

Editorial

Once again, it appears, the Anglican Communion has reached the very edge of the precipice only to slam on the brakes just in time and move back (at least a little) onto safer ground. It seems, however, only a matter of time before renewed conflict over who should drive and in what direction will lead us all to peer over the cliff again – probably sometime in September or October given the deadline given to the American church by the Primates at Tanzania.

More positively, what is becoming clear, in and through the difficulties of recent years, is that the Communion is, painfully and precariously, embracing and seeking to deepen a renewed pattern of interdependent life together in communion and mission that is faithful to Scripture and to our Anglican heritage. The recent Primates' meeting, and particularly the work on a Communion covenant, mark major steps in these developments. It is therefore important to understand their significance and also the nature of recent conflicts.

The presenting issue is clearly differences over homosexuality and in particular the truthfulness of the 1998 Lambeth Resolution I.10 and its status within the life of the Communion as a whole. For many Anglicans, particularly evangelical Anglicans, this amounts – given the wording of part of that resolution ('rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture') and their own convictions as to Scripture's clarity and plain sense on this subject – to a fundamental question about the authority of the Bible. It has, however, become increasingly clear that interacting with this question is disagreement over an ecclesiological question about the nature of life in communion. The focus of this disagreement is the inter-relationships that autonomous provinces have with each other and with the Anglican Communion as a whole through the various Instruments of Communion, although a subsidiary question is how the Communion responds to a province where internal relationships of communion become severely impaired or broken. The 2004 Windsor Report from the Lambeth Commission on Communion is here the key text (equivalent to Lambeth I.10 in relation to sexuality), and disagreements over this also threaten division among Anglicans.

Mapping the terrain

In order to understand the current tensions and interpret the present situation it is necessary to map out different Anglican responses in two areas. Firstly, differences in relation to pressure to change church teaching and practice on sexuality. Secondly, regarding the relationships between the two different areas of reactions to Lambeth I.10 and to The Windsor Report.

At least since the founding of *Integrity* (the group working for gay and lesbian inclusion in the American church) by Louie Crew in 1974, there have been a number of different reactions to the claim that the church must affirm the full inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered Christians and the blessing of sexual

relationships other than marriage between a man and a woman. The normal mapping divides people into two camps with various contested labels then being given – ‘conservative’ vs ‘liberal’, ‘traditionalist’ vs ‘revisionist’, ‘reasserter’ vs ‘reappraiser’. In fact, from early on in the American church and still today across the Communion, the situation is much more complex than this simple dichotomy suggests. While any schema or categorisation will fail to do justice to the complexity, a four-fold differentiation may be helpful, effectively dividing each of the two ‘camps’ into two further sub-groups.

On the ‘conservative’ side a distinction can be drawn between a stance of *rejection* and one of *reassertion*. A vehement rejection of *Integrity* was evident in the response of one bishop to their first Newsletter:

I have your two letters and a copy of your filthy, blasphemous publication. I note in your publication that you quote various people. Do not put my name in your filthy rag. Be advised. In my letter to you of November 11, I intimated that I might be interested in ministering ‘effectively’ to any members of our Church who might be involved with your group of perverts. My effective ministering to members of this church involved with you would be to excommunicate them immediately.¹

A similar tone has sometimes been heard in the wider Communion in recent years and, as here, this rejection of groups campaigning on this issue can often be linked to revulsion at anyone identifying as a homosexual.

Despite agreement on the presenting issue of the morality of homosexual behaviour, this *rejectionist* stance needs to be distinguished from one of *reassertion* of traditional church teaching that in God’s intention sexual intercourse is for a man and a woman who are married to each other and thus the church should not commend or bless other sexual relationships or ordain anyone in a non-marital sexual relationship. This view, although sometimes treated as indistinguishable from the first group by those who disagree, differs in its focus on biblical, moral and theological defence of traditional teaching. It seeks to offer a compassionate and understanding pastoral response to gay and lesbian Christians, is willing to listen to them and their experience, and is often explicitly critical of those in the first group.

On the ‘liberal’ side, there are also two broad groupings. Those who believe we need to *reassess* (or reappraise) the church’s traditional teaching and practice in the light of such developments as new knowledge about sexuality, the public visibility and moral qualities of Christians attracted to (and often in an intimate relationship with) someone of the same sex, and an awareness of the church’s unloving attitude to those who identify as gay or lesbian. This stance is open to seeing the church entering a period of ‘reception’ in this area (as it has over the ordination of women) and, even if not personally convinced of the correctness of change, many of this view are willing to tolerate diversity and plurality within church teaching and practice in order to enable discernment of God’s will.

Finally, there are those who are convinced advocates for the *reinterpretation* (or revision or reconfiguration) of traditional teaching and practice in relation to sexual

1 *Integrity Newsletter*, Vol 1 No 2, Dec 1974.
Name of bishop withheld.

ethics. This is seen as necessary in order to end injustice against gay and lesbian people when their loving relationships are not recognized and affirmed by the church and those in such relationships barred from ordained ministry. This end of the spectrum represents whole-hearted support for the stance of groups like *Integrity*, *Changing Attitude* and *LGCM*.

Clearly these are four groupings across a complex spectrum and they are not water-tight. Individuals will move between them over time and even within one category there is a range of different attitudes and approaches. However, most individuals and groupings can be helpfully classified and distinguished in terms of rejectionists, reasserters, reassessors, and reinterpreters.

In terms of ecclesiology, it is again helpful to distinguish four groups, this time not in terms of positions along a spectrum but in terms of four quadrants defined in relation to attitudes to the teaching on sexual ethics in Lambeth I.10 and in relation to attitude to the vision and proposals on communion in The Windsor Report.

There are, first, those committed to I.10 who are not clearly committed to Windsor (particularly in relation to non-intervention in other provinces) and its communion ecclesiology. These have been called ‘federal conservatives’ as they appear to be happier with the Communion developing into a looser network of relationships between provinces, more akin to a federation, in which there is less mutual accountability. Second, however, are those committed not only to I.10 but to the pattern of life in communion set out in Windsor – ‘communion conservatives’. The third grouping is to some degree opposed to I.10’s teaching but supports Windsor ecclesiology and therefore recognises that I.10 is the teaching of the Communion which must be respected in the practices of individual dioceses and provinces. These may be called ‘communion liberals’. Finally, there is a fourth group of ‘federal liberals’ who are not only opposed to I.10’s sexual ethic but also to the Windsor vision. This is seen to be a denial of provincial autonomy and the creation of a centralised structure of authority that will limit the freedom of the Spirit to lead the church into all truth, a replacing of bonds of affection with the chains of Communion policy and law.

These groupings can be represented in terms of the four quadrants created by an X-axis in relation to sexual ethics/I.10 and a Y-axis in relation to ecclesiology/Windsor:

Ecclesiology	Pro-Windsor
GROUP III (eg Rowan Williams) <i>Communion Liberals</i> Anti I.10 and Pro-Windsor	GROUP II (eg Tom Wright) <i>Communion Conservatives</i> Pro I.10 and Pro-Windsor
Sexual Ethics	Sexual Ethics
Anti-I.10	Pro-I.10
GROUP IV (eg Gene Robinson) <i>Federal Liberals</i> Anti I.10 and Anti-Windsor	GROUP I (eg Sydney, Nigeria) <i>Federal Conservatives</i> Pro I.10 and Anti-Windsor
Ecclesiology	Anti-Windsor

It is of course tempting to seek to correlate these two different four-fold categorisations. The first one effectively divides the Sexual Ethics X-axis into four rather than two categories with the far left being reinterpreters, the more central left being reassessors, the more central right being reasserters and the far right being rejectionists. While there clearly cannot be a perfect correlation (because one's attitudes and strength of feeling on matters of sexual ethics is a different theological question to that of one's ecclesiology), broadly speaking it would seem that the two extremes are more likely to be found below the line (reinterpreters as 'federal liberals' in group IV and rejectionists as 'federal conservatives' in group I) while those who on sexual ethics are more moderate reassessors and reasserters are likely to be happier to address the issues within a Windsor-type communion model.

In the light of this mapping, it is now possible to examine where we are in the Communion after the Primates' Meeting.

The Anglican Communion Post-Tanzania

At their previous meeting in Dromantine, the Primates reaffirmed I.10, supported the Windsor Report and its recommendations and asked the American Church (then known as ECUSA, now known as TEC) to respond to Windsor at its General Convention in 2006. It also set in process the drafting of a covenant which will articulate the commitments involved in life in communion in the hope that all provinces will ratify it and thereby put inter-provincial relationships on a firmer footing. Although the Primates in Tanzania in February discussed many other important matters it was these issues of the American response to Windsor and the covenant – together with a proposed interim internal solution for the American church – that dominated the meeting and communiqué and have further helped to give shape to the Communion.²

All that happened needs to be framed by (and interpreted in the light of) the covenant process. This has progressed remarkably speedily after only one meeting of the Covenant Design Group chaired by Archbishop Drexel Gomez of the West Indies. A draft covenant is now in place and has been commended by the Primates for consideration around the Communion.³ It has avoided the fears of some – that it would be an overly juridical or confessional document – and offers a series of affirmations and commitments that already appear to have been warmly received across different traditions of Anglicanism and different parts of the Communion.

Developing a draft covenant produced by the Global South, the draft covenant also draws on work in Australia and the wording and vision of numerous well-established Anglican statements including the Church of England's Declaration of Assent and the Five Marks of Mission. Its seven sections are all introduced with a string of biblical references and it has a clear mission focus and rationale – the covenant is made 'in order to proclaim more effectively in our different contexts the Grace of God revealed in the Gospel, to offer God's love in responding to the needs of the world, to maintain the unity in the Spirit in the bond of peace, and to grow up together as a worldwide Communion to the full stature of Christ' (Preamble).

2 The communiqué is to be found at www.aco.org/primates/downloads/communique2007_english.pdf

3 The Report and Draft Covenant are available at www.aco.org/commission/d_covenant/docs/covenant.pdf

The proposed covenant makes no mention of human sexuality (although it does speak of commitment to ‘uphold and act in continuity and consistency with... biblically derived moral values and the vision of humanity received by and developed in the communion of member Churches’⁴) nor does it establish a system of expulsion from the Communion (although it acknowledges that ‘matters in serious dispute’ may be referred to the Primates and ‘most extreme circumstances’ may arise in which ‘a process of restoration and renewal will be required’ to re-establish a covenant relationship⁵).

In terms of the mapping above, it is clearly an ‘above the line’ vision of interdependent life in communion which it must be hoped will – in part because of its reticence about addressing our current difficulties explicitly - also prove attractive to all but the most determined and lower sections of the ‘federal’ groups I and IV. There remains, however, the real possibility, that some provinces will be unwilling to enter into such a covenant because it limits their ‘autonomy’. We will then perhaps face a situation in which there will be ‘constituent’ covenant-committed Anglicans (broadly groups II and III) but also ‘associate’ covenant-rejecting Anglicans (broadly groups I and IV). Whether this is the fate of the current Communion will probably only become clear during the next decade of this century after the covenant has been to some degree approved by the Lambeth Conference (in 2008) and the Anglican Consultative Council (in 2009) and is then debated and either ratified or rejected by the member churches of the Communion.

In the meantime, the problem of differing responses to (and within) the American church threatens to derail the covenant process. The Primates had to determine the extent to which TEC’s General Convention in 2006 had adequately responded to the three recommendations of the Windsor Report in relation to the American church. It was, in a sense, having to determine whether the American church at General Convention had placed itself in Group III or in Group IV and what to do in the light of that assessment.

To assist them the Primates had the responses already given to the Archbishop of Canterbury which he explained to General Synod in these terms:

After the debates at the American General Convention last summer, I wrote directly to all the primates of the Communion to ask about their reaction and the likely reaction of their provinces as to whether the resolutions of Convention had met the proposals of the Windsor Report for restoring something like normal relations between the Episcopal Church and others in the Communion. The answers were instructive. About eleven provinces were fairly satisfied; about eleven were totally dissatisfied. The rest displayed varying levels of optimism or pessimism, but were not eager to see this as a life and death issue for the Communion. Of those who took one or the other of the more pronounced view, several on both sides nonetheless expressed real exasperation that this question and the affairs of one province should be taking up energy to the near-exclusion of other matters.⁶

The Primates also had a report from an advisory group⁷ that surprised many by giving a relatively positive assessment of the General Convention’s compliance with

4 Draft Anglican Covenant, 3(1).

5 Draft Anglican Covenant, 6(5) and 6(6).

6 Presidential Address to General Synod, 26th February 2007.

7 www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/articles/42/25/acns4249.cfm

Windsor.⁸ In the end, however, the Primates judged that although ‘they value and accept the apology and request for forgiveness made’ they also ‘deeply regret a lack of clarity’ about some of the responses. In particular, they highlighted the failure to address the matter of a moratorium on same-sex blessings and the ambiguity concerning the nature of a moratorium on the election and consecration of people in same-sex unions. As a result, ‘the response of The Episcopal Church to the requests made at Dromantine has not persuaded this meeting that we are yet in a position to recognise that The Episcopal Church has mended its broken relationships’.⁹ The American House of Bishops has now therefore been asked to ‘make an unequivocal common covenant’ not to authorise any rite of blessing for same-sex unions and to confirm that the resolution passed at General Convention ‘means that a candidate for episcopal orders living in a same-sex union shall not receive the necessary consent unless some new consensus on these matters emerges across the Communion’. The Primates wish an answer to this by 30th September and make clear the consequences of failure:

If the reassurances requested of the House of Bishops cannot in good conscience be given, the relationship between the Episcopal Church and the Anglican Communion as whole remains damaged at best, and this has consequences for the full participation of the Church in the life of the Communion.¹⁰

It is now clearer than ever before that a determination to disregard Lambeth I.10 and the Windsor Report (ie to place oneself in group IV) is incompatible with full participation in the Communion. There is therefore now a clear boundary and practical limit to diversity within the Anglican Communion even though the exact nature of the consequences of refusing to live within that boundary remain unstated.

What, though, of the Communion’s response to those in Group I and in particular the increasing disorder and chaos as parishes leave TEC and dioceses within it appeal for Alternative Primatial Oversight? The Primates are clear that ‘the interventions by some of our number and by bishops of some Provinces, against the explicit recommendations of the Windsor Report, however well-intentioned, have exacerbated the situation’.¹¹ However, given the American church’s failure to respond adequately, ‘those Primates who have undertaken interventions do not feel that it is right to end those interventions until it becomes clear that sufficient provision has been made’¹² for those ‘faithful people’ who ‘feel great pain at what they perceive to be the failure of The Episcopal Church to adopt the Windsor proposals in full’.¹³

In order to try to rectify this situation, the Primates – based on a number of Lambeth resolutions urging them to exercise greater authority in such situations – made the unprecedented step of proposing their own solution to the internal

8 For a commentary on and critique of the Report see www.anglicancommunioninstitute.org/articles/2006/CommentaryonTheReportoftheCommunionSub.htm

9 Primates’ Communiqué, 19th February 2007, para 24.

10 Primates’ Communiqué, Key Recommendations ‘On Clarifying the Response to Windsor’.

11 Primates’ Communiqué, para 26.

12 Primates’ Communiqué, para 26.

13 Primates’ Communiqué, para 25.

problems of the American province. This involves the establishing of a Pastoral Council of up to five members (chaired by a Primate nominated by the Archbishop of Canterbury and with two members nominated by the Primate and two nominated by the Presiding Bishop) to implement a Pastoral Scheme, facilitate and encourage healing and reconciliation, monitor TEC's response to Windsor and 'consider whether any of the courses of action contemplated by the Windsor Report §157 should be applied to the life of The Episcopal Church or its bishops'.¹⁴

The Pastoral Scheme is focussed on the group known as 'Windsor' or 'Camp Allen' bishops (and others who may join them). They may provide pastoral oversight to parishes who request it and nominate a Primatial Vicar who will be delegated powers and duties by the Presiding Bishop and be responsible to the Council. Crucially, this system is to be implemented whatever decisions are made by the House of Bishops prior to September 30th this year and the Scheme is 'intended to have force until the conclusion of the Covenant Process and a definitive statement of the position of the Episcopal Church with respect to the Covenant and its place within the life of the Communion, when some new provision may be required'.¹⁵

The benefits of this solution are, first, that it prevents the establishment of a new province by creating a Primatially-sponsored and overseen interim structure *within* TEC during the covenant process. Second, it offers the hope of bringing an end to violations of this aspect of Windsor because, once the Pastoral Scheme is in place, 'the Primate undertake to end all interventions' and 'congregations or parishes in current arrangements will negotiate their place within the structures of pastoral oversight' set out in the scheme.¹⁶ It is, however, noted that there are 'particular difficulties' with the more structured interventions undertaken by Rwanda (American Mission in America – AMiA) and Nigeria (Convocation of Anglicans in North America – CANA), both of which have consecrated former ECUSA/TEC priests as bishops. Third, it represents a conciliar way forward for the Communion agreed by the Primate as a whole rather than a unilateral solution offered simply by some of the Primate's such as the Global South grouping or a part of that network.

This proposal therefore seeks to maintain the internal unity of the American church by providing much more robust structures of alternative pastoral oversight which are to be monitored by the wider Communion. In so doing, it hopes to encourage those currently identified with (or flirting with) Group I to become more communion-minded and align more clearly with Group II, just as elsewhere the communiqué seeks to encourage the American bishops clearly to distinguish themselves from Group IV by complying fully and unambiguously with The Windsor Report's recommendations.

The Primate in Tanzania therefore managed not only to avoid any split within the Communion but also to take actions that uphold both Lambeth I.10 and the Windsor Report and that encourage bishops, dioceses and provinces to act in

14 Primate's Communiqué, Key Recommendations, Pastoral Council (g). The paragraph of Windsor speaks of 'processes of mediation and arbitration; non-invitation to relevant representative bodies and meetings; invitation, but to observer status

only; and, as an absolute last resort, withdrawal from membership'.
 15 Primate's Communiqué, Key Recommendations, Foundations (e).
 16 Primate's Communiqué, Key Recommendations, Pastoral Scheme.

conformity with these and move away from Group I and Group IV (positions that increase pressure for fragmentation and realignment) into Group II or Group III. The question now is whether TEC will be able to give the necessary reassurances and implement the proposed Pastoral Scheme and whether intervening bishops from the Global South will then work with the Scheme. Each one of these conditions remains far from certain but were they to be met then there is the real possibility that there could be greater stability over the next few years as the covenant process unfolds and a new pattern of life in communion continues to develop in our Communion relationships, to be articulated in Communion statements and to reform the Instruments of Communion. (Just before going to press the American bishops rejected the Scheme).

The Listening Process post-Tanzania

The differences over sexuality of course remain and here another matter of discussion at Tanzania – the ‘listening process’, now facilitated by Canon Phil Groves – remains of great importance. The challenge is that the two poles identified earlier – rejectionists and reinterpreters – find the current Communion stance on sexuality and listening difficult to accept. Rejectionists tend to be sceptical or hostile to any such listening on the grounds that it gives time and space to undermining clear biblical teaching and promoting immorality (the Presiding Bishop claimed one Primate compared discussing the ethics of homosexuality to discussing the ethics of murder) while their mirror-image is found in reinterpreters who are increasingly frustrated that the Communion currently prevents them (because of the authority accorded Lambeth I.10) from putting into practice what they believe the Spirit is clearly saying to the church and instead gives time and space to views that they consider homophobic.

At Tanzania the Primates made clearer than ever before that the Communion remains committed to the teaching of Lambeth I.10 and the implications of this stance for provincial policies as reiterated in The Windsor Report. If these boundary-markers can indeed be recognised and implemented then there may now be the opportunity for ongoing listening and discussion to become less heated and divisive as the quite varied experiences and understandings found among Christians with experience of same-sex attraction are heard and the different theological and hermeneutical issues weighed and discussed. That will, however, also require the creation of safe spaces and a united commitment to take a stand against what the Primates anathematised at their previous meeting in Dromantine – ‘the victimisation or diminishment of human beings whose affections happen to be ordered towards people of the same sex’.¹⁷

The Church of England

Finally, it is impossible to ignore that our own situation in England also remains complex and precarious. The ‘Covenant for the Church of England’ issued in December 2006 makes clear how unhappy some evangelicals are with the current situation and the recent General Synod debate and criticism of the Bishops’ Statement on Civil Partnerships demonstrated that although the centre ground is

¹⁷ Primates’ Communiqué, Dromantine, 24th February 2005, para 6.

holding, many Synod representatives are increasingly unhappy with the compromise and at times duplicity that they see at work in the actual practice of the church. Certainly were the American church to fail to respond adequately to the Primate's requests by September then the tensions within the Church of England would only increase. Many would wish in such a situation to make clear that this must have consequences for full communion between TEC and the Church of England while others would wish to signal their support for the American church's determined commitment to the full inclusion of lesbian and gay Christians and draw attention to similarities on the ground between England and the United States.

Evangelical disagreements over the 'covenant' and the absence of a clear, agreed and persuasive voice among evangelicals in the Synod debates on lesbian and gay Christians and civil partnerships show it is particularly important that evangelical Anglicans find ways in coming months of addressing the real differences that exist among them (between those more sympathetic to Group I and those aligned with Group II in terms of ecclesiology and between those who are more 'rejectionists' and those who are more 'reasserters' on matters of sexual ethics, not to forget the small but perhaps growing number of evangelicals becoming 'reassessors') in order to find a common pattern of speaking and acting that is faithful to the truth of the gospel, committed to the unity of the body of Christ, gracious in its dialogue with others and passionate about nurturing mission and discipleship, including among gay and lesbian people.

In this issue

Central to evangelical unity and witness is commitment to the authority of the Bible. In recognition of this fact, the focus of this issue is on Scripture with a variety of articles on this theme. Edith Humphrey's address to the conference for ordained evangelical Anglican women (AWESOME) is both an excellent example of biblical exposition and a powerful and envisioning call for us to listen to the Word. Oliver O'Donovan's article offers numerous insights into one of the issues at the heart of our current discussions on sexuality – how Scripture shapes our ethics. The third article with this focus comes from another female biblical scholar, Jenni Williams, and is based on a workshop she gave at the same AWESOME conference. It provides guidance on how to wrestle with and preach on tough texts, particularly those appearing to condone the mistreatment of women. Gordon Kuhrt's article offers a succinct and illuminating overview and commentary on the growing significance of evangelical theological colleges in recent decades. Finally, Alister McGrath's review article of Richard Dawkins' latest book will hopefully both inform and encourage readers so they can participate with confidence in wider debates about *The God Delusion*.

Andrew Goddard