

Lambeth 1998 – the Death of Anglicanism?

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The outcome of the 1998 Lambeth Conference was probably beyond the best expectations of Evangelicals. We are so used to depressing, vague statements emerging from the higher reaches of our denomination that the determinedly biblical nature of some key resolutions is a considerable shock and a cause for much rejoicing. In the months since the Conference many reports and commentaries have been made in the church press and at other meetings. Already there are signs of attempts to sideline and ignore what was said there. Naturally the Lambeth resolutions have no binding force on individual provinces like the Church of England, but their moral force can be used to sound the trumpet of the gospel and biblical morality. Yet in working to make Lambeth 1998 a milestone for biblical Christianity we should not make unwarranted assumptions about the future shape of the Anglican Communion based on a distorted view of the past. In that danger lies the point of this article.

The title 'Lambeth 1998 – the Death of Anglicanism' may sound unduly pessimistic in the light of the resolutions that came out of the Conference, yet it should not be seen in that way. The title has been carefully phrased. It is not prophesying the death of the gospel nor is it prophesying the death of the Church of England. What it may be prophesying is the death of what is called 'Anglicanism'. And that, when we understand it properly, could be a very welcome development.

We may begin by outlining the development of this phenomenon called 'Anglicanism', and along with it the story of the origins of the Lambeth Conference. This story has great relevance to the problems we face as Christians today at the end of the twentieth century. It is through understanding the development of this phenomenon known as Anglicanism that we are equipped to see a way through the jungle of ecclesiological confusion which confronts us today.

In tracing the story of Anglicanism and the Lambeth Conferences we are focusing on matters which influence us today in ways we probably hardly realize. Given the current disarray in Anglicanism and Western Christianity, the time is surely ripe to stand back and see whether we have not been led up a blind alley. To highlight the importance of this point one

needs only to realize that the word ‘Anglicanism’ appears to have been invented in the 1830s. Before that time this word and the term ‘Anglican Communion’ simply did not exist. This entire nexus of words is something that emerged in the nineteenth century.¹ Even in 1878 Lord Plunket, later to be Archbishop of Dublin, protested at such usage.²

This study therefore starts by looking at the early development of what is known today as the Anglican Communion, and then focuses on the nineteenth-century evolution of the Church of England into a denomination. It will then be possible to consider the current situation and what might happen to what is called ‘Anglicanism’ in the future.

The Early Development of the Anglican Communion

The Reformation of the sixteenth century was provoked by the discovery that the Scriptures clashed with the leadership of Roman Catholic Christianity. When that leadership refused to submit to scriptural Reformation, many Christians and nations decided they had to reform themselves, in obedience to the will of God.

Thus it was in England that the authority of the Pope was replaced by that of the Crown and parliament. Although it would be foolish to say that the Church of England had not existed prior to this time, that term came to be used to describe these new arrangements. Under these new arrangements the preaching of the gospel of justification by faith alone was advanced and all the main features of Protestant Christianity were adopted. It is instructive to consider how the Church of England at that time viewed churches elsewhere in Europe. In the light of what happened later this is a most informative exercise.

For example, Archbishop Cranmer’s perspective is very revealing.³ Cranmer was an internationalist. His great vision was to establish a pan-European grouping of Reformed churches. He undertook correspondence to that end. Sadly the death of Edward VI meant that this vision and his labours towards it were never fully realized. However the principle on which he would have based such international co-operation would surely have been that of Article 34 (from the 39 Articles) which recognized particular or national churches as having the right to order themselves in ways appropriate to themselves, so long as everything ‘be done to edifying’.

1 P Avis ‘What is “Anglicanism”?’ S Sykes, J Booty and J Knight edd *The Study of Anglicanism* (London: SPCK 1998) pp 460-1

2 A Stephenson *Anglicanism and the Lambeth Conferences* (London: SPCK 1978) p 7

3 D MacCulloch *Thomas Cranmer* (London: Yale 1996) pp 501-2

The reality is that an international *Anglicanism* would have been thought very odd by Cranmer and others involved in the English Reformation. What we tend to call Anglicanism was then simply the way godly Christians in these islands sought to organize their service of God.⁴ Despite Cranmer's martyrdom, this was undoubtedly the vision carried by many into the Elizabethan church. Nigel Atkinson in his recent book on Hooker refers to a Dutch Calvinist minister who held a number of livings in the Church of England without being reordained. What is more, this minister actually pastored the dying Hooker!⁵ Of course Hooker is regarded as the paragon of Anglicanism today, so this situation must be regarded as a very surprising phenomenon by many. There was an interchangeability of ministries then that puts today's efforts, such as the Porvoo agreement, to shame.

At the time of the English Reformation therefore, the vision for international contacts was simply one in which different national churches sought to work together on the basis of their shared commitment to Reformed and biblical doctrine. The variety of ways in which these churches ordered their own affairs would not have been a hindrance to that – even whether they had bishops or not.

Nevertheless the factor that then muddied the waters as matters progressed within the seventeenth century was this question of bishops. The behaviour of certain English bishops in the earlier part of the century prejudiced many English and Scottish Christians against them. Perhaps understandably they wanted to throw the baby out with the bath water. The Civil War gave them the opportunity to do so.

But then when political events led to the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 it was equally unsurprising that the re-establishment of bishops within the national church became a non-negotiable point for those involved in the Restoration. It was the hard-line insistence by some on episcopacy which led to the Great Ejection of 1662. And in Scotland of course the imposition of Episcopacy was even more fiercely resisted by the Covenanters.

The net effect of these largely political events was to create a form of Christianity which was distinguished by its insistence on the necessity of bishops. It is vital today to grasp that this was in no way part of the original vision of the English Reformation. It is possible to see that many originally thought on entirely different lines by looking at what was happening in Ulster in the early sixteenth century.

4 J Richardson "‘To Our Own People Only’: Re-owning Original Anglicanism' *Churchman* vol 112/2 1998 pp 124-30

5 N Atkinson *Richard Hooker* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press 1997) p 75

Hamilton speaks of the Irish Established Church in the early seventeenth century as being in a wonderfully comprehensive mood.⁶ He reminds us of Archbishop Ussher's Presbyterian theological education and then goes on to say:

It can easily be understood how Brice and the other Presbyterian ministers who came over at this time to Ulster occupied the parish churches of such a body, received the tithes, and were recognised by the bishops of the dioceses in which they respectively laboured as the parochial clergy, all the time that they were not prelatially ordained, conducted service after the simple scriptural fashion to which they had been accustomed in their own country, preached a thoroughly Calvinistic theology, and were, as they had been before, Presbyterian ministers.⁷

It was only the later insistence on the necessity of bishops that forced the ministers of Presbyterian background to leave the Irish Established Church. Not surprisingly therefore it is during this period of the seventeenth century, when nonconformity emerged on the British church scene that we begin to discover the phenomenon of Episcopalianism. That is why, for instance, so-called 'Anglicans' in Scotland belong to the Scottish *Episcopal* Church.

We can observe parallel events at this time developing across the Atlantic Ocean in America. In America there were many different colonies and the particular feature of American settlement was that different colonies developed their own form of ordering church life. We are likely to be well aware of the Puritan colonies in New England, but places like Virginia were ordered in accordance with the practice of the Church of England. This situation was in a sense not a problem while these colonies were ruled from England. And we find someone like George Whitefield still possessed of Cranmer's vision of international Christianity, since when Whitefield preached in America he did so in all sorts of churches. However a new twist to the situation came with the American Revolution, a twist which steered matters further in the direction of what we today call Anglicanism.

Prior to the revolution there was no bishop in the American colonies. This led to a reliance on a certain amount of lay activity and control amongst those we would now term 'Anglicans'. As Puritan vigour declined in the early eighteenth century in New England the Anglican way of doing things became more attractive. Disillusionment with congregationalism led

6 T Hamilton *History of Presbyterianism in Ireland* (Belfast: Ambassador 1992) p 37

7 T Hamilton *History of Presbyterianism in Ireland* (Belfast: Ambassador 1992) p 38

several teachers at Yale including the President to become Anglicans.⁸ As the century progressed there was pressure for the consecration of a bishop for the colonies. However most, *including Anglicans*, were opposed to this because the role of a bishop was too tied up with English political control.

When that political control was irretrievably broken by the American Revolution a new situation emerged. The adherents of the Church of England had to decide what to do. One clergyman called William White⁹ advocated that control of the churches be exercised through a national convention of clergy and laity. He envisaged a superior order of ministers but deliberately avoided the traditional title of 'bishop'. White believed that since there were no bishops in America, at this stage at least a Presbyterian style of ordination could be adopted. Various states in America adopted White's suggestions. But in Connecticut in 1783 ten clergy met and elected a man named Seabury to be their bishop. They had to get Seabury consecrated to this office. This was impossible in view of the political position with relation to England, so they went instead to bishops in Scotland.

This development precipitated further discussion and in the end a pattern emerged in which lay involvement in church life was endorsed on the one hand and bishops were adopted by further consecrations on the other. These were then able to take place in England and included the man called White mentioned above. It was significant that the adherents of Church of England practice then became known as the Protestant *Episcopal* Church in the USA.

The significance of this development should be plain. In England the authority and appointment of bishops had been linked to the Crown. But in America a form of church government had been developed which remained attached to Episcopacy without any role being played by the Crown.

As we move into the early nineteenth century we are faced with the development of the British Empire and the emergence of further colonies abroad in which there was extensive English settlement. Before 1841 ten diocesan sees were established outside the USA and Britain. They were mainly in Canada, India and the West Indies, with the diocese of Australia being established in 1836.

However, by then the Tractarian movement was beginning in England. We note its influence by 1840 in the appeal to establish a Colonial

⁸ W Sachs *The Transformation of Anglicanism* (Cambridge: CUP 1993) p 64

⁹ W Sachs *Transformation of Anglicanism* p 66

Bishoprics Fund. It was said that it was not enough just to send missionaries but that the full benefits of the Church of England's apostolical government and discipline must be imported.¹⁰ By this they were implying that *bishops* were necessary for the health of church life abroad.

But of course in some places it was not just Anglicans who predominated amongst those who settled abroad. There was religious pluralism – Presbyterian and Methodist settlers too. The colonies therefore began to face similar circumstances to those that had been encountered in America. The threat of effective disestablishment of the Church of England in these colonies therefore led to the call for synods to gather church people together. This movement first developed in Australia and New Zealand.

Nevertheless there was a problem with such synods. Historically in England it was the prerogative of the monarch to call synods. This raised the question of whether bishops should be appointed by Letters Patent issued by the Crown, or through the Colonial Church's own structure and procedures.¹¹ It also raised quite complicated questions as to how the colonial bishop should exercise his authority.

It is interesting that it is only now that this issue is finally coming home to roost in England. The recent appointment of the Bishop of Liverpool has raised this question. Many are wondering whether bishops in England should be elected rather than appointed by the Crown through the Prime Minister. Others are questioning the entire future of establishment on various grounds, one being the difficulties there may be in relating to Prince Charles as king. The Church of England is finally facing the same questions that were faced in the United States after Independence and in the British colonies during the nineteenth century. The grave danger in this situation is of course that of seeing episcopacy as the be all and end all of the Church of England.

It is out of the above developments that there arose the first Lambeth Conference in 1867. Synods came to be seen, especially by High Churchmen and Tractarians, as a means of unifying the church and forwarding its mission. They also came to be a means whereby colonial bishops who felt constrained by the Protestant Reformation settlement in England could loosen their ties with the Mother Church and develop a pattern of church life which was more in accordance with their own principles. Evangelical clergy were naturally suspicious of this. They tended to assert the rights of the Crown to direct church life in the colonies

¹⁰ W Sachs *Transformation of Anglicanism* p 114

¹¹ W Sachs *Transformation of Anglicanism* p 191

for this very reason.

We observe therefore from this historical survey that the vital issue at stake is the question of the exercise of authority within the Christian church. All pay lip service to the supreme authority of Scripture, but how is the authority of God's Word to be practically implemented in the Christian community? Prior to the Reformation it had been the Pope who exercised that human authority. After the Reformation in England it was the Crown, who gave derived authority to bishops. By the early nineteenth century bishops had come to be seen by many as a distinctive and essential mark of the Church of England's way of operating. Yet those bishops were still appointed by the Crown. The rise of Tractarianism meant that this link was regarded with increasing distaste. And so it was that synods, at least overseas, came to be seen by some as the way forward.

Members of the Church of England and the Anglican Communion are today so used to synods that it is rather hard to imagine life without them. Yet the evangelical response to the need in these circumstances for mission was not to emphasize the role of synods. Amongst Evangelicals mission was facilitated by the initiation of voluntary societies. When England faced the population increases of the Industrial Revolution the evangelical response was to form societies like the Church Pastoral Aid Society. Evangelicals favoured such informal networking and to them this pressing necessity for bishops and synods was an unwarranted novelty.

That is not to say that Evangelicals then took the view that synods were inherently bad, but they were well aware that synods are not the only possible response to problems and obstacles in church life. However the High Church movement definitely favoured synods. They were working in this direction in England. It was in 1852 that the Canterbury convocation of the Church of England was revived. York followed suit in 1862.

The First Lambeth Conference

It was in these circumstances that calls for a conference of all the Anglican bishops began to be heard. The developments just outlined demonstrate the sense in which it was now possible to speak of Anglicans and Anglicanism. It was High Church initiatives that gave impetus to this phenomenon.

If Anglicans faced problems in the colonies and elsewhere then it was natural for High Churchmen to look to a synod of Anglican bishops as the way to resolve such problems. They looked to the Archbishop of Canterbury to provide a lead in calling such a synod. However while the

evangelical Sumner was Archbishop between 1848 and 1862 this would not happen. The situation only changed when the next Archbishop, Longley, took over at Canterbury in 1862. Longley was cautious but he was certainly open to the idea. For him it was possible to consider that the right way of solving Anglican problems would be to gather Anglican bishops together.

It is at this point that another factor in the calling of the first Lambeth Conference emerges. In 1860 the book *Essays and Reviews* was published. It quickly became notorious as an expression of liberal theology and opinions. Clearly something needed to be done to counter this liberalism. The response by the Canadian bishops was to submit a request to the Archbishop of Canterbury to call a meeting of all bishops to tackle the issue. The pressure was growing.

This pressure was further fuelled by a complicated dispute that had been developing in South Africa. Robert Gray was the Bishop of Cape Town. He was one of those High Churchmen who wished to loosen ties with the Crown and the Protestant settlement by calling synods. Under him from 1853 there was a bishop called John Colenso. As Colenso reflected on his missionary experience he began to examine Scripture from a more critical perspective. This led him into dispute with the rigorously orthodox Bishop Gray.

Gray then deposed Colenso for his heretical opinions. But the question naturally arose as to the authority Gray had for doing this. Colenso appealed to the Privy Council in England. Many Evangelicals supported him, not because they liked his liberal opinions, but because they were very disturbed by Bishop Gray's arbitrary and autocratic manner of action (which he had already demonstrated against them). In 1865 the Privy Council found in favour of Colenso and declared that Gray's action in deposing Colenso had no legal validity. Gray then planned to consecrate another bishop in place of Colenso.¹²

One can easily see why Gray would be keen for a gathering of Anglican bishops which would endorse his action. In the event, the first Lambeth Conference did not do that but this South African affair is all part of the matrix of circumstances which brought pressure for the gathering together of Anglican bishops.

Thus it was that in 1867 Archbishop Longley acceded to the pressure for him to call such a gathering. He did this in a rather cautious spirit,

12 A I've *A Candle Burns in Africa* (Natal: Church of England in South Africa 1992) pp 33-47

Churchman

being well aware of some of the matters which were at stake:

It should be distinctly understood that at this meeting no declaration of faith shall be made, and no decision come to that should affect generally the interests of the Church, but that we should meet together for brotherly counsel and encouragement... I should refuse to convene any assembly which pretended to enact any canons, or affected to make any decisions binding on the Church...¹³

Longley wanted to deal with problems afflicting the Church of England yet was very wary of this gathering of bishops taking any decisions which carried binding authority. On 22 February 1867 Longley sent out invitations to 151 Anglican bishops. In the event 76 bishops came. Many evangelical bishops including the Archbishop of York refused to attend. Evangelical distaste for the Conference came from the simple fact of their awareness that 'General Councils can and do err'.

What came out of that first Lambeth Conference? The Colenso affair was rather suppressed. The general outcome was, as one might expect from the nature of the Conference, a strong endorsement of synodical government. For example, we find the bishops agreed that 'wherever the Church is not established by law, it is ... essential to order and good government that the Diocese should be organised by a Synod'.¹⁴

Later Lambeth Conferences

There was of course no necessity for a second Lambeth Conference but events and personalities ensured that this would happen in 1878. The 1870s saw a decade of controversy over ritualism and this ensured that many saw the need for a further gathering to deal with such problems. The fact that A C Tait was now Archbishop of Canterbury was a considerable factor. Tait had himself been strongly in favour of the first Conference in 1867.

Thus it was that the pattern of Lambeth Conferences became established, although at the second one in 1878 still only 100 out of 173 bishops attended. Certain Evangelicals continued to stay away. By 1888 the proportion of those attending was much better. As High Church influence increased it was even suggested that the Archbishop of Canterbury be accorded the title of patriarch. This was rejected but on the other hand chief bishops in various provinces were accorded the title of archbishop.

13 A Stephenson *Anglicanism and the Lambeth Conferences* (London: SPCK 1978) p 31

14 W Sachs *Transformation of Anglicanism* p 203; A Stephenson *Anglicanism and the Lambeth Conferences* p 38

Space demands that we now jump forward to more recent developments in what has come to be known as Anglicanism. The Lambeth Conference of 1978 took place in the aftermath of a significant event in the United States. In July 1974 three retired bishops and one active bishop defied church canon law to ordain 11 women deacons to the priesthood in Philadelphia. This precipitate action was probably a factor which helped the American church's General Convention formally approve such ordinations in 1976.

This issue therefore dominated the 1978 and 1988 Conferences. Underneath all the bluster it was clear that the ordination of women threatened to torpedo all the brave words about unity and the wonderful structure of Anglicanism. By 1988 Archbishop Eames from Ireland was commissioned to lead a study of this issue to see how the Anglican Communion could live with it. And thus it was that a phrase called 'impaired communion' entered Anglican vocabulary. In other words it was recognized that relations between different churches and provinces were not good, and that some would reject the ministry of others. 'Impaired communion' is in fact a polite way of saying that there is a big problem which is disrupting Christian fellowship. This was the state of affairs prior to the 1998 Lambeth Conference.

It is now appropriate to remind ourselves of some of the issues that the story of the Lambeth Conferences raises for us today. It is possible to get so accustomed to the way affairs are conducted in our denomination that we fail to stand back and take a broader view. The use of the terms 'Anglican' and 'Anglicanism' has already been seen to be a questionable matter. The Church of England was not originally seen as a denomination and the use of those terms can be said to have bought into the assertion that this is what we are and what we ought to be.

Furthermore we have seen that the origin of the Lambeth Conference lay in a desire to deal with particular problems amongst those who adhered to the Church of England. We must remember that the calling of the Lambeth Conferences was not the only way in which those problems could have been tackled. And the issues of homosexuality and the ordination of women are now showing the limitations of this approach to our problems. An excessive reliance on particular Christian individuals, however godly and learned they may be, to foster unity and mission is a fundamentally flawed approach.

The story of relations amongst those who claim allegiance under God to the Church of England and the story of the Lambeth Conferences is an account which highlights issues of authority and discipline amongst God's people. At the 1998 Conference it began to be recognized by some that this

was where the basic difficulties lay. Many of the reports and reflections written since then from various quarters recognize this.¹⁵ Perhaps some are now better prepared to see more clearly the wrong turnings that have been taken in the past.

The Future

It is important now to review the current state of what is known as the Anglican Communion and to consider in the light of Lambeth 1998 what might happen in the years to come. Has Anglicanism indeed got a future?

There is a need to acknowledge the truth that denominational labels are beginning to mean less and less within Western Christianity. Certainly in urban districts such as East London the fact that a congregation is denominationally Church of England is largely irrelevant to those outside the church doors. It is very seldom that any of the people who cross the threshold of inner-city churches for the first time do so with an awareness of the church's denominational affiliation. Our denominational label is increasingly irrelevant.

This decline or end of denominationalism is particularly marked in those under 30. In fact it is noticeable that this state of affairs can even be observed amongst ordinands. It is important that we do not react with horror to those Christians in the younger generation who sit rather lightly to the denomination they find themselves in. They are not necessarily engaged in rejecting our most hallowed traditions, but are instead making us focus our attention on what is really vital and important in the life of the Christian congregation. They are impatient with a focus on secondary matters when great issues of the gospel are at stake, and we need to learn from this.

The future of the Church of England and the future of Anglicanism is bound up with this dilemma. The tensions within the Anglican Communion at this time are indicative of fundamental developments in Western Christianity. We are probably entering a confusing time and we need to make sure that our focus is on those gospel priorities that we rightly hold dear and not on other lesser matters. If we cannot make such a distinction then we will surely find it hard to chart a steady course in the stormy waters that lie ahead for us all. It is in that sense that one can truly wish for the death of Anglicanism.

In observing a world map showing where the Anglican Communion is represented one would probably be surprised at the impressive coverage it

¹⁵ *Church Times* 12/2/1999 p 3

has.¹⁶ The only gaps appear to be Russia and China and parts of French speaking Africa. Indeed it may be pointed out that in days past there was in fact an Anglican Church in China, prior to the Communist Revolution.

However, while the geographical coverage may be impressive, the reality is less so. The Anglican Church of Chile is quite a thriving organization but it only has 93 congregations and 11,500 people affiliated to it.¹⁷ Those sorts of figures would be typical of the Anglican presence in many parts of the world. There are some areas where, for historic reasons, the Anglican Church is relatively strong. This would be true of Canada, the United States, Australia and the British Isles. Yet we are all too well aware that in these areas the Anglican Church is declining and that the core, committed membership is much smaller.

For real encouragement in terms of growth one has to look to Anglican churches in Central and East Africa and some parts of Southeast Asia. It is no coincidence that these areas generally speaking have a conservative and orthodox leadership. In somewhere like Uganda the Anglican Church is far and away the largest Protestant denomination.

This global picture should make us realistic about the nature of what is called the Anglican Communion. We can all too often view the world through the Christian scene that we are accustomed to in the British Isles for example. This perspective may over-stress the importance of Anglicanism in global terms, but may perhaps underplay the exciting growth that is happening in many different denominations across the world.

The Anglican Communion is structured in provinces, of which there are currently 33. The important feature of each province in the Anglican Communion is that it is autonomous; in other words they are entirely self-governing. No matter what the Archbishop of Canterbury says or what a Lambeth Conference may resolve, each province is entirely free to go its own way. This has meant that issues like the ordination of women tend to be settled at the provincial level. One province will have women priests and another will not. It is the tension between provinces arising through this that is now placing great strain on the concept of the Anglican Communion as a whole. It is vital to understand that the many fine resolutions of Lambeth 1998 have not done anything to deal with these fundamental tensions. The issues of homosexuality and women bishops continue to tear down the very concept of Anglicanism.

With an awareness of the provincial structure of the Anglican

16 B Huston *Lambeth 1998* (London: The Anglican Communion) pp12-13

17 P Johnstone *Operation World* (Carlisle: OM Publishing 1993) p 160

Communion we realize that the Lambeth Conference can only be consultative and the Archbishop of Canterbury can only have an advisory role outside his own Church of England. He is certainly no pope and not even a patriarch. It is striking that a publicity booklet for this year's Lambeth Conference instinctively defined the Anglican Communion as being churches in communion with the See of Canterbury.¹⁸ Such a concept clearly exalts the role of the Archbishop. Yet this must be recognized as a very contentious definition and indeed it serves to highlight part of the problem facing the Anglican network of churches. Unity is being instinctively sought through a human figure and not through a common submission to the Word of God.

Even after the encouragingly conservative outcome of the 1998 Lambeth Conference the fundamental difficulties facing the Church of England and the Anglican Communion have still not been addressed. Nevertheless it may be that the biblical nature of the resolutions that were passed and the determinedly biblical stance of many bishops there will greatly assist in clarifying what is going on. There is a need to work hard at ensuring that the real issues about authority are addressed in future – both in England and elsewhere.

In both the women's issue and homosexuality the authority of Scripture amongst God's people is what is at stake. The reality is that one cannot ignore what God says in his Word and then expect harmony amongst those who claim to be his people. If the authority of Scripture can be overturned by synods or bishops – what will happen to that denomination? What will happen is what we are seeing in parts of the Anglican Communion and indeed many of the traditional Protestant denominations of Western Christianity. Gradually the organizational unity of the denomination comes under increasing strain. And there comes a point at which there is a straw which breaks the camel's back.

In preparation for the 1998 Conference Archbishop Eames headed a commission which produced a report exploring the meaning and nature of communion. It declared that Anglicans are held together by the characteristic way in which they use Scripture, tradition and reason in discerning afresh the mind of Christ for the church in each generation.¹⁹ Unfortunately it nowhere ventures to define what that characteristic way actually is. One reviewer pointed out that the problem with this so-called Virginia Report was that it was largely descriptive and pragmatic. That cannot solve the crisis which faces the Anglican Communion.

18 B Huston *Lambeth 1998* (London: The Anglican Communion) p 3

19 J Rosenthal and N Currie edd *Being Anglican in the Third Millenium* (Harrisville: Moorehouse Publishing 1997)

How can one keep the Anglican Communion together in these circumstances? One fears that in the future most will still go for a solution which seeks to maintain an organizational unity through a reliance upon human individuals. When the authority of God's Word is rejected the only alternative appears to be an increasing reliance on the authority of individual human beings.

At Lambeth 1998 suggestions were made about casting the Archbishop of Canterbury in the role of mediator in inter-Anglican disputes, along with a strengthened role for the Anglican Consultative Council. Dr Carey can be commended for standing up to liberal American bishops, but he should reject calls for him to exercise a patriarchal-type ministry. We have already seen in fact that the idea of his see becoming a patriarchate was rejected in days gone by. It is a solution that may of course still find favour amongst orthodox Anglo-Catholics. In time the lesser concept of being in communion with the See of Canterbury could well provide a straw that many will want to consider.

This sort of arrangement might be an option favoured by many and it has already been noted how it makes its appearance in a publicity booklet about the Lambeth Conference. However it will not work in the end. Any attempt to maintain Christian unity by human means is ultimately doomed to failure. Either the attempt simply does not work in that the office of that human figure is not recognized by some, or else that unity is maintained through a form of tyranny. In either outcome there is certainly no *Christian* unity. An article by Tim Bradshaw on the Virginia Report makes essentially this very point.²⁰

In the continuing confusion the Anglican Communion, and indeed other denominations, needs to face up to the fact that unity must always be under the authority of Scripture. There is no true unity where God's Word is not honoured and obeyed. Naturally we need human leadership in the church and God provides such leadership for us. But there can be no true unity without godly leaders who by their life and doctrine provide a wholesome example to the flock of Christ. Where there is a dearth of such godly leaders one is faced with a problem that no amount of tinkering around with structures and sitting on committees will resolve.

In the years to come many congregations and dioceses will continue to preach the gospel and exercise a biblical ministry to strengthen God's people. They will do so encouraged by the support of the 1998 Lambeth resolutions. But since those resolutions only have moral authority in each province, godly congregations and ministers must be prepared for

20 T Bradshaw 'Unity, Diversity and the Virginia Report' *Grace and Truth in the Secular Age* T Bradshaw ed (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1998) pp 180-93

opposition to persist and for contentious situations still to arise. Women bishops and homosexuality will not go away without big battles. In the light of this we must think about how the structure of the Anglican Communion is likely to evolve.

One suspects that the key area of contention will be over geographical jurisdiction. It is part of the arrogant ethos of modern Anglicanism that considers its secondary and purely denominational characteristics to be highly prized by God. One cannot help but think that some believe Anglicanism to be defined not by doctrine but by the presence of bishops and the parish system. That is why the attempt to define the Anglican Communion as churches in communion with the See of Canterbury is so wrong. That definition would force the Archbishop always to choose between two rival Anglican churches operating in the same area. To say one was in communion would tend to imply the other was not. Yet this would actually run against the whole spirit of the Church of England's pattern at the Reformation. We have already seen that the vision of Cranmer was of groups of churches which had biblical Reformed theology in common and yet which varied in outward forms and customs.

The issue of geographical jurisdiction will be the battleground in future because it shows whether bishops are seeking unity through human individuals or whether they sit under Scripture and recognize that godly congregations will exist with varying forms and customs. It can be predicted that as relationships between provinces, dioceses and congregations break down over issues like homosexuality and a female episcopate, many bishops will fight tooth and nail to preserve their territorial integrity. The pill that many bishops will find hardest to swallow will be the idea that churches can exist in 'their diocese' which look elsewhere for episcopal oversight.

The pretence at the moment is that there are no parallel jurisdictions in existence and that there are no rival Anglican bishops. In reality there are already situations where there is an ambiguity in Anglican practice. For many successive Lambeth Conferences there has been some equivocation about the status of the churches in India. Here the Anglicans joined 50 years ago with Christians from other denominations. In the Lambeth 1998 publicity booklet these churches are indicated in brown so as to contrast with the true blue of Anglican provinces. Are these churches really Anglican or not?

Then in Europe we find the interesting situation that both the Church of England and the Episcopal Church of the USA operate Anglican chaplaincies for their respective expatriates. These chaplaincies certainly overlap and in some cases there is rivalry between them. This situation

demonstrates that it is possible for separate Anglican bodies to exist in the same geographical area.

But the most obvious case where Anglican ambiguity exists is in South Africa. The crisis that hit the Church of England there in the middle of the last century over the dispute between Bishop Gray of Cape Town and his assistant John Colenso has already been referred to. Many Evangelicals at that time were deeply unhappy with the autocratic and unProtestant behaviour of Bishop Gray, and so despite Colenso's incipient liberalism these Evangelicals sided with Colenso. Out of this dispute there emerged a group of Church of England churches who refused to accept the authority of the Bishop of Cape Town.

There was a protracted series of legal disputes in the earlier part of this century as well as several attempts to resolve the basic disagreement. However these attempts failed, while the legal cases largely upheld the stance taken by the evangelical churches. The outcome of all this has been that alongside the Church of the Province in South Africa there is also the Church of England in South Africa and these exist as rival bodies.²¹ The firmly evangelical body (CESA) is small, perhaps ten per cent of the size of the other, but we must recall that it is a good deal larger than the Anglican Church in Chile mentioned earlier. What is more in recent years it has acquired considerable self-confidence and missionary vision and is growing rapidly.

Of course CESA has been persecuted through the other body applying pressure to the Archbishop of Canterbury to refuse any invitations to Lambeth for the evangelical bishops. We are thus faced with the bizarre situation that an orthodox and biblical body like CESA had its bishops turned away from Lambeth 1998 while immoral and apostate bishops from the USA and elsewhere were invited to that gathering.

This extraordinary set of circumstances highlights the dilemma facing the Anglican Communion. Do you define Anglicanism by some organizational means, such as being in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury, or do you define it by adherence to biblical authority and teaching? The situation in South Africa of parallel jurisdictions confronts us with a choice that increasingly we will have to make elsewhere.

Already in England there is a movement, mainly amongst catholic opponents of the ordination of women, which calls for the establishment of a third province in England. It says that this is the only way of resolving the tensions in which some parishes reject the authority of their diocesan

21 *A I've A Candle Burns in Africa* pp 191-200

bishop and turn to flying bishops instead. The logic is very compelling. Added to this there is now the pressure for alternative episcopal oversight over the homosexual issue. Before long in this country even the softer evangelical opponents of the ordination of women will have to face up to the problems that will be created by the arrival of women bishops.

When congregations and ministers are confronted with dilemmas over doctrinal and moral issues they must face up to this choice, which will become increasingly sharper as the years go by. Is one going to associate with bishops who turn away from the faith once delivered to the saints? Or is one going to seek the wisdom and guidance that godly bishops from elsewhere can provide? It is through necessary courage and firmness in individual cases that the Anglican Communion is likely gradually to fragment into a confusing situation with competing geographical jurisdictions. This is where the immediate future probably lies and that is why one suspects that any Lambeth Conference called for the year 2008 could be characterized by confusion and the death of Anglicanism.

However it is not necessary to conclude on a rather sad note with a picture of the Anglican Communion fragmenting as the chickens of unbiblical and ungodly leadership in certain parts come home to roost. We should conclude by returning to something of the original vision and concept of the Reformation settlement in England. What is happening at present in the Anglican Communion is also happening in other denominations. It is part of a massive readjustment in Western Christianity. This readjustment is given added impetus by the declining role that Christianity plays in public life.

Evangelical Christians need to gain a new vision for creating and maintaining links with other evangelical congregations wherever they are to be found. This vision should not be founded upon an organizational concept of unity, it should rather foster co-operation and mutual assistance in the priority of gospel work. We should labour to find ways in which Presbyterians and Anglicans, Baptists and Methodists, Pentecostals and Independents can really work together. This is not simply a question of swapping pulpits. It should involve ways of practically helping each other in mission – perhaps through finance and personnel.

Evangelicals appear to have an innate tendency to bicker and dispute with one another over minor matters. The nightmare would be that as denominations disintegrate, Evangelicals will form a myriad of small groupings and networks which quarrel amongst themselves. That is why we should be thinking now about the way in which real scriptural unity between congregations can be exercised. It is more comfortable to retreat into our own ghettos but in the long run that will be disastrous for the

gospel. So we must be prepared for the hard work of building relationships with other evangelical churches that we do not easily get on with.

It may be that such a future vision lies a number of years beyond the present, but this is something we would do well to reckon with. It is all too easy to be negative and gloomy in the current confusion of Western Christianity, but that is not an appropriate response. Perhaps the Lambeth 1998 resolutions will at least encourage us to be a good deal more optimistic for the future of biblical Christianity, even if the role of 'Anglicanism' within that future may prove to be questionable.

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