

Virginia Report

CHAPTER 6

THE WORLDWIDE INSTRUMENTS OF COMMUNION: STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES

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6.1 In this chapter we raise a number of questions about the future development of the world-wide instruments of communion, the way they function and their inter-relation, one with the other. The Commission was not asked to give specific proposals for future developments. It simply seeks to ask questions which the bishops at Lambeth will need to address if they are to give direction for the future interdependence and coherence of the Anglican Communion.

I. The Archbishop of Canterbury

6.2 In our historical section we noted that to be in communion with the See of Canterbury is an important ingredient of Anglican interdependence, yet each of the Provinces is autonomous. The Archbishop of Canterbury is neither a supreme legislator nor a personification of central administrative power, but as a pastor in the service of unity, offers a ministry of service, care and support to the Communion. The interdependence of the Anglican Communion becomes most clearly visible when the Archbishop of Canterbury exercises his primatial office as an enabler of mission, pastoral care and healing in those situations of need to which he is called. This pastoral service of unity is exercised by invitation. For example, at the request of Provincial leaders, the Archbishop has exercised a pastoral role and mediation in the Sudan and Rwanda.

6.3 The Archbishop of Canterbury exercises his ministry in relationship with his fellow Primates. In considering how to respond to a request for assistance from a Province, he wisely consults all the appropriate resources in the region, the Province and the local diocese. Here, as elsewhere in the exercise of primacy, subsidiarity is important. So too is the exercise of an episcopate in which personal, collegial and communal elements are held together.

6.4 Together with a ministry of presence and teaching, there is also a certain administrative primacy. Historically this has found its unique expression when the Archbishop of Canterbury calls and presides at the Lambeth Conference, where the relationship of the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Communion, and the bishops to each other, is most clearly seen. It is also visible in his chairmanship of the regular meetings of the Primates, and also exercised within the life of the Anglican Consultative Council where the Archbishop of Canterbury acts as its president and as an active participant in its meetings.

6.5 It is nevertheless most often the personal pastoral element in the exercise of this office which has become the most visible evidence of the Archbishop of Canterbury as an instrument of unity. Given the magnitude of this ministry, there must be concern that pastoral and spiritual care, beyond the prayers of the Communion, be made available to the Archbishop.

6.6 The special position of the Archbishop of Canterbury in the Communion raises questions that need to be addressed. Are there mechanisms by which tasks may be shared within the fellowship of the Primates, without weakening the symbol of unity provided by one person?

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Is the Archbishop of Canterbury adequately resourced as Primate of the Communion? Is there sufficient coherence and consultation between the Anglican Communion Secretariat and the staff of Lambeth Palace? Does the role of the Archbishop mean that the Church of England must be more cautious in its decisions than other Provinces? Does an Archbishop of Canterbury necessarily have to be a member of the Church of England? Does the Primate of the Anglican Communion need to be the occupant of the see of Canterbury?

II. The Lambeth Conference

6.7 The Lambeth Conference plays an important role in strengthening the unity of the Anglican Communion by expressing the collegiality of bishops in a clear and concrete way at the international level and in symbolising the relatedness in bonds of spiritual communion of each of the dioceses from which the bishops come.

6.8 Though the Conference is not legislative it offers the opportunity to bishops who come from churches in different cultures and social and political contexts, and with different agendas and problems, to live together, to worship together, to join in Bible study together and to listen to each other. Through these means each bishop may share the difficulties and joys of every other church. This indicates that each church in the Anglican Communion is a partner in mission and a part of the body of Christ. In this way the Conference embodies the Pauline concept of the Church as a body. As Paul writes "when one part of the body suffers the rest of the body suffers". Each part of the body is different, but every part is necessary to the body.

6.9 The Conference also signifies the fundamental importance of face to face communication for the healthy life of the Communion. The personal encounters that it facilitates and the relationships that grow from them signify one aspect of the servanthood of bishops who bring the reality of each diocese to the whole Communion as a whole back to their own diocese.

6.10 The Lambeth Conference thus helps to define the bishop's role as one who represents the part to the whole and the whole to the part, the particularity of each diocese to the whole Communion and the Communion to each diocese.

i. Attentiveness at the Lambeth Conference

6.11 In the context of the Lambeth Conference, Christian attentiveness entails, in the first place, that individual bishops and groups of bishops will heed the voice of other bishops when these express the needs and hopes of the Church in their place. Such respecting of the voice of others, especially when such respect requires taking into account needs and agendas that

are not one's own, can mean that bishops from one part of the world make their own an agenda they did not bring originally to Lambeth. This can result in a bishop or group of bishops leaving the Lambeth Conference committed to a quite new programme.

6.12 A special concern of Lambeth 1998 will need to be how the college is attentive to, and integrates the insights of, women bishops attending the Conference for the first time.

6.13 Christian attentiveness at Lambeth should mean giving special heed to those bishops whose first language is not English, and to those bishops who do not come from politically, culturally and economically powerful Provinces in the Communion. Attentiveness becomes distinctively Christian when the bishops assembled give ear to, and make space for, the voices of those Christians who are seldom, if ever, heard.

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6.14 One example of such Christian attentiveness in the past is western bishops' heeding of, and being responsive to, the deep concern of African bishops regarding polygamy. A second example, from the Lambeth Conference, 1988, is western bishops acknowledging the legitimacy of a call from Asian and African bishops for a renewed commitment to evangelism. All the bishops left Lambeth 1988 committed to a Decade of Evangelism which they had not anticipated before the Lambeth Conference process began.

6.15 Increasing the opportunities for, and occasions of, Christian attentiveness should be promoted and protected at the Lambeth Conference. This will allow the bishops gathered at Lambeth to share in, to be shaped by and to show forth the attentiveness of God the Father's love as we know it in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

ii. Interdependence at the Lambeth Conference

6.16 The principle of communal interdependence, if brought to bear on the Lambeth Conference, might be thought to demand its reform so as to introduce priests and deacons and lay people into its structure. This was in fact suggested in 1871 before the second Lambeth Conference, when the presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, USA suggested that the Lambeth Conference should be transformed into a "Patriarchal Conference" of world bishops, representative clergy and laity, under the presidency of the Archbishop of Canterbury. This would tend, however, to confuse Lambeth with the synodical structures of the local and national churches and move it in the direction of a "world synod". The calling of a World Anglican Congress from time to time may be a more appropriate opportunity for presbyters, deacons and lay people to meet together with bishops at an international forum. We explore this proposal in Appendix II.

6.17 An alternative approach would be to suggest that the gathering of bishops should continue to be seen collegially, but in the context of the life of the Church as a whole. Insofar as bishops are representative persons, they should understand Lambeth as an opportunity to bring the issues and concerns of their own dioceses to the consideration of brother and sister bishops. Few issues are entirely peculiar to a particular diocese, and the sharing of experiences and approaches to the resolution of difficulties makes for the easing of the burden of decision making.

6.18 At the last Lambeth Conference the Archbishop of Canterbury invited participating bishops "to bring their dioceses with them". At the same Lambeth Conference bishops voted on resolutions in the light of a preceding consultative process that had already occurred in their home dioceses and Provinces and at ACC-7. One obvious example was the resolution on the Final Report of ARCIC I which expressed a "Communion-wide mind" on the consonance of ARCIC with the faith of Anglicans. This resolution did not just express the mind of the bishops acting entirely alone, but as spokespersons who reflected the mind of their Provinces and were together expressing the mind of the Communion.

6.19 The bishops acting collegially can speak prophetically to the Church and to the world. On some issues such as, for example, ordination, the Church itself should expect the advice of those to whom the responsibility to ordain has been given. When the bishops speak to the Church, however, this should not be in an autocratic way, but in a manner that makes a positive contribution to, and stimulates, a continuing conversation in the wider life of the Church. True leadership demands consultation and partnership.

iii. Accountability at the Lambeth Conference

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6.20 Bishops are accountable for their words and actions at Lambeth, before God and the whole Church. The bishops at Lambeth are to represent those who have no voice: those who can rely on no one else to tell their story and plead their case; those whose concerns society and/or the Church have chosen, sometimes deliberately, sometimes forgetfully, to address. It is when the bishops consider themselves to be accountable to those who have the least that they discover the way of God's Kingdom.

6.21 The diocese is to be brought with the bishop to Lambeth, and Lambeth through the bishop back to the diocese. It is an important way of involving the entire membership of the people of God in the concerns and thinking of the world-wide communion. Post-Lambeth educational programs may dictate that, in addition to the usual publication of a report of its proceedings, educational resources, audiotapes and videos should be made available so as to assist the bishops in the sharing of the Lambeth experience.

6.22 There are again questions worth asking. Is a Conference every ten years too frequent to allow for adequate preparation, consultation and reception? What is the nature of the authority of the Conference? How binding are the resolutions of the Conference? How should issues be selected and prepared; what concerns should be addressed? What form of report or pastoral letter would best strengthen the communion of the Church? If the Lambeth Conference is an effective instrument of unity of the Anglican Communion, what is its special vocation in relation to the movement for the visible unity of the Church? What part should ecumenical participants play? How might the Lambeth Conference encourage the development of shared oversight with other Christian traditions? How does the authority of the Lambeth Conference relate to the authority of other churches, in particular to those churches which claim to be the Church?

III. The Anglican Consultative Council

6.23 Unique among the international Anglican instruments of unity, the ACC includes laity among its members. The inclusion of the laity in decision-making bodies has long been a principle of Anglican life. Thus, the royal priesthood of the entire people of God (1 Peter 2:9), and the mutuality and interdependence of the various ministries within the Church, are witnessed to and affirmed. Means must be found to honour the specific experience and expertise that various lay members bring and also to provide them with whatever further resources and experiences they might need to participate fully and responsibly in the life of God's Church.

6.24 It is important that these rich experiences of being in community not be lost through either infrequency of meeting or too large a gathering. Significant too is the participation of members from the two-thirds world who represent a growing majority in the Communion and whose issues increasingly occupy the Communion's concern. Every effort needs to be made to enable people whose first language is not English to communicate freely and effectively so that there be no feeling of exclusion.

6.25 The mission of the Anglican Consultative Council is to represent the concerns of the Communion, in the Communion and for the Communion. Most of this work is effected day by day through the General Secretary and the Secretariat. However, to be effective and credible, the Secretariat must be governed by a reference group which is informed, has continuity and is also representative of the Communion's diversity. It must be adequately staffed.

6.26 There are two possible ways in which change might be effected in order to enhance the representative nature of the ACC and its effectiveness: first, by creating a smaller council

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which would meet more frequently, or alternatively, by enlarging the Standing Committee and leaving the size and frequency of the ACC as it presently is. It is important that the representation be balanced between laity and clergy, with greater continuity of membership than at present. Representatives should have entree to the councils of their own church and be knowledgeable about its concerns and interests.

6.27 The existence of the Anglican Consultative Council raises questions of a general nature. What is the relationship of this body to the Lambeth Conference and to the Primates' Meeting? What part should the ACC play in contributing to the major issues that are to come before the Lambeth Conference and the reception of the Lambeth resolutions? Should the on-going tasks of the Communion be done by an expanded secretariat, or through meetings of the ACC, or a combination of both? Who is responsible for the continuity of membership in the ACC; is it the members themselves, is it the Primates, who make this decision? What is the nature of the responsibility and accountability of those elected to serve on the ACC?

IV. The Primates' Meeting

6.28 The Primates' Meeting provides the opportunity for mutual counsel and pastoral care and support of one another and of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Their meetings have an inherent authority by virtue of the office which they hold as chief pastors. The Meeting provides a place between Lambeth Conferences for each to share the burning or persistent issues of their Province and their own primatial ministry. It is the context in which Primates can identify common issues and resolve outstanding concerns. It also provides for a broader horizon than the Provincial which makes it possible for a Primate to consider a regional matter in a world- wide context. There is an opportunity to take responsibility together in the concern for the wellbeing of all the churches.

6.29 The Primates have in fact found it easier to affirm collegiality for the sake of consultation, study and mutual support than for the exercise of pastoral, moral and doctrinal guidance. This experience raises in yet another context the theological and practical importance of holding together the personal, collegial and communal modes of episcopate.

6.30 Each Primate exercises his personal primatial ministry with fellow bishops and the synod of his Province. Similarly, the Archbishop of Canterbury exercises this Communion-wide ministry both collegially and communally. In the same way, the collegiality of the Primates' Meeting is exercised in relation to the personal and communal elements of the episcopate at the communion-wide level.

6.31 The exercise of collegiality with one another and with the Archbishop of Canterbury, as well as the exercise of collegiality with all the bishops at the Lambeth Conference, raises the question of the relation of the Primates' Meeting to the communal gatherings of the Anglican Consultative Council. It is to be noted that while the Standing Committee of the Primates' Meeting meets with the Standing Committee of the ACC, this has hardly enhanced relations with the ACC. As an instrument of world-wide unity within the Communion, the Primates' Meeting has responsibility to maintain a living relationship with the ACC, so that the collegial and communal exercise of oversight are held together. Archbishop Donald Coggan commented at the 1978 Lambeth Conference that the Primates' Meeting should be in the very closest and most intimate contact with the ACC. What in fact this would mean in practice still has to be worked out.

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6.32 How far should the task of the Primates' Meeting be that of responsibility for monitoring the progress of recommendations and resolutions which come from the Lambeth Conference in the interim between Conferences? For example, in the period following Lambeth 1988, the Primates received and promulgated the recommendations of the Eames' Commission to the Communion. The Primates' Meeting also referred to the Provinces the Porvoo Common Statement and the Concordat of Agreement.

6.33 In chapter 3 (paragraph 3.50) it was noted that the Primates have been reluctant to give serious consideration to resolution 18 Section 2(a) of Lambeth 1988 which asks the Primates to exercise greater responsibility in offering guidance on doctrinal, moral and pastoral matters. Should Primates be expected to make authoritative statements, or should the Primates' Meeting be encouraged to exercise a primarily pastoral role, both for their own

numbers, but also for the Communion? What is the relationship of the Primates' Meeting to the Lambeth Conference and the Anglican Consultative Council? Do the Primates have sufficient resources for their ministry?

V. The Inter-relation of the Instruments of Communion

6.34 In reviewing the world-wide instruments of communion this report has at times commented on the relationship of one to the other and on their inter-connectedness with structures at other levels of the Church's life. Three instruments, the ACC, the Primates' Meeting and the Lambeth Conference, have their own distinctive characteristics and potentially hold in balance and tension three aspects of the life of the Communion. Lambeth focuses the relation of bishops to bishops and therefore dioceses to dioceses. The Primates' Meeting focuses the relation of Primates to Primates, and therefore Provinces to Provinces. The ACC, which is the most comprehensive gathering, represents the voice of the inner life of the Provinces, with representatives of laity, clergy and bishops. These three instruments of interdependence are presided over by the Archbishop of Canterbury, thus focusing the unity and diversity of the Communion.

6.35 At the present time the formal structural and continuing relations between the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative council and the Primates' Meeting is the responsibility of the Secretary General and the Anglican Communion Secretariat which staffs all three bodies. Greater clarity on the relations between the instruments of communion themselves would make for creative, effective and sustainable relations within the Anglican Communion. It is urgent that ways be found to strengthen the resourcing of the ACC Secretariat if it is to serve effectively the world-wide structures of Anglican belonging.

VI. Final Reflections

6.36 A deeper understanding of the instruments of communion at a world-level, their relationship one to another and to the other levels of the Church's life should lead to a more coherent and inclusive functioning of oversight in the service of the koinonia of the Church. When the ministry of oversight is exercised in a personal, collegial and communal way, imbued with the principles of subsidiarity, accountability and interdependence then the community is protected from authoritarianism, structures serve the personal and relational life of the Church and the diverse gift of all is encouraged in the service of all. The Church is thus opened up to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit for mission and ministry and enabled to serve more effectively the unity and community of humanity.

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6.37 We have necessarily concentrated in the report on the world-wide instruments of the Anglican Communion. However, by virtue of our baptism we have in a communion in the Holy Trinity and therefore with the universal Church. The long history of ecumenical involvement, both locally and internationally, has shown us that Anglican discernment and decision making must take account of the insights into truth and the Spirit-led wisdom of our ecumenical partners. Moreover, any decisions we take must be offered for the discernment of the universal Church.

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