and the question of Subscription and Assent to them'. The Commission was chaired by Bishop Ian Ramsey of Durham, and the seventeen other members included Professors Henry Chadwick, Dennis Nineham, Ninian Smart and Maurice Wiles, as well as two future bishops—John Austin Baker and David Jenkins. The Commission worked quickly, publishing its report *Subscription and Assent to the Thirty-nine Articles* in July 1968, in time for the 1968 Lambeth Conference.

The Commission observed in its Report that while most Anglicans appeared unconcerned about subscription, two diverging tendencies could be discerned. On the one hand, there was increasing dissatisfaction with the requirement of subscription to the Articles, which many felt was morally questionable in that ordinands were required solemnly to commit themselves to things which they (in common with many others in the Church) did not actually believe. At the same time, however, others regarded attacks on the Articles as part of a general erosion of doctrine within the Church of England, and opposed any weakening of the requirement of assent to them.⁵

In Chapter 5 of its Report the Commission considered whether the Articles should cease to be printed with the Prayer Book, but did not recommend this course of action. Chapter 6, which discussed whether the Articles could be revised or replaced by a new statement of faith, was inconclusive. Chapter 7 therefore proposed that the problem should be addressed not by revising or replacing the Articles but by replacing the declaration of assent. It set out the conditions which a new declaration would need to satisfy 'if it is to win widespread acceptance', as follows:

- (a) It must recognize that the Articles are an historic document and should be interpreted only within their historical context.
- (b) It must leave room for an appeal to the Articles as a norm within Anglican theology.
- (c) It must not tie down the person using it to acceptance of every one of the Articles of 1571.
- (d) It must preserve the comprehensiveness characteristic of the Church of England.
- (e) It must not put the Articles in isolation, but must acknowledge that Bible, Creeds, Prayer Book, Ordinal, and the developing consensus of Anglican thought also have their own contributions to make to the doctrine of the Church of England. It must also indicate that these possess different degrees of authority.
- (f) It must not only declare in what ways the Church of England is distinctive, but must indicate the doctrines she shares with all Christians.
- (g) The possibility of fresh understandings of Christian truth must be explicitly left open.⁶

This, the Commission suggested, would best be achieved by a brief Form of Assent preceded by a Preface spelling out 'the context in which [it] was to be understood and given its meaning and implications.'⁷ A proposed Preface and Form of Assent were

⁵ *Subscription and Assent*, paras 51-7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, para 89.

⁷ *Ibid.*, para 94.

set out in paragraph 97 of the Report.

The suggestion of 'a contextualizing homily prefacing a brief declaration' had been made by the Revd John Austin Baker (later Bishop of Salisbury) during the Commission's third meeting in February 1968.⁸ He proposed a draft (which he later described as 'somewhat wordy'), and this was simplified and amended by the Commission. After the meeting he proposed an amended version of the Commission's draft Preface to remedy 'a number of stylistic inelegancies', and this was further amended at the Commission's next meeting, in May.⁹ Interestingly, the Commission was evenly divided over whether to list the historic formularies in the order Prayer Book — Ordinal — Articles (as in its earlier draft and John Austin Baker's amended version) or Articles — Prayer Book — Ordinal, the Chairman giving his casting vote in favour of the latter order as representing the *status quo* in the 1865 declaration.¹⁰ A further amendment to the Preface was made at a meeting in July immediately prior to publication.¹¹

At its September meeting, the Commission gave further consideration to its Report 'in the light of points raised not only by self-criticism but also in the Press and at the Lambeth Conference', and agreed an amended text of the Preface 'to avoid misunderstanding of the original text and to improve it stylistically'.¹² The Preface and Form of Assent proposed by the Commission were as follows. (Brackets indicate deletions in the amended text, while inserted words and punctuation are printed in bold type.)

'PREFACE

The Church of England is part of the Church of God, having faith in God the Father, who through Jesus Christ our only Lord and Saviour calls us into the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. This faith, uniquely [revealed] **shown forth** in the holy Scriptures, and proclaimed in the catholic Creeds, she shares with other Christians [throughout] **in all parts of** the world. She has been led by the Holy Spirit to bear a witness of her own to Christian truth, **as** in her historic formularies—the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons. [Now, as before, she has a responsibility to maintain this witness] Through her preaching and worship, the writings of her [confessors] **scholars and teachers**, and the utterances of her councils[.], **the lives of her saints and confessors, she has sought, through her history, to further this witness to Christian truth. This responsibility remains.**

You will therefore, in the profession you are about to make, [you will] affirm your loyalty to this inheritance of faith, as your inspiration and direction[.] under God[.] for bringing to light the truth of Christ and making him known to this generation.

FORM OF ASSENT

I, *A. B.*, profess my firm and sincere belief in the faith set forth in the Scriptures and in the catholic Creeds, and my allegiance to the doctrine of the Church of England.'

The Commission added that the Form of Assent could conclude with a promise to use only authorised forms of worship. The requirement of public reading of the

⁸ Lambeth Palace Library, Archbishop's Commission on Christian Doctrine, vol. 1, Minutes, 23–4 February 1968: f. 68v, nos 38(iv) and 39.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Paper 26: suggested emendations, f. 105r; Minutes, 29–30 May 1968: ff. 115–16, no. 47.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Minutes, 29–30 May 1968: f. 116, no. 47.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Minutes, 19 July 1968: f. 118, no. 55.

¹² *Ibid.*, Minutes, 23–4 September 1967, f. 136, no. 81(c); note appended to *Subscription and Assent*.

¹³ *Subscription and Assent*, para 99.

Articles should be abolished.¹³

4. GENERAL APPROVAL

In 1969 the Church Assembly and the Convocations of Canterbury and York debated the report and asked for the necessary legislation to be prepared. Because it was thought that such a technical and complex subject should not come before the new General Synod at its first meetings, it was not until November 1972 that a draft Amending Canon containing the new Canon C 15 was introduced into the Synod, alongside the Church of England (Worship and Doctrine) Measure which would, by section 2, empower the Synod to regulate subscription and assent by canon. The Preface and Declaration of Assent (as they were now called) set out in the new Canon C 15 were in fact the Preface and Form of Assent proposed in the amended version of the 1968 Report, with the addition of the promise: 'and in the public prayer and administration of the sacraments, I will use the forms of service authorised by Canon and none other'.

In the General Approval debate, the proposed Preface and Declaration were subjected to a number of criticisms. The Rector of St Aldate's Oxford, Canon de Berry, and Bishop Maurice Wood of Norwich pleaded for retention of assent to the Articles, but 'in a general way', and extolled the benefits of public reading of the Articles. Other speakers argued that the reference in the Declaration to 'the doctrine of the Church of England' lacked precision. The phrase might be expounded in Canon A 5,¹⁴ but members of the congregation listening to the Declaration being made were unlikely to be aware of this.¹⁵

The Preface was also attacked on stylistic grounds. One speaker called it 'soporific both in length and substance': 'will this welter of words impress either the person called to make his assent or the listening congregation?'¹⁶ Professor Geoffrey Lampe commented 'It reminds me painfully of some of the less happy statements in the proposed reconciliation rite in the Anglican/Methodist scheme. It is the kind of ecclesiastical language which my tutor taught me long ago to call guff, and I wish that it could be pruned and if possible omitted.'¹⁷ A lay member added that 'the preface, because of its vagueness and verbosity, seems to me to be the sort of thing written by my great grandmother in one of her more lucid moments'.¹⁸

5. THE REVISION COMMITTEE

Most speakers had accepted the proposal of a Preface and Declaration, as had their predecessors in the Church Assembly and Convocations, but the wording clearly needed considerable amendment. This would be the task of the Revision Committee, under the chairmanship of the Venerable John Lewis, Archdeacon of Hereford.

When the Committee met on 26 January 1973, it had before it proposals from thirteen Synod members, five of whom attended the meeting. In addition, there were six letters from evangelical clergy or ordinands requesting retention of the 1865 declaration. Three asked that it should at least be available as an option, but a proposal to

¹⁴ 'The doctrine of the Church of England is grounded in the Holy Scriptures, and 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 Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordinal.'

¹⁵ *Report of Proceedings*, iii (1972), 789–804.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 791; the Revd P. J. M. Bryan (Peterborough).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 797.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 802–3; Mr K. Haye (Lincoln).

¹⁹ Church of England Record Centre. GSA/CNS/C15/1: Proposals from Members of the Synod (DA(73)1). Letter from Lady Alethea Eliot (DA(73)2). Further Correspondence (DA(73)3); Declaration of Assent: Report of the Revision Committee (GS 116A).

that effect by Dr Oliver Wright Holmes was rejected by the Committee.¹⁹

(a) *The Preface*

Two of the proposals, from Professor Douglas Jones and the Revd Raymond Avent, the Vicar of St Paul's, Tottenham, contained complete texts of a preface and declaration. The Preface proposed by Fr Avent read:

'The Church of England is part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ. As such it adheres to the Faith and Practice of the universal Church of all ages, uniquely shown forth in the Holy Scriptures and proclaimed in the catholic Creeds. To this faith and practice such formularies as the XXXIX Articles of Religion, the 'Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church' and the 'Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons', bear witness. In the declaration you are about to make you are therefore asked to affirm your loyalty to this inheritance of faith and practice as your inspiration and direction under God in bringing the 'grace and truth' of Christ to this generation.'

Fr Avent explained that he preferred 'part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ' to the 1968 Commission's wording 'part of the Church of God' because 'Church of God' is vague and is now the name of a certain sect. In such a preface it would be well to state categorically that the Church of England is a part of the one Church of Christ in which we declare our belief in the Nicene Creed. (See also Canon A1.) In general he rejected the Commission's wording as 'too insular and not set firmly enough in the wider context': 'It suggests a church founded in the sixteenth century whereas the specific Anglican formularies were an attempt to interpret the essence of the Catholic Faith as handed down from the earliest days and grounded in the teachings of the ancient Fathers and Councils of the Church.' The original fourth and fifth sentences he omitted altogether as being tautological; he preferred the biblical 'grace and truth' (John 1:17) to the Commission's 'bringing to light the truth of Christ' and pointed out that 'profession' should read 'declaration', since that is what it was.²⁰

At the meeting a third member, Mr Bernard Stanley (a solicitor from the Diocese of Portsmouth) produced another text for the Preface, which drew both on the Commission's wording and on Fr Avent's proposal.²¹ It was Mr Stanley's text, with a few minor amendments, that the Committee adopted. (Again, brackets indicate deletions and insertions are given in bold type.)

'The Church of England is part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church worshipping the one true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. She [adheres to] **professes** the [one] faith [authoritatively] **uniquely** revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the [C]atholic creeds, which faith the [Universal] Church is called **upon** to proclaim afresh [to] **in** each [succeeding] generation. Led by the Holy Spirit, she has borne witness [of her own] to Christian truth in her historic formularies, the Thirty-[N]ine Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons. In the declaration you are about to make [you] will **you** affirm your loyalty to this **inheritance of** faith as your inspiration and [direction] **guidance** under God in bringing the grace and truth of Christ to this generation and **making Him known to those in your care?**

Mr Stanley's text, like the other two, took the Doctrine Commission's 1968 text as its starting point and included its key themes. It began with the important description of the Church of England as 'part of' the Church, made a Trinitarian reference, set out the relationship of the Scriptures and the Creeds to the faith, spoke of the Holy

²⁰ DA(73)1, p. 2.

²¹ GSA/CNS/C15/1: untitled document.

Spirit leading the Church of England to bear witness to Christian truth in her historic formularies, and required the person making the declaration to affirm loyalty to the Christian faith.

Mr Stanley's text did not only shorten the Preface and improve its style, however. He followed Fr Avent (and Professor Jones) in using the term 'One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church', but without adding 'of Christ' or 'of God'. His Trinitarian reference was not only much more succinct than that of the Commission, but also replaced 'having faith in God' with 'worshipping the one true God' (a typically Anglican emphasis?). It was in the second sentence that Mr Stanley made what was perhaps his most original contribution. Replacing 'shown forth in the Holy Scriptures' with the Commission's original 'revealed...', he added 'which faith the [...] Church is called upon to proclaim afresh to each [...] generation'. His object in this was 'to emphasise that our faith is divinely revealed and consequently unchanging but that the expression of that faith must be set in its historical context and re-interpreted from age to age'.²² This was subtly different from the Commission's aim (not really achieved in its own proposed wording) of explicitly leaving open 'the possibility of fresh understandings of Christian truth', but its effect was not dissimilar.

The third sentence, which followed the Commission's proposal most closely, was not only four words shorter; it also emphasised 'led by the Holy Spirit' by placing it at the beginning, and by removing 'as' gave the historic formularies a distinctive place, rather than making them one example of the Church of England's bearing witness to the faith. Mr Stanley followed Fr Avent in dispensing with the Commission's next two sentences as unnecessary. The final sentence again followed Fr Avent in speaking of 'the declaration' and of 'bringing the grace and truth of Christ' to this generation. The Revision Committee restored the Commission's 'inheritance of' faith and reference to making Christ known (adding 'to those in your care').

In all of the subsequent correspondence and debates this version of the Preface was never questioned — except for the use of 'she' for the Church taken over from the Doctrine Commission's original wording. With that exception it remains in force today.

(b) *The Declaration*

Not surprisingly, the Declaration, although much briefer, proved much more problematic. The Doctrine Commission had proposed the following wording for the first part of the Declaration: 'I, A. B., profess my firm and sincere belief in the faith set forth in the Scriptures and in the catholic Creeds, and my allegiance to the doctrine of the Church of England.' In the General Synod debate, this formulation was objected to because the text did not itself make clear what 'the doctrine of the Church of England' was or make any reference to the historic formularies. Prof. Lampe suggested 'I profess my firm and sincere belief in the faith set forth in the Scriptures and in the catholic Creeds, and in the historic formularies of the Church of England, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons.'²³ The Revision Committee took this as its basis, beginning 'I, A. B., do so affirm and accordingly declare my belief...'²⁴ Fr Avent had pointed out that in a declaration one needed to 'declare', and Prof. Jones that 'firm and sincere' was redundant ('Either you assent or you do not').²⁵ The Committee omitted the listing of the historic formularies at the end (the term having been explained in the Preface). The Declaration continued: 'and in public prayer and administration of the sacraments I will use only the forms of service which are autho-

²² DA(73)1, p. 6.

²³ *Report of Proceedings*, iii (1972), 797.

²⁴ GSA/CNS/C15/1: E. A. Eadie to M. F Elliott-Binns, 31 January 1973, enclosing Draft Amendments.

²⁵ DA(73)1, p. 3, DA(73)3, p. 5.

²⁶ GS 116A.

rised or allowed by Canon'.²⁶ In response to Canon P. J. M. Bryan, who had suggested omission of the words 'and none other' as superfluous, the Revision Committee inserted 'only' and omitted 'and none other' as being 'unduly emphatic'.²⁷

Following the meeting, Michael Elliott-Binns, the secretary of the Revision Committee, wrote to the Chairman, Archdeacon Lewis, to express concern at the implications of the Committee's adoption of Professor Lampe's suggestion:

'The new form of the declaration really restores the 1865 position over the historic formularies as against the policy of the Doctrine Commission... It seems to me (backed by legal opinions here) that the person making this declaration would declare his belief, not generally in the faith, but in the faith as set forth in the Scriptures, the creeds and the formularies. The Thirty-Nine Articles are the real problem... 'Declare belief in' seems to me to be stronger than 'assent', and belief in the Thirty-Nine Articles is required on the same basis as belief in the creeds. Belief in every article seems to me to be implied.'²⁸

He had drafted the relevant paragraph of the draft Report of the Revision Committee (after a telephone discussion with the Chairman) 'helping as far as I can the liberals who will now be in the greatest difficulties' and reflecting the Committee's policy, but 'I do not believe that the wording of the declaration supports the paragraph'. 'My draft of the report I think conceals the issue and misleads, but I have no other instruction.' If the Declaration were to be changed, he proposed, in line with the Preface, either 'witnessed in the historic formularies' or 'to which the historic formularies of the Church of England bear witness'. The following week he wrote again to suggest adopting a phrase inserted into the Church of England (Worship and Doctrine) Measure by its Revision Committee, requiring belief in the faith as 'grounded in' the Scriptures, creeds and formularies.²⁹ The draft Amendments to draft Canon C 15, incorporating the latter change, were sent out to the members of the Revision Committee and to those Synod members who had submitted proposals for comment, together with a revised draft Report.³⁰

Two evangelical members of the Committee objected to the words 'grounded in' as too weak. Michael Elliott-Binns reported this to the Chairman and suggested two alternative solutions: his original proposal (keeping 'set forth' for the Scriptures and the creeds, and adding 'to which the historic formularies of the Church of England bear witness') and a much longer text based on Canon A 5.³¹ The Archdeacon, however, wrote to the two members with a slightly different suggestion, following the words of the Preface more precisely in the first part but adopting Michael Elliott-Binns's suggestion for the second: 'the faith as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, set forth in the catholic creeds and to which the historic formularies of the Church of England bear witness'.³² The two members agreed to this version, which was duly circulated to the Committee.³³

Another member then objected that the new version was 'clumsy to read and will be more clumsy still to speak'; he also wished to insert 'Christian' before 'faith' and preferred 'set forth' for both the Scriptures and the creeds.³⁴ The Chairman agreed to a tidying up of the grammar ('which is revealed . . . and set forth . . . and . . .') but

²⁷ GS 116A, para 10.

²⁸ GSA/CNS/C15/1: Elliott-Binns to Lewis, 6 February 1973.

²⁹ GSA/CNS/C15/3: Elliott-Binns to Lewis, 15 February 1973. See the Church of England (Worship and Doctrine) Measure 1974, s 5(1).

³⁰ GSA/CNS/C15/3: Elliott-Binns to Lewis, 19 March 1973.

³¹ GSA/CNS/C15/1.

³² GSA/CNS/C15/3: Lewis to R. J. Byrom, 5 April 1973.

³³ GSA/CNS/C15/1: Further Communication from the Chairman (DA(73)7).

³⁴ C. R. Campling to Elliott-Binns, 4 May 1973.

not to the other changes, and thus the text of the Declaration was fixed.

The Revision Committee's Report explained the reasoning behind the wording of its Declaration as follows:

'Belief is expressed in the faith, not in particular documents, but this faith is expressed by reference to certain documents. The Doctrine Commission specified the documents as the Scriptures and the catholic creeds and then referred to allegiance to the doctrine of the Church of England in a separate clause. We have added the historic formularies of the Church of England, and have followed the wording of the preface in a more precise form.

We feel that in the Declaration of Assent, it is the faith of the Church which should have the key position, giving the Scriptures and the creeds as the source along with the particular witness of the later formularies of the Church of England. We desire to be definite in the sense that these sources are clearly indicated, but we do not wish to suggest that we wanted to be narrowly rigid in our use of them.'³⁵

6. THE SYNODICAL PROCESS

The Revision Committee's report was considered by the Synod in July 1973. An evangelical, Mr Hugh Craig, moved an amendment to replace the final version of the Declaration with the penultimate one which had referred to the faith 'as grounded in the Holy Scriptures...'. It was pointed out that this phrase, which had been approved by the majority of members of the Revision Committee, had been removed at the request of two evangelical members. Mr Craig's amendment failed to attract sufficient support, as did another seeking to replace 'belief in' with 'commitment to'.³⁶

Mrs C. M. Tebbutt (Peterborough) described the reference to the Church of England as 'she' as 'a bit old-fashioned': 'Perhaps it has something to do with "mother" Church and "father" priest.' She preferred to speak of the Church as 'it'.³⁷ No amendment to that effect was moved, but bishops who supported such a change had their opportunity in January 1975, when the House of Bishops considered the draft Canon (as 'a provision touching doctrinal formulae') prior to its Final Approval, in accordance with Article 7 of the General Synod's Constitution. The House changed 'she' to 'it' and ordered that 'Him' should be printed 'him'.³⁸

It was in this amended form that the draft Amending Canon was considered for Final Approval in February 1975. There was no debate, and approval was given by overwhelming majorities, with just one priest and two lay people voting against — a remarkable achievement. The Canon was promulgated on 4 July 1975, and came into force on 1 September.³⁹

7. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The story of the genesis of the Declaration of Assent is an interesting and in some respects surprising one.

The method of a brief Declaration preceded by a more extensive Preface placing it in context was suggested by John Austin Baker, and the Preface follows, with some omissions, the outline suggested by him and the Doctrine Commission. The dignified, poetic and theologically sensitive final text of the Preface was not the work of academic theologians, however, but of two back bench Synod members—com-

³⁵ GS 116A, paras 8–9.

³⁶ *Report of Proceedings*, iv (1973), 475–80.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Report by the House of Bishops (GS 116 C).

³⁹ The Canon was amended in 1992 (without debate) to remove the requirement that the Declaration be subscribed (actually signed) as well as made (read aloud).

binning a parish priest's theological vision with a solicitor's skill in drafting—amended in minor details by a synodical revision committee at a single meeting. It is noticeable that of the three phrases from the Preface quoted by the House of Bishops in its response to *Ut Unum Sint*, one ('part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church') owes its formulation to Fr Avent and one ('which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation') was contributed by Mr Stanley.

In the Preface, the historic formularies of the Church of England are discussed in a separate sentence from the Scriptures and the creeds, which does not relate the formularies directly to the faith, but says that the Church of England has 'borne witness to Christian truth in' the formularies. It is the Declaration proper which offers the succinct statement of the relationship between the faith, the Scriptures, the creeds and the formularies which has come to characterise the whole document ('the faith which is revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds and to which the historic formularies of the Church of England bear witness'). Similarly, it is the Declaration proper which contrives to require belief in the faith in general (and not 'the doctrine of the Church of England') but at the same time demand affirmation of loyalty to the Church of England's inheritance of faith and acknowledgement that its historic formularies bear witness to the faith. Remarkably, the relevant formulation in the Declaration was a last-minute production by the secretary of the Revision Committee, Michael Elliot-Binns, refined by its chairman, Archdeacon Lewis, and another member, and only attempted because two members had objected to the previous solution.

Thus both the Preface and the Declaration of Assent can be said to be the product of a committee, and a fruit of the much-maligned synodical process.

One aspect of Canon C 15 is perhaps unfortunate. Whether for reasons of convenience or embarrassment, the oaths and the old declaration of assent were often made privately before institutions and licensings. The Doctrine Commission recommended that the Preface and Declaration should be used *publicly* on these occasions,⁴⁰ but Canon C 15 could not insist on this, because institutions and licensings may take place in private. Under the Clerical Subscription Act 1865, the congregation had still heard the old declaration even where it had been made in private, because, under section 7, it had to be repeated on the following Sunday when the Articles were read. However, when the new Canon C 15 was drafted not only was the requirement for incumbents to read the Articles dropped, but the obligation to repeat the declaration was dropped with it. Ministers licensed to a stipendiary curacy continued to have to repeat the declaration,⁴¹ but in parishes where the Bishop does not have the Declaration of Assent made publicly at the Institution and where there is no licensed stipendiary curate, this defining statement of the Church of England's identity is never heard by the people.

As a statement of the identity of the Church of England, the Preface and Declaration are highly interesting. The Church of England is given no denominational or confessional description. The term 'Anglican' does not appear (it would essentially be tautologous), and neither do the words 'Protestant' or 'Reformed' (whereas 'catholic' appears three times—of the Church and of the creeds). The only name given is a purely geographical one—'of England'. The Church of England is thus defined first and foremost as a national part of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church. The distinctions between revelation of the faith in the Scriptures, the setting forth of it in the catholic creeds, the witness of the historic formularies to it and the (need not to change it, but) 'to proclaim [it] afresh in each generation' make this a classic statement. The Preface's culmination in the evangelistic and pastoral

⁴⁰ *Subscription and Assent*, para 95.

⁴¹ Revised Canons Ecclesiastical, Canon C 15, para 4.

task with regard to 'this generation' is another important and distinctive element. Finally, a comparison with equivalent Continental Protestant declarations is instructive. These tend to culminate in a promise to preach according to the confessional documents, whereas for the Church of England it is common prayer, the use of the liturgies authorised or allowed by Canon, which defines a loyal Anglican. In the end, *lex orandi* is indeed *lex credendi*.