

***In Persona Christi: Its Application in the Anglican Church with Reference to the Kenyan Context***

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**Abstract**

The phrase *in persona Christi* - "in the person of Christ" - expresses one of the deepest mysteries of Christian ministry: that in sacramental actions, it is Christ Himself who ministers through the Church's ordained servants. This paper explores the application of this doctrine within the Anglican Church, with a particular focus on the Kenyan context. It argues that Anglican theology, shaped by the Reformation's *via media*, holds a distinctive balance between sacramental objectivity and communal participation. The priest, acting *in persona Christi*, is neither a mystical intermediary nor a mere functionary, but a representative servant through whom Christ's reconciling grace flows to the faithful. Historically, the concept emerged from Catholic teaching affirmed by the Council of Trent, was critiqued and reinterpreted by the Reformers, and found renewed expression in Anglicanism's synthesis of Scripture, tradition, and reason. In Kenya, the doctrine is not abstract but embodied in pastoral realities; single mothers seeking acceptance, elderly polygamists walking paths of conversion, and believers living with HIV longing for healing at the Eucharistic table. Acting *in persona Christi* thus calls clergy to embody Christ's hospitality, truth, and mercy amid cultural diversity and moral complexity. The study concludes that this doctrine anchors the Church's sacramental life in Christ's faithfulness, nurtures communal priesthood, and inspires servant leadership rooted in the Gospel's call to reconciliation.

Keywords: *In persona Christi*, Anglican Church, Kenya, priesthood, Eucharist, pastoral theology

### 1: Introduction & Historical–Theological Foundations

Few theological expressions carry as much mystery and pastoral consequence as the Latin phrase *in persona Christi*, meaning “in the person of Christ.” In Christian theology, particularly within the sacramental tradition, this phrase signifies the sacred reality that when a priest celebrates the Eucharist or pronounces absolution, it is Christ Himself who acts through that minister (Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC], 1994). The priest is not simply repeating ancient words or performing ritual gestures; he is a vessel through whom Christ’s saving work continues in the present.

This understanding assures the faithful that the efficacy of the sacraments does not depend upon the minister’s personal holiness, eloquence, or status. It shifts attention from human weakness to divine faithfulness. In every liturgical action, the congregation encounters not the personality of the celebrant but the presence of Christ, who continues His ministry through the Church (Ramsey, 1972).

Within Anglicanism, the doctrine is received with characteristic balance. The Anglican Communion - shaped by the English Reformation - embraces a *via media*, a middle way between two extremes: clericalism, which over-exalts the priest’s role, and functionalism, which reduces ministry to administration. The Anglican priest therefore acts *in persona Christi* not as a mystical intermediary detached from the people, but as a representative of both Christ and the gathered Church, holding together heaven and earth in the Eucharistic act.

In the Kenyan context, this theology becomes incarnate in vibrant worship and diverse communities. Parishes reflect the realities of everyday life - farmers seeking rain, widows mourning loved ones, youth navigating unemployment, and parents praying over school fees. Here, the priest is a shepherd who walks alongside the flock, interpreting Scripture amid local

struggles and mediating divine compassion in cultural complexity (Mbiti, 1969; Mugambi, 1995).

This section traces the doctrine's emergence from Catholic roots, through Reformation critique, to Anglican synthesis, and finally, its Kenyan pastoral expression. In doing so, it affirms that *in persona Christi* is not a foreign import, but a living truth embodied in the Church's ministry across contexts.

### **Catholic Origins: Christ's Presence Through the Priest**

The clearest articulation of *in persona Christi* appears in Catholic theology. The Council of Trent (1545–1563 CE) affirmed that in the Mass, “the same Christ who offered Himself once on the altar of the Cross” is made present sacramentally (Council of Trent, 2011). The priest, therefore, stands not by his own power but as an icon and representative of Christ the High Priest. If the Eucharist represents the one sacrifice of Calvary, then the minister acts *in persona Christi* so that Christ Himself remains the true celebrant.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church captures this vision: “In the ecclesial service of the ordained minister, it is Christ Himself who is present to His Church as Head of His Body” (CCC, 1994, §1548). Ordination permanently configures the priest to Christ, enabling him to speak and act in His name (§1581). This configuration assures believers that sacramental grace flows from Christ's faithfulness rather than human merit. As Augustine taught, the sacraments operate *ex opere operato* - by the work performed - signifying divine reliability even amid human frailty.

In Kenya, where clergy often serve several congregations across wide rural parishes, this doctrine brings deep assurance. The people know that even if their priest is transferred or absent, the sacraments remain valid, for Christ Himself presides through His Church.

**Reformation Responses: The Priesthood of All Believers**

The Protestant Reformers challenged medieval views that overemphasized the priest's role as a sacred mediator. Martin Luther insisted on the priesthood of all believers, teaching that all baptized Christians share in Christ's priestly identity, while ordained ministers serve by proclamation and administration of the sacraments (Luther, 1962). Ordination, therefore, is not an ontological elevation but a vocational commission to public service.

John Calvin developed this further, describing ministers as instruments through whom the Holy Spirit distributes grace to the faithful (McPartlan, 2010). Both Reformers emphasized Christ's promise as the foundation of sacramental efficacy. The minister's words are effectual not because of personal status, but because Christ is faithful to His Word.

This corrective preserved the centrality of grace while restoring dignity to the laity. In contemporary Kenyan Anglicanism, where lay readers, catechists, and evangelists sustain parish life, Luther's insight resonates powerfully, the whole Church sharing in Christ's mission.

**The Anglican *Via Media*: Representative Participation**

The Church of England, navigating between Rome and Geneva, articulated a mediating stance. The Thirty-Nine Articles describe sacraments as "effectual signs of grace" (Article XXV) and affirm their validity despite the minister's unworthiness (Article XXVI). Thus, the focus remains on Christ as the true actor, not on the celebrant's virtue (Church of England, 2008).

Richard Hooker (1977) synthesized sacramental realism with ecclesial order, defining ministers as necessary instruments for the Church's edification. They are neither mystical hierophants nor mere functionaries but representatives through whom Christ acts.

Later Anglican theologians expanded this view. Michael Ramsey (1972) called the priest "a sign of Christ's presence," while Rowan Williams (2014) emphasized Eucharistic presidency as representative participation - Christ acts in and through His Church's ministers. This vision

resists both clericalism and minimalism, integrating sacramental seriousness with communal identity.

In Kenya, this balance is embodied in participatory liturgies. The priest leads as part of the congregation, not above it, guiding song, prayer, and thanksgiving. The presidency becomes a sign of unity, reminding all that the Eucharist is Christ's table where every believer finds a place.

### **Scripture, Tradition, and Kenyan Reception**

Anglican discernment rests on the threefold cord of Scripture, tradition, and reason. Yet in practice, both tradition and reason are accountable to Scripture, which remains the supreme rule of faith. Kenyan clergy, therefore, approach pastoral dilemmas - whether admitting a repentant single mother to Communion or guiding an elderly polygamist toward discipleship - by reading Scripture within the Church's teaching and the lived experiences of God's people.

In this discernment, *in persona Christi* serves as a pastoral compass. It reminds priests that the altar is Christ's table, not a platform for judgment or exclusion. Yet it also safeguards truth: hospitality without holiness becomes sentimentality. Acting *in persona Christi* requires both mercy and moral clarity, exercised in consultation with bishops and synods for the unity of the Church.

Thus, Anglican theology in Kenya integrates doctrinal fidelity with contextual compassion. The priest who presides at the Eucharist embodies Christ's reconciling presence, welcoming, healing, and transforming the community into a living sign of grace.

## **2: Historical and Theological Foundations**

### **Clerical Identity in Anglican Theology**

In Anglican theology, clerical identity is not defined by superiority but by service. The priest stands as a visible sign of Christ's continuing ministry in the world, embodying the kenotic

pattern of the Lord who “emptied himself, taking the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:7, New Revised Standard Version). This theological foundation rejects notions of sacerdotal privilege and instead affirms that priesthood is participation in Christ’s own self-giving love. As Michael Ramsey (1972) reminds us, “the priest is called to represent the humility and compassion of Christ, not to dominate but to serve.”

The early Church Fathers, including Augustine and John Chrysostom, also conceived the priesthood as a pastoral vocation of burden-bearing and care. Augustine famously described his role as “with you I am a Christian, for you I am a bishop” (Sermon 340), emphasizing solidarity with the laity rather than distance from them (Augustine p.184). Chrysostom, in “On the Priesthood,” underscored the awesome responsibility of ministry, calling it “the art of arts and the science of sciences.” (Chrysostom, 1994, p.121). The priest thus stands among the people, not above them, to guide them toward holiness.

Within the Anglican Communion, this identity is expressed through the balance of representative ministry and shared discipleship. The priest is ordained from among the baptized, embodying the Church’s faith while nurturing the royal priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9). This vision resists both clericalism and functionalism. The priest is not a spiritual elite dispensing grace, nor a mere administrator of rites, but a servant who holds the tension between divine mystery and human need (Hooker, 1977; Sykes, 1998).

In Kenya, clerical identity carries additional pastoral weight. Communities expect their priests to be moral exemplars, educators, and agents of social cohesion. In regions marked by poverty, corruption, or ethnic tension, the priest becomes a sign of integrity and hope. Acting *in persona Christi* calls clergy to embody Christ’s compassion in tangible ways such as visiting the sick, defending the vulnerable, and mediating reconciliation among estranged families. The

priest's identity is thus relational, contextual, and incarnational – summed up in Mbiti's affirmation that "Wherever the African is, there is his religion." (Mbiti, 1969, p. 1). As Mugambi says "The church in Africa ought to become an institution of service and witness in the home, the village, the workplace — in short in every situation of actual life." (Mugambi, 1995, p. 140).

### **Ordination and Ecclesial Representation**

Anglican ordination is both a gift of the Spirit and a commission from the Church. Through the laying on of hands, the bishop invokes the Holy Spirit to equip the ordinand for ministry, while the congregation bears witness to the call. This act, rich in apostolic symbolism, signifies continuity with the Church's historic faith and participation in Christ's eternal priesthood (Ramsey, 1972).

However, Anglican theology resists any notion of ordination conferring ontological superiority. Richard Hooker (1977) described the priesthood not as an essence but as an office - ordered service within the body of Christ. The ordained act *in persona Christi* precisely because they stand *in persona ecclesiae* - in the person of the Church. They speak the Church's prayer, declare God's forgiveness, and preside at the Eucharist not by personal right but by ecclesial commission.

This representative dimension is twofold. First, the priest represents Christ to the Church, acting as a visible sign of His presence in word and sacrament. Second, he represents the Church to Christ, gathering the community's petitions and thanksgiving before the throne of grace. In every liturgical act, the priest embodies this dual movement of mediation and participation.

In Kenya, ordination often unfolds as a communal celebration, enriched by ululations, singing, and traditional gestures of blessing. These cultural expressions reflect African ecclesiology, where vocation is affirmed by the whole community. The priest is sent forth not as an isolated figure but as part of a collegium - working under episcopal oversight and alongside

lay leaders. This reinforces Anglicanism's emphasis on shared ministry, where discernment and decision-making occur in synodical collaboration (Sykes, 1998).

Ultimately, ordination embeds the priest within the life of the people. The cleric's authority is not self-derived but relational - exercised through accountability to the bishop, partnership with the laity, and fidelity to the Gospel.

### **The Eucharist: Locus of Representation**

The Eucharist is the supreme theatre of *in persona Christi*. When the celebrant pronounces the dominical words, "This is my body... This is my blood," he does not merely recall a past event but enacts Christ's living presence through sacramental sign. Anglican theology, shaped by both Reformation insight and catholic continuity, affirms that Christ Himself is the true celebrant at every Eucharist (Church of England, 2008; Williams, 2014).

Here, the priest's role is representative participation. Acting *in persona Christi*, he lends voice and hands to the Lord's self-offering, while simultaneously giving voice to the Church's praise and intercession. This double representation - Christ to Church, Church to Christ - mirrors the mystery of the Incarnation, where divinity and humanity meet without confusion or separation (McPartlan, 2010).

Anglican-Roman Catholic dialogue (ARCIC) has deepened this understanding. Both traditions affirm the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and the instrumental role of ordained ministry. Yet Anglicanism retains its *via media*, refusing to define the mystery in metaphysical terms while confessing its reality in faith. The priest's presidency is thus sacramental and symbolic - uniting the community around Christ's table without eclipsing the corporate nature of worship (ARCIC, 1981).

In the Kenyan context, this theology takes vibrant liturgical form. Drums, local choruses, and vernacular prayers weave the Eucharist into the fabric of daily life. The priest, vested yet



approachable, leads not as a distant hierarch but as a servant-host, gathering the faithful into one Body. In rural parishes and urban cathedrals alike, the Eucharist becomes a site of reconciliation where divisions of tribe, class, or gender dissolve in shared thanksgiving. Bread and wine thus become both signs and instruments of the Kingdom's unity (Mbiti, 1969; Mugambi, 1995).

### **The Word, the Table, and the World**

In Anglican worship, Word and sacrament form an inseparable whole. The proclamation of Scripture and the celebration of the Eucharist together reveal the fullness of Christ's presence. The priest who preaches the Gospel must also embody it at the altar; the one who breaks bread must also break barriers in society. Acting *in persona Christi* thus extends beyond liturgy into the rhythms of pastoral life and mission.

This integration reflects the Church's participation in the *Missio Dei* - the mission of God. Every Eucharist begins with the Word proclaimed, moves to the Table shared, and culminates in the sending forth of the faithful: "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord." The dismissal is not a conclusion but a commission, empowering believers to live eucharistically in the world - feeding the hungry, reconciling enemies, and embodying Christ's mercy (Lambeth Conference, 1988).

Kenyan theologians such as John Mbiti (1969) and Jesse Mugambi (1995) have underscored that African Christianity must unite faith and action. Mugambi's theology of reconstruction calls the Church to rebuild social and moral order after colonialism and conflict. When the priest acts *in persona Christi*, he not only consecrates elements but also consecrates communities, transforming villages, schools, and marketplaces into altars of justice and hope.

Thus, the Word, the Table, and the World form a trinitarian rhythm of ministry: proclamation (truth), celebration (grace), and mission (love). The priest stands at the intersection of these dimensions, bridging heaven and earth, doctrine and life. In the Kenyan Anglican

experience, such integration ensures that liturgy births service, and theology blossoms into transformation.

### **3: *In Persona Christi* in Anglican Sacramental Theology and Pastoral–Ecclesiological Dimensions**

#### **Anglican Sacramental Theology: Christ Acting Through the Church**

In Anglican theology, sacramental life is the heartbeat of the Church's worship and witness. Rooted in the incarnational principle - "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14) - sacraments embody the reality that divine grace is mediated through visible signs. This theology affirms that God uses material means - bread, wine, water, oil - to communicate spiritual realities. The Church, as Christ's Body, participates in this sacramental economy, becoming the locus through which Christ continues His redemptive work in the world (Hooker, 1977).

Within this vision, the priest acts *in persona Christi*, not as a magician wielding power but as an instrument through whom Christ Himself acts. As Michael Ramsey (1972) observes, "The priesthood of the Church is the priesthood of Christ in His people; the priesthood of the minister is the priesthood of Christ for His people." This theological framework safeguards two truths: first, that the sacraments are Christ's actions among His people; and second, that the priest's role is representative and participatory, not autonomous.

Anglican sacramental theology draws from both Catholic realism and Reformation critique. From the Catholic tradition, it inherits the conviction that sacraments are effectual signs of grace - real encounters with Christ (Council of Trent, 2011). From the Reformation, it receives a renewed emphasis on faith, Word, and the primacy of grace. Thus, when the priest stands at the altar, he acts not by personal virtue but by divine commission, ensuring that the faithful's

confidence rests not in the frailty of the minister but in the fidelity of Christ (Ramsey, 1972; Williams, 2014).

In the Kenyan Anglican experience, this theology is tangible. The priest who lifts the chalice in a mud-walled church in Turkana or a grand cathedral in Nairobi does so in continuity with Christ's own self-offering. Regardless of social setting, the Eucharist remains the same mystery: Christ Himself feeding His people. Such universality ensures that even in marginalized contexts, the sacraments proclaim the unchanging faithfulness of God.

### **Pastoral Dimensions of Representation**

To act *in persona Christi* is to embody the pastoral heart of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. To paraphrase Michael Ramsey, the 100<sup>th</sup> Archbishop of Canterbury, a priest's work at the altar is closely connected to caring for people. What is celebrated in Holy Communion is meant to be lived out through visiting parishioners, offering guidance, teaching, and helping to restore relationships. The meaning of giving oneself for others is shown daily in a priest's service, presence, and prayer for the people (Ramsey, 1972). Ramsey says, "*The words 'for you' which the priest utters at the altar are words which must rule his life day by day.*" (Ramsey, 1972, p. 22). This means that the words that Christ said is said by him through Christ that is in him.

In Anglican spirituality, pastoral ministry is not merely functional but deeply incarnational. The priest, standing in persona Christi, is a visible reminder that God's grace meets people amid their struggles. Whether offering absolution to the penitent, anointing the sick, or blessing the poor, the minister participates in Christ's compassionate outreach. John Chrysostom's admonition still rings true that the priest must be pure as though standing among angels (*On the Priesthood*, Book III, Section 4; Chrysostom, 1994, p. 55).

In Kenya, pastoral representation often means engaging with communities navigating poverty, illness, or brokenness. Priests serve not only as liturgical presidents but also as

counsellors, educators, and advocates. Acting *in persona Christi* thus requires a fusion of theological depth and social awareness. A priest who celebrates the Eucharist must also confront injustice, comfort the grieving, and nurture holistic transformation (Mugambi, 1995).

This pastoral identity also carries a profound moral dimension. Because the priest represents Christ's presence, integrity of life becomes essential to credibility. The faithful expect coherence between the Gospel preached and the life lived. Thus, *in persona Christi* challenges ministers to embody holiness not as perfectionism but as faithfulness - walking humbly with God and the people they serve (Micah 6:8).

### **Ecclesiological Implications**

The doctrine of *in persona Christi* has far-reaching implications for Anglican ecclesiology. It affirms that ministry is not an individual possession but a corporate reality rooted in the Body of Christ. The ordained minister serves within, not above, the community of believers. As Stephen Sykes (1998) asserts, Anglicanism resists clerical isolation by emphasizing collegiality and the priesthood of all believers.

Ordained ministry, therefore, exists to enable the Church's corporate priesthood. The celebrant presides so that the whole congregation may participate in Christ's offering of praise and thanksgiving. This understanding shapes Anglican liturgy, where lay readers proclaim Scripture, intercessors voice communal prayers, and choirs lead worship. The priest acts as conductor of a symphony whose melody belongs to the people of God.

In Kenya, where parishes often rely on lay leadership due to clergy shortages, this ecclesiology is vividly enacted. Catechists, evangelists, and Mothers' Union leaders extend pastoral care in partnership with clergy. The priest acts *in persona Christi* not by monopolizing ministry but by coordinating it - ensuring that every baptized member discovers their vocation within the mission of God.

Furthermore, Anglican polity - expressed through synods, councils, and episcopal oversight - embodies shared discernment. Authority is exercised in communion, reflecting Christ's own servant leadership. Thus, *in persona Christi* is not a solitary role but a relational vocation, lived out in collegiality with bishops, deacons, and lay faithful (Ramsey, 1972; Sykes, 1998).

### **Integration of Word, Sacrament, and Mission**

For Anglicanism, the unity of Word and sacrament anchors its theology of mission. The priest who preaches and presides does so *in persona Christi* - not only within the sanctuary but also in the public square. Every proclamation and celebration propels the Church into the world's pain and promise.

This integration reflects the holistic vision of the *Missio Dei*. Each Eucharist begins with the Word proclaimed, centers on the Table shared, and ends with the sending forth of the people. The dismissal - "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord" - is a call to enact the Gospel in workplaces, classrooms, and marketplaces. The sacrament of the altar thus becomes a sacrament of life: what is consecrated in worship must be lived in witness (Williams, 2014).

African theologians reinforce this integration. Mbiti (1969) emphasizes that African Christianity is inherently communal - faith must touch economics, family, and governance. Mugambi (1995) calls for a theology of reconstruction, where salvation embraces both spiritual renewal and social transformation. For Kenyan priests acting *in persona Christi*, this means translating liturgy into livelihood - advocating for justice, promoting environmental stewardship, and fostering peace.

Ultimately, *in persona Christi* in Anglican sacramental theology is not confined to ritual words but extends into the fabric of discipleship. The priest's life becomes an enacted sermon, the parish a living Eucharist, and the Church a sacramental sign of God's reconciling love.

Through this integration, theology becomes mission, and worship becomes witness - a rhythm that sustains the Anglican Church of Kenya as it embodies Christ's presence in a broken yet hopeful world.

#### **4: Application in the Kenyan Context**

##### **Theology with an African Face**

The doctrine of *in persona Christi* only becomes fully alive when translated into lived reality. In the Kenyan context, theology must speak the language of soil, story, and struggle. As John Mbiti (1969, p. 1) notes, Africans are “notoriously religious,” and religion “permeates all departments of life.” For Anglicans in Kenya, this means that faith cannot be confined to Sunday liturgies or cathedral precincts - it must take on the texture of daily life, community relations, and moral formation. The African worldview is communal rather than individualistic. People discover their identity through relationships in family, clan, and community. Salvation, therefore, is not merely a private affair but a restoration of harmony between God, humanity, and creation. Acting *in persona Christi*, the priest embodies Christ's reconciling presence in this network of relationships. The altar thus becomes a table of kinship where all are invited to find healing and belonging. This incarnational theology demands that priests read Scripture alongside the cries of their people. The pastoral question is never abstract: “How does the Gospel sound in the ear of a widow evicted from ancestral land? What does the Eucharist mean to a young man searching for employment in Nairobi's informal settlements?” To act *in persona Christi* here is to listen deeply, to interpret suffering through the lens of the Cross, and to mediate hope through word and sacrament. The priest stands, therefore, not as a distant ritualist but as a fellow sojourner - an icon of God's compassion walking with the community toward wholeness. As Mugambi avers, “African Christian theology must be developed within the life of the community and for the sake of that community.” (Mugambi, 1995, p. 43)

**Case Study 1: Single Mothers and Eucharistic Welcome**

In many Kenyan communities, single motherhood continues to carry cultural stigma. Social norms often assign moral blame to the woman while overlooking the man's responsibility. Consequently, some single mothers approach the Church with hesitation, fearing rejection at the altar rail. Yet, the Gospels consistently reveal Jesus' hospitality toward those burdened by shame. He dined with tax collectors and sinners, spoke peace to the woman caught in adultery, and turned social outcasts into witnesses of grace (Luke 7:36–50; John 8:1–11). Acting *in persona Christi*, therefore, calls the priest to mediate this same inclusive mercy. The Eucharist is not a prize for the perfect but medicine for the wounded (cf. Mark 2:17). Admitting a single mother to Holy Communion is a pastoral act that reaffirms her dignity as a child of God. It proclaims that grace is greater than guilt. Yet mercy must walk hand in hand with discipleship. The priest's role does not end at the altar. Continued pastoral guidance, mentorship through the Mothers' Union, and teaching on Christian family life form part of the restorative journey. Several Kenyan dioceses, including Butere, Nairobi, and Maseno South, now host fellowship groups for single parents, combining Bible study, vocational training, and mutual support. These ministries embody *in persona Christi* at the communal level - creating spaces where forgiveness bears fruit in transformed lives.

**Case Study 2: Elderly Polygamists and the Path of Mercy**

Polygamy remains a pastoral reality in parts of Kenya. Many elders entered plural marriages before hearing the Gospel or before missionary engagement reached their villages. The question for clergy is not merely legal but deeply theological: How can grace be proclaimed without undermining Christian teaching on marriage? The Lambeth Conference (1988) offered balanced counsel, allowing baptized polygamists to receive Communion provided they take no additional wives. This recognizes both the permanence of family bonds and the call to

monogamous discipleship. In dioceses such as Eldoret, Kitale Kitui and Maseno South, bishops and priests have implemented this guidance with pastoral sensitivity. After careful catechesis, such believers are admitted to the Eucharist as a sign of inclusion and hope. Acting *in persona Christi* here means mediating grace without moral compromise. The priest becomes a bridge - honoring cultural history while pointing families toward the eschatological ideal of Christ's faithful love for His Bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:25–32). In this way, Anglican pastoral theology in Kenya embodies both realism and redemption. The Eucharist becomes a school of grace where imperfect beginnings can mature into holy endings.

### **Case Study 3: HIV/AIDS and the Eucharist of the Wounded**

The HIV/AIDS pandemic of the 1990s posed immense pastoral challenges. Fear and misinformation led some congregations to exclude infected persons from full participation in the sacraments. Many believers, internalizing stigma, withdrew from communal worship altogether. Priests acting *in persona Christi* confronted this fear not with policy but with presence. By sharing the common chalice with those living with HIV/AIDS, they proclaimed that Christ's touch heals rather than contaminates (Mark 1:40–42). In this gesture, the Eucharist became a sacrament of solidarity - declaring that all members of Christ's body share one bread, one cup, and one hope. Congregations such as St. Stephen's Jogoo Road developed comprehensive ministries: counseling, nutritional support, antiretroviral therapy access, and prayer fellowships. Each Eucharistic celebration became a living testimony that the Church is a hospital for sinners and a sanctuary for the suffering. Such ministries remind Kenyan Anglicans that to act *in persona Christi* is to touch wounds with reverence, to stand against stigma, and to transform fear into fellowship.

### **Case Study 4: Admission to Communion after Baptism**



The Anglican Church of Kenya's Prayer, Our Modern Services (ACK, 2002), allows newly baptized Christians to receive Holy Communion before confirmation when pastoral need arises. This practice reflects an ancient rhythm, unity between font and table. In vast rural dioceses, where episcopal visits may be infrequent, withholding Communion until confirmation risks fragmenting initiation. Acting *in persona Christi Capitis et Ecclesiae* - in the person of Christ the Head and the Church - the priest welcomes the baptized to the Eucharist, affirming their full incorporation into the Body of Christ (Githiga, 2001). However, this welcome must be accompanied by ongoing catechesis. Post-baptismal teaching deepens understanding, linking sacramental participation with moral formation and mission. In the Kenyan setting, where faith communities grow rapidly, such pastoral flexibility ensures that grace is not delayed while discipleship continues to mature.

### **Broader Implications for Kenyan Anglicanism**

a) Sacramental Mission – Acting *in persona Christi* transforms the altar into a launching pad for mission. The priest who consecrates bread must also challenge systems that deny daily bread. Worship propels witness. Inspired by Mugambi's (1995) theology of reconstruction, clergy are called to engage in civic holiness - advocating for justice, ecological stewardship, and peacebuilding. The Eucharistic "Amen" must echo in social action.

b) Inculturation and Integrity – Kenyan Anglican liturgies increasingly weave African songs, rhythms, and gestures into worship. Acting *in persona Christi* within these settings requires discernment. The priest becomes a theologian of culture - embracing what reveals Christ while rejecting what obscures Him. Drums and dances may express joy in the Lord, yet syncretistic invocations must be reinterpreted through the Gospel (Mbiti, 1969; Githiga, 2001). True inculturation is not cultural accommodation but Christ-centered transformation.

c) Clergy Formation – Theological Colleges such as St. Paul’s Limuru, Kabare, Kapsabet and Carlile College now integrate contextual theology, pastoral psychology, and community development into ministerial training. Ordinands learn that *in persona Christi* encompasses not only sacramental competence but emotional intelligence, cultural fluency, and prophetic courage. The formation of clergy in Kenya thus mirrors the holistic nature of Christ’s own ministry - teacher, healer, and shepherd united in love. In these diverse applications, *in persona Christi* emerges not as abstract doctrine but as living reality. It animates pastoral decisions, shapes worship, and fuels mission. In the Kenyan Church, it invites clergy and laity alike to encounter Christ at every altar and in every act of mercy - until the day when all creation gathers at the heavenly banquet, where Christ Himself is both Host and Feast.

### **5: Broader Theological Reflections and Implications**

#### **Theological Integration: Word, Sacrament, and Character**

The doctrine of *in persona Christi* invites an integrated vision of Christian ministry that unites belief, practice, and disposition. In Anglican theology, orthodoxy (right belief) cannot be separated from orthopraxy (right action) and orthopathy (right disposition). The priest who stands *in persona Christi* at the altar must also embody the Gospel in word and deed; theology finds its fullest expression when proclaimed, enacted, and lived (Ramsey, 1972).

This integration flows from the Incarnation itself. In Jesus Christ, the Word became flesh; in the Eucharist, that Word continues to take flesh in the Church’s life. Consequently, sacramental ministry cannot be reduced to ritual performance. It is the convergence of truth, grace, and character - what Augustine called *veritas, gratia, et caritas*. The celebrant’s life must mirror the mystery he proclaims.

Within the Kenyan context, where clergy often serve as moral beacons in communities wrestling with corruption or moral ambiguity, *in persona Christi* demands visible integrity. The

people's trust in sacramental grace is strengthened when the minister's conduct resonates with the Gospel he articulates. Yet Anglican theology simultaneously guards against moral perfectionism through the doctrine of *ex opere operato*: the efficacy of the sacraments rests on Christ's faithfulness, not clerical virtue (Hooker, 1977). Grace flows through frail vessels; the treasure remains Christ (2 Cor 4:7).

Thus, theological integration calls priests to holiness of life, humility in leadership, and constancy in prayer. The daily office, acts of mercy, and contemplative silence together nurture the interior life from which authentic ministry springs. Acting *in persona Christi* is therefore not an occasional role but a continual conversion - a lifelong shaping of heart and habit after the likeness of the Servant Lord (Phil 2:5-11).

### **Anglican Identity and Ecclesial Balance**

The Anglican tradition's *via media* - its middle way - offers a balanced framework for understanding *in persona Christi*. Holding together Scripture, tradition, and reason, Anglicanism resists both sacerdotal excess and reductionist functionalism. The priest neither monopolizes divine grace nor becomes a mere liturgical coordinator; he serves as a representative of Christ within the communion of saints (Sykes, 1998).

This representative identity is corporate, not individualistic. The ordained minister embodies the Church's faith before God and God's mercy before the Church. Such dual representation sustains the sacramental economy without eclipsing the baptismal priesthood of all believers. In every Eucharist, Christ's once-for-all self-offering is re-presented through the Church's thanksgiving.

In Kenya, Anglican identity is continually refined by plural realities - historical missionary legacies, ecumenical interactions, and indigenous expressions of spirituality. The *via media* here entails cultural discernment: affirming communal strengths such as hospitality and

respect for elders while confronting distortions like patriarchy or ethnic exclusion. The priest acting *in persona Christi* must thus interpret both Scripture and culture through the lens of the Gospel, embodying Christ's reconciling authority amid diversity (Mbiti, 1969).

Ecclesial balance also manifests in collegial governance. Synods, diocesan councils, and parish committees express Anglican conviction that authority is shared. The priest's presidency at the altar mirrors - not replaces - the bishop's oversight and the laity's participation. Such conciliarity reflects the Trinitarian communion in which unity and distinction coexist.

### **Moral and Spiritual Formation**

To act *in persona Christi* is fundamentally an ethical and spiritual vocation. The priest is called to transparency before God and the community, cultivating virtues that sustain ministry: faith, hope, charity, prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Moral credibility enables sacramental authenticity; hypocrisy undermines proclamation.

Kenyan congregations often look to their clergy as exemplars in matters of family life, stewardship, and civic responsibility. When priests model integrity - eschewing favoritism, financial impropriety, or tribal bias - they embody the righteousness of Christ they proclaim. Conversely, lapses in conduct erode confidence in the Church's witness. Hence seminaries must wed theological instruction with character formation through mentorship, accountability, and disciplined prayer (Githiga, 2001).

Spiritual formation also entails kenosis - the self-emptying love of Christ. The priest's authority is cruciform, exercised through service rather than domination. Washing feet, sharing meals with the poor, or accompanying the bereaved become extensions of Eucharistic presidency. In these gestures, doctrine is enfleshed; the chalice lifted on Sunday is mirrored by compassion poured out on Monday.

Moreover, *in persona Christi* invites continual repentance. Clergy, like all believers, stand in need of grace. Regular confession, retreat, and spiritual direction sustain humility. Such practices anchor the minister's identity not in role or recognition but in "belovedness" before God.

### **Missional Ecclesiology: From Altar to Society**

The Eucharist propels the Church outward. Every "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord" commissions disciples to embody what they have received. Acting *in persona Christi* therefore entails extending Christ's reconciling work beyond liturgical walls into economic, political, and ecological arenas (Williams, 2014).

In Kenya, where inequality, ethnic tension, and environmental degradation persist, priests are summoned to prophetic engagement. Celebrating the Eucharist while ignoring systemic injustice would betray its meaning. The broken bread must critique broken systems; the shared cup must inspire shared responsibility. Thus, the altar becomes a launching pad for advocacy - championing fair governance, sustainable agriculture, and peacebuilding across communities.

This missional vision resonates with Mugambi's (1995) theology of reconstruction, which urges African Christianity to rebuild societies scarred by colonialism and conflict. The Church, nourished by Word and sacrament, participates in God's project of renewal. Parish development initiatives - tree-planting, literacy programs, micro-finance groups - are not secular add-ons but sacramental signs of the Kingdom breaking in.

Furthermore, Anglican ecclesiology emphasizes partnership. Priests collaborate with lay professionals, NGOs, and government agencies, witnessing that salvation encompasses all spheres of life. Acting *in persona Christi*, the priest bridges sacred and secular, revealing that every just act echoes divine grace.

### **Ecumenical and Global Implications**

The theology of *in persona Christi* positions Anglicanism as a valuable interlocutor in global ecumenical dialogue. Through the Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), Anglicans and Catholics have discovered substantial convergence regarding ministry and Eucharist, affirming that ordained priests serve as instruments of Christ’s presence while remaining within the corporate life of the Church (ARCIC, 1981). This shared understanding nurtures mutual recognition and cooperation in mission.

With Protestant traditions, Anglicanism offers a mediating voice. It upholds the priesthood of all believers while retaining visible, ordered ministry. Such balance can model reconciliation in contexts where debates over authority and sacrament divide.

Globally, African Anglicanism contributes experiential depth: theology forged in communities of resilience. Kenyan reflections on *in persona Christi* - shaped by poverty, pluralism, and vibrant spirituality - remind the wider Communion that ministry is both sacramental and prophetic. The Christ who presides at the altar also walks dusty roads, feeding crowds and confronting injustice.

In an era of secularization and clerical scandal, this doctrine re-centers hope on Christ Himself. The Church’s credibility does not depend on flawless ministers but on faithful participation in the Lord’s mission. Every act of presidency becomes a confession: “Not to us, O Lord, but to your name give glory” (Ps 115:1).

### **Summary Reflection**

Ultimately, *in persona Christi* gathers theology, spirituality, and mission into a single thread: Christ acting through His Church for the life of the world. For Anglicans in Kenya, this truth is not confined to cathedrals but sings through village choirs, echoes in social reform, and kneels beside the suffering. The priest who stands *in persona Christi* becomes sign, servant, and

shepherd - pointing beyond himself to the One who still says, “I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:27).

## **6: Conclusion – In Persona Christi as the Face of Christ’s Reconciling Presence Re-centering the Mystery of Christ’s Agency**

The doctrine of *in persona Christi* anchors Anglican sacramental theology in the living agency of Christ Himself. At every altar and font, the Church proclaims that grace flows not from human worthiness but from divine faithfulness. This conviction steadies faith amid the fragility of ministers and institutions: the Christ who once broke bread in the upper room now feeds His people through ordained servants. By safeguarding the truth that Christ is the principal actor in every sacramental encounter, Anglicanism restores confidence that salvation is God’s gift before it is humanity’s achievement (Ramsey, 1960; Hooker, 1977).

### **A Kenyan Expression of the *Via Media***

In the Kenyan Church, *in persona Christi* assumes tangible form within communities marked by vibrancy and vulnerability. Clergy minister in settings where poverty, cultural plurality, and moral contestations intertwine. Acting *in persona Christi* thus means embodying both hospitality and holiness - welcoming the wounded while summoning them to transformation. Whether guiding single mothers toward restored dignity, accompanying elderly polygamists in grace, or embracing persons living with HIV/AIDS, the priest mirrors the reconciling Christ who dines with sinners yet calls them into new life (Mbiti, 1970; Mugambi, 1995).

This incarnational approach exemplifies the Anglican *via media*: a path holding mercy and truth in creative tension. The priest neither absolves without repentance nor condemns without compassion. In contextual discernment - tested by Scripture, illumined by tradition, and

informed by pastoral reason - the Church discovers how eternal grace meets temporal circumstance (Church of England, 2008).

### **From Altar to Marketplace**

The Eucharist sends forth a missionary people. Every dismissal - “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord” - propels the baptized into classrooms, farms, and offices as witnesses of reconciliation. Acting *in persona Christi* therefore extends beyond liturgical presidency to civic participation. Priests become catalysts for justice, advocates for ecological stewardship, and companions of the poor. In a nation confronting inequality and corruption, sacramental authenticity demands social responsibility (Williams, 2014).

Initiatives such as parish-based micro-finance groups, peace caravans, and tree-planting liturgies embody what Mugambi (1995) terms theology of reconstruction - a spirituality that rebuilds broken systems with the materials of faith, hope, and love. Thus, the same hands that elevate the chalice on Sunday may plant seedlings on Monday; both acts reveal the Creator’s renewing grace.

### **Clerical Identity as Servant Leadership**

For Anglican clergy, *in persona Christi* confers vocation rather than privilege. The priest’s authority is cruciform, shaped by service. Spiritual discipline - daily prayer, study of Scripture, confession, and retreat - forms the interior sanctuary from which outward ministry flows. In Kenyan dioceses, where pastoral loads are heavy and resources scarce, sustainability requires collegial support and accountability. Bishop, priest, deacon, and lay leaders together manifest the corporate body of Christ (Sykes, 1998).

Servant leadership also resists clerical isolation. By empowering catechists, lay readers, youth mentors, and Mothers’ Union leaders, the priest ensures that every baptized person



exercises a share in Christ's priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9). This diffusion of ministry transforms congregations from spectators into participants in God's mission.

### **A Pilgrimage of Ongoing Conversion**

To act *in persona Christi* is to walk a lifelong road of conversion. Each celebration of the Eucharist renews the priest's own dependence on mercy. The words "This is my body" implicate the celebrant as well: his life must become bread broken and wine poured out for others. Failures, when they occur, are met not with despair but with repentance and restoration. Augustine's *ex opere operato* remains a safeguard for the flock, yet it also summons ministers to continual sanctification.

Seminaries and continuing-education programs must therefore integrate doctrinal depth with moral formation. Mentorship, peer reflection, and pastoral supervision cultivate habits of transparency essential for credible witness (Githiga, 2001). In this way, *in persona Christi* becomes less a static status and more a dynamic journey toward Christ-likeness.

### **Ecumenical Hope and Global Witness**

Within the wider Communion, Kenyan insights enrich global Anglicanism. They remind the Church that theology matures in dialogue with context and that Christ's presence is discerned not only in cathedrals but also in villages humming with life. Engagements through the Anglican–Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC, 1981) reveal convergences on sacramental theology that encourage mutual recognition of ministry. Likewise, collaboration with evangelical and Pentecostal bodies in Kenya models unity in mission despite diversity of expression.

As the world faces secularism and disillusionment, *in persona Christi* offers a grammar of hope: Christ has not abandoned His Church; He continues to act through fragile yet faithful

servants. Every authentic sacrament, every reconciled relationship, every act of justice whispers the same assurance - Emmanuel, God with us.

### **Toward an Eschatological Horizon**

Finally, *in persona Christi* gestures beyond the present toward the consummation of all things. The Eucharistic table foreshadows the heavenly banquet where divisions cease and love reigns. Kenyan liturgies, rich with song and dance, anticipate that day when every tribe and tongue will join the Lamb's feast (Rev 7:9). Until then, the priest's task is to keep the table open and the vision clear, nurturing a pilgrim people sustained by grace.

### **Summary**

In sum, the Anglican doctrine of *in persona Christi* - received from catholic tradition, refined by Reformation insight, and inculturated in African soil - affirms that Christ alone is the true celebrant of His mysteries. The priest stands as sign and servant, enabling the Church's thanksgiving and God's self-giving to converge. In Kenya, this vocation finds expression in compassionate pastoral care, courageous social engagement, and contemplative holiness.

Wherever bread is broken and mercy proclaimed, the faithful may confess with confidence: Christ is present, Christ is active, Christ is enough.

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