

Editorial Matters

Crisis in the Anglican Communion

It appears beyond doubt that this coming year will prove decisive for the future of worldwide Anglicanism. Attention has now – thankfully – shifted from disputes over homosexuality to questions concerning what the Anglican Communion is and how it must change if it is to survive the current crisis.

It is therefore important to understand *why* there is a crisis without reference to same-sex unions and ‘gay bishops’; similar issues could arise in relation to a number of different areas, for example in relation to lay presidency at the Eucharist. What has happened is that one diocese (New Westminster in Canada) and a whole province (The Episcopal Church of the United States of America, ECUSA) have taken decisions that violate the mind of the wider Anglican Communion. Furthermore, that Communion and the one holy, catholic and apostolic Church of which it is a part, holds those actions to be contrary to Scripture. The Communion has also repeatedly urged restraint from radical innovations until they can be more widely recognised as legitimate expressions of Christian faith and practice.

This has produced a crisis at three levels: within the innovating provinces, between those provinces and other provinces, and in relation to the Communion’s four current ‘instruments of unity’ (the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Primates’ Meeting, the Lambeth Conference, and the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC)).

Is This Really Novel?

Of course, some argue we are simply re-visiting the questions raised when parts of the Communion began ordaining women priests and bishops, and that the appointment of an Eames Commission confirms this continuity. Although similarities exist with the impairment of communion from women’s ordination, it would be a serious error to treat the current situation as equivalent.

Firstly, there are substantive *theological* differences. The presenting issue is one where, only six years ago, the bishops at Lambeth overwhelmingly agreed they could declare certain conduct ‘incompatible with Scripture’.¹ Obviously not everyone shares that assessment. Nevertheless, as the Communion is ‘bound together...by mutual loyalty sustained through the common counsel of the bishops in conference’,² disregard for such a strongly worded resolution is qualitatively different from what happened in relation to women’s ordination. There, the previous Lambeth Conference had simply declared ‘the theological arguments as at present presented for and against the ordination of women to the priesthood are inconclusive’.³

1 1998 Lambeth Resolution I.10(d). That conference also clearly stated that the Scriptures ‘contain “all things necessary to salvation” and are for us the “rule and

ultimate standard” of faith and practice’ (Resolution III.5).

2 1930 Lambeth Resolution 49.

3 1968 Lambeth Resolution 34.

Secondly, there are significant *procedural* differences between the two issues. The Anglican Communion lacks a central legal authority. It is, therefore, a recognised communion principle that member churches are advised ‘not to take action regarding issues which are of concern to the whole Anglican Communion without consultation with a Lambeth Conference or with the episcopate through the Primates Committee’.⁴ This pattern of consultation was followed in relation to women’s ordination. Before proceeding, the Bishop of Hong Kong sought the ACC’s advice and, at their first meeting in 1971, they narrowly agreed that if any bishop acting with the approval of his Province decided to ordain women to the priesthood then ‘his action will be acceptable to this Council’.⁵ They therefore committed the Council ‘to encourage all Provinces of the Anglican Communion to continue in communion with these dioceses’. In 1973 the Council agreed by 50 votes to 2 that a decision to ordain women to the priesthood ‘should not cause any break in communion in our Anglican family’ and in 1978 the Lambeth Conference overwhelmingly endorsed this assessment.⁶

Here, and in the subsequent restraint over women bishops until after Lambeth 1988, the procedural contrasts with current unilateral actions are stark. Those pressing for changes in relation to sexuality knew their actions would not be viewed as within the acceptable bounds of Anglican diversity. They ignored even the stark warnings of the Primates’ Lambeth Statement (October 2003) that ‘these actions threaten the unity of our own Communion as well as our relationships with other parts of Christ’s Church, our mission and witness, and our relations with other faiths, in a world already confused in areas of sexuality, morality and theology, and polarise Christian opinion’. They proceeded with the consecration of Gene Robinson knowing it threatened to ‘tear the fabric of our Communion at its deepest level’.⁷ Many discern a sign of a deeper spiritual malaise here. Even Bishop Peter Selby, while ‘rejoicing with all those who find themselves affirmed’ by Robinson’s consecration, comments, ‘The problem for me is that much of the language used to doubt the purpose of “waiting” for the Anglican Communion to assent to the election of an openly gay man as a bishop sounds not that different from the language used to justify the U.S. invasion of Iraq without waiting for the UN Security Council’.⁸

Thirdly, the *political* realities are now totally different. Relationships between provinces absorbed the innovation over women’s ordination and the diversity it produced in the Anglican family. Already, however, provinces have clearly stated their relationship with New Westminster and ECUSA has been severely impaired. Although most provinces are waiting until the Commission reports this September, many will simply proceed as they believe correct – forming a new Communion if necessary – if the Commission treats this like women’s ordination and proposes a modified model of ‘reception’ and ‘unity in diversity’.

4 1978 Lambeth Resolution 11.

5 ACC 1971 Resolution 28(b).

6 1978 Lambeth Resolution 21.

7 The full text of this statement, with a commentary, is available on the web at www.anglicancommunioninstitute.org/primatestmtcommentary.htm

8 P. Selby, ‘The Globalisation of Anglicanism Is Rather Like The Globalisation of Many Other Things’, on the web at www.thewitness.org/agw/selby121703.html.

ECUSA Schism?

The Lambeth Primates' Meeting at Lambeth said, 'Whilst we reaffirm the teaching of successive Lambeth Conferences that bishops must respect the autonomy and territorial integrity of dioceses and provinces other than their own, we call on the provinces concerned to make adequate provision for episcopal oversight of dissenting minorities within their own area of pastoral care in consultation with the Archbishop of Canterbury on behalf of the Primates'. However, the Presiding Bishop's decision to proceed as chief consecrator in New Hampshire, combined with a history of 'liberal' bishops acting in a most illiberal and authoritarian manner, makes this solution very difficult to achieve. It appears that adequate episcopal oversight will not be provided and that some of the Primates will no longer respect ECUSA's claimed autonomy and territorial integrity.

The actions of ECUSA's General Convention and its bishops who have disregarded the mind of the Anglican Communion has resulted in many parishes and clergy (and some diocesan bishops) being unable to continue in the same relationship with their bishop and the official organs and representatives of ECUSA. Many Global South Primates, meeting in Nairobi before the Lambeth Primates' Meeting, shared this assessment and called for ECUSA to be disciplined by the wider Communion.⁹

In Archbishop Rowan's memorable word, the situation is now 'messy'. Nevertheless, the recently formed Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes¹⁰ could create a structure in canonical continuity with ECUSA but also in full acceptance of the Communion's teaching on sexuality and the disciplines of common life within communion. If this can be achieved, it could be recognised by other provinces and perhaps by ecumenical partners.

Inevitably, there is a real danger of a quagmire of legal actions over property and other matters and the accusation of 'schism' will be hurled at those in this network. This is, however, different from the actions that led to the Anglican Mission in America (AMiA) in 2000. In a real sense it is ECUSA's understanding of 'autonomy' – and its consequent disregard for mutual accountability within the church of Christ – that represents the real 'schism'. The overwhelming majority of Anglicans worldwide (not to mention other denominations) cannot accept ECUSA's innovations as in accord with Scripture. If they recognise a genuine orthodox Anglican church in the emerging Network then, however regrettable such a development may be, it cannot be condemned as the sin of schism, unless one defines 'schism' solely in terms of non-recognition of existing episcopal jurisdiction and so turns a blind eye to those authorities' disregard for the wider church or the truthfulness of their actions.

9 The text of this proposal is posted at www.anglicancommunioninstitute.org/foa-primates.htm. Although not implemented at the Lambeth meeting, it still reflects the perception and purposes of many Global

South Primates after that meeting failed to produce a change of heart within ECUSA.
10 For more details see www.anglicancommuniondioceses.org

Whither the Communion?

The Anglican Communion acts in two main forms. *First* it exists through the relationships between the various provinces within the Communion. Each province – including at some point our own – will have to clarify how their relationship has changed with ECUSA (and perhaps with other provinces if they have a different relationship with ECUSA).

The potential seriousness of this was clear when the Primates warned that if the consecration proceeded, ‘we have reached a crucial and critical point in the life of the Anglican Communion and we have had to conclude that the future of the Communion itself will be put in jeopardy...the ministry of this one bishop will not be recognised by most of the Anglican world, and many provinces are likely to consider themselves to be out of Communion with the Episcopal Church (USA). This...may lead to further division...as provinces have to decide in consequence whether they can remain in communion with provinces that choose not to break communion with the Episcopal Church (USA)’.

Although a certain restraint is being shown at present, already strong statements are being issued.¹¹ There is a widespread commitment, especially in the Global South, to a real and deepening worldwide Anglican Communion. There is no great desire for a looser ‘federation’ where autonomy and pluriformity over-ride mutual accountability and orthodoxy (including in matters of sexual morality). As a result, many provinces will loosen or sever their existing bonds with ECUSA (unless it changes course) and instead establish links – missionary, financial, ministerial etc – with those in ECUSA who reject its innovations.

In order to prevent this degenerating into anarchic chaos, the *second* form of the Communion – the instruments of unity and especially the Archbishop’s Commission – has a vital role.¹² The Commission will assist provinces to interpret unfolding events and understand the nature and levels of ‘communion’ that exist. It will also have to discern how the more focussed, representative and symbolic aspects of the Anglican Communion can survive. For this to happen, reforms must take place; it is unlikely another Primates’ Meeting, never mind a Lambeth Conference, can take place in the manner of the past.

The challenge here is that Anglicans have eschewed any central legal authority within the Communion. Even now there is no great desire for a standing, hierarchical jurisdictional authority at a supra-provincial level. However, the last Lambeth Conference called on the Primates’ Meeting to include among its responsibilities, ‘intervention in cases of exceptional emergency which are incapable of internal resolution within provinces, and giving of guidelines on the limits of Anglican diversity in submission to the sovereign authority of Holy Scripture and in loyalty to our Anglican tradition and formularies’.¹³ There is already

11 For examples see www.thinkinganglicans.org.uk/ss/archives/000355.html and www.anglican-mainstream.net/global.htm.

12 Details of this Commission are posted and will be updated on the Anglican

Communion website at www.anglicancommunion.org/ecumenical/commissions/primates/index.cfm.

13 1998 Lambeth Resolution III.6(b).

a proposal – in *To Mend the Net* – as to how that might be accomplished in response to cases such as the present one. This involves the creation of ‘observer status’ within international meetings of the Communion for those who have distanced themselves by their actions from the Communion’s teaching.¹⁴ Although more work is needed, and it is important that this is not ‘excommunication’, some such form of discipline is required. The alternatives are for the Communion to disintegrate into a looser and theologically incoherent body and/or to be replaced by a new communion of inter-provincial relationships.

Invitations to Primates’ Meetings and Lambeth Conferences are not a legal right. They are at the discretion of the Archbishop of Canterbury, who acts as a focus of unity with primacy of honour in the Anglican Communion. It is therefore perfectly feasible for an institutional ‘innovation’ such as ‘observer status’ to develop in response to ECUSA’s theological and ecclesiological innovations. Indeed, a signal from the Archbishop or the Commission that something along such lines is being seriously considered (in preference to the ‘reception’ model used over women’s ordination), might lead to calmer responses from individual provinces and greater clarity within ECUSA.

The disrespect shown to the Communion requires innovations in its structure if it is simply to continue being what it has always claimed to be: a fellowship, within the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, of dioceses and provinces that are in communion with the See of Canterbury, uphold and propagate the Catholic and Apostolic faith and order as generally set forth in the Book of Common Prayer, and are bound together by mutual loyalty sustained through the common counsel of the bishops in conference.

What About the Church of England?

The Church of England historically lies at the heart of the Anglican Communion. Still recovering from our own ‘Reading crisis’, little attention has been paid to the implications of all this for the Church of England. These are, however, potentially very significant.

From the day of his appointment, Archbishop Rowan Williams has made clear his commitment to the Anglican Communion and the dangers in disregarding its teaching on human sexuality. Recent events make it almost inevitable that, in the very near future, he and the wider Church of England will have to make a choice: *either* show concrete commitment to the Communion and its teaching *or* support the freedom of an Anglican province to ignore it and go undisciplined by the wider Communion.

Faced with this stark decision, some in an already polarised situation may welcome the showdown with their opponents over sexuality: ‘liberal revisionists’ able to side with ECUSA and perhaps other liberal provinces, ‘conservative traditionalists’ able to secure their views in England boosted by an alliance with Anglicans worldwide. Many, however, will feel torn: ‘traditionalists’ committed to

14 A summary of this is at www.anglicancommunioninstitute.org/summtomend.htm.

Lambeth I.10 but unsure they wish to see the Communion divide over this and certain they don't want the ongoing English debate on sexuality (helpfully resourced by *Some Issues in Human Sexuality*) dictated from – or silenced by – Nigeria, 'revisionists' eager to affirm gay Christians but unhappy with American unilateralism or losing international links with the Communion.

It is, therefore, important to keep debates over sexuality distinct from debates over the nature and future of the Anglican Communion, even if they are now closely related. The issue is *not* whether the Communion can continue as before and accept different policies on human sexuality as it has on women's ordination. It is clear that this is a non-starter. The issue is whether a way can be found *within* the Communion to uphold its teaching and the disciplines of a common life. This will require in some manner rebuking or disciplining provinces that unilaterally break with it and exalt 'autonomy' at the expense of 'mutual accountability'. Sadly, if the Communion fails to do this, there is a real risk it will divide into separate international bodies.

Many fear we are entering a period that could witness the Anglican Communion and perhaps the Church of England experience the painful words of Yeats' 'The Second Coming':

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
 The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
 Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity.

The challenge is to continue to pray for the Archbishop of Canterbury and all serving on his Commission, and to discern how the special gift of communion we have been given with our fellow Anglicans – here in England and around the world – can be provided with structures that enable communion to deepen and be extended to others in the body of Christ.

In This Issue

All four articles have some bearing on the Anglican Communion and its future, as well as much wider application and value. At the heart of *Anvil* is a focus on mission and on learning in and from the worldwide church. I am therefore delighted that the Annual CMS Sermon (delivered in London, Oxford, Birmingham and York in October 2003) by Vinoth Ramachandra from Sri Lanka is appearing in *Anvil*. It offers insights into our changing world and reminds us of the importance of a global Communion and the priority of local and global mission. The next article by John Nolland opens a series of four articles for *Anvil* on loving our enemies. I am very grateful to Craig Smith, a member of the *Anvil* editorial board, for commissioning these articles and he has the final word below as he introduces them and explains the vision behind them. John Corrie again refocuses us on mission and, drawing on the Anglican tradition of *Via Media*, calls for an integrated approach that he believes may be a particularly Anglican contribution to mission. Finally, Martin

Davie's article reminds us that we cannot escape struggles and disagreements within Christian theology. He sets out a helpful framework in which to interpret these and to be faithful in our thinking and speaking about God.

Andrew Goddard

Craig Smith writes:

The vision for these articles began as I reflected on the three simple words Jesus shared on a hill beside the Sea of Galilee, 'love your enemy'. These are simple words but constitute a profound message. I believe that this is a vital message for today given the present situation globally and nationally. Jesus' mandate raises two questions. Who is my enemy? How do I love him or her or them?

The first question about who is my enemy is an important one but one which will not be addressed in this series of articles. Jesus assumes that one knows who one's enemy is and I will make the same assumption. Nevertheless, it is important when considering this topic to keep the words of Solzhenitsyn close at hand:

If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?

There will be four articles in this series. The first three articles will focus on the second question – how do I love my enemy? – and look at the issue from the New Testament. In the first article, John Nolland lays the foundation by focussing on the specific command to love our enemies in Matt. 5:43-48. Building on this, in issue three, Howard Marshall will trace through Acts the response of the early church to pressure exerted by its religious enemies. I will follow this in issue four by looking at how the church is exhorted to respond to the spiritual enemy and in fact how it did respond. Next year, in the final piece, Ron Boyd-MacMillan examines how to preach this difficult and sensitive issue. The goal of these articles is to help you, the reader, engage in the issue more deeply in order that you might fulfil Jesus' exacting command.

