



The **Constitution**, the authorized **Liturgy** of the Church and the authorized **Statement of Principles and Summary of Doctrine**, constitute the official documents of The Liberal Catholic Church. Below is an abridged form of the Church's *Statement of Principles* as well as the complete *Summary of Doctrine*.

Introduction

The Liberal Catholic Church exists to forward Christ's work in the world. The name Liberal Catholic was chosen because the Church's outlook is liberal, in that acceptance of its teaching and doctrine is not obligatory. It is Catholic in the sense of being all embracing, and also because it allies itself with the historic Church as the source of its Holy Orders and of its sacramental tradition. From its inception, The Liberal Catholic Church has sought to combine Catholic forms of worship – stately ritual, deep mysticism and witness to the reality of sacramental grace – with the widest measure of intellectual liberty, and respect for the individual conscience.

Overall Perspective

The Liberal Catholic worldview emphasises the unity of all that lives, both seen and unseen, all moving forward together in a vast evolutionary scheme, initiated and guided with absolute love and absolute wisdom by the Supreme Deity, or God. Literally, "*in him we live and move and have our being*" (Acts 17:28). However little this may be outwardly apparent at our present stage of development, human beings are, in essence, divine. Our Lord Christ is regarded not only as the founder and inward inspirer of Christianity, but also as the embodiment of that empowering influence which is behind everything that is good and nourishing in all of the great religions of the world. Accordingly The Liberal Catholic Church draws the inspiration for its work from the intense faith of its members in Him. It is confidently asserted that the vitality of a church gains in proportion as its members not only commemorate a Christ who lived two thousand years ago, but strive also to serve as a vehicle for the eternal Christ who lives ever as a mighty spiritual presence in the world, guiding and sustaining his people. It accepts the promises of Christ when on earth: '*Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the consummation of the age*' (Matt. 28:20) and, '*Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*' (Matt: 18:20). It regards these promises as validating all Christian worship of whatever kind, as long as it is sincere.

The Liberal Catholic Church emphasises the value of corporate Christian life and worship. Christianity, as a system of ethics, philosophy and worship, enables us to express the love of Christ. In the power of this love, we develop that universal tolerance and concern for the well being of others, which is the cornerstone of a true religious life, and without which no system of social organisation can function properly. It leads us to recognise the inherent oneness of all life. We have ethical duties, not only to our fellow human beings, but also to all the realms of nature, which constitute our world environment. The true disciples of Christ are distinguished by their capacity for love and compassion, rather than any specific beliefs, which will inevitably change as they grow in wisdom.

It further holds that while the promise of His presence with individual believers is thus fulfilled, our Lord also appointed certain rites or sacraments (called 'mysteries' in the Eastern Church) for the greater helping of His people, to be handed down in His Church as special channels of His power and blessing. Through these means of grace He is ever



present in His Church, giving to His people the privilege of fellowship and communion with Him, guiding and protecting them at every stage of life.

Freedom of Thought

The Liberal Catholic Church leaves to its members freedom in the interpretation of Creeds, Scriptures and Traditions, and of its Liturgy and Doctrine. It asks only that differences of interpretation shall be courteously expressed. It takes this attitude, not from any indifference to truth, but because it holds that belief should be the result of individual study and intuition. Truth is not truth, nor revelation a revelation, until it is seen to be so. The inability to recognise a truth involves simply the loss of the help that such recognition would bring. As we grow into spirituality, so will we grow into the perception of truth. No mere lip profession or superficial assent of the mind can take the place of this growth. Surely the Christian religion is meant to be one of love and freedom, which should help people at their many different stages along the path of spiritual growth.

The Liberal Catholic Church considers therefore, that it acts in accordance with the spirit of its Master in welcoming gladly into its membership those who seek truth. It aims to help them to discover truth for themselves by providing opportunities for spiritual growth, that is, the realisation of each one's divine potential. Whilst it presents certain doctrinal statements, it does not exact acceptance of any dogmatic standards. It asks of its members, as a working basis of fellowship, not a profession of common belief, but the willingness to worship together through a common ritual. It also asks of its members, sincerity, purity of motive, tolerance, breadth of mind, courtesy of expression, and, a constant pursuit of high ideals.

Holy Communion

The Holy Eucharist, or Mass, is the central act of Christian worship and the focal point of this central act for the great majority is Holy Communion. The Church firmly holds the view that its Bishops and Priests offer the holy sacrifice before the Throne of God and celebrate the mysteries of Christ's love on behalf of, and together with, all present, believing that during the Prayer of Consecration the bread and wine in their natural substance become the Body and Blood of Christ (in the sense of being charged with His very Life). Through Holy Communion all are brought into close and intimate union with our Lord Christ. Through the Eucharist, each time it is celebrated, there passes forth into the world a wave of peace and strength, and this, which is the primary object of the service, is achieved whether the priest be alone in his private oratory or ministering to and assisted by a vast congregation in a magnificent cathedral. Therefore, it offers to all of us the unequalled opportunity of becoming labourers together with God, and of doing Him true and laudable service by acting as channels of His wondrous power.

The Sacraments

The Liberal Catholic Church defines the sacraments as: *An outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace given unto us, ordained by Christ Himself, as a means whereby we receive the same, and a pledge to assure us thereof* (the Anglican Book of Common Prayer). The Church holds that it is important to recognise that the grace given unto us is a free gift of grace and is not proportionate remuneration for any personal effort on our part. It is a gift of God through Christ, not the response to one's aspirations.



Holy Orders

Holy Orders is the sacrament by which, in their various degrees, ministers of the Church receive grace, power and authority to perform their sacred duties. Our Lord works through human agency and to the end that those who are chosen for this sacred ministry as Bishops, Priests or Deacons, shall become readier channels for His grace, he has ordained that they shall be linked closely with Him by this holy rite and shall thereby be empowered to administer His sacraments and act as almoners of His blessing. It is most important that people should remember that they receive all sacraments from the hand of Christ Himself, and that the officiant is but an instrument in that Hand.

The Liberal Catholic Church has a deep conviction of the reality of the Apostolic Succession, through which is transmitted the grace, power and authority which was given to the Apostles by the resurrected Christ. This grace, power and authority have been passed on down the ages by the laying on of hands, with the words and intent of consecration. There is, thus, an unbroken line from the Apostles to the Bishops of this Church.

From its understanding of the Apostolic Succession, the inner realities of the sacramental system, and the tradition of the Church throughout the ages, the Church accepts only men for Holy Orders. Men and women are embodiments and expressions of a polarity within the Godhead, who created them *in his own image... male and female created he them* (Gen. 1:27), as vessels to channel different but profoundly complementary energies and forces – both physical and super physical – in the creative life of the planet. The Church holds that this functional distinction applies in the domain of sacramental grace.

Clergy

The Clergy of the Liberal Catholic Church make no claim to spiritual or temporal domination over those who adhere to its rite. In common with the priesthood of other Churches, they hold Christ's commission to teach, but claim no authority over the individual conscience, stress being laid rather upon their function as ministers of the divine sacraments – stewards of the mysteries of God. They are ready in all reasonable ways to help those who ask or need such help. The clergy of the Liberal Catholic Church are unpaid, and may not ask a fee for any of their work in connection with the Church. They therefore normally retain secular occupations, whilst carefully excluding those forms of employment which involve cruelty or exploitation.

Worship and Liturgy

The Liberal Catholic Church believes that, through the stately ritual and language of the sacraments, with the unseen help of the angels, those who worship together are able to so turn their thoughts, emotions and aspirations to the influence of divine grace, that the church becomes a spiritual window through which God's light and love and blessing can flow more freely to all the world.

The Liberal Catholic Church uses its own liturgy, which preserves the essential sacramental form with scrupulous care, but couched in joyous, vibrant language. It affirms most emphatically that God is a loving Father, not a vengeful God. Therefore we should worship Him with joy, love, and sincerity. The central act of Christian worship is the Holy Eucharist. During this service Christ Our Lord is present among us, as, through



His priest, He pours His life and blessing into the sacramental elements. Most sense the sanctity of the moment, many feel His presence. The Holy Eucharist is not only a commemoration of Christ's life, death, and resurrection, but is also His supreme gift of Himself to His Church.

Scripture

The Liberal Catholic Church regards the scriptures, creeds and traditions of the Church as the means by which the teachings of Christ have been handed down to us, but in view of the early history of these writings, it does not regard them as literally infallible. It deduces from them certain principles of belief and conduct which it regards as fundamental, true, and sufficient, but not necessarily exhaustive as a basis of right conduct and right understanding. The scriptures contain some things that whilst not literally true, may be allegorically and spiritually understood. The scriptures of some non-Christian religions contain passages of the highest inspiration, and truly merit our closest attention. Indeed, an understanding of Eastern religions and Eastern psychology throws much light on the interpretation of Christian doctrine.

Holy Unction (Spiritual Healing)

The Liberal Catholic Church gives special attention to the ministry of healing. Although the power to heal seems to have been exercised frequently in the time of the Apostles, we cannot assume that an ability to heal is conferred at ordination, or that the gift of healing is other than a charismatic power. But, in the revivifying breath of the Holy Spirit in the grace of Absolution, and in the sacraments of Unction and the Holy Eucharist, Christ's Church has means of grace to vitalise and supplement ordinary healing methods. Healing and priestly functions are complementary. There is a growing recognition that bodily ailments are, in many instances, the outcome of maladies of the psyche, which can be treated and remedied by means of Holy Unction.

Holy Matrimony (Marriage)

Christ did not institute marriage, but the sacrament blessing such marriage. This is intended to help the parties live together in a state of love and mutual aid. When they have pledged their love and fidelity to each other in the presence of Christ, the priest blesses them in His Name. The ring, which is the symbol of their spiritual union, is also blessed. The Church holds that through the sacramental grace received at the joining together of a two in Holy Matrimony, a firm foundation is given for the building and sustaining of family, community, and society as a whole.

The Liberal Catholic Church allows its clergy to marry. It expects that both clergy and laity will respect the sanctity of their marriage vows, the couple relating to one another with loving care and respect. In times of marital difficulties, the Church offers itself, its ministers and the Sacraments as an ever-ready source of help. The Church also recognises that some marriages may fail – but holds the view that divorce should be the last possible option, not the first and easy solution. The Church does not normally refuse to re-marry divorced persons where there is a clear commitment from both parties to a stable relationship.

Baptism



Baptism is the door that gives admittance to fellowship in the *Mystical Body of Christ*, as St Paul termed the Church. If a person wishes to join The Liberal Catholic Church, and has not been previously baptised in another Church, in complete form, then that person must be baptised in The Liberal Catholic Church. If previously baptised in a complete form, then a simple service of Admission is used. If there is doubt about the validity of a previous baptism, then conditional baptism is used. In each case the person then becomes a member of The Liberal Catholic Church.

Confirmation

Confirmation is, literally, the making of the person 'firm', or strong in the life of Christ begun at Baptism. It has the two-fold effect of strengthening the body and soul, thereby allowing the soul greater power to express itself through the body. The candidate pledges him/herself to endeavour to set aside the smaller life of personal interests and to work for the common good. Having offered him/herself thereunto fully in Christ's service, the sacramental act of Confirmation follows and the candidate is sealed with the sign of the holy cross, the emblem of the life of sacrifice and service.

Confession & Absolution

A form of general Confession and Absolution is included in the public services of the Church. If a person feels compelled to make a private Confession, then a Priest will hear this and give what help he can, but this form of Confession is reserved for exceptional circumstances. This Church does not believe that Absolution rids a person of the consequences of wrongdoing, but does help to restore that inner harmony and renewal of purpose that encourages a more resolute and kindly life in future, bringing the person once more into tune with the Divine Power which flows through him or her.

The Maternal Aspect of Divinity

The Liberal Catholic Church recognises within the Fatherhood of God a maternal aspect of divinity (Gen. 1:27), which brings forth and nourishes all created life. This aspect is represented by the Holy Lady Mary, our heavenly Mother, whose tender care for all women and children in particular and in general for all who suffer, supplements the divine ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ; it is shown forth on earth in our recognition of the sanctity of life and is exemplified by the sacrifice and love of human motherhood which call forth our deep reverence and respect.

Mysticism and the Wisdom Tradition

For many centuries some individuals have reported their own truly enlightening mystical experiences, yet these are not widely understood or appreciated. Those who have entered into this state of awareness, and who have attempted to leave written accounts, are remarkably consistent in their statements. They tell of a sense of all-embracing love, of knowledge beyond any possibility of doubt that all are one, and that "I am not the I, I thought I was" – and much more. Such experiences are not confined to any era, religious group or sect, but are intimations of the inheritance awaiting all humans as we become progressively more refined and sensitive to such experience – it is part of our spiritual heritage as children of the Most High (vide Ps 82: 6 and Rom 8: 16-17).

The Liberal Catholic Church further contends that within the current excessive flow of information – and misinformation – about the inner life and the emergent faculties of



human beings, all those elements that are true and helpful for the safe unfolding of human potential were in fact known to the wisest among the ancients. These transformative teachings (i.e. the Way of Christ) are seen as a major component of the accumulated wisdom of the ages, which we refer to as the Ancient, or Ageless Wisdom, or as the Wisdom Tradition. In every great civilisation the Wisdom Tradition underpinned the popular or exoteric religions, and was accessible to those deemed ready to benefit from it (vide Lk 10: 23-24 & 1 Cor 2: 6-8). As implied, the esoteric teachings had guardians who sought to encourage and guide the worthy, while they protected the unready from all power – bestowing knowledge by a sternly maintained silence.

Science & Religion

From earliest times people have asked questions about themselves, their origins and the world around them. Initially, they were satisfied with explanations which, within the limits of their knowledge, sounded reasonable, but which in time were often found to be untrue. More recently, what we know as science has, by disciplined investigation, observation and experiment, found answers to many of the questions that we ask, questions that have multiplied with the advance of civilisation. The findings of science have frequently conflicted with earlier traditional explanations, which had often been incorporated into scriptural writings. Thus the apparent conflict between religion and science developed.

However, modern science has acknowledged, and confirmed, the interrelationship and interrelatedness of all life – there is, albeit outwardly invisible to the human eye, a unity of life. Thus within the theology of the Sacraments, the concept of the *free gift of grace* – the idea that it transcends anything in the nature of proportionate response – turns on the principle of the unity of life, the one life, the Life of God that maintains all things. The Liberal Catholic Church believes that in religion, as in science, truth is the ultimate goal to which we should all aspire. Absolute truth rests with God and cannot be known in full by humans. Life is therefore a constant progression from less true to more true. That is why The Liberal Catholic Church has adopted freedom of belief as a cornerstone of its foundations. It has a body of teaching, but recognises that individuals must find their own truth from within, rather than adopt beliefs second-hand from without. The Church must also constantly review the doctrine that it teaches. For these reasons extreme tolerance is expected from Church members.

Philosophical Background

The Liberal Catholic Church has identified, from among the various schools of Christian thought, the Platonic and Neo-Platonic as being those most closely attuned to the Wisdom Tradition. In the spirit of these schools the Church approaches questions of religion in terms of practicality: *Do these ideas, this body of teaching, withstand re-examination in the light of advancing knowledge? Do these teachings present a coherent and convincing explanation of life in all of its complexities? And again, Do these teachings conduce to human spiritual awakening and self-mastery?*

Given affirmative answers to these questions, these teachings may be said to partake of the nature of a theosophy. Theosophy (Greek for ‘divine wisdom’) differs from theology in emphasising the importance of each individual’s quest for spiritual understanding based upon personal experience (*gnosis* or *sophia*) as opposed to dogmatic imposition of particular interpretations of scripture, which may be limited by the human being’s



knowledge of the world at any one time. While certain higher teachings remain within the category of revelation, because they are beyond our grasp and attainment, others less remote are capable of verification, and even of development, by those who have awakened within themselves the necessary spiritual vision. The human being, being in essence divine, can ultimately know the deity whose life he or she shares and, by gradually unfolding through successive lives on earth the divine powers that are latent in him, can grow into a greater knowledge of the universe, which is itself the expression of that divine life. This method of approach has much in common with the ancient *Brahmavidya* of the Hindu Upanishads, or the *dhyana* (Chinese *Ch'an*, Japanese *Zen*) of the Buddhists. It finds justification in scripture. The term 'theosophy' has constantly appeared in the religious thought of both East and West and denotes not only the mysticism but also the eclectic philosophy to be found in all religions. The Liberal Catholic Church affirms that there is a body of doctrine and mystical experience common to all religions, which cannot be claimed as the exclusive possession of any. Moving within the orbit of Christianity and regarding itself as a distinctively Christian Church, it nevertheless holds that other religions are divinely inspired and that all proceed from a common source, though each may stress different aspects of this teaching; some even falling temporarily into abeyance. From a Liberal Catholic perspective, it is clear that as a Church ceases to produce leaders having direct knowledge, its teachings tend to narrow and harden; its theology become legalistic and mechanical. "*Where there is no vision the people perish*" (Pro. 29:18). The Church affirms that a theology can justify itself and be of permanent value, only in so far as it can withstand constant re-examination in the light of progress of human knowledge, and individual spiritual awakening. The Liberal Catholic Church aims at being a gnostic Church, not in the sense of reproducing any extravagances of early Christianity, but in the sense of helping its members to attain for themselves certainty of knowledge, the true gnosis of which St. Clement of Alexandria has written. The ancient path of purification, illumination and union, which in olden times brought the candidate to this certainty, continues to be open for treading. Those who tread it may still hope to attain discipleship – that direct communion with the Master, which should be the aim of every Christian. The Way of the Cross is the progressive unfoldment of the Christ-spirit within the human being and to this end, the sacraments of Christ's holy Church avail. The Liberal Catholic Church is a living Christian Church, both progressive and historical. Progressive in the sense that it maintains that forms of religion should keep pace with human growth and enlightenment; historical, in that it holds that the Church has been handed down a precious heritage from Christ himself. It behoves all our Clergy and members to live up to the high ideals in the teaching and practices of the Church to the very best of their ability.

The Arts

True artistic expression is a creative activity of the Holy Spirit and a potent factor in the moral and spiritual upliftment of humanity. The training and refining of the emotions and intuitive perceptions through the influence of art are as necessary as the development of the mind by science and philosophy.

The expression of beauty in acts of worship is most valuable in our technological and utilitarian society. The rhythm of ceremonial, the colour and form of vestments, the uplifting power of music, and the simple beauty of buildings and furnishings, are all part



of the liturgical work of the Church. Art has been called the handmaid of religion. It is in truth an integral part of worship.

Politics

The Liberal Catholic Church does not involve itself directly in politics.

Other Churches & Communion

The Liberal Catholic Church is part of the historical Church, which is truly one, despite its many outward divisions, because the one life of Christ animates and sustains it through the sacraments that He instituted. The Liberal Catholic Church therefore seeks to work in amity with all other Christian denominations. It has no wish to convert the adherents of any other church. Anyone is welcome to participate fully in Liberal Catholic services, and will not be expected to leave his or her own church. Visitors are always welcome to take communion with us. The Church's chief appeal is to those who are not members of another church. The Liberal Catholic Church is ready at all times to co-operate with other Churches in any way that may be mutually agreeable.

SUMMARY OF DOCTRINE

1. The Liberal Catholic Church teaches the existence of God, infinite, eternal, transcendent and immanent. He is the one essence from which all forms of existence are derived. *'In him we live and move and have our being'* (Acts 17:28)
2. God manifests in His universe as a Trinity, called in the Christian religion Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three Persons in one God, co-equal and co-eternal; the Father the cause of all, the Son the Word who was made flesh and dwelt among us, the Holy Spirit the life-giver, the inspirer and sanctifier.
3. Man is a complex of spirit, soul and body. The spirit of man, made in the image of God, is divine in essence. Therefore he cannot cease to exist; he is eternal and his future is one whose glory and splendour have no limit.
4. Christ ever lives as a mighty spiritual presence in the world, guiding and sustaining His people. The divinity, which was manifest in Him, is gradually being unfolded in all of us, until each shall come *'unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ'* (Eph. 4:13).
5. The world is the theatre of an ordered plan, according to which the spirit of man, by repeatedly expressing himself in varying conditions of life and experience, continually unfolds his powers. This spiritual unfoldment takes place under an inviolable law of cause and effect. *'Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap'* (Gal. 6:7). His doings in each physical incarnation largely determine his experience after death in the intermediate world (or world of purgation) and the heavenly world, and greatly influence the circumstances of his next birth. Man is a link in a vast chain of life extending from the highest to the lowest. As he helps those below him, so also he is helped by those who stand above him on the ladder of life, receiving thus a free gift of grace. There is a communion of saints, *just men made perfect* (Heb 12:23) or holy ones, who help mankind. There is a ministry of angels, who transmit God's love and vitalizing energy to all parts of His evolutionary scheme.



6. We have ethical duties to ourselves and to others. *'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment and the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and Prophets'* (Matt. 22:37-40). It is our duty to learn to discern the divine light in ourselves and in others, that light *'which lighteth every man'* (John 1:9). Because we are the children of God, we are all inseparably linked together. We all share His life. That which harms one, harms all. Hence we owe it as a duty to God, both within ourselves and in others, to live up to the highest that is in us, thereby enabling the God within to be more perfectly manifested in our lives; and also, to recognise the unity of all humanity by constant effort towards unselfishness, by love of, consideration for, and service to, our fellow human beings. The service of humanity, reverence for all life and the sacrifice of the lower self to the higher, are laws of spiritual growth.
7. Christ instituted various sacraments in which an inward and spiritual grace is given to us through an outward and visible sign. The Liberal Catholic Church recognises and administers the seven traditional sacraments, which are: Baptism, Confirmation, the Holy Eucharist, Absolution, Holy Unction, Holy Matrimony, and Holy Orders. To ensure their efficacy it guards with the greatest care the administration of all sacramental rites. The doctrine of these sacraments is sufficiently set forth in the authorised liturgy of the Church. Christ, the living head of the Church, which He founded, is the true minister of all sacraments.

Conclusion

The Liberal Catholic Church welcomes to its membership all who are seeking truth. Therefore it does not require its members to accept this *Statement of Principles and Summary of Doctrine* as a prerequisite for worship, or membership of the Church. However, the Church regards this *Statement of Principles and Summary of Doctrine* as containing the distinctive contribution of The Liberal Catholic Church to Christian thought. The Bishops are prepared to accept as candidates for ordination only those who are in general agreement with it, and are ready to apply and teach the principles embodied in this *Statement and Summary*.