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## A changing Communion

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I have to confess that I was an evangelical Anglican for many years before I really began to recognize the existence, never mind the importance, of the Anglican Communion. I suspect that the same could be said of many evangelicals in the Church of England.

For me, the penny began to drop back in 2002, shortly after I joined the staff at Wycliffe Hall in Oxford. To mark the college's 125th anniversary, we held a conference on 'The future of Anglicanism', which brought together Anglicans from across the globe. For the first time, I was in a significant gathering of Anglican leaders (mainly evangelicals) from Africa, Australia, New Zealand, South-East Asia, North America, the West Indies and South America.

At the time when we met, the tensions and divisions within the Communion were already appearing: New Westminster Diocese in Canada agreed to bless same-sex unions, and it was announced that Rowan Williams would be the next Archbishop of Canterbury, leading to protests from some conservative evangelicals in the Church of England because of his previous statements on sexuality. Those tensions would erupt a year later with the consecration of Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire, and the first authorized same-sex blessing in New Westminster. By then, I had been on a steep learning curve about the nature of global Anglicanism, working with others to help the Primate of the West Indies present a paper on these issues to the Communion's leaders.

In the years since that conference, most evangelicals in the Church of England have been on a similar learning curve, becoming much more aware of Anglicanism outside England and the significance of the wider Communion. The Communion now has forty-one member churches

(known as provinces), with two more in formation, and five other extra-provincial churches (such as the Falkland Islands). These are located in more than 165 countries and the Communion claims to comprise tens of millions of Anglican Christians. Nevertheless, understanding of its history and structures, and even of its recent struggles and divisions, remains a mystery to many. This chapter seeks to respond to that widespread ignorance and lack of clarity by offering, with the delayed fifteenth Lambeth Conference now happening, a short, simple guide to the history of the constantly changing identity and structures of the Anglican Communion.

As with so much in relation to the Anglican Communion, determining when it began is itself far from easy. Some might point to the first ever Lambeth Conference, gathered by Archbishop Longley just over 150 years ago, in 1867. There the gathered bishops sought 'Unity in faith and discipline . . . among the several branches of the Anglican Communion' (Resolution IV). The earliest known use of the term, however, is two decades earlier. It appears in November 1847, in a letter from the Missionary Bishop in the Dominions and Dependencies of the Sultan of Turkey – a title that captures the combination of missionary endeavour and English imperialism which gave birth to the Communion. Bishop Southgate wrote of 'The Anglican Branch of the Church of Christ', highlighting that the Communion has always sought to locate itself within the wider, one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. He also referred to 'the Anglican Church', describing 'the three branches of the Anglican Communion . . . the English, the Scotch, and the American'. That threefold distinction points to the longer history behind the Communion as we know it.

The Scottish branch arose in the late seventeenth century when, following the Glorious Revolution, the national, established Church of Scotland abolished episcopacy and embraced Presbyterianism. This led to the creation of the Scottish Episcopal Church, distinct from the Church of England. It would, nearly a century later, play a crucial role in what would become the Anglican Communion when, in November 1784, it established the third branch, referred to by Southgate. Following American Independence, former churches of the Church of England in the USA sought their own bishop, but one could not be consecrated within the

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Church of England, due to the requirement to swear allegiance to the Crown. It was the Scottish bishops, therefore, who consecrated Samuel Seabury as Bishop of Connecticut, the first bishop from and for the American church and the first 'Anglican' bishop to serve outside the British Isles. Here, then, is another, even earlier, possible date for the birth of the Communion.

Three years later, in 1787, following changes in English law, two more Americans were able to be consecrated as bishops by English bishops and then, in 1789, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the USA was formally constituted. Its origins included its separation from the state and the different place of bishops (and lack of Archbishops) within its formation. Its distinctive constitution and canons expressed a different understanding of church polity, shaped by a political vision similar to that underlying the new US Constitution. All this represented a major development within the emerging family of churches related to the Church of England. Some of these historic mutations, built into the DNA of American Anglicanism from its birth, have, arguably, contributed to the Communion's subsequent evolution and its more recent difficulties.

While recognizing this expansion beyond England, it is also important to remember that those branches distinct from the Church of England were, strictly, not even in full communion with it for many decades. The Acts of 1786 and 1792 relating to the American and Scottish churches made it clear that their members of clergy could not minister in the Church of England. This continued into the middle of the next century. So, for example, a private Act of Parliament was required in 1843 to enable Henry Caswall, ordained in the American Church, to be able to hold a benefice in England. Only after further Acts of Parliament in 1864 and 1874 were ministries in the two countries interchangeable.

In the eight decades that followed the formation of the American Church, before the Communion took visible and structural form at the first Lambeth Conference, we can trace its gestation as a result of evangelistic and missionary enterprise, which was interconnected, normally, with British imperial expansion. An important formative influence on the American Church was the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (known as SPG, later USPG). Founded by the Reverend Thomas Bray in 1701, and often connected with the work of SPCK (which

Bray also led when serving as the Bishop of London's representative in the American colonies), its more catholic tradition would give birth to, and shape, much more than the Episcopal Church in the USA (to which it sent more than 300 missionaries, including John Wesley, before American Independence). Through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it played a major part in the birth and/or growth of Anglican churches in many other parts of what would later become provinces within the Anglican Communion, including the West Indies, Canada, West Africa, India, Japan and Burma/Myanmar.

Nearly a century after the SPG started, in 1799, evangelical Anglicans founded the Society for Missions to Africa and the East, which would become the Church Missionary (from 1995, Mission) Society (CMS). Starting in Sierra Leone, its work spread rapidly, particularly through much of Africa (it was important in Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Sudan and Congo) but also in Asia (India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) and Australia and New Zealand. In contrast to the SPG, and reflecting its evangelicalism, the CMS was less tied into existing ecclesiastical and episcopal structures. Under the leadership of Henry Venn, it sought to establish self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating ('Three Self') churches. That vision and the significance of the CMS's work has led to Venn being described as 'a father of the worldwide Anglican Communion'.

These two missionary movements were instrumental in the appearance of an international 'Reformed Catholic' church, which was an earlier designation than that of the 'Anglican Communion' for identifying the spread of the pattern of faith established in England post-Reformation. Their emphasis was weighted differently between the 'Reformed' and the 'Catholic' aspects, as seen in, among other things, their different visions for the relationship between mission and episcopacy. This 'Reformed Catholic' church, however, was very much (apart from the American Church) the Church of England overseas. When the United Church of England and Ireland (with Wales as part of the Church of England) was established in 1800, it had only two overseas dioceses, both in Canada. A further eight were added over the next four decades (two more in Canada but also Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, Barbados and Jamaica, and Australia) and became seen as a new branch: 'the Colonial Church'.

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In the decades that followed, more ‘missionary bishops’ would be consecrated for the colonies and sent out from England. Alongside this, from the 1830s, the American Church, via its Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society (founded in 1821), began to send missionaries overseas to places such as Liberia, Argentina, Greece, China (for which they consecrated their first ever missionary bishop outside the USA in 1844) and Japan.

In this context of global expansion, it is easy to forget what a radical and controversial step it was for the Archbishop of Canterbury to call together at Lambeth in 1867 those 151 serving and retired bishops ‘in visible communion with the United Church of England and Ireland’. The background for this initiative within the Church of England was the revival of church councils apart from Parliament. The Convocations of Clergy began to meet for genuine deliberation again in the 1850s and 1860s, after over a century of inactivity, and 1851 had seen the first calling of a diocesan synod in Exeter. Abroad, there had been an appetite for such a development for some time, with calls for an international gathering of bishops from the bishop of Vermont in 1851 and the Provincial Synod of Canada in 1865. There had also been major theological controversies. Most notable were the publication of *Essays and Reviews* in England in 1860, giving voice to radical, liberal theological views and the dispute in Natal surrounding Bishop Colenso’s deposition, which also related to scriptural authority, as well as his more accommodating stance regarding polygamy. Nevertheless, the innovative and unprecedented step was not universally welcomed by some English bishops. Most significantly, the Archbishop of York – and many bishops from his province – refused to attend. Alan Stephenson’s history of the conferences also notes that, when Longley circulated a programme and possible declaration, ‘Evangelical bishops . . . were not a little alarmed at the Declaration and its reference to the first four Great Councils and what they considered its inadequate attitude to the Bible, the Reformation, and the Thirty-nine Articles’.<sup>1</sup>

It was also not clear exactly what was being convened. Longley adamantly repudiated the idea that it was ‘a synod’ (terminology some were happy to use to describe what they sought) and significantly noted that it would do nothing ‘in direct opposition to the authority of the Crown’. Nevertheless, the gathering’s discussions and resolutions (deliberately not

called 'canons'), revealed a desire for greater consultation and coordination between the 'several branches of the Anglican Communion' and even the development in future of 'due and canonical subordination of the synods of the several branches to the higher authority of a Synod or Synods above them' (Resolution IV).

At the time, however, it wasn't even clear that there would be another such gathering. There was certainly no sense that this innovation would become the important instrument in the development of the idea of an Anglican Communion that it is today.

The second conference was called by Archbishop Tait in 1878, just over a decade after the first gathering. This established the frequency of episcopal meetings that has become the pattern. There were still only 173 bishops to invite and only about 100 accepted the invitation and did attend. Further Lambeth Conferences occurred in 1888, 1897 and 1908. They followed a similar pattern, of gathering from around the world in England for several weeks of worship, discussion in groups focused on various themes, agreeing resolutions on a range of theological, ecclesiological and ethical matters, and issuing an encyclical letter to the churches.

Despite a slowly growing number of bishops representing churches from outside the UK, Canada or the USA, the Conferences remained dominated by white Englishmen and Americans. Samuel Crowther, the first black Anglican bishop, a Nigerian converted through the work of CMS, was consecrated in 1864, but he did not attend a conference until 1888. It would take a century before the cultural variety and ethnic diversity of the churches represented was reflected in the composition of attendees at the conference.

By meeting every ten years, a developing sense of shared identity was developed and articulated. Thus began the process that Owen Chadwick famously described in 1992:

Meetings start to gather authority if they exist and are seen not to be a cloud of hot air and rhetoric. It was impossible that the leaders of the Anglican Communion should meet every ten years and not start to gather respect; and to gather respect is slowly to gather influence, and influence is on the road to authority.<sup>2</sup>

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Particularly important to this growing sense of shared identity was the decision in 1888 to affirm what has become known as the Chicago–Lambeth Quadrilateral. Originating in the work of American priest William Reed Huntingdon, this adapted an 1886 resolution of the American bishops. It set out four agreed articles as the basis for finding church unity, although these are often also taken to provide a definition of the characteristic features of Anglican identity.

- 1 The holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as ‘containing all things necessary to salvation’ and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.
- 2 The Apostles’ Creed, as the baptismal symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith.
- 3 The two sacraments ordained by Christ himself – baptism and the supper of the Lord – ministered with unfailing use of Christ’s words of institution and of the elements ordained by him.
- 4 The historic episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called by God into the unity of his church.

It soon became clear that some additional structure would be required in order to nurture the developing common Anglican identity and facilitate communication across the distant provinces between the decennial conferences. In 1897, the conference therefore asked the Archbishop of Canterbury to create ‘a consultative body . . . for information and advice’. This Consultative Committee first met in 1901, although without the Americans, who (in an early sign of their different ecclesial identity and caution about any limitations being put on their autonomy) declined to participate. Only one of the nine episcopal attendees was then serving outside England. Restructured in 1908 as the Central Consultative Body (CCB), with wider colonial representation but the American Church still absent, this would continue to evolve and become an important episcopal, predominantly primatial, group. Increasingly, it acted almost as a standing committee of the Lambeth Conference, with American representatives attending from the 1930s.

Following the horrors of the First World War, the 1920 conference (then comprising more than 250 bishops) built on the Chicago–Lambeth Quadrilateral to issue its famous ‘Appeal to All Christian People’. Based on its opening confession that ‘God wills fellowship’, this would become a foundational statement of an Anglican vision of ecumenism. The question of the character of the fellowship embodied and sought among Anglicans within this quest for wider unity was also addressed by the Encyclical Letter. It included words that are worth quoting at some length as they are perhaps even more powerful a century later than they were at the time:

The more our minds are filled with the hopes of seeing the universal fellowship in full and free activity, the more zealous ought we to be to improve and strengthen in every way the fellowship of our own Church. This is one of the most direct and obvious methods of preparing for reunion . . . Because our Church has spread over the world and still more because we desire to enter into the world-wide fellowship of a reunited universal Church, we must begin now to clear ourselves of local, sectional, and temporary prepossessions, and cultivate a sense of what is universal and genuinely Catholic, in truth and in life . . . The fact that the Anglican Communion has become world-wide forces upon it some of the problems which must always beset the unity of the Catholic Church itself. Perhaps, as we ourselves are dealing with these problems, the way will appear in which the future reunited Church must deal with them . . . The Lambeth Conference . . . does not claim to exercise any powers of control or command. It stands for the far more spiritual and more Christian principle of loyalty to the fellowship. The Churches represented in it are indeed independent, but independent with the Christian freedom which recognizes the restraints of truth and of love. They are not free to deny the truth. They are not free to ignore the fellowship. And the objects of our Conferences are to attain an ever deeper apprehension of the truth and to guard the fellowship with ever increasing appreciation of its value. If the Conference is to attain such objects, it must be because it is itself a fellowship in the Spirit.<sup>3</sup>



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Discerning the nature of that fellowship was a particular concern of the next conference, in 1930. Drawing on the report of one of the conference's committees, it passed no fewer than thirteen resolutions relating to the 'Anglican Communion', giving much sharper definition than ever before to its nature. Having affirmed that 'the true constitution of the Catholic Church involves the principle of the autonomy of particular Churches based upon a common faith and order', the bishops approved, in Resolution 49, a statement on the 'nature and status of the Anglican Communion', which became, over time, a definitive statement of the ecclesial identity of the 'Anglican Communion'.

The fundamental identity of the Communion is that it is:

a fellowship, within the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, of those duly constituted dioceses, provinces or regional Churches in communion with the See of Canterbury.<sup>4</sup>

These churches are then held to have three characteristics in common:

- a. they uphold and propagate the catholic and apostolic faith and order as they are generally set forth in the Book of Common Prayer as authorized in their several churches;
- b. they are particular or national churches and, as such, promote within each of their territories a national expression of Christian faith, life and worship; and
- c. they are bound together not by a central legislative and executive authority but by mutual loyalty sustained through the common counsel of the bishops in conference.<sup>5</sup>

Here, we find helpfully named the various strands of Anglican Communion identity. There are the emphases on the Anglican recognition of the wider church, of which it is but a part, and the shared historically based links to Canterbury within the fellowship. The centrality of catholic and apostolic faith and order tied to common prayer, the importance of diverse adaptation to local context and the balance between autonomy and interdependence in the decision-making processes are also key. These are the strands that, in recent decades, have increasingly unravelled and become frayed.

Due to the Second World War, the 1930 conference would be the last full corporate expression of the Communion for nearly twenty years. The bishops did not gather again until 1948, although the CCB met several times during the 1930s and in 1944, 1946 and 1947. At the post-war conference, presided over by Geoffrey Fisher, the bishops began a process that would accelerate in the following debates: seeking to establish new structures to enable communication, consultation and coherence in a growing and increasingly diverse Communion. It welcomed plans to create new provinces in Africa, proposed a Communion Advisory Council on Missionary Strategy (ACMS), urged a Central College, and began work to hold 'a congress representative of the Anglican Communion' (similar to that held back in 1908 and eventually held in 1954 in Minneapolis). A 'Primates' Committee' also met to advise the Archbishop and, following the conference, the CCB was reconstituted, with each primate an ex officio member.

This trajectory continued at the 1958 conference, with reform of the CCB so that it included representatives of sixteen provinces and, significantly, was staffed by a full-time secretary. The number and identity of the provinces illustrates how different the Communion was then compared to now. There were four from the UK; the four provinces of the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand; and eight others (just three from Africa – South Africa and the new provinces of West Africa and Central Africa – plus the West Indies, China, Japan, the Middle East and a single province covering India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon).

Following this decision, the first Executive Officer of the Anglican Communion, Bishop Stephen Bayne from the USA, was appointed in 1960. Herein lie the origins of what would become the increasingly influential Anglican Communion Office (ACO). He played a vital role, particularly in the 1963 Toronto Congress, which brought together clergy and laity as well as bishops. It set out a new vision of 'Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ' (MRI) that became central to the Communion's self-understanding and development. There appears to have been a growing recognition in this period that the political 'winds of change' that Harold Macmillan had spoken of back in 1960 in relation to decolonization would need to blow also through the imperially formed ecclesial structures of Anglicanism. There was, too, with the

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expansion of international air travel, a growing Communion-wide ministry for the Archbishop of Canterbury, with Fisher visiting many of the provinces for the first time.

These early attempts at an institutional expression of the Communion took a major and distinctive leap forwards at the 1968 conference. It proposed the creation of an Anglican Consultative Council (ACC), with formal functions, constitution, offices (including a Secretary General) and membership. Each of the member churches was to be represented by a bishop but also by a member of the clergy and/or the laity – the first non-episcopal participation in the Communion's formal structures. By bringing together dozens of Anglicans for over a week, every two years, and with an annual Standing Committee, this development was to greatly intensify the inter-provincial connections within the Communion. It also ended the episcopal dominance, even monopoly, within Communion structures.

The ACC's first meeting was held in 1971 in Kenya – the newly created national African province – and twenty-two member churches were represented. That meeting also voted on the most contentious issue of the time within the Communion. It made the significant decision, by the smallest of majorities and against the vote of its President, the Archbishop of Canterbury, to accept any province's decision to ordain women as priests and committed itself to 'use its good offices to encourage all Provinces of the Anglican Communion to continue in communion with these dioceses'. Nearly half a century later, only a relative handful of provinces of the Communion still do not permit women priests.

By the time of the next Lambeth Conference, in 1978, the ACC had met two further times, there were more provinces and a number of provinces had ordained women priests. That conference sought a way through the threatened divisions over the issue in order to hold the Communion together. It also learned from the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Donald Coggan, that he was formalizing and extending a more ad hoc pattern that had developed: he intended to start convening meetings of the Communion's primates on a regular, likely twice-yearly, basis. This decision established the Primates' Meeting as the fourth of what would soon become known as the 'Instruments of Unity' (later 'Instruments of Communion') alongside the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth

Conference and the ACC. From the start, its relationship to the ACC was unclear and contested. Over the years, these two bodies have struggled to establish a clear relationship with each other and they (and their respective forms of authority) have come to be viewed quite differently across the Communion. Broadly speaking, the historic, Western, more liberal provinces have favoured the ACC, while the growing, more conservative, global south provinces have (with the support of resolutions from Lambeth Conferences) looked to the primates to exercise enhanced authority, especially in relation to defining the boundaries of Anglican diversity and safeguarding faith and order.

The 1978 Lambeth Conference was also the first conference directly to address the issue of homosexuality. This was already becoming contentious in a number of Western Anglican provinces, as openly gay and lesbian people were being ordained and some sought to bless same-sex unions. It reappeared on the conference agenda ten years later in 1988. Then an attempt by an American bishop (later revealed to have been in various gay relationships himself while married) to affirm the rights of homosexuals was strongly resisted by other, especially African, bishops. This was the first Lambeth Conference to embody the new geographical and theological shape of the Communion. The number of African bishops present, who numbered only 80 in 1978, had more than doubled to 175. Nigeria, represented as a separate province for the first time in 1988, would continue to grow, sending 59 bishops in 1998 (and, currently, has around 160 bishops). It was also in 1988 that the bishops (pressured by the American Church) voted to acknowledge that provinces could ordain women as bishops. Although a highly contentious development at the time, it has now been implemented in most of the provinces with only a minority having never chosen a woman to serve as bishop.

Another important feature of this changing shape of global Anglicanism has been the emergence of what has become known as the 'global south'. Growing numbers of local (often evangelical) leaders in South-East Asia and various African provinces were developing innovative forms of mission and ministry. This led to the ACC sponsoring an 'Anglican Encounter in the South' gathering in Kenya in 1994, which brought together Anglicans from twenty-three different provinces under the chairmanship of the Nigerian Primate. Another important contributory

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factor was the work of the Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion (EFAC), which had been set up by John Stott back in 1961. EFAC, along with Stott's Langham Scholarships, helped to nurture and connect leaders in what was then called the two-thirds world and built relationships between the historic Anglican churches and the new ones. Following the Kenya meeting, a second gathering in Kuala Lumpur in February 1997 issued a 'trumpet call' with Scripture, evangelism and mission at its heart. It also published a statement on sexuality arising from concerns about the direction of the Communion under the influence of the American Church. Here, for those with eyes to see, was one of the first signs of the storm that would engulf the Communion from the 1998 Lambeth Conference onwards.

Disputes over sexuality have riven the Communion for the past twenty-plus years. Triggered by Resolution I.10 at the 1998 Lambeth Conference and the reactions to it, they have raised awareness of the Communion and its importance, not least in England. That resolution, overwhelmingly supported by the bishops, reaffirmed a traditional Christian sexual ethic in a concerted attempt by both Western conservatives and the many global south bishops to prevent a more affirming, or at least permissive, stance towards same-sex relationships. Hopes that this would put a brake on developments and divisions, particularly in the American church, proved unfounded.

In early 2000, two Communion primates (South-East Asia and Rwanda) consecrated two American priests to serve as bishops in what was called the Anglican Mission in America (AMiA). When, in 2003, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church (TEC) elected Gene Robinson – a gay priest in a same-sex relationship – as Bishop of New Hampshire, further fractures developed. A Primates' Meeting, hurriedly convened by the then Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, warned the imminent consecration would 'tear the fabric of the Communion at its deepest level', but this powerful prophetic image was ignored. As a result, further splits occurred in North America, and yet more global south provinces offered oversight to breakaway congregations and consecrated new bishops to serve in the USA.

In late 2004, the Lambeth Commission on Communion, commissioned by the primates a year earlier, published the Windsor report. This set out

a vision of life together as a communion of churches building on the vision we've seen set out in earlier Lambeth Conference resolutions and more recent work, such as the 1997 Virginia report. It also proposed a way forwards together based on apologies for, and moratoria on, contentious actions, such as same-sex blessings, same-sex-partnered bishops and cross-provincial interventions. It soon became clear, however, that these recommendations were not going to be accepted. Furthermore, not one of the Instruments of Communion was able or willing to implement them and address the problems effectively. This was despite the fact that these matters dominated regular and fractious Primates' Meetings in 2005, 2007 and 2009. The attempt to find a short-term resolution having failed, attention then turned to the proposed medium- and long-term solution in the Windsor report: the development of a new Anglican Communion Covenant. It was hoped that this would draw people together in shared commitments and agreed procedures for managing disagreements.

Work began on the covenant in 2007 and its second draft was considered at the last Lambeth Conference in 2008. That conference was markedly different from its predecessors on two counts. First, hundreds of bishops refused to attend because of the failure to resolve the conflict and to discipline the American and Canadian Churches for their unilateral actions. Those bishops (and others) instead attended a new gathering – the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) – which brought together many conservative Anglican leaders in Jerusalem, just before the Lambeth Conference. That meeting issued the Jerusalem Declaration as the basis for their fellowship and made clear their belief that being a faithful Anglican and being in communion with the see of Canterbury were now to be viewed as distinct categories. Second, the Lambeth Conference took the form of an indaba, with small group conversations, and, for the first time, there were no resolutions expressing the mind of the bishops gathered in common counsel.

The covenant was finally published at the end of 2009. It gave clear expression to the self-understanding of the Anglican Communion as this has developed since at least the 1920 conference. It attempted to balance provincial autonomy with interdependence and mutual accountability of the provinces, asking member churches to join together to embrace its affirmations and commitments. Although a number of provinces expressed

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their support, more provinces either ignored or rejected it. GAFCON supporters and other conservative provinces saw it as too weak and ‘toothless’. In contrast, others were concerned that it was too centralizing and controlling and would be used to punish and marginalize churches that were innovating. Its rejection by the dioceses of the Church of England in 2012 effectively ended any chance that it could provide the pathway forward for the Communion. Since taking up office in 2013, Justin Welby has made no effort to revive it and, unlike his predecessor, never clearly articulated and commended its vision of Communion life.

Taking reconciliation as one of the priorities for his ministry as Archbishop of Canterbury, Welby has sought to move the Communion on from these conflicts and decisions and the impasse reached by the Windsor and covenant processes. After visiting all the primates in their own countries, he called a meeting in January 2016 – the first attempt to gather all the primates since 2011 when, following the precedent set at Lambeth 2008, a significant number of primates had refused to attend. Remarkably, Welby succeeded in gathering them all (although Uganda left after a few days), in part by also inviting the primate of the new conservative province in North America (ACNA) to attend. ACNA, although not part of the Anglican Communion and, in origin, a breakaway from the Episcopal Church, is the American Anglican Church, recognized by many Communion provinces, GAFCON and the global south. In what many experienced as a miraculous work of the Spirit, the Communion primates expressed their ‘unanimous desire to walk together’. However, now faced with the TEC’s 2015 acceptance of same-sex marriage, they also recognized that there remained ‘significant difference between us’ and ‘huge strains on the functioning of the Instruments of Communion’. In recognition that ‘such actions further impair our communion’, it was agreed that for a period of three years, the TEC would ‘no longer represent us on ecumenical and interfaith bodies, should not be appointed or elected to an internal standing committee and that while participating in the internal bodies of the Anglican Communion, they will not take part in decision making on any issues pertaining to doctrine or polity’. This development suggested to some that, despite the failure of the covenant, its controversial proposal of ‘relational consequences’ for unilateral and divisive actions was now being applied.

In the years since that meeting, the reactions to it and the implementation of its decisions have varied. The Archbishop of Canterbury and many others have stressed the language of 'walking together', the growing trust and honest communication among Communion leaders and the need to move on from the bitter divisions of the past two decades. Others, particularly within GAFCON (which met again in Jerusalem in 2018), have highlighted the continuing differences, strains and impairment, protested that the agreed consequences have not been followed through and, in some cases, continued to absent themselves from Communion gatherings. The decision by Archbishop Welby to invite all Communion bishops to Lambeth (including those in same-sex marriages, in contrast to his predecessor's decision in 2008 not to invite Gene Robinson) has fuelled these concerns, with hundreds of bishops, especially from the provinces of Nigeria, Uganda and Rwanda, again deciding not to attend.

In late 2019, the global south, meeting in Cairo, published its own detailed proposals for a covenantally structured 'Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches', which are now being implemented. Their covenant comprises doctrinal declarations (though with no reference to GAFCON's Jerusalem Declaration), relational commitments and, significantly, 'conciliar structures for a global ecclesial body'. These structures are 'for addressing "Faith and Order" issues, establishing the limits of diversity, holding one another accountable to a common dogmatic and liturgical tradition, and making decisions which carry force in the life of the Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches'. Questions remain as to how this will become an ecclesial reality and how it relates to the vision developing within GAFCON. Nevertheless, it represents a serious attempt to re-establish a coherent ecclesiology for the Anglican Communion in continuity with the past and with clear theological boundaries. This is something that, since the stalling of the covenant, has largely disappeared from the statements of the established instruments.

As we approach the 2022 Lambeth Conference, much remains unclear about the present and future structures and ecclesial identity of the Anglican Communion. Some will argue that we have entered a new phase and detailed political and institutional questions should not be a major concern. What matters, they say, is that there continue to be flourishing relationships and genuine 'bonds of affection' between Anglicans around



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the globe. This is evident in long-standing connections between numerous dioceses and their leaders. These involve financial and other support, partnership together in a shared mission – shaped by the Communion's Five Marks of Mission – and a variety of fruitful Communion networks (Environmental, Inter-Faith, Peace and Justice and others), despite the tensions within the formal instruments.

These positive signs of life in communion continue to offer hope and show that God has not abandoned the churches of the Communion. It would be wrong, however, to downplay the seriousness of the challenges that remain. The history sketched here illustrates how the Communion, over many decades, developed a deepening understanding of how God was at work within it. Also, how it sought to establish its common faith and order as a fellowship of churches within a wider vision and hope for greater Christian unity. As part of this, there evolved structures which embodied that understanding and encouraged deeper communion. In recent decades, various actions have undermined those structures and seriously impaired communion. The attempt in the Windsor report and the covenant to rise to these challenges, rearticulate that vision, renew the existing instruments and recover what has been weakened, or even lost, appears to be no longer being pursued.

More recently, a growing tendency has developed to define the Anglican Communion in rather limited legal, even bureaucratic, terms, as simply those churches in full communion with the see of Canterbury or listed on the schedule of the Anglican Consultative Council. This masks the more complex reality of the pattern of impaired and broken relationships of communion that now exist. Many provinces within the Communion are not in communion with other provinces but are in full communion with alternative, overlapping 'particular or national' provinces that they recognize as more faithfully Anglican, even though those are not in communion with Canterbury. It must not be forgotten that the classic 1930 definition was a *theological* account which also spoke of characteristic features of the Communion as a fellowship of churches located within the broader catholic church. It is the loss of these shared characteristics that reveals the changing nature of the Communion and the crisis it still faces. The decision that the TEC (and, subsequently, the Scottish Episcopal Church) should not represent the Communion ecumenically or

participate in Communion decisions on doctrine or polity effectively acknowledged that not all Communion churches now recognizably 'uphold and propagate the catholic and apostolic faith and order'. That is because what some viewed as simply 'a national expression of Christian faith, life and worship', other churches viewed as a departure from Christian faith, life and worship. These deep differences then further transformed the Communion because of actions that showed a disregard for 'mutual loyalty sustained through the common counsel of the bishops in conference'. Potentially more serious are the pattern of many bishops declining invitations to the Lambeth Conference (if the next conference after 2022 is in 2032, it will then be thirty-four years since bishops from some major provinces have attended) and the changing structure of the Lambeth Conference itself (to being shorter, not generative of resolutions and now including spouses in a joint rather than separate conference). These may even have removed any future possibility of the Communion expressing such common episcopal counsel in the way that it did for more than a century. Were the Church of England, following the 'Living in love and faith' process, itself to act in ways that other provinces viewed as undermining these historic characteristics, it is likely that the continuing bond of 'communion with the see of Canterbury' would be damaged or even destroyed.

Alongside this, however, new movements, structures and visions of what it might mean to be a global communion of churches have appeared. Both GAFCON and the wider, reconstituted Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches arise from the new branches of the Communion's provinces that, in many cases, have only gained their own autonomy in the past half century or so. Many of these churches were born out of, and shaped by, evangelical Anglicanism. GAFCON, through its emphasis on confessional Anglicanism, is reaffirming the importance of catholic faith, which, it believes, the Communion has failed to safeguard. The Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches, through its new covenantal structure, is reaffirming the importance of catholic order, which the Anglican Communion's covenant also sought to do, but failed to achieve, to re-establish, in continuity with the Communion's historic self-understanding. A major question likely to face evangelicals in England in the coming decade is, 'How can we participate in these new movements

and structures and how can we learn from them and embody their insights within the Church of England?’

## Notes

- 1 A. M. G. Stephenson, *The First Lambeth Conference, 1867* (Church Historical Society; London: SPCK, 1967), p. 34.
- 2 O. Chadwick, Introduction, in R. Coleman (Ed.), *Resolutions of the Twelve Lambeth Conferences 1867–1988* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1992), p. xvii.
- 3 *Conference of Bishops of the Anglican Communion: Holden at Lambeth Palace, 5 July to 7 August 1920: Encyclical letter from the bishops, with the resolutions and reports* (London: SPCK, 1920), pp. 13–14 (available online at: <<https://archive.org/details/conferenceofbish00lamb/page/n3/mode/2up>>).
- 4 Lambeth Conference, 1930, Resolution 49 – The Anglican Communion (available online at: <<https://anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1930/resolution-49-the-anglican-communion.aspx>>).
- 5 Lambeth Conference, 1930, Resolution 49 – The Anglican Communion (available online at: <<https://anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1930/resolution-49-the-anglican-communion.aspx>>).