

The Anglican Consultative Council: Instrument of Anglican Unity

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Origins

The Anglican Consultative Council emanated from the 1968 Lambeth Conference. Changes in the relationships between Churches of the Anglican Communion and with other Churches and organisations convinced the Lambeth Fathers that a new pattern of regular consultation was now necessary, in which 'Anglicans may fulfil their common inter-Anglican and ecumenical responsibilities in promoting the unity, renewal, and mission of Christ's Church'.¹ Hitherto the Lambeth Conference had been the only continuing consultative body for the Communion — between the 1958 and 1968 conferences a Lambeth Consultative Body had met. But for the Lambeth Conference to meet normally at ten-yearly intervals no longer seemed sufficient in a quickly-changing world. Moreover, for an entirely episcopal body to be the only forum of consultation was not thought to measure up to emerging Anglican understandings of the exercise of authority in the Church. It has to be stressed that the Lambeth Conference has no legislative jurisdiction within the Communion, nor did it contemplate any such powers for the Anglican Consultative Council. Thus its exercise of authority could not wholly reflect that of a national or diocesan synod. The authority of the Conference was, and is, moral and persuasive, not legislative. And indeed the ACC could not be set up until authorised by at least two-thirds of the member Churches of the Communion — in the event the replies were unanimously in favour. But, when synodical forms of government were becoming an accepted pattern of exercising authority in the member Churches it was seen that consultation between the autonomous members of the Anglican family should include laity and non-episcopal clergy in the process. Hence, the ACC was to have a quasi-synodical structure. To the question of authority in the Anglican family and developments relating to it since 1968 we must return.

The first meeting of the ACC was in February 1971 at Limuru, Kenya. It became, and remains, the only inter-Anglican body with a constitution agreed by all the member Churches. Its numbers are relatively small. Each Church is represented by between one and three persons, according to its size. Those with three representatives must elect one bishop, one other member of the clergy, and one lay person. Where two representatives are required they should be one ordained and one lay. At the ninth ACC meeting in Cape Town in 1993 changes to achieve a better balance of representation

1 *Lambeth Conference Report 1968* p 145.

were set on foot. Reference to them will be made later. The intention was for a meeting every two or three years. The President would always be the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Council would elect its Chairman and Vice-Chairman, each for two meetings, and its Standing Committee, which meets every year. As far as possible the Council was to meet 'in various parts of the world'.

Who are members?

The creation of a constitution, essential if only to handle funds and employ officers on the basis of a charitable trust, brought about a significant change in respect of membership of the Anglican Communion. Who decides whether a Church or Province is in the family? The presence of bishops at the Lambeth Conference had been, and remains, at the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury. In formulating a constitution, however, with a definition of its constituent members, and their rights of representation and powers, precision is required. Hence, the constitution clearly lays down the authorised member Churches. Additions to the list, and conceivably deletions, must be decided by the Council, with the advice of the Primates of the Communion led by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Two of the consequences of the definition of membership of the Anglican Communion are worth mentioning. United Churches in full communion with Anglican Churches are included in the membership. At present it is those of the Indian subcontinent. Recognising their links with other world Communions, there was concern on the part of Anglicans not to appear possessive. It was the United Churches themselves who requested full membership as now sharing fully in the historic catholic order. A much less happy consequence relates to the situation in South Africa. The Church of the Province of Southern Africa is a member Church. The Church of England in South Africa is not. Between the two Churches there is a long history of division. Whatever the rights and wrongs in the past — and CESA certainly expresses feelings of injustice — any inclusion again within the membership of the Communion cannot be but by decision of the ACC on the advice of the Primates. The Archbishop of Canterbury cannot and would not on his own authority declare CESA to be within the Anglican Communion, as some leading members of that Church apparently wish. A rapprochement with the CPSA — and various attempts have been made in the last decade or so but have failed chiefly by objections from many on the CESA side — would be a condition of acceptance into the Anglican Communion.

Holding the family together

The existence of consultative bodies such as the ACC and the Lambeth Conference, and the Primates Meeting to be described later, presupposes the need for the Anglican Communion to hold together. The presupposition deserves examination. The Anglican Communion is a family of 35 autonomous Churches. Each member Church legislates for its own business, and makes its own decisions for its mission, worship, ordering of its life and

understanding of and working out of the Christian faith in its own context. There is a shared tradition, a recognisable Anglican ethos and bonds of affection between members of the family evident at every inter-Anglican gathering. But certain ties regarded as of primary significance in past generations have suffered differing degrees of erosion. The Book of Common Prayer was described in a report to the 1948 Lambeth Conference as 'the standard of our worship'.² Most member Churches now have their own modern liturgy shaped in varying degrees to their own culture. Spread over one hundred and sixty four countries Anglican worship exhibits considerable variations, even of eucharistic theology, although a family pattern is still discernible. A mutually accepted ordained ministry was undoubtedly another strong unifying bond. The report to the 1948 Lambeth Conference already quoted could also speak of Anglican authority as 'reflected in our adherence to episcopacy as the source and centre of our order'. Today the ordination of women to the priesthood has resulted in an impaired rather than a mutually accepted ministry, with not only sections of member Churches but some whole Churches refusing to countenance women priests. And now with the emergence of women bishops the episcopacy 'as the source and centre of our order' is under question in some quarters. It is, however, not only the women's ordination issue that creates tensions in the Anglican family. Christian initiation, human sexuality issues and cultural expressions of the faith also strain relationships.

Is it worth it?

The question should therefore be asked — can the Anglican family hold together, and is it worth the effort? To maintain the inter-Anglican consultative bodies (the Lambeth Conference, the ACC, and since 1978 the Primates Meeting) is an expensive exercise. If the decreased contributions of some member Churches is a guide there is not the capacity at present, or the will, to meet the bill.

Anglicanism does not exist for its own sake; its motivation must not be merely self-preservation. In the words of Michael Ramsey it sees itself as 'pointing through its own history to something of which it is a fragment'.³ It recognises its provisionality as it confesses faith in one, holy, catholic, apostolic Church. Yet, as I have claimed elsewhere,⁴ there are cogent reasons, strengthened rather than diminished by contemporary developments, for the autonomous member Churches holding together as a family. I group those reasons under three headings.

1 *The ecumenical dimension*

A coordinated Anglican response to other world Communions is required,

² 'The Meaning and Unity of the Anglican Communion', reproduced as an Appendix in *Authority in the Anglican Communion*, ed. Stephen W. Sykes, Anglican Book Centre, Toronto 1987.

³ Michael Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*, Longmans Green, London 1936, p 220.

⁴ John Howe & Colin Craston *Anglicanism and the Universal Church*, Anglican Book Centre, Toronto 1990, pp 219-221.

whether in a whole series of bilateral conversations with Rome, the Orthodox, the Oriental Orthodox, the Lutherans, the Reformed, the Baptists, the Methodists, the Pentecostals, or in multilateral relationships under the aegis of the World Council of Churches such as led to the report 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry'. There are regional dialogues, particularly with the Lutherans and Reformed Churches in Europe, North America and Australia, which represent the brightest spots in the ecumenical scene at present, but each needs to keep in step with the world Anglican/Lutheran talks. The way a coordinated Anglican response to other Communion may be processed is seen in the response to ARCIC 1: every member Church gave its own answer, but it was collectively as a family at the 1988 Lambeth Conference that the Communion's response was given to Rome. And Rome knew it would be that way. So, the family needs to stay together for ecumenical reasons.

2 *Mission and evangelism demands*

The Anglican Communion came into being by mission and evangelism from the older Churches. Younger, mainly dependent Churches were founded. Within the last thirty or forty years the picture has completely changed. Bishop John Howe, in *Anglicanism and the Universal Church*,⁵ refers to a watershed crossed in the establishment of new Provinces, adult and autonomous. No longer can we think of a head office and branch offices overseas — any tendency to think of head office as located in the United Kingdom has, in any cases, been out of date for two centuries: that is, since the establishment of the Episcopal Church of the USA after the American War of Independence. The younger Churches now prosecute their own mission. They exchange missionary personnel among themselves — Africans to Asia, Asians to Africa and both in a two-way exchange with Latin America. With the recognition that all Churches are in a missionary situation has come a greater sharing of resources across the Anglican family. Fast-growing Churches — it is reckoned that the Communion grows by an average of 3,000 members a day — need skills in theology and education and other expertise that the older Churches can supply. Older Churches can certainly benefit from the enthusiasm for evangelism, spiritual commitment and concentration on essentials evident in Churches of the South, as we now refer to the Third World Provinces. Partnership in mission, as a principle and in practice through planned consultations, is widely accepted. Without doubt, 'the responsibility for mission in any place belongs primarily to the Church in that place',⁶ yet as the ACC has stressed, there is a necessity for sharing among Christians 'from each and every part of the world with their distinctive insights and contributions'. Such partnership ought to be ecumenical as far as possible, and to a small degree it is. But as a practical reality it has to be built on the foundations of already existing inter-Anglican partnerships. Collaboration through the established structures of other denominational Churches can be a slow and complicated process. In the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Communion and Women in the Episcopate

5 Ibid., p 17.

6 *Partners in Mission: Report of ACC Second Meeting*, Dublin 1973, p 53.

(the Eames Commission) we have an example of a way in which the structures of Anglicanism can operate together constructively.

In the Decade of Evangelism increasing benefits are evident as member Churches share their stories, insights and needs. To shift 'to a dynamic missionary emphasis going beyond care and nurture to proclamation and service', as the 1988 Lambeth Conference Resolution 44 calls for, is not proving as easy in some areas as might have been thought at the beginning of the 1990s. Mission and evangelism, therefore, in their various emphases seem to require greater unity in the Anglican family, rather than less, in the closing years of this century.

3 The Anglican contribution

The Anglican tradition expressed through all its member Churches has a distinctive contribution to make to the universal Church. In a family of autonomous Churches experiencing considerable stresses and differences in policies arising from varying theological interpretations there is a challenge to discover and work for unity in diversity. Christian unity, which is both a gift of God and a goal to reach, will not be the unity of uniformity. Nor will it be a unity imposed or maintained by a central jurisdiction as seen in the Roman Catholic Church. Whatever Anglicans learn about unity in diversity in a close association of Churches discovering the way faith is to be lived out in their own nations and cultures can be put into the worldwide ecumenical treasure store.

As with other world Communion Anglicanism has its own ethos to contribute to the universal Church. It represents catholicism renewed by the Reformation and influenced by subsequent movements, notably the Enlightenment and the Romantic Movement, and by the evangelical, catholic and liberal traditions. In 1984 the sixth meeting of the ACC, in a definition of Anglicanism, claimed that 'the Communion seeks to be loyal to the apostolic faith and to safeguard it and express it in catholic order always to be reformed by the standards of Scripture. It allows for a responsible freedom and latitude of interpretation of the faith within a fellowship committed to a living expression of that faith'.⁷ Latitude of interpretation has its downside as well as any positive value. How elastic may the parameters be allowed to be? Can Anglicans believe anything? And could a situation arise where a member Church by its interpretation of the faith forfeited the right to continue within the Anglican family? To these questions we will return.

As with all living traditions there has been development, and still is, in the Anglican ethos. The 1984 meeting of the ACC already mentioned spoke of 'a way of thinking and of feeling that has developed over the centuries which calls for an acceptance of measures of diversity, an openness, tolerance and mutual respect towards others'.⁸ Reflection on earlier centuries will incline to the view that tolerance is a relatively recent characteristic of the Anglican ethos. Development as a contemporary phenomenon is most evident in the

7 *Bonds of Affection: Report of ACC Sixth Meeting*, Badagry 1984, p 72.

8 *Ibid.*, p 73.

process of inculturation. As 'Englishness' in the Anglican tradition across the world disappears, and rightly so, worship, traditions of spirituality and styles of management grow more varied. Yet the marks of Anglicanism can still be seen.

A further aspect of the Anglican contribution worthy of note is our understanding of the exercise of authority in the Church. Anglicanism inherited catholic order centred upon episcopal leadership. In contrast to a congregationalist ecclesiology the basic unit of the Church is seen as an association of local churches in communion with a bishop. But in contrast also with the Roman and Orthodox Churches which have maintained catholic order Anglicans have seen fit to draw laity and non-episcopal clergy into the exercise of authority. The theological basis to this is that the authority of Christ over his Church is devolved to the whole people of God. Hence the Anglican way has well been described as 'episcopally led and synodically governed'. There is a rightful authority residing in the episcopate, singly and collegially, but that is to be balanced by the authority of 'bishop in council' with laity and other clergy. If the balance is not kept, trouble ensues. Synodical government has been developing across the Communion for two centuries now, adapted to some extent to cultural conditions. With whatever faults in practice may be adduced, the Anglican experience of episcopal leadership and synodical government is a distinctive contribution to the universal Church.

Maintaining the unity

If the case for wholehearted commitment to the holding together of the Anglican family is established the major question is — How? The basic answer is by consultation. Various means may be found useful, even essential, to the task. Theological agreements, sharing of liturgical experience, partnership in the expressions of mission will all come into the agenda. But for the family to stay together its members must talk together and not just in an haphazard, unstructured way. Thus the 1968 Lambeth Conference felt the need to add another level of regular consultation to its own meeting every ten years.

The ACC has now met nine times in different parts of the Communion, the last occasion being in Cape Town in January 1993. Its pattern of work has ranged over all the concerns of the Communion of the last twenty-five years. Because its members normally serve for three meetings there is a change-over of at least one third every time, producing both advantages and disadvantages. A weakness in the Council's operation and thus its effectiveness as a consultative body occurs if the representatives sent from a member Church do not report directly to the centres of authority in their Church. This may happen if they are elected democratically by their respective national or provincial Synod. The Church of England ensures that two of its three representatives are members of its General Synod Standing Committee.

A further weakness is the inability of the Council so far to ensure a good balance of bishops, clergy and laity with a good representation of women and young people. The ninth meeting in Cape Town took steps to remedy the

faults.

Because of the changing membership of the Council there is a tendency from time to time to 're-invent the wheel' on some issue or subject. The problem is not confined to meetings of the Council. Other inter-Anglican bodies, especially one-off meetings, exhibit the same tendency. Yet the accumulated reports of ACC meetings make impressive reading on many matters if not on all.

Relating to other Anglican bodies

The greatest challenge now emerging for the ACC, however, is its relationship and cooperation with the other inter-Anglican consultative bodies. Care in compilation of agendas, in definition of roles and communication of decisions is essential if confusion through divergent policies is to be avoided.

Hitherto the relationship between the Lambeth Conference and the ACC has been creative and mutually beneficial. When Archbishop Runcie, in October 1983, after consultation with the Primates of the Communion and the ACC Standing Committee, decided to call the 1988 Lambeth Conference a structure of preparation and study for the Conference was drawn up. It was to be within four sections — Mission and Ministry, Dogmatic and Pastoral Concerns, Ecumenical Relations and Christianity and the Social Order. The two meetings of the ACC that led up to the 1988 Conference, in 1984 and 1987, shaped their agendas in accordance with those four sections. Before the next Lambeth Conference in 1998 there will be another ACC meeting which, in addition to pressing business, could deal with pre-Lambeth study. And following precedent, the non-episcopal members of the ACC will participate, but without voting rights, in the Conference agenda and discussions.

Cooperation with the Primates

It is with the other consultative body, the Primates' Meeting on which little has yet been said, that the matter of relationship demands closer attention. The Primates' Meeting came into being by a decision of the 1978 Lambeth Conference — ten years later than the ACC. The principal need for a regular gathering of the Primates was to afford mutual support and consultation for men exposed to enormous pressures in their leadership of their Churches. Mention of Primates such as Archbishop Eames of Ireland and Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa is sufficient to make the point. And, in particular, the Archbishop of Canterbury would have a forum for consultation and support, especially in dealing with emergencies in the Communion. Behind the setting up of the Primates' Meeting there was also the feeling in some minds, according to reports, that an eye had to be kept on the ACC. At the first ACC meeting in 1971 a request for advice on the ordination of women to the priesthood from the Bishop of Hong Kong was debated. The Council resolved that if he or any other bishop acting with the approval of his Synod and/or Province did proceed on that course it would be acceptable to the ACC. The resolution succeeded by a very narrow majority. The

Council has been perceived by many to have exceeded its powers. And certainly there has been care ever since to avoid the appearance of assuming legislative powers.

When the setting up of the Primates' Meeting was agreed, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Donald Coggan expressed the firm hope that it would meet in close association with the ACC. During the first ten years of its life that hope was barely realised. On four occasions the ACC Standing Committee met following a Primates' Meeting with a day or so overlap but not with a great deal of consequence in terms of mutual consultation. In retrospect it can be seen that the respective roles of the two consultative bodies needed clarification. Of the value of, and indeed necessity for, mutual support and consultation among the Primates there has been increasing evidence. But it is not possible to gather the episcopal leadership of the Communion together and expect them not to touch major issues within the Anglican family. Indeed, if what has been said earlier about the place of episcopal leadership in Anglican understanding of authority is true, their contribution on such matters as doctrine, worship, ministry and the unity of the Communion is essential. But the ACC is also bound to relate to the same concerns. How then may unhelpful disagreements and divergent approaches be avoided? Over recent years the two bodies have come near to embarrassing divergence on one or two occasions.

A developing debate

Consideration of the centres of authority, also described as instruments of unity, has been in high profile since the preparation for the seventh meeting of the ACC in 1987. An attempt was made to define how the Lambeth Conference, the ACC and the Primates' Meeting should relate, and what the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury towards each, and in the Communion as a whole, should be. The 1988 Lambeth Conference in its report⁹ describes the 'four particular embodiments or agents' making provision for our process of consultation. They are the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council and the Meeting of Primates. The agents are described and affirmed but very little is said about their relationship or collaborative working beyond the recommendation that the ACC should do its work 'in close cooperation with the Primates Meeting'.¹⁰ The following year at an overlap meeting of the Primates and the ACC Standing Committee in Larnaca, Cyprus, a definition of the respective roles of the four agents or instruments of unity was attempted, together with a planned programme of meetings up to the next Lambeth Conference. In addition to the Standing Committees of the Primates and the ACC meeting together there were to be joint meetings of the parent bodies in 1993 and 1996.

The ACC (meeting for the ninth time) and the Primates had their first joint meeting in Cape Town in January 1993. For various reasons, some beyond the control of the Standing Committees who had planned it, the meeting was

9 *The Truth Shall Make You Free: The Lambeth Conference 1988*, ACC, London 1988, pp 110f.

10 *Ibid.*, Resolution 18, p 216.

not an unqualified success. The Primates did not have sufficient time for the sharing among themselves and consultation they so much needed. Some members of both bodies felt the meeting over-weighted with episcopal membership. There was, however, considerable advantage in the coming together of Primates and the ACC to debate and agree on some vital concerns in the Communion. Notably, there was most welcome consensus on the preservation of episcopal oversight in the light of disagreement over women's ordination and on the pastoral care of opponents of the development so that the maximum degree of unity is maintained. One can only imagine with alarm the disarray possible if the two bodies had met separately and proposed solutions conflicting in any significant way. And, because other decisions, touching ecumenical relations, doctrinal and theological consultations, liturgy and mission, involving a financial commitment to be borne by member Churches, were made jointly, potential trouble was avoided.

The joint meeting of the Standing Committee of the Primates and the ACC in March 1994 decided against a repetition of the Cape Town experiment when the ACC next meets in 1996, but the two Standing committees would continue to meet jointly. Will this be sufficient to avoid divergent policies? Basic to the resolving of this question is a clarification of the respective roles of the two bodies and how matters of concern to both are to be handled. In the Church of England over recent years a beneficial accommodation between the House of Bishops and the General Synod has emerged. Separate meetings of the House and its full participation in the meetings of the Synod has been a way of steering the Church through difficult issues. There has been episcopal leadership and Synodical Government. The question facing the Communion, it seems, is: 'Can the Primates Meeting and the ACC achieve some similar relationship, given the difference between the exercise of authority in a Province and in a Communion of autonomous member Churches?'

A complication to the solution of this issue is the existence of different emphases on episcopacy and Synodical Government in different parts of the Communion. Some Anglicans are less than enthusiastic about the development or even the existence of the Primates' Meeting, and indeed of the Lambeth Conference, believing that consultation by bodies entirely episcopal is to be resisted. They would go for an enhanced ACC, while others strongly endorse the concept of collegial episcopal leadership.

Other channels of communication

This article has concentrated on three inter-Anglican consultative bodies as instruments of unity. They are served by one, modestly-staffed Anglican Communion secretariat employed by the ACC. Whereas there used to be separate funding for each of the three bodies, somewhat haphazard in the case of the Lambeth Conference and the Primates, one Inter-Anglican Budget now provides for all, or rather should do if all member Churches were to meet their commitments fully.

There are, however, other ways in which member Churches collaborate and the needs of the Communion are served. An Inter-Anglican Theological

and Doctrinal Commission met during the 1980s. A successor will tackle theological issues referred to it from the Lambeth Conference in the near future. The Eames Commission to consult on women and the episcopate had its final meeting in December 1993. Two successive Mission Issues and Strategy Advisory Groups have worked since the early 1980s, and from 1994 a continuing Anglican Mission Commission, entitled 'MISSIO', will carry forward their work, particularly exploring ways of developing theological perspectives for mission and evangelism. Reference has earlier been made to the series of bilateral dialogues with other world Communion, which like the groups just mentioned, are serviced by the Anglican Communion Secretariat led by the Secretary-General, Canon Sam Van Culin, who retires at the end of 1994.

There are also Networks, not funded from the Inter-Anglican Budget, but required to report to the ACC. They specialise in areas like Refugees, Indigenous Peoples, Peace and Justice, the Family, Youth, and Inter-Anglican Information Communication. They are sustained by workers in those areas of service sent by their respective Churches. A most important development for several of the Networks was the establishment three years ago of an office at the United Nations with Non-Governmental Observer status. Bishop Sir Paul Reeves, formerly Archbishop and then Governor-General of New Zealand, has occupied the post.

While it is not called a Network, the International Anglican Liturgy Consultation contributes much to the Communion. Advice on the development of new liturgies, to ensure a continuing pattern of Anglican worship while responding to cultural needs, is available through its good offices. And considerable work has been done on Christian initiation, lectionaries and calendar revision.

A watershed still to cross?

In describing the ethos of Anglicanism reference was made to 'a latitude of interpretation of the Christian faith within a fellowship committed to a living expression of that faith', and the question raised as to how elastic those parameters of interpretation can be allowed to be within the Communion. Bishop John Howe in *Anglicanism and the Universal Church* spoke of two watersheds needing to be crossed.¹¹ One it had crossed successfully — the transition from older Churches with missionary outreach overseas to a family of autonomous Churches. The other watershed, he maintained, had not yet been crossed. It was to reach an adequate agreement on the acceptable limits of faith and practice in the Anglican Communion. Comprehensiveness can be seen 'as scooping up diversities and contradictions and letting the one pot contain them all'.¹² He was not advocating a universal, total and therefore imposed canon law, but was warning that excessive diversity within one Communion threatens its unity and furthermore hinders its witness to the gospel and acceptance by other Christians that Anglicanism can be taken seriously.

¹¹ *Anglicanism and the Universal Church*, p 17.

¹² *Ibid.*, p 32.

Whatever value the Lambeth Quadrilateral has had it does not seem to meet this particular need. Is some more developed statement of Anglicanism's essential witness now desirable? Debate, disagreement, even conflict in theology, will continue as it has from the beginning, but should it be within a mutually agreed framework more detailed than the Quadrilateral? At the seventh meeting of the ACC there were proposals for a Common Declaration based on the Quadrilateral but expanded by statements drawn from Lambeth Conferences over the years. One suggestion was that it might be included in the constitutions of member Churches and used at the consecration or installation of bishops. With a favourable wind from the ACC the draft Declaration went to the 1988 Lambeth Conference, where by Resolution 19 it was referred to the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission when it is next convened. Meanwhile the Primates' Meeting in 1989 commended the draft to the Church for comment.

Which ecclesiology?

In many parts of the Anglican Communion a 'congregationalist' philosophy underlies the attitudes of local parishes, even if not actually thought through. Church members can see the need to support and pay for their own church, ministry and work. They seem less convinced about the work and service of their diocese, still less about activities of the provincial or national Church. It needs little imagination to see where this ecclesiological approach, if it may be dignified by that description, leaves the provision for the consultation process and agreed services of the whole Anglican family. One large (and the wealthiest) diocese of the Australian Church, Sydney, has opted out of contributions to the Inter-Anglican Budget. There would appear to be no strong conviction that belonging to the worldwide Anglican family is to be valued, and that the Communion needs to be held together for the sake of its contribution to the universal Church. Maybe the fault is a failure of communication. Or perhaps an Anglican ecclesiology is still far from clear.

I end on a personal note. Since 1981 I have counted it a great privilege to serve on the Anglican Consultative Council and thus to see something of the life and ministry of different parts of the Communion. It is easy to exaggerate the significance of any body on which one serves. But immersion in the Anglican Communion across the world has been a 'conversion experience' to me. I fully accept the Michael Ramsey reminder of the provisionality of Anglicanism but so long as it remains I believe there is great cause for gratitude to God for the Communion's unity, vitality of life and opportunity of mission, ministry and service.

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