

Reading and Reshaping the Anglican Communion

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Dear Fulcrum friends,

There is a story of a bishop visiting a care home for the elderly. He bends down in his cassock and asks a lady, 'Do you know who I am?' She replies, 'No. But if you ask the warden, I'm sure she'll tell you.' Questions – and misapprehensions - of 'identity' are being discussed avidly as we approach the Lambeth Conference next month.

One of my favourite quotations concerning mission and the Church is by Ivan Illich. In 1974 he described the study of mission as:

The science about the Word of God as the Church in her becoming; the Word as the Church in her borderline situations; the Church as a surprise and a puzzle; the Church in her growth; the Church when her historical appearance is so new that she has to strain herself to recognize her past in the mirror of the present... missiology therefore is the study of the Church as surprise.

[Ivan Illich, *Mission and Midwifery* (Gweru, 1974) p. 6 f., cited in David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Orbis Books: 1991) p. 493.]

I was reminded of that definition in June 2006, when I read on the web the letter from The Archbishop of Canterbury to the Primates of the Anglican Communion, '[The Challenge and Hope of Being an Anglican Today](#)'. It was written soon after the General Convention of The Episcopal Church, and stated:

There is no way in which the Anglican Communion can remain unchanged by what is happening at the moment... for this to survive with all its aspects intact, we need closer and more visible formal commitments to each other. And it is not going to look exactly like anything we have known so far... We have some very hard work to do to embody this more clearly. The next Lambeth Conference ought to address this matter directly and fully as part of its agenda.

Well, some very hard work has been done since then by the Covenant Design Group chaired by Archbishop Drexel Gomez, and more recently by the Windsor Continuation Group, chaired by Bishop Clive Handford. The Lambeth Conference, which meets over 20 days from 16 July to 4 August, will consider these two major subjects: the Covenant and the future shape of Anglican structures.

The focus of the conference is on 'The Bishop in Mission' but, since mission and Church interweave so closely, these two subjects, the Covenant and the future shape

of the Communion, will be studied in depth by designated groups throughout the conference, will be discussed in plenary sessions and some decisions will be made. To be part of this process, it is essential for bishops to be present. Presence is more powerful than absence.

The conference will be bathed in prayer, with a retreat in Canterbury Cathedral at the beginning and constant background prayer from monks and nuns gathering at the Franciscan Centre, on the university campus. Bible study groups will meet each morning, focussing on John's Gospel. Later each morning there will be 'indaba' groups for fellowship and for sharing news of 'the Church in her borderline situations'. In the afternoons there will be seminars to opt into ('self select sessions'). There will be some key note addresses as well as some plenary sessions.

Last year, while rummaging through the shelves of a second hand bookshop, I came across another book by Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh's Didascalicon* (University of Chicago Press, 1993). Not knowing who's Hugh, nor of the significance of his book, but trusting Illich who had been an illuminating guide in the past, I bought the book – and was fascinated by reading it.

I discovered a hidden jewel of a 12th century theologian, Hugh of St Victor, and a gem of a book, *Didascalicon: De Studio Legendi*, written in 1140. The title concerns teaching and the sub title is on the Study (of the Art) of Reading, includes within it both teaching and study. It was the first book to be written on this subject. In the Abbey of St Victor just outside Paris, Hugh provided a key map for learning, setting out four major categories: theory, practice, mechanics and logic. These all had sub categories.

Illich pointed out that Hugh lived at a pivotal moment in the history of Europe. After him came Peter Lombard, whose 'Sentences' – a four-volume compilation of quotations from the Fathers on various doctrines – introduced a new way of reading.

In the last eight hundred years, there have been three such pivotal moments in the development of reading and learning. In the 12th century, there was a key shift, between Hugh and Peter Lombard, from 'monastic' to 'scholastic' learning, with the introduction into books of chapter headings, contents pages, indexes and footnotes. After that people did not have to read a book from the beginning but could find a particular passage within it. In the 15th century, the invention of the printing press brought about previously unimaginable transformations and multiplication of books. After that, people did not have to copy books by hand – though that continued - they could print, distribute and read. At the end of the 20th century, the world-wide web opened up new vistas adding the screen to the book. Illich wrote in 1993, before the full power of the 'google' indexing system was developed, which may be compared in influence to the invention of indexes in the 12th century. After that, people could access and search vast arrays of literature from around the whole world from their homes.

It seems to me that each of these pivotal moments of 'reading' also eventually led into a reshaping of the Church, through developments in theology: the growth of scholasticism led to new monastic orders and the development of universities; the invention of the printing press contributed to the dissemination of the biblical theologies of the Reformation; the rapid expansion and indexing of the web has produced networks of instant global news and views, and calls to reconfigure the Anglican Communion.

The crisis in the Communion has gathered in pace since the consecration, in 2003, of a bishop who is in a sexual relationship outside of marriage. Some of the organisers of GAFCON, the Global Anglican Future Conference in Jerusalem later this month – whose hidden strapline may well be ‘Not the Lambeth Conference’ – are calling for ‘realignment’. I suggest that the word ‘reshaping’ is a more appropriate response to this crisis.

‘Realignment’ would probably lead to a destructive ‘splitting’ of the Communion and to setting up an Anglican Federation without a centre at Canterbury, which would lead to more ‘splitting’. ‘Reshaping’ would involve imaginative new relationships which build on the historic link to Canterbury, while also recognising, and responding to, the reality of world-wide Anglicanism.

So, let us turn first to reading the present situation in the Communion and then to a proposal for reshaping the Communion.

A. Reading the Anglican Communion: the Quadrant Revisited

We begin with Scripture. In June 2006, just before the General Convention of The Episcopal Church at Columbus, Ohio, I wrote a Fulcrum newsletter entitled, ‘[Shechem, Corinth and Columbus: ECUSA's choices](#)’. I drew on the lessons of wisdom or foolishness in the crucial decision at Shechem (1 Kings 12). There, Rehoboam tragically listened to the advice of the younger men - ‘Now, whereas my father laid on you a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke’ - and the kingdom split into two. I commented:

So it seems that the seeds of this schism were being formed in the folly and lack of discipline during David's reign, getting worse while largely undetected under Solomon before being blown wide open by Rehoboam's utter folly. Having ditched the House of David, the northern tribes were never able to establish a settled dynasty in its place.

We have seen ominous signs of a split in the USA (and Canada) since June 2006. The question is whether this split is kept to the USA (and Canada) and dealt with there where the crisis began, or whether it is encouraged to affect the whole Communion.

I also drew on Paul's second letter to the Corinthians chapter 7, where the context was that a wrong had been committed and others had been involved in their negligence in dealing with it. Paul had written a ‘severe letter’ and now wrote:

For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death.

The Windsor Report, (which, I suggested, it was not too far fetched to see as a version of Paul's ‘severe letter’) requested The Episcopal Church to express regret for the act of consecrating the Bishop of New Hampshire. As I mentioned in last month's Fulcrum newsletter, ‘[Faith and Fellowship in Crisis](#)’, The Episcopal Church has expressed regret for *the hurt caused* by the consecration to others in the Anglican Communion, but not *for the fact* of the consecration. May this be seen more as ‘worldly grief’ than ‘godly grief’? It has announced a ‘moratorium’ on the consecration of non-celibate gay and lesbian persons as bishops (Resolution B003 of the General Convention 2006, elucidated by the New Orleans House of Bishops statement

September 2007), but it is still unclear whether this will continue after 2009. The Episcopal Church continues to 'wink' at local public services of blessing of same-sex unions, though technically, it has not centrally authorized such public rites.

So we turn from reading Scripture and trying to interpret it in our current crisis, to reading the Anglican Communion. How can we 'read' the Anglican Communion at this time? Well, an attempt can be made to 'read' the signs of the times, of theologies, of people and of places and to outline a 'map' which may – or may not - help others.

Drawing on an original idea from the Bishop of Exeter's [address](#) to the House of Bishops of The Episcopal Church in March 2006, and Andrew Goddard's perceptive commentary on it, this is what I attempted to do two years ago. The quadrant of four categories I suggested have been taken into discussions on the web, especially in the designation 'Communion Conservative' and 'Federal Conservative' – sometimes reduced to 'Com Con' and 'Fed Con'. Sadly, Fed Con has developed into GAFCON...

Before updating the quadrant, I quote from '[Shechem, Corinth and Columbus](#)':

The vertical line intersecting the quadrant concerns Resolution 1.10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference: to the right are those in favour of it, and to the left those against. The horizontal line intersecting the quadrant concerns the Windsor Report and Dromantine Communiqué: above the line are those in favour of it, and below the line are those against it.

1. 'Federal Conservatives', in the bottom right, consists of those who are conservative on sexual ethics but who do not consider highly the ecclesiology of the Windsor Report and especially its warnings against transprovincial interventions. They would not be unhappy with the demotion of the Anglican Communion to a Federation of Anglican Churches.

2. 'Communion Conservatives', in the top right, consists of those who are conservative on sexual ethics but have a high regard for the ecclesiology and the recommendations of the Windsor Report. They are keen to hold to the concept of Communion.

3. 'Communion Liberals', in the top left, consists of those who are liberal on sexual ethics but have a high regard for the ecclesiology set out in the Windsor Report, if not all its recommendations.

4. 'Federal Liberals', in the bottom left, consists of those who are liberal on sexual ethics and have a low regard for the ecclesiology set out in the Windsor Report and many of its recommendations.

I gave suggestions for the placing of various people and groups in these categories. Two years on, it may be worth trying to update this quadrant slightly. I have kept the basic shape, and the names of the four sections, but have outlined a new section within the Federal Conservatives of 'Non-Canterbury Federal Conservative'. This reflects the development of the Common Cause Partnership in North America (CCP), its offshoot GAFCON in Jerusalem, and [responses](#) to both of them.

In the Fulcrum Newsletter for January, '[Substance and Shadow](#)', I mentioned the moves to set up a 'non-Canterbury centred Communion'. This, on reflection, I realise is a misnomer, and a 'non-Canterbury centred Federation' may be more accurate. Some will insist that it would still be a 'Communion', but their apologetic is

unconvincing. Someone with the blog name JamesW, has [written](#) recently on TitusOneNine:

The GAFCON folks believe that the "Anglican Communion" is already a defacto federation and are responding as such. Their intent is to create the "inner tier Communion" and that inner tier will not include the ABC, at least not to begin with. That does not imply that they are leaving the "Anglican Communion."

This reminds me of Humpty Dumpty's attitude to words in *Alice through the Looking Glass*:

'When I use a word, Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less.'

'The question is', said Alice, 'whether you *can* make words mean different things.'

'The question is', said Humpty Dumpty, 'which is to be master - that's all.'

My suggested updating of the quadrant, therefore, is as follows:

Communion Liberal

Liberal on sex, Communion based

Desmond Tutu, former Abp Cape T
Peter Lee, Bp Washington
John Saxbee, Bp Lincoln

Ian Fraser, Prof at Epis Sch Div
Affirming Catholicism
Changing Attitude
Inclusive Church (parts)

Communion Conservative

Conservative on sex, Communion based

Tom Wright, Bp Durham
John Chew, Abp SE Asia
Mouneer Anis, Primate Jerusalem
John Howe, Bp Central Florida
Michael Poon, Dir CSCA, Singapore
Anglican Communion Institute
Fulcrum
Covenant
Global South Anglican (parts)

Federal Liberal

Liberal on sex, Federation based

John Chane, Bp Washington
Marilyn McCord Adams, Prof Oxford
Integrity USA
Inclusive Church (parts)
Modern Churchp Union

Federal Conservative

Conservative on sex, Federation based

Peter Jensen, Abp Sydney
Bob Duncan, Bp Pittsburgh
Anglican Mainstream' (parts)
GAFCON (parts)
Global South Anglican (parts)

Non-Canterbury Federal Conservative

Conservative on sex,
Federation-without-Canterbury based
Peter Akinola, Archbp Nigeria
Martyn Minns, CANA
Stephen Noll, Prof at Mukono, Ugan
Anglican Mission in America
Anglican Mainstream (parts)
Global South Anglican (parts)
GAFCON (parts)

Now I realise that generalizations are dangerous, that geographical regions are varied and that fixed models are not fluid, and give apologies in advance to anyone who thinks they have been put in the wrong section, but I hope this quadrant will contribute positively to the discussion of our current reading of the Communion.

B. Reshaping the Anglican Communion: a Proposal

I like the story of a little boy asking Robert Runcie, when he was Archbishop of Canterbury, a key question about identity: 'Were you in Noah's Ark?' When he replied 'No', the boy continued with impressive logic, 'Then why weren't you drowned?'

Identity also needs the context of time, and time moves on. To be 'Communion based', as in the top two squares of the quadrant, does not mean leaving the Communion structures as they are currently constituted. It is worth remembering the words of Rowan Williams, with which I started: '...it is not going to look exactly like anything we have known so far.'

The heart of our Communion is expressed in worship and mission, fellowship and interdependence. Structural change is subservient to these central concerns and will only be effective if they are thereby enhanced. The following proposal is offered as a tentative solution and the word 'would' is used merely in order to avoid repeating the phrase 'it is suggested that...'. I developed it in July 2006, in the light of criticisms from Michael Poon that my quadrant model only concerned 'traditions' and did not take 'geography' into account in a post-colonial Communion.

The planning of Anglican Communion meetings needs authentic contributions from all six continents and effective coordination by a group small enough to interact corporately by email.

'Coordinating Primate'

The Anglican Communion should be shaped by all six continents and one Primate from each continent, a 'Coordinating Primate', would be elected by the Primates of that continent to contribute to the coordination of Communion meetings.

Another alternative title may be 'Continental Metropolitan': the noun 'Metropolitan', draws on the meaning of an ecumenically recognised ecclesiological title, but the addition of the adjective 'Continental' creates a wider meaning than usual. 'Coordinating Primate' is preferable as the title, since it builds on an established Anglican title and widens it.

'Continental Councils' (every 3 years)

There are already some continental (and sub-continental) councils of Anglican Provinces in the Communion eg: The [Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa](#) (CAPA) and the [Council of Churches of East Asia](#) (CCEA). These regional councils need encouraging and developing so that each of the six continents has a council which is resourced: Africa, Asia, Latin America, Australasia, North America and Europe.

Planning can then be devolved to the most appropriate council. These Councils would consist of the Coordinating Primate as president, together with bishops, clergy and lay people who would be elected by the Provinces.

‘Coordinating Primates Group’ (every year)

The group of the six Coordinating Primates, the ‘Coordinating Primates Group’, would serve as the Standing Committee of both the Primates’ Meeting and of the Anglican Council (see below). The Windsor Report recommended the setting up of a [Council of Advice](#) for the Archbishop of Canterbury (paragraphs 111-112). The ‘Coordinating Primates Group’ would fulfil that role and may draw on wider clerical and lay expertise on particular occasions.

‘Continental Anglican Communion Offices’

The Coordinating Primates would need some secretarial support and there would be six small Anglican Communion Offices in the cities of the Coordinating Primates, including London.

‘Anglican Council’ (every 5 years)

The Anglican Consultative Council would evolve into the ‘Anglican Council’. This would be made up of representatives of the six Continental Councils, and include the Coordinating Primates, together with the bishops, clergy and lay people who would be elected by the Continental Councils. The Anglican Council would meet every 5 years and the Coordinating Primates Group would also be its standing committee.

Primates’ Meeting (every 3 years)

The Primates’ Meeting would take place every 3 years, with the ‘Coordinating Primates Group’ acting as its Standing Committee.

Lambeth Conference (every 10 years)

The Lambeth Conference, for all bishops of the Anglican Communion, would continue to meet every ten years but the location may be on a different continent each time.

The Archbishop of Canterbury

The Archbishop of Canterbury would be likely to be elected the Coordinating Primate for Europe, and *primus inter pares* in the ‘Coordinating Primates Group’. If not so elected, at the meetings of the Coordinating Primates, Primates, Anglican Council and Lambeth Conference, he would still preside. It may well be that someone else would need to represent the concerns of the Church of England at some of these meetings. The Archbishop of York is suggested for this role.

The advantage of this proposal is that, like The Windsor Report, it steers carefully between ‘Curial’ and ‘Federal’ models and holds to a ‘Communion’ model. Some may perhaps criticise it for veering toward the ‘Curial’ model, but it does not go very far in that direction, and the development of Continental Councils helps to offset, in a slight Federal direction, such concerns. The foundational shape of the proposal is the ‘Communion’ model and into that Communion, centred on Canterbury, would flow contributions from all six continents.

Conclusion

In the middle of the twelfth century at the Abbey of St Victor just outside Paris, Hugh developed a creative space between his contemporaries, Abelard, the liberal dialectician, and Bernard, the Cistercian rigorist. He wrote the first book on 'The Art of Reading'.

Two years ago, in his letter to the Primates concerning Anglican identity, Rowan Williams wrote:

The reason Anglicanism is worth bothering with is because it has tried to find a way of being a Church that is neither tightly centralised nor just a loose federation of essentially independent bodies – a Church that is seeking to be a coherent family of communities meeting to hear the Bible read, to break bread and share wine as guests of Jesus Christ, and to celebrate a unity in worldwide mission and ministry. That is what the word 'Communion' means for Anglicans, and it is a vision that has taken clearer shape in many of our ecumenical dialogues.

Next month, Lambeth 2008 will be a pivotal conference for reading and reshaping our Communion. Let us pray for the Archbishop of Canterbury, the bishops and their spouses - for wisdom and insight, holiness and mercy and for the Holy Spirit to indwell the whole gathering, leading it in the ways of Christ, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Yours in Christ,

Graham

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