

Anglican structures and ecumenical relations: ecclesiological factors in the TEC ELKB dialogue

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I: The Anglican Communion and its Member Churches

The Anglican communion is a global communion of churches bringing together more than 70 million Christians in 38 “Provinces” plus six extra-provincial churches or dioceses, across 161 different countries.¹

The 1930 Lambeth Conference defined the communion thus:

The Anglican Communion is a fellowship, within the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, of those duly constituted dioceses, provinces or regional Churches in communion with the See of Canterbury, which have the following characteristics in common:

- a. they uphold and propagate the Catholic and Apostolic faith and order as they are generally set forth in the Book of Common Prayer as authorised in their several Churches;
- b. they are particular or national Churches, and, as such, promote within each of their territories a national expression of Christian faith, life and worship; and
- c. they are bound together not by a central legislative and executive authority, but by mutual loyalty sustained through the common counsel of the bishops in conference. (Lambeth 1930, resolution 49)²

The stipulation “in Communion with the See of Canterbury” means that most Anglican churches are daughter (or grand-daughter) churches of the Church of England, and were established in connection with British and American colonialism. The Episcopal Church (TEC) is in its origins a daughter church of the Church of England, which became an independent entity in the course of the struggle for American independence. For legal and political reasons, the first American bishop, Samuel Seabury, was consecrated by the bishops of the Scottish Episcopal Church.

Over the past one hundred and fifty years, since the first Lambeth Conference in 1867, Anglican churches have sought to articulate and to some extent formalise their structures and to articulate what it is that binds them. The 1930 description of the Anglican Communion can be seen as part of that process. It makes clear that membership of the Communion is not based on acceptance of a particular creed or confession. In the Anglican

¹ A list can be found here: <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/structures/member-churches.aspx>.

² Lambeth Conference Resolutions are available here: <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/structures/instruments-of-communion/lambeth-conference.aspx>.

Communion Covenant, in section 1, which was generally well received, each member church was to affirm:

(1.1.1) its communion in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church, worshipping the one true God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

(1.1.2) the catholic and apostolic faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation. The historic formularies of the Church of England, forged in the context of the European Reformation and acknowledged and appropriated in various ways in the Anglican Communion, bear authentic witness to this faith.

(1.1.3) the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as containing all things necessary for salvation and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith⁴.

(1.1.4) the Apostles' Creed, as the baptismal symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith.

(1.1.5) the two sacraments ordained by Christ himself – Baptism and the Supper of the Lord – ministered with the unfailing use of Christ's words of institution, and of the elements ordained by him.

(1.1.6) the historic episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of his Church.

(1.1.7) the shared patterns of our common prayer and liturgy which form, sustain and nourish our worship of God and our faith and life together.

(1.1.8) its participation in the apostolic mission of the whole people of God, and that this mission is shared with other Churches and traditions beyond this Covenant.³

Despite the mention here of the historic formularies of the Church of England, it is probably true to say that if there is a common text which forms a foundation stone for the Anglican Communion, it is the Book of Common Prayer. However, there are extra-provincial member churches of the Anglican Communion, specifically the Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church and the Lusitanian Church of Portugal, which are effectively Old Catholic churches and which do not use, and never have used, the Book of Common Prayer.

Since 1867, the Anglican Communion has developed a series of organs by which its member churches take counsel with each other and make recommendations. The first of these is the *Lambeth Conference*, a meeting of all bishops of all Provinces, gathered at the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Lambeth Conference has met approximately every decade since 1867. Its deliberations and resolutions not strictly binding, but are advisory for the member churches of the Anglican Communion. The *Anglican Consultative Council* was established on the recommendation of the 1968 Lambeth Conference approved by all member churches. It brings together a bishop, and either a lay representative, or an ordained

³ *The Anglican Communion Covenant*, online at http://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/99905/The_Anglican_Covenant.pdf, pp 2-3.

representative, or both, from each member church, and meets every three years. (ACC-16 is taking place in Lusaka as we meet.) Again, its resolutions are not binding, but are advisory for member churches of the Communion. The *Primates' Meeting* was established in 1978 by Donald Coggan, then Archbishop of Canterbury, as an opportunity for "leisurely thought, prayer and deep consultation" and has met regularly since. The status of its decisions is not entirely clear, and there is also some confusion between informal "meetings of the Primates" and the more official "Primates' meeting".⁴

The question of whether there is such an entity as "the Anglican Church" is a fraught one. In its report to ACC15 (2013), the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity Faith and Order (IASCUFO) observed:

The Anglican Communion has a common faith, grounded in Scripture, inscribed in the ecumenical creeds and supported by the historic formularies. It has a common ordained ministry in the historic threefold order of bishops, priests and deacons (albeit with some impairment with regard to interchangeability, because Anglican churches are not all in the same place at a given time with regard to the question of whether women should be ordained to the threefold ministry). It has a common sacramental life that involves mutual eucharistic hospitality and (subject to that degree of impairment that has already been mentioned) interchangeable eucharistic presidency. It has conciliar structures for consultation, discernment of God's will and decision-making about its common life.⁵

However, it concluded:

The Anglican Communion is not formally constituted as a church. To be a duly constituted church requires not only many informal links and ligaments that bind it together as one community, but also more formal structures. In particular, a church needs a unified structure of oversight, embedded in a common discipline or law which is enforceable as a last resort. A church also requires a coherent overall policy with regard to its liturgy, its doctrinal and ethical teaching, and the question of who can be ordained. Although the Anglican Communion is sustained by several informal links and connections (the various Networks, diocesan companion links, the Anglican Alliance supporting shared relief and development work, theological education exchanges, NIFCON, the mission agencies and not least the Mothers Union), more formal, constitutional provisions, sufficient to sustain a church, do not exist in the Anglican Communion.⁶

In terms of their constitutions, the member churches of the Anglican communion are independent churches; each has "its own canons ... its own liturgy ... Moreover, each church takes responsibility for its doctrinal and ethical teaching ... and each church decides

⁴ See for all these, the ACC website: <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/identity/about.aspx>, and also <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/structures/instruments-of-communion.aspx>.

⁵ IASCUFO, "Towards a Symphony of Instruments," § 1.8, in IASCUFO Report to ACC-15 (online at <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/39744/iascufo-complete-report-to-acc.pdf>), pp. 3738.

⁶ IASCUFO, "Towards a Symphony of Instruments," § 1.9 (p. 38).

what categories of person it will ordain or not ordain.”⁷ All Anglican churches are episcopally ordered with synods, although the relationship between bishops and synods varies from church to church. However, “the Anglican Communion does not have any way of ensuring that, for example, a recommendation agreed by the Lambeth Conference or the Primates’ Meeting is implemented across the Communion.”⁸ Consequently, the Anglican Communion is, observes the IASCUFO report, “precisely what it has consistently defined itself to be, that is to say a communion or fellowship of churches.”⁹

Section 3 of the Anglican Covenant, which was also generally received positively, recognises the autocephalous nature of the member churches of the Anglican Communion whilst seeking to affirm their interdependence. It asks each member church to affirm:

(3.1.2) its resolve to live in a Communion of Churches. Each Church, with its bishops in synod, orders and regulates its own affairs and its local responsibility for mission through its own system of government and law and is therefore described as living “in communion with autonomy and accountability”. Trusting in the Holy Spirit, who calls and enables us to dwell in a shared life of common worship and prayer for one another, in mutual affection, commitment and service, we seek to affirm our common life through those Instruments of Communion by which our Churches are enabled to be conformed together to the mind of Christ. Churches of the Anglican Communion are bound together “not by a central legislative and executive authority, but by mutual loyalty sustained through the common counsel of the bishops in conference”¹⁶ and of the other instruments of Communion.

(3.1.3) the central role of bishops as guardians and teachers of faith, as leaders in mission, and as a visible sign of unity, representing the universal Church to the local, and the local Church to the universal and the local Churches to one another. This ministry is exercised personally, collegially and within and for the eucharistic community. We receive and maintain the historic threefold ministry of bishops, priests and deacons, ordained for service in the Church of God, as they call all the baptised into the mission of Christ.

(3.1.4) the importance of instruments in the Anglican Communion to assist in the discernment, articulation and exercise of our shared faith and common life and mission.¹⁰

Each member church was at the same time asked to commit itself “to respect the constitutional autonomy of all of the Churches of the Anglican Communion, while upholding our mutual responsibility and interdependence in the Body of Christ, and the responsibility of each to the Communion as a whole.”¹¹

⁷ IASCUFO, “Towards a Symphony of Instruments,” § 1.10 (p. 38).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ IASCUFO, “Towards a Symphony of Instruments,” § 1.11 (p. 39).

¹⁰ *The Anglican Communion Covenant*, p. 6.

¹¹ *The Anglican Communion Covenant*, § 3.2.2, p. 7.

This balance between autonomy and interdependence is one with which the Anglican Communion has been struggling and with which it continues to grapple, as the outcome of the January 2016 Primates' Meeting (or meeting of Primates?) demonstrates.

II: Anglican Ecumenical Relationships

Anglican ecumenical relationships have always taken place at different levels. The third, 1888, Lambeth Conference passed resolutions recommending deeper relations with the Scandinavian Lutheran Churches, and especially the Swedish church; the Moravian church or *Unitas Fratrum*; the Old Catholic Churches in Holland, Germany, Switzerland and Austria, and Old Catholic movements in Italy, France, Spain and Portugal; and the Orthodox Patriarchs. Ecumenical discussions between the Anglican Communion on behalf of its member churches resulted in the 1930s in agreements of communion with the Old Catholic churches of the Utrecht Union (Bonn Agreement 1931), and the Lutheran Churches of Sweden (1920), Finland (1934), Latvia and Estonia (1938). Anglicans were also involved in the Life and Work and Faith and Order movements.

Since the Second World War, Anglican ecumenical relationships have proceeded both globally and regionally. Agreements of (Full) Communion have been reached between TEC and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Anglican Church of Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, and the British and Irish Anglican Churches and (most of) the Nordic and Scandinavian Lutheran Churches. ACC-15 passed a resolution that the parties to these agreements should work to make them "touch each other" so that communion (and thus interchangeability of ministries) would also be possible between e.g. the ELCA and the SEC or between TEC and the Church of Sweden.

Other regional agreements do not achieve full communion (ie there is no interchangeability of ministries) but do achieve pulpit and altar fellowship. These include the Meissen agreement between the EKD and the Church of England.

These regional agreements have led to different "levels" of relationship within both the Anglican Communion and the LWF: the most recent Anglican Lutheran International Commission concluded that the time was not yet ripe for a global agreement of communion between Anglicans and Lutherans. This means that there is precedent for different types of relationship within already existing communions.