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Editorial

High Speed Conflict and Anglican Identity

Bruce Kaye

We are now approaching the 2008 Lambeth Conference. Not since 1867 when a number of bishops refused to attend has a Lambeth conference been so controversial. At the time of writing in June 2007 it is not at all clear who will attend. Hopefully all those who are invited will find a way of coming together since there is much to learn from direct personal conversation in these difficult times of miscommunication and megabyte messages through the ether. The next two issues of the *JAS* are devoted to themes we hope will assist bishops and others as they approach the questions before the conference.

At the end of the 1998 Lambeth Conference the conference newspaper, the *Lambeth Daily*, reported the presiding Archbishop, George Carey, as saying that the Anglican Communion was 'significantly stronger' as a result of the conference.¹ John Kater, who attended the conference as secretary of section three of the conference, reported that he could only marvel at such a conclusion since the conference heard serious voices 'threatening the dissolution of the Communion'.² The Western bishops at the conference were outnumbered and some found this loss of direction to be not only new but also difficult. Kater reported on complaints from African bishops that they were described as not far away from witchcraft and to have contributed in ignorance or in the notorious words of the bishop of Newark, 'superstition'. In fact the last days of the conference and the conduct of the final debate on sexuality were seen by many Anglicans around the world as both disgraceful and embarrassing.

How people behave in the conduct of this argument is not irrelevant to the christian profession of the church community. The constant refrain of the Eames Report and later documents for courtesy and respect has

1. Jan Nunley, 'Communion "Stronger" for Lambeth Experience', *The Lambeth Daily*, 8 August 1998, p. 1.

2. J.L. Kater Jr, 'Faithful Church, Plural World: Diversity and Lambeth 1998', *Anglican Theological Review*, 81.2 (1999), pp. 235-60 (249).

been an important calling and many have honoured it. These are not peripheral questions. They are central to the christian witness of the Anglican community. It is after all the way we love each other that testifies to our being Christ's disciples.

Conflict in itself is not a bad thing. It can be creative. It can sharpen the identity borders and enlarge the lines of connection in our communities. It can challenge our commitments to others and to the values which we had thought guided our own conduct. Conflict can also be destructive. The heat of conflict can lead to failures in relationships which might be hard to reconstruct. Things said and done in the heat of conflict can create divisions on matters which are not germane to the main issue in dispute. These are common truths well known to any involved in conflict resolution or relationship counselling. David Schnarch, a prominent marriage counsellor, has written of long-term intimate relations as a crucible in which the virtues are learned.³ In sustaining long-term intimate relations we learn to forgive and to be forgiven and we learn humility and respect, patience and mutuality.

Similar things can be said about the church. It is a long-term community of committed relationships. The diversity of gifts and perceptions within the church are necessarily matters of potential conflict. In part that is implicit in the New Testament exhortations to sustain unity in the church and is the framework of the exposition of love in 1 Corinthians 13. Within the same cultural context our own folly and the limitations of our perception and imagination will create differences as to how we are to be faithful. In a global community of Anglicans set in different cultures with different challenges, the call to live faithfully in the circumstances in which we find ourselves will produce differences and these can easily lead to conflicts.

The present set of conflicts engaging the attention of Anglicans has arisen because of moves in the Anglican Church of Canada to authorize rites of blessing for same-sex unions and in the Episcopal Church in the United States of America the ordination as a bishop a man in a same-sex relationship. The question at issue is the place of homosexuality in the public life of the church. That is a question not just about homosexuality, but about the identity of the church. The global problem is that different provinces have taken different views on this issue and also some provinces have taken the view that this is an issue on which the provinces should agree a common position across all cultural and social differences.

3. D. Schnarch, *Constructing the Sexual Crucible: An Interrogation of Sexual and Marital Therapy* (New York: Norton, 1991).

Given the history of worldwide Anglicanism it is inevitable that there will be other currents in this conflict. A struggle for power is one obvious factor. There has always been an underlying power issue in global Anglican relations. The dependence of colonial Anglican churches on the Church of England was manifest early in their history and was also inter-related with the political power relations between England and the colonies. In the eighteenth century Anglicans in the American colonies experienced this and then were caught in other tensions during and after the War of Independence.

Such power imbalances are not necessarily wrong. They are just a fact of life. No society, or a fellowship of churches with the kind of history Anglicans have, could escape such power imbalances. But the balances have been changing in the last fifty years and the nature of the power has also been changing. Especially since the early 1990s Anglican churches in Western countries have declined in members and churches in the two-thirds world have been growing. Churches in Africa and Asia have not only been growing in numbers, but also in resources, theological skill and dynamism of life. These changes in the power relations have added to the dynamics of the present conflicts.

Rapid communications and travel have also added to the vigour of the conflict. Reactions shoot around the globe instantaneously and it is possible to conceive of the long-distance oversight of a bishop in ways which a generation ago was not conceivable.

But there is also a very profound issue of understanding. This is not just a matter of comprehending the general meaning of words and sentences. Anyone who has worked in more than one language knows that you need to be sensitive to more than mere words to understand. Not only are the words we use shaped by the linguistic customs of the culture of the language, they also come out of the world of our own personal inner consciousness. In order to understand others we need to have some feeling for both their linguistic culture and also the world out of which the words of the speaker come. The Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Richard Ford speaks about the imagination that is needed to enter into the inner world of the other person and that in creating his characters he has to live inside their minds. Adam Smith made the same point in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) in seeking to outline an understanding of social life. In similar vein Jesus told us that what came out of that inner world was what defiled a person.

All that we know of others is what they make available to us and what we can creatively imagine. We may not need to know too much of the inner world of the ticket collector at the train station, but if we want to have any confidence in understanding the faith of our fellow Anglicans

on contentious and important personal questions then we will need to have a very high order of understanding and sympathy. Emails and websites do not particularly facilitate that.

Even given a consciousness of these issues there still remains a serious difference among Anglicans on sexuality in the public life of the church. Addressing that difference will involve some idea of who we are, or who we think we ought to be as Anglican churches and the ecclesial nature of the Anglican Communion. These are two distinct identity questions and each influences the way in which we might approach the task of trying to explain how we see our own approach to these current disputes as true to our identity as Anglican Christians.

Identity is often unselfconscious. We reflect upon our identity when circumstances change or we encounter difference. Anglicans are in just that situation in the present generation and the issue of homosexuality is the presenting question for identity reflection in the wider ongoing story of Anglicanism. The Tudor constitutional revolution in the sixteenth century involved remarkable transformations for Anglicans in England. Similar things could be said for Anglicans in Japan after the Second World War and many African Anglicans after national independence. There was already a huge transformation going on in Anglicanism before the issue of sexuality came on to the public agenda.⁴ Part of this transformation of Anglicanism involved the introduction of the novel idea of a worldwide Anglican Communion.⁵

Anglican ecclesiology had been formed in provincial mode even from the very early development of regionalism in Western Europe from the seventh to the twelfth centuries. That long-standing provincial tradition shaped the formation of Anglican Provinces around the world in the last 200 years. Now in relatively recent times the character of the worldwide connections between these provinces has become a practical and political challenge for Anglicans. More profoundly, however, it has become a theological challenge because of the very strong provincial tradition in Anglican ecclesiology. It is complicated further by the fact that this provincial tradition has often been worked out over against the commitment of the Roman Catholic Church to being a universal church with global jurisdiction.

4. See the more general and speculative account in P. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Rise of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

5. See W. Sachs, *The Transformation of Anglicanism: From State Church to Global Communion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) and B. Kaye, *Reinventing Anglicanism: A Vision of Confidence, Community and Engagement in Anglican Christianity* (Adelaide: Openbook, 2004), pp. 12-46.

Not only was Anglican ecclesiology provincial in shape, it was also conciliar in character. Within the history of Western Christianity it espoused this conciliar character very early. While this dynamic was disguised to some extent by the idea of the christian nation the conciliar elements persisted through the sixteenth-century reformation. With the demise of the christian (Anglican) nation it was expressed in synodical structures which are now universal in Anglican churches. As with the provincial strand of Anglican ecclesiology this conciliar element was worked out over against the monarchical model adopted in the eleventh century under the inspiration of Pope Gregory VII and pursued in that church thereafter.⁶ The underlying truth in the conciliar model is that the authority for the life of the church belongs properly to the whole church, and not, for example just to the ordained. Officers and orders within the church have their ecclesial authority by delegation within that framework. Synods are just a particular attempt to give expression to that truth.

The report of the first Inter Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission (IATDC), *For the Sake of the Kingdom*, understood Anglican identity in terms of enculturation and a form of legitimate and necessary pluralism, but subsequent developments have not followed up their lead. Rather, crisis management of disagreements over the ordination of women shaped the brief given to the second IATDC which produced the Virginia Report and its cousin the Eames Report was similarly directed. This strategy appeared to contain the dispute. When the dispute over the ordination of women was overtaken by the current conflict the Windsor Report followed the same containment strategy.

Already implicit in this strategy was a view about the nature of the worldwide institutionality of Anglicanism. It was to be an arena which had a defined perimeter with clear and detailed rules about entry and exclusion. The Primates meetings have increasingly taken to themselves the role of executive body for membership purposes despite the conciliar character of Anglican ecclesiology and the synodical structures from which they held their positions. Whereas the Lambeth conference tended in the past to speak of the Anglican Communion as a fellowship of churches, now voices are heard speaking of it as a church with a judicature and a mechanism of compliance or disciplinary authority. It is an interesting innovation so far without much specifically Anglican theological rationale.

If the worldwide Anglican community were conceived of as a fellowship of churches then a different strategy might have suggested itself,

6. On the development of conciliarism and its relation to Anglicanism see P.D.L. Avis, *Beyond the Reformation? Authority, Primacy and Unity in the Conciliar Tradition* (London: T & T Clark, 2006).

perhaps specific conflict resolution practices. It is remarkable that the actual issue of sexuality has not been the subject of an Anglican Communion initiative. One might have thought that a mediation strategy would have appealed to a 'fellowship' model, rather than a structured containment strategy, but that has not yet happened. Instead we have a listening process as if gay and lesbian people have to explain themselves because this dispute is somehow their fault. The latest interim report of the current IATDC suggested such a conflict resolution body in the Anglican Communion.⁷ It will be interesting to see if such an arrangement is made in the Communion. Such a strategy would not resolve the current conflict in the sense of gaining everyone's agreement. Conflict resolution generally does not do that. Rather it enhances understanding and respect and facilitates the parties living together, either literally or metaphorically, on new agreed terms. That might be thought to bear some relationship to the idea that the crucial test for disciples of Christ is that they love one another and thus witness to their belonging to Jesus.

Furthermore, such a strategy would imply a different model of the Anglican Communion. It would be a fellowship of churches. Sometimes these two models are expressed in terms of the Anglican Communion as a 'church' or as a 'loose federation' of churches. This is not altogether unfair but it does rather suggest that a 'loose federation' is somehow less attractive than being a church. There are some hints in the Windsor Report and subsequent material that some think that one ambition in the present strategy is to be a world communion which could relate to other world communions. The Roman Catholic Church is the only church tradition which is a world communion in a sense other than a loose federation. No Orthodox or Protestant tradition functions at the global level as anything other than a loose federation. It is an odd and out of place note in an ecclesiological tradition which has been provincial and conciliar in character and that over against the Roman Catholic model. It sits uncomfortably with the 1930 Lambeth Conference section report on the Anglican Communion:

There are two prevailing types of ecclesiastical organisation: that of centralised government, and that of regional autonomy within one fellowship. Of the former the Church of Rome is the great historical example. The latter type, which we share with the Orthodox Churches of the East and others, was that upon which the Church of the first centuries was developing until the claims of the Roman church and other tendencies confused the issue. The Provinces and Patriarchates of the first four centuries were

7. IATDC, Responding to a proposal of a covenant, October 2006, Section 5, available at <http://www.aco.org/ecumenical/commissions/iatdc/20061710covenant.cfm>

bound together by no administrative bond: the real nexus was a common life resting upon a common faith, common Sacraments, and a common allegiance to an Unseen Head.⁸

In the event it may not be fair to see these two, 'church' or 'loose federation', as strict alternatives, but rather as two poles between which Anglicans need to find a way. The constitution of the Anglican Consultative Council contains no theological recitals but defines its character according to the Anglican Provinces around the world. It thereby makes it clear that the creedal position of the Anglican Communion is what is generally embedded in the constitutions of the provinces.⁹ The idea of defining the faith of the Anglican Communion, or its theological position on some particular topic beyond this provincial method would be entirely unprecedented. Given the character of the tradition that is not just a happenstance of history, but reflects a well-established ecclesiology.

That is not to say that the development of a theological account of the Anglican Communion which was consonant with the tradition is not possible. It is rather to say that it has not yet been done. In order to do this we probably need to go back to the report of the first IATDC and work on the identity of Anglicanism from that general starting point. The Draft Covenant document attempts in its recitals to express some form of theological position for the Anglican Communion, but it lacks serious argument from the tradition and it lacks any serious ecclesiology which could be regarded as Anglican and which could be the basis for a theological account of the Anglican Communion. That is not to blame the drafting group. They were not asked for that. They were asked for a text which would state some propositions and that is what they have produced. They were not asked for a theological defence of the project itself. Nor indeed was the IATDC in relation to its recent document on the covenant project.

The Virginia Report and the Windsor Report did not attempt this task. They were not asked to do so. In both cases their brief was much narrower and more specific. The Virginia Report addresses some relevant themes on the question of *koinonia* and its relation to unity among the Anglican provinces. The Windsor Report suggested a covenant as a way of providing some compliance leverage. It did not address the prior question

8. *The Lambeth Conference 1930: Encyclical Letters from the Bishops with the Resolutions and Reports* (London: SPCK, 1930), p. 153.

9. 'The Council shall be constituted with a membership according to the schedule hereto': Section 3(a), the constitution of the Anglican Consultative Council, available at <http://www.aco.org/acc/docs/constitution.cfm>, accessed 19 June 2007. This point was made explicit in resolution 19 of the Lambeth Conference 1888.

of a theological rationale for the overall strategy itself. Neither report contains the kind of argument out of the tradition which would enable an appropriate or defensibly Anglican theological account for this model of the Anglican Communion.

At issue here is a question of Anglican identity in general, and also of the identity of this new phenomenon, the Anglican Communion. Anglican identity is not a new question. In 1888 the Lambeth Conference put forward a view about how Anglicans might approach ecumenical conversations. It came to be called the Lambeth Quadrilateral and was the subject of resolution 11. The subject was not directly or generally Anglican identity. Rather the resolution was addressed to the question of home reunion: 'That, in the opinion of this Conference, the following articles supply a basis on which approach may be by God's blessing made towards home reunion'.¹⁰ That it was a resolution directed to the attention of the provinces is made abundantly clear by the following resolution at the conference.

The 1888 Lambeth Conference very sensibly wanted information about the creedal commitments of Anglican churches as a prelude to ecumenical conversations. The conference 'recommends as of great importance, in tending to bring about reunion, the dissemination of information respecting the standards of doctrine and formularies in use in the Anglican Church'.¹¹ In a new environment where new things are being suggested, or new circumstances have arisen it is not just sensible to clarify one's self understanding but also the sources of our tradition and their influence on our identity. That was the case in 1888, and it has arisen now with a different challenge.

Our theological tradition itself points us back to the Scriptures as the ultimate standard for our faith and life. However, the Anglican tradition of our use of Scripture makes it clear that we should not expect to be able to read off from the text of Scripture material which will be sufficiently specific or precise for our present needs. In that context we will need to study again some of the sources in the tradition for refining our understanding of an Anglican identity which will enable us to deal adequately with the present issues. We will also have to learn from each other how our faith works in our different contexts so that we will be able to understand the nature of the faith which we share and its meaning for each of us in our own different circumstances.

10. Lambeth Conference 1888, Resolution 11, from <http://www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1888/1888-11.cfm>, accessed 19 June 2007.

11. Lambeth Conference 1888, Resolution 13.

For these reasons the *Journal of Anglican Studies* is presenting for the coming Lambeth Conference and for the wider audience of our readers two special issues on these aspects of our present situation. This issue contains articles on what have generally been regarded as 'classic texts' in the Anglican tradition. They begin with the most recent, Stephen Neill's *Anglicanism*, and end with the oldest in this group, Richard Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Lawes*, Book V. In between are texts from William Temple, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Paley. Not all these texts will be readily known to the present generation, but they have been influential in their day and in every case for generations afterwards. They have become prominent elements in the landscape of the Anglican tradition of the faith. In the case of the oldest of the texts, Hooker's *Lawes*, the article contains an extensive exposition of the text itself.

We will continue further articles on other classic texts in later issues of the Journal. They will constitute an occasional series of articles and that series is introduced in this issue by Dr Rowan Strong, an Associate Editor of the Journal and coordinator of the series.

The second aspect of the question, the local meaning of the tradition, will be the subject of the second special Lambeth 2008 issues of the *JAS*. This issue will contain articles drawn mainly from Africa, Asia and Latin America, dealing with the way in which ordination candidates are formed in an Anglican identity for their own specific cultural contexts. This series of articles is coordinated by Dr Stephen Pickard, who is an Associate Editor of the Journal and a bishop in the diocese of Adelaide.

With these two special issues we hope to provide theological material which can inform and inspire the preparation of bishops going to the Lambeth Conference and to provide a broader framework for understanding the present situation in which, as Anglicans, we are called to be faithful disciples of Christ.