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# Walking Together? The Future Shape of the Anglican Communion

**In this stop-press late addition, Andrew Goddard examines the impact of recent events in the Anglican Communion and looks ahead to how these might shape its future.**

A year ago it was far from certain the Anglican Communion was able to survive. Disregarding repeated appeals not to do so, ECUSA had proceeded with the consecration of Gene Robinson and dioceses were authorising rites to bless same-sex unions. Archbishop Eames and the Lambeth Commission had been given less than a year to come up with some solution, parishes and dioceses in North America committed to the Communion's teaching on sexuality were organising a new Network, and overseas bishops were intervening to offer episcopal oversight in New Westminster and ECUSA.

In the last five months, we have seen a remarkable chain of events. First, the Lambeth Commission, after three plenary meetings, produced the historic *Windsor Report (TWR)*.<sup>1</sup> Second, the Reception Review group collected responses, including a number of substantial commentaries and critiques.<sup>2</sup> Third, the English House of Bishops and General Synod backed the Report, with an excellent paper by Bishops Michael Nazir-Ali and John Hind.<sup>3</sup> Fourth, the Primates met in Northern Ireland (20<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> February) and issued a communiqué.<sup>4</sup> Although barely a week has passed between that communiqué and writing this late postscript to *Anvil*, an initial assessment can be made of the current state and possible future shape of the Anglican Communion.

Archbishop Drexel Gomez of the West Indies said at the press conference after the release of the Primates' Communique, 'We came to this meeting, some of us, with fears that it might have been the last'. In fact, although it would be wrong to deny major harm has been done to our 'bonds of affection' or to believe we are now in calm waters, *TWR* and the communiqué in many ways strengthen the Communion in

1 The Report and many submissions are at [www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/index.cfm](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/commission/index.cfm)

2 The most significant of these are *Repair the Tear* from Anglican Mainstream and the Church of England Evangelical Council ([www.anglican-mainstream.net/repair.asp](http://www.anglican-mainstream.net/repair.asp)), *The Faith Once For All Delivered* from Australian, mainly Sydney, evangelicals ([www.australianchurchrecord.net/windsor](http://www.australianchurchrecord.net/windsor)), Jonathan Clatworthy and David Taylor

(eds), *The Windsor Report: A Liberal Response*, O Books, Winchester 2005 (supported by the Modern ChurchPeople's Union) and Andrew Linzey, *Has Anglicanism A Future?: A Response to the Windsor Report*, LGCM 2005.

3 This is available at [www.cofe.anglican.org/about/gensynod/agendas/g1570.rtf](http://www.cofe.anglican.org/about/gensynod/agendas/g1570.rtf).

4 The text is at [www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/articles/39/00/acns3948.cfm](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/acns/articles/39/00/acns3948.cfm)

its identity and its structures. What follows is a preliminary analysis of the state of the Communion and the remaining issues in relation to North America and sexuality.

### **What is the Anglican Communion?**

It soon became clear during 2003-4 that a deeper difficulty existed than disagreements over sexuality. This was to be found in perhaps fundamental and irreconcilable differences about the nature of the Anglican Communion. The North American provinces justified their actions by emphasising provincial autonomy and the lack of any legal limits or authorities within the Communion at an inter-provincial level. Others accused them of abusing that autonomy to take actions that meant they had departed from genuine, apostolic Christian faith.

Remarkably, given its limited time-frame, diverse composition and the pressures under which it worked, the Lambeth Commission produced a report which articulated, especially in Section A and Section B, a clear vision of life together in Communion centred on 'autonomy-in-communion' or interdependence. Within this it highlighted the authority of scripture, the manner in which the limits to autonomy are discerned (in discussion of *adiaphora*) and the level at which decisions are to be taken within the Communion (the principle of subsidiarity). The Report also emphasised that 'unity, communion and holiness all belong together' (*TWR*, para 3) and set its whole account in the context of mission. Even if none of its specific recommendations in Section C or Section D are implemented, for this account alone, *TWR* is a landmark document in understanding Anglican ecclesiology and authority in Anglicanism.

The Church of England has accepted these principles, especially the 'basic principle of autonomy-in-communion exercised within the constraints of truth and charity'. The Primates, too, have now accepted this account stating,

We believe that the Windsor Report offers in its Sections A & B an authentic description of the life of the Anglican Communion, and the principles by which its life is governed and sustained....We accept the description offered in Sections A & B of the Windsor Report as the way in which we would like to see the life of the Anglican Communion developed, as we respond in faithful discipleship to Christ. These sections speak of the central place Anglicans accord to the authority of scripture, and of "autonomy-in-communion" as the balanced exercise of the inter-dependence between the thirty-eight Provinces and their legitimate provincial autonomy.<sup>5</sup>

The Primates 'request all provinces to consider whether they are willing to be committed to the inter-dependent life of the Anglican Communion understood in the terms set out in these sections of the report', particularly ECUSA and the Anglican Church of Canada 'as they consider their place within the Anglican Communion'.<sup>6</sup>

The Anglican Communion has never before articulated so clearly and fully its self-understanding. Given the rapid growth of the Anglican Communion in recent decades (especially in the Global South<sup>7</sup>), the wider globalisation of our culture, and Anglicanism's characteristic features of diversity and autonomy it was only a matter of time before such articulation of Anglican ecclesiology became necessary.

5 Primates' Communique from Northern Ireland, 24<sup>th</sup> February 2005, para 8.

6 Communique, para 14.

7 On the changing face of world Christianity see Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*, OUP, Oxford 2002 and data at [www.globalchristianity.org](http://www.globalchristianity.org).

It is tragic it required some to 'tear the fabric of our Communion at its deepest level' (as the Primates said in October 2003) for this to happen. Nevertheless, it is now clearer than ever before just who we are as Anglicans within the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. That is a major fruit of the suffering of recent years with benefit not only in inter-Anglican discussions but wider ecumenical ones.

## **Instruments of Unity or Communion**

Not only has the current crisis resulted in a clearer sense of who we are and wish to become as a Communion, it has also begun to reshape Communion bodies.

### **Anglican Consultative Council (ACC)**

This body which first met in 1971 meets every three years (next in Nottingham this June) and includes representatives from provinces' laity, clergy and bishops. It is therefore highly significant that the Primates' Meeting has invited ECUSA and Canada to withdraw their ACC representatives in the period running up to the next Lambeth Conference. This is effectively self-suspension from this key Communion body. If one or both of the North American provinces now 'walk apart' from the Communion, this would provide an opportunity for more wholesale reform of this instrument which has been seen as the most 'liberal' and 'western-dominated' of the Communion's instruments.

The ACC's permanent secretariat is the Anglican Communion Office which has a new Secretary General (Canon Kenneth Kearon, replacing Canon John Peterson). Both the Communion Office and the ACC itself are likely to see changes in coming years under Canon Kearon and his deputy, Canon Gregory Cameron. *TWR* calls for 'a rethinking of the strategic role of the Anglican Communion Office' among a number of reforms and many are concerned at its unrepresentative composition. Global South Primates have stated that 'a more deliberately global approach to leadership is vital if we are to be able to respond to the challenges and complexities of worldwide mission'. While many in the past felt alienated from the Office which was seen to be dominated by Western churches, especially ECUSA, that situation is rapidly changing and further developments are inevitable.

### **The Lambeth Conference**

The ten-yearly gathering of Anglican bishops has 'proved to be a powerful vehicle for the expression of a concept central to Anglican ecclesiology, the collegiality of the bishops' (*TWR*, para 102). In 1988 and even more obviously in 1998 its composition and proceedings began to reflect the shifts within the Communion as the historic Western centres declined and the historic mission fields grew. In many ways, recent events could be interpreted as the reaction of the traditional power-bases in the Communion to their loss of power and influence first dramatically experienced at Lambeth 1998. Perhaps for North America this was most symbolically evident in the massive majority for Resolution I.10, restating traditional teaching on sexuality.

While lacking formal legal authority, Lambeth resolutions are of great significance. In particular, it has now been regularly re-stated that I.10 has 'moral force'<sup>8</sup> and is 'the standard of Christian teaching on matters of human sexuality...which should command respect as the position overwhelmingly adopted by the bishops of the

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8 Primates' Statement from Lambeth meeting, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2003.

Anglican Communion'.<sup>9</sup> Whether or not *TWR*'s proposal is formally accepted that there should be some resolutions that are recognised as having special status as touching upon the definition of Anglicanism or 'the authentic proclamation of the Gospel', it is clear that in practice this is increasingly likely to happen.

The decision to abandon the idea of moving the 2008 Conference away from England, the acceptance that the Archbishop of Canterbury has discretion as to whom to invite, and the recommendation that he 'should invite participants to the Lambeth Conference on restricted terms at his sole discretion if circumstances exist where full voting membership of the Conference is perceived to be an undesirable status, or would militate against the greater unity of the Communion' (*TWR*, para 110) are all significant recent developments. There are now recognised mechanisms for rebuke and discipline within the Communion without establishing complex legal structures. Without full compliance, few expect ECUSA or Canadian bishops will be full members of the 2008 Conference. Even if they are they will be even more outnumbered by bishops from Africa and Asia than they were in 1998.

### **The Primates' Meeting**

Perhaps the most dramatic change in Northern Ireland was in the role and character of the Primates' Meeting. Since first meeting in 1978, the Primates have been urged at both the 1988 and 1998 Lambeth Conferences to take 'enhanced responsibility'. They have been very cautious about doing so but in 2005 in Newry they did.

The Primates first took control of their own agenda, insisting the agenda prepared in advance (which gave relatively little time to discussion of *TWR*) be put aside. Both in preparation for the meeting and during it, Primates from the Global South (who sometimes in the past had felt marginalised and isolated, struggling to follow procedures and lacking advisors while working in other than their first language) made sure their concerns were clearly heard and taken seriously. Arguably even more significant than the concrete decisions in relation to ECUSA and Canada was the deeper, almost tectonic shift, in the dynamics and power balance of the meeting that has now taken place. The changes that began at Lambeth 1998 have now impacted the Primates' Meeting which will never be the same again.

In relation to the current crisis, the Primates (without – miraculously – fragmenting among themselves) have pronounced clearly on the causes and taken action. In effect they have requested the North American provinces to step aside for a time from the councils of the Communion and put them on notice that unless they comply with what *TWR* and now the Primates' Meeting has requested then they will have chosen to 'walk apart' from the Anglican Communion.

The other significant feature was that for the first time the Primates' Meeting was unable to hold a corporate eucharist where all Primates received communion. At their meeting in Nairobi in January, Global South Primates made clear that the actions of ECUSA and New Westminster represented 'departure from genuine, apostolic Christian faith' and, if persisted in, amounted to a choice to "walk alone" and follow another religion'. Several Primates therefore made clear they were in broken communion with ECUSA and could not share eucharistic fellowship. This, again, led to a change in the planned structure of the meetings and they maintained this position even at the end

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9 Communique, para 6.

of the meeting. There can be little doubt that when the Primates next meet in 2007, the composition of the meeting will be different unless ECUSA and Canada take the time and space granted to them truly to amend their life. They must affirm in word and deed they are willing to 'accept the same teaching on matters of sexual morality as is generally accepted elsewhere in the Communion' and end the tragic situation where 'the underlying reality of our communion in God the Holy Trinity is obscured, and the effectiveness of our common mission severely hindered'.<sup>10</sup>

Once the Communion has reached a new equilibrium after navigating through these troubled waters, there is the real possibility that the Primates' Meeting will become a focus of truly collegial council and fellowship, interdependence, teaching and leadership in mission that can embody the cultural diversity of Anglicanism and give real vision and direction to the Communion. This will make it a unique and highly significant body in global Christianity.

### **The Archbishop of Canterbury**

In the words of *TWR*, the Archbishop of Canterbury's role is 'pivotal' as he is 'at the centre of each the Instruments...the one factor common to all' (*TWR*, para 108). The Commission recommended that he 'not be regarded as a figurehead, but as the central focus of both unity and mission within the Communion' (para 109). Rowan Williams has, in a relatively short space of time, made his mark on the Communion. His refusal to lead decisively from the front has frustrated some but has enabled him to exercise his gifting to 'speak to us as primus inter pares about the realities we face as a Communion'.<sup>11</sup> This was very evident in Newry and much praised by his fellow Primates. It began on the day he was appointed when he wrote, 'the Lambeth resolution of 1998 declares clearly what is the mind of the overwhelming majority in the Communion, and what the Communion will and will not approve or authorise. I accept that any individual diocese or even province that officially overturns or repudiates this resolution poses a substantial problem for the sacramental unity of the Communion'.<sup>12</sup>

It is clear that Archbishop Rowan is applying to his primatial role, the understanding he has of the Christian priest:

The fundamental task is that of announcing in word and action in the middle of the community what the community is and where it is...For this to happen in the ministerial life, there must be skill and willingness and space for at least three things. The priest has to be free to be a lookout, an interpreter, and what I can best call a weaver...In the context of conflict within the Church, local or global, the priest as a human participant charged, like it or not, with making particular decisions, may have to take sides at some points; but before and beyond that, the priest has to remind everyone involved of what and where they are, and so of the expectation that, if the Church is what it claims, Christ will be visible on both sides in certain ways.<sup>13</sup>

It is also increasingly clear that Archbishop Rowan knows he must now, to some extent, 'take sides' and that his understanding of the church catholic and his commitment to it means he cannot side with the pattern of behaviour demonstrated

10 Communique, para 12.

11 Communique, para 10.

12 Archbishop Rowan Williams' letter to Primates, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2002.

13 'The Christian Priest Today: lecture on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Ripon College, Cuddesdon', 28<sup>th</sup> May 2004.

in recent events by the North American provinces. In doing so, however, he is painfully aware that if these provinces walk apart then something significant will be lost for us all. This is because, in the words of Mike Higton's excellent study of Rowan Williams' theology, 'it is only by discussing, by arguing, by returning to the Scriptures together, that we can hope to discover what is central and what is peripheral, what must be rejected and what must be affirmed. Even those who we – perhaps rightly – condemn as heretics may have something to teach us of the nature of the Gospel which they too are trying to understand'.<sup>14</sup>

It remains to be seen whether and how *TWR*'s proposals for enhancing the Archbishop's role (the 'attempt to promote me from a piccolo to a tuba' as he put it at General Synod) will develop. There are clearly quite widespread concerns about giving him too much (non-legal) authority. However, providing him with a Council of Advice would make his a truly international and collegial role.

Though not commented on from this perspective, the Primates' request that 'the Archbishop of Canterbury appoint, as a matter of urgency, a panel of reference to supervise the adequacy of pastoral provisions'<sup>15</sup> in North America is a major, unprecedented innovation. Although this panel's terms of reference and composition are as yet unknown, it is a further sign the Communion is entering new uncharted waters as a result of having to respond to this crisis.

### **Anglican Covenant?**

The most significant longer-term proposal in *TWR* is the development and signing of an Anglican covenant. This has also raised major concerns from right (Sydney) to left (Bishop Spong) and uncertainty among Anglicans between these two poles. The Primates have welcomed it in principle and 'commend this proposal as a project that should be given further consideration in the Provinces of the Communion between now and the Lambeth Conference 2008'.<sup>16</sup> Any final covenant will undoubtedly look significantly different from the draft in *TWR* (itself cut down to 27 from the 39 articles apparently present in the first draft!). Nevertheless, such a formal statement of the vision of communion we have now begun to articulate and accept, and the confirmation of each province's adherence to it in a communion canon, would represent a major strengthening of Anglican identity and interdependence giving Anglicanism greater coherence and distinctiveness within worldwide Christianity.

### **Whither North American Anglicanism?**

One way to understand what the Primates have done is that they have contained the current tensions and crisis within North America. There was a real risk divisions over sexuality and the nature of communion would spread from those provinces and cause deeper division in the Communion, including the Church of England. By calling on the two provinces to step apart for a time to consider their stance this tragic outcome was avoided. It remains, however, a real problem that few in the hierarchy, particularly of ECUSA, appear willing to heed the calls of the wider Communion.

ECUSA's House of Bishops at their January meeting pointedly refused to respond to what *TWR* asked of them (though over twenty bishops did sign a minority statement expressing their commitment to the Report). It appears that

14 Mike Higton, *Difficult Gospel: The Theology of Rowan Williams*, SCM, London 2004, p86.

15 Communique, para 15

16 Communique, para 9.

any decision will now be postponed until the next General Convention in summer 2006. Sadly, few observers of the American church scene expect ECUSA to turn back from the path it chose to walk at General Convention 2003.

What has changed, however, is that the Primates have made clear that persistence in the direction they have begun to walk is, in the words of the crucial last paragraph of *TWR*, to 'walk apart' (para 157). Already several of the actions of the Primates fall into the sort of 'actions that might need to be taken' in such a situation: 'mediation and arbitration' will be part of the task of the new panel of reference examining episcopal oversight, 'non-invitation to relevant representative bodies and meetings' is effectively occurring now in relation to the ACC.

While all must be done to encourage the provinces to walk the path of healing and reconciliation, this cannot be forced on them and so preparation for non-compliance must go alongside an effort to persuade for compliance. It is clear the Communion will not abandon North America even if the constitutional bodies of the current provinces of North America abandon the Communion. Already many Primates recognise the Network of Anglican Communion Dioceses and Parishes headed by Bishop Bob Duncan. What is now needed is for that body of faithful witnesses to be increased and existing Network structures to be transformed, perhaps even undergo a death and resurrection, in the process. There needs to be a clear and growing body of Communion Episcopalians, defined by commitment to interdependent life in communion not autonomy as self-assertive, self-expressive independence. There are already signs of greater co-operation between the Network and some who have left ECUSA (an alliance known as Common Cause). However, over the months ahead it is the battle for ECUSA's soul that must be the priority for all the Communion-minded. ECUSA defines itself as 'a constituent member of the Anglican Communion' and yet it is now explicitly being asked to consider its place within that Communion. The Primates have made clear that the course set by ECUSA and Canada pulls them away from the rest of the Communion and the conditions for them to remain and re-establish themselves as fully constituent members are clear. Our General Synod accepted the House of Bishops' view that it was necessary 'to seek to achieve reconciliation by persuading all within the Anglican Communion to comply with the mind of the Communion as expressed by the Instruments of Unity, in the light of the recommendations of the Windsor Report'. The question now is whether or not ECUSA and Canada will be wise enough, catholic enough and biblical enough to reach the same conclusion.

### **What about sex?**

The concern of *TWR* and of the Primates and the proper focus in North America is the nature of communion and not sex. Nevertheless, disregard for Communion teaching in this area triggered this crisis and debates on this subject will not disappear. The ACC have been invited to ask Canada and ECUSA to 'set out the thinking behind the recent actions of their Provinces',<sup>17</sup> especially in relation to public rites of same-sex blessings. It has also been asked to do what many protest the Communion has consistently failed to do (despite past Lambeth resolutions) and 'take positive steps to initiate the listening and study process' in relation to sexuality.<sup>18</sup>

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17 Communique, para 16.

18 Communique, para 17.

Exactly how this can be done remains far from clear and the example of North America shows how poorly it can be done.<sup>19</sup> It is, encouragingly, being done within a clear restatement that Lambeth I.10 is ‘the present position of the Anglican Communion’.<sup>20</sup> It is also clear in *TWR* and in the statement from our own House of Bishops that it is Scripture and tradition that must be decisive not contemporary experience. It is also evident though that real listening needs to take place<sup>21</sup> and a real conversion occur in many places in the light of the Primates remarkably strong statement that ‘the victimisation or diminishment of human beings whose affections happen to be ordered towards people of the same sex is anathema to us’.<sup>22</sup> Even that statement, however, with its talk of affections which ‘happen to be ordered’ a certain way demonstrates how difficult it is to find a common language in which to define and address these issues.

A central element in the planned future listening and study must be to discern together how the gospel of Jesus Christ is able to interpret the experience and transform the lives of those who understand themselves to be gay or lesbian. That is what the overwhelming majority of Anglicans feel they do not yet fully understand and where we need to learn from one another. We should, of course, expect to learn this primarily from those committed to orthodox Christian teaching but we must not rule out in advance that we have something to learn from those with whom we quite fundamentally disagree.

Both here in England, but also in many other parts of the Communion, we need to hear the protests of those who reject the teaching of the Communion and say that those of us who support it do not listen to experience and do not speak out against homophobia at home and abroad in a manner that makes a difference. We need to listen to those who accuse us of being literalist, hard-hearted and rigorist in this area but tolerant of diversity in other areas of Christian ethics. We need to respond to the challenge that we have failed to understand the reality of gay identity in our society or to see the many good qualities in gay relationships because we are more concerned with defending a particular hermeneutic than loving our gay neighbours. It is not easy to receive such critiques and not all of them are valid but perhaps more of them are relevant than we like to admit when we find ourselves in heated debate.

The simple fact is that God is undoubtedly at work in the Anglican Communion at present. We will, however, only be changed through this process if we seriously weigh these challenges and are willing to be changed in some way – as yet unknown to any of us – by listening to and learning from one another. That experience of transformation together is, after all, one central reason why it is so important that we do indeed live out our life in interdependence, walking together again within the Anglican Communion.

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19 See Ephraim Radner, ‘Conversations In the Communion: We Need More Than A Translator’ at [www.anglicancommunioninstitute.org](http://www.anglicancommunioninstitute.org).

20 Some protest that ‘present’ implies ‘but not future’. Leaving aside the fact Lambeth Conference resolutions are not infallible (see past statements on contraception or Article XXI), it is important that it was orthodox Primates who fought for such a description

because it ‘further cemented the goalposts’ against claims the resolution was more a matter of history than real and present authority.

21 For what such listening might involve, see Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, SCM, London 1972, pp75-6, cited in Jeffrey Heskins, *Face to Face: Gay and Lesbian Clergy on Holiness and Life Together*, SCM, London 2005, pp 24ff.

22 Communique, para 6.