



# The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals



*Voices in Response  
from The Episcopal Church*

The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals  
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of The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America



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“For as one and the same law divine..., is unto all Christian churches a rule for the chiefest things; by means whereof they all in that respect make one church, as having all but ‘one Lord, one faith, and one baptism:’ so the urgent necessity of mutual communion for preservation of our unity in these things, as also for order in some other things convenient to be every where uniformly kept, maketh it requisite that the Church of God here on earth have her laws of spiritual commerce....”

—Richard Hooker, *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie*, Book I.X.14.

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## Preface

The Anglican Communion’s standing commission on doctrinal matters, The Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith, and Order (IASCUFO) was asked by the Anglican Consultative Council at its 2023 meeting to consider anew “structure and decision-making to help address our differences in the Anglican Communion” (ACC-18, res. 3(a)). In taking up this work, IASCUFO was asked to consider: “To what extent are the [four] Instruments<sup>1</sup> fit for purpose? To what extent might some (or all) of the Instruments be reconfigured to serve the Communion of today and the future?” (§3.3)

The Commission issued its report, “The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals: Renewing the Instruments of the Anglican Communion,” in Advent of 2024. In March of 2025, Presiding Bishop Sean Rowe asked the Ecclesiology Committee (“the committee”) to make “a robust response” to the document. At the same time, members of the newly created Task Force on the Anglican Communion and Countering the Colonial Mindset of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church (“the task force”) began to draft responses in accord with that part of mandate as defined by Resolution A041.<sup>2</sup>

The following essays by members of both the committee and the task force make robust, and diverse, responses to the proposed changes to the Anglican Communion’s governance. They range from supportive to severely critical. They point out that the unity that the Anglican Communion is meant to represent and enable in all its members across the world is already present in Jesus Christ and enabled by the Holy Spirit. Thus all

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1. At present the four Instruments of Communion are the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Primates’ Meeting, and the Anglican Consultative Council. The IASCUFO has already consulted with all four.

2. 81st General Convention, Resolution A041 (“Create a Task Force on The Episcopal Church-Anglican Communion Relationships”).

Anglicans should recognize that in this divine unity lies the diversity of the Trinitarian Persons, and so the pale image of God that we as the Body of Christ incarnate is both One and Many.

The gist of the proposals is to reduce the number of Instruments to three, by eliminating the notion of communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury as constitutive of church membership in the Communion. Rather, to be Anglican is only to have “a historical connection to Canterbury.” They propose to increase the weight of the Primates’ Meeting, and especially its Standing Committee, calling for the election of one of the primates to serve for six years in place of Canterbury in presiding the Anglican Consultative Council, representing the Communion to the world, and calling the Lambeth Conference.

The supportive bishops call attention to the real shift in populations of Anglicans from the North to the South, and that the context is now postcolonial, as IASCUFO points out. The essayists from the Committee call for the need to define The Episcopal Church’s relationship to the Anglican Church of North America, which is the most neuralgic issue for our church (and the Anglican Church of Canada). Critical essays dismiss the proposals as presenting a “technical fix” when a serious “adaptive response” is required. Several question the doctrinal underpinnings of the proposals, raising in various ways the question of what “doctrine” means in this context as well as generally.

Perhaps the most salient feature of the essays from the Committee is how seriously they take the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals. They recognize that the Commission has worked hard to generate the proposals, and they commend the authors. Several wondered why the Five Marks of Mission were not present at all in the proposals; one missed the parallel with the late Pope Francis’ easing of blessings for same-sex couples. Another proposed a significant revision to emphasize the active role of the laity as part of the practice of conciliarism. Yet another criticized the seeming goal of the proposals in philosophical terms.

Members of the Task Force contributed papers from scholarly and parish ministry perspectives, offering voices from the grassroots of mission and ministry as well as social analyses. Their concerns align with the overall critiques of increased primatial influence over the Anglican Communion and skepticism over whether the proposals would resolve what they sought to address. They also express apprehension over possible marginalization and exclusion of faithful Anglicans from a diverse range of cultures and social locations. One essayist from the task force contends that for a local parish truly to be a parish, it must exist in ecclesial and ontological communion with the diocese; the diocese, in turn, with the denomination; and denomination with the Anglican Communion, thus sustaining the

charism of full participation in, and support for, the life of the Anglican Communion.

Since the proposals themselves are really a beginning rather than an end, the members of the committee and the task force, authors and readers, believe that a robust response is worth making. Committee and Task Force members plan to discuss the essays with the official representatives of The Episcopal Church for the next meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council.

We hope that this offering will help people as they consider the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals, and more widely, what the Anglican Communion is for them.

The Right Reverend Pierre Whalon  
*Chair of the Ecclesiology Committee of the House of Bishops*

Ms. Martha Gardner  
*Chair, Task Force on the Anglican Communion  
and Countering the Colonial Mindset  
The General Convention of The Episcopal Church*

“The state of this present age, wherein zeal hath drowned charity, and skill meekness, will not now suffer any man to marvel, whatsoever he shall hear reproved by whomsoever.”

—Richard Hooker, *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie*, Book IV (I).

## Editor's Foreword

The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America, otherwise known as The Episcopal Church (which name is hereby recognized as also designating the Church), is a constituent member of the Anglican Communion, a Fellowship within the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, of those duly constituted Dioceses, Provinces, and regional Churches in communion with the See of Canterbury, upholding and propagating the historic Faith and Order as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer. This Constitution, adopted in General Convention in Philadelphia in October, 1789, as amended in subsequent General Conventions, sets forth the basic Articles for the government of this Church, and of its overseas missionary jurisdictions.

These are the words of the Preamble to the Constitution of The Episcopal Church. Before setting down to the task of establishing the order and polity of the church—before, that is, setting down to the work of ecclesiology—the framers of this Province of the Anglican Communion set down in these few words a statement both of identity and obligation. The first thing we say about ourselves to the world is that we are part of the Anglican Communion, and in communion with the See of Canterbury.

The reader of these essays will be helped in their consideration of what follows by knowing the intersecting considerations that brought them about. The first, and perhaps the most important, is the statement made in our Preamble.

The second arises from two specific actions of the General Convention, the governing body of the church. Historically, the relationships between the Episcopal Church and its Anglican Communion partners have been largely—if not exclusively—regarded as a matter of our sharing in the mission of God. Within the governing councils of our church,

these relationships were seen as the purview of the Standing Commission on World Mission.

By the time of the Eightieth General Convention of the Episcopal Church, held in June of 2024, it became clear that emergent challenges to the future of the Anglican Communion called for a different approach. New occasions teach new duties, as the hymn reminds us, and so the 2024 General Convention passed a resolution (A041) that called the church to consider anew how best to locate within our governing structures the responsibility of receiving, reflecting on, and responding to statements from bodies of the Communion. The Resolution reads:

*Resolved*, that the 81st General Convention...create a task force on The Episcopal Church–Anglican Communion relationships, to work in collaboration with the Presiding Bishop, and whose mandate includes, but is not limited to, (1) conducting a study of issues impairing relationships of communion between The Episcopal Church and other Provinces of the Anglican Communion, and the development of proposals for engaging constructively across differences; (2) proposing systematic ways for the Episcopal Church to respond to theological statements issued by the instruments of the Communion; (3) proposing a means of establishing clear guidance for representatives of The Episcopal Church to the triennial meetings of the Anglican Consultative Council; and (4) supporting the work of the Offices of Ministry Beyond the Episcopal Church as it relates to relationships with our Anglican Communion partners; and (5) encouraging The Episcopal Church’s participation in the life, councils, and budget of the Anglican Communion, its Office, and its programs...<sup>1</sup>

At that same meeting, a second Resolution, arising from separate but not unrelated concerns, called on the church to undertake a more thorough study of the lingering impact of the experience of empire, both on our church and on the wider Anglican tradition. That resolution (A080) reads as follows:

*Resolved*, That the 81st General Convention reckon with the history and present reality of colonialism in The Episcopal Church and its dual identity as a former colony and a colonizing power; and be it further

*Resolved*, That General Convention recognize the following working definition of the colonial mindset as: “the living legacy of colonialism in the 21st century exemplified by the supremacy of Western/European mindsets, modes of thinking, cultural and economic systems, and bodies in former colonial states and their partners”; and be it further

*Resolved*, That General Convention create a Task Force on Countering the Colonial Mindset, whose mandate include, but be not limited to, researching and highlighting historic and present realities of the colonial mindset

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1 Eightieth General Convention. Resolution A041 (as passed), accessed at <https://www.vbinder.net/resolutions/487?house=HD&lang=en>

in our common life, and establishing educational materials for dioceses, churches, and mission partners to use in their work and ministry...

Given a mandate by each of these two distinct resolutions, the presiding officers of the church—the Presiding Bishop, and the President of the House of Deputies—chose to link the two mandates together as a charge to a single task force, given the dual remit of answering to the tasks specified in the resolutions.

It was only after these resolutions had passed and the Task Force had been commissioned that the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith, and Order (IASCUF) brought forth its proposals for the reform of the Instruments of Communion, known familiarly (and referred to throughout this work) as the “Nairobi-Cairo Proposals.” This development made clear, in a way not seen since the 1997 “Virginia Report” of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, the need for a clearly defined place in the church’s structures of governance for receiving and responding to these and similar initiatives.

In the event, the report, appearing nearly immediately after the investiture of a new Presiding Bishop, invited—and clearly warranted—a considered response. At the annual spring meeting of the House of Bishops in March of 2024, the new Presiding Bishop, The Most Reverend Sean Rowe, called on the Ecclesiology Committee of the House of Bishops to prepare a series of responses to the proposals for the consideration of members of that House. Subsequently, at its first in-person meeting, the Task Force on Episcopal Church–Anglican Communion Relationships and Countering the Colonial Mindset (as it is now called) saw the need, despite the breadth of an already weighty mandate, to take up the task of widening the compass of reflections and responses to these proposals.

The volume you now have before you is the result of these interwoven influences.

It is essential to understand that this volume neither constitutes nor claims to be the “official response of The Episcopal Church” to the proposals set forward by IASCUF. That response will properly come from the members of this church duly elected to serve as our representatives to the next gathering of the Anglican Consultative Council, to be held in June of 2026.

What this volume reveals is deep reflection on the part of leaders in the church in both episcopal and parochial ministry, as well as in academe, to a newly envisaged Anglican Communion as described in the proposals. The reader will quickly find that there is no common mind among the contributors here. There are, however, some themes that emerge from the differing perspectives:

- The problemata of the Archbishop of Canterbury as both primate of the Church of England and titular head of the Anglican Communion is real, and needs to be addressed. It is, seen from at least some perspectives, a last vestige of empire; seen from others, the continuing exclusion of potential candidates from this leadership role save for bishops of one church of the Communion amounts to a profound loss of opportunity for the future representativeness and responsiveness of a global church.
- Related to this, it seems to at least some of the authors here that the movement effectively to marginalize the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury in the governance (such as it is) of the Communion seems hardly to be unrelated to the possibility, and now the reality, that the successor to the cathedra of Canterbury would be a woman. The church has a long and sad history of systematically marginalizing women who rise to traditional leadership roles, and the haste both of these proposals and the demands they transmit for action are difficult to separate from this development.
- Changes in organizational structures are technical solutions. But the problems facing the churches of the Communion are not technical; they are adaptive. To use language more suited to our life the Body of Christ on earth, the bonds of affection and mutual understanding that for a century and half were the lifeblood of the Communion have been badly frayed—in ways often amplified by a culture that now delights in tearing down rather than building up. We have permitted ourselves to become the subjects of this culture, rather than critics of it, and we all share in the responsibility both for the emergence of that circumstance and for changing it.
- A relatively long list of resolutions from past Lambeth Conferences, as well as writings of bishops of our churches down through the decades, gives clear evidence that the idea of a law-giving, orthodox-adjudicating magisterium has never been consistent with the Anglican ethos. The seeming call for one now seems to have much more to do with a demand for a reallocation of power among churches of the communion, and not with any principled reflection on God's call in mission to this church over the century to come as it is best expressed in our distinctive ecclesiology.

With the consent of the authors, this volume is offered to stimulate discussion and debate on the basis of a Creative Commons CC-BY-NC-ND license. You are encouraged to share this in any form, digital or printed, so long as you abide by the terms of the license granted on the copyright page. The translations from Hooker's *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie* are drawn from Richard Mammana's helpful contemporary language edition.

*C. Andrew Doyle*

## Household of God: Kinship, Holiness, and Apostolicity in Response to the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals

I write as an Anglican bishop formed by three decades of listening—to curates in Houston, grandmothers in Harare, and ecumenical partners across five continents. That pastoral range has convinced me that arguments about polity are never merely institutional; they reach the catechist's classroom and the communion rail. This essay critiques the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals because I love the Communion they would reshape. Rooted in the Anglican habits of common prayer and reasoned dialogue, I test the proposals against Scripture, sacramental theology, and lived Global South wisdom. My goal is not to defend the status quo but to imagine a conciliar life sturdy enough for our disagreements and spacious enough for every baptized voice.

### **Introduction: The Stakes for the Communion Rail and the Pew**

In what follows I aim to provide a case for why the structural debates at the core of the Nairobi–Cairo proposals touch catechists, clergy mobility, and sacramental trust. I hope to provide a resource for bishops, elected Anglican leaders, clergy, and lay Anglicans who may not be deeply familiar with or interested in the frameworks, processes, and language of global Anglican polity.

At a time when our Communion is marked by significant theological disagreement and relational tension among some provinces, the proposals from the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith, and Order (IASCUF<sup>O</sup>) represent one of the broadest re-evaluations of Anglican polity in recent times. Such a shift as proposed here has not been seen in

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almost a hundred years, and yet it comes with a similar mindset as previous work. The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals for renewing the Instruments of Communion, first released in draft in the fall of 2024, and now available in final form for response, seek to fundamentally change how Provinces are perceived as belonging together in the Anglican Communion, with global repercussions for our institutions, relationships, and public witness.

This paper serves three purposes. The first is to make clear the theological, pastoral, and practical stakes of the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals for all Anglicans. Second, as a theological and ecclesial resource for the life of the Anglican Communion and therefore necessarily written in an Anglican ethos, this essay seeks by way of argument and suggestion to respond to the Proposals, and to raise alternatives for consideration in dialogue with provinces. Third, the Proposals, while seeking to address some issues (namely, consistency in institutional behavior on hotly contested questions), will create challenges for Anglican churches and people by relaxing some of the doctrinal, sacramental, and constitutional safeguards in our Instruments of Communion. I want to make these challenges clear, as they could potentially remove the very things that draw many faithful Anglicans to Anglicanism as their tradition.

### **Language is Important**

At its best, Anglican polity is an expression of the sacramental and doctrinal bond of the baptismal covenant, which is ‘sealed’ in visible forms. This covenant is both visible and verifiable through its conciliar structures. The four traditional Instruments of Communion—Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Primates’ Meeting, and the Anglican Consultative Council—make visible this bond of the baptismal covenant by keeping provinces mutually accountable in faith, order, and mission. They are more than nice ways for bishops to meet. Anglican polity is the safeguard and expression of Anglican identity, an identity that is too often held lightly or simply as a matter of legal convenience.

Yet our Instruments of Communion have long been spoken of using the language of industry, an inheritance that the new Nairobi–Cairo Proposals may intensify. The Windsor Report was the first major Anglican document to popularize the phrase the Instruments of Communion.<sup>1</sup> It suggested that conflicts work through channels of these instruments so that our life in Christ is articulated and sustained, an understandable attempt to name what Anglicans do to maintain their connection.

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1. “The Lambeth Commission on Communion: The Windsor Report” (hereinafter “The Windsor Report,” 11. Accessed at <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/68225/windsor2004full.pdf>

Such language matters. William Stringfellow famously cautioned that whenever human beings are treated as instruments, they are dehumanized and instrumentalized by the institutional logic that maintains them, and we are called to resist it.<sup>2</sup> Ivan Illich likewise warned that systems thinking can conceal or even extinguish the reciprocal bonds of friendship which make any community truly human, obscuring the truth that our neighbor is not simply an object but a subject in relationship with us.<sup>3</sup> And the word “instrument” itself comes from Latin *instrumentum*, instrument for, a worker-like image not often applied to the church of God. The biblical language that the proposals should recover is *kinship*.

Kinship names not mechanisms and systems, but persons. It names the reciprocal gift exchange among free human beings, not mass production. The most obvious biblical icon of such kinship is found at the foot of the cross, where the new kinship Christ bestows on the church is given visual form: Jesus entrusts Mary to the beloved disciple in the kin exchange “Woman, behold your son...Son, behold your mother” (John 19:26–27, NRSV). It is a household that Christ grants, not an institutional fix for the problem of the cross. Any Anglican polity worthy of the gospel must therefore honor this cross-shaped exchange of mother and disciple, treating provinces and people as kin, never as levers or objects in institutional design.

Still, for this household to prosper, its welcome must be radical and rooted. Anglican tradition has long maintained that hospitality flows from a doctrinal and sacramental center. As the Book of Common Prayer says of the church, she is apostolic because she “continues in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers” (BCP 1979, 854). Creedal confession, baptism in the Triune Name, and common Eucharist are not exclusions but thresholds of grace, the common practices that form the virtues and habits of the household. Otherwise, “welcome” is at risk of becoming elastic sentimentality instead of a disciplined love. True kinship, like Augustine’s city of God, is both mercy and rule, hospitality and holiness.

To translate this kinship vision into ecclesial structure, we must make explicit how a household operates in practice. A healthy household distributes authority, shares burdens, and maintains accountable relationships across generational and regional lines. In this spirit, the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals might more clearly align with household logic by advocating a rotating presidency within the Anglican Consultative Council. Just as no one parent dominates a family, no one province should hold enduring

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2. William Stringfellow, *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1973).

3. Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

primacy in setting agendas. Similarly, integrating lay and clerical voices into agenda-setting bodies could ensure all household members are heard (1 Corinthians 12:14–20). These changes echo the conciliar instincts of Acts 15 and resist the creeping bureaucratic logic that treats Communion members as mere units in a system.

The Acts 2 picture of believers “devoted to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42, NRSV) is another biblically anchored image of such household belonging where each member is meant for the flourishing of the others. We must therefore resist any ecclesial polity, no matter how well meaning, that instrumentalizes provinces or people as levers for problem-solving. Anglicans are kin in Christ, not cogs in an ecclesial machine.

One sign that this household language is already being taken up is the African–Lambeth bible study method, first introduced by Kenyan and Ugandan bishops at Lambeth 1978. Rooted in *lectio divina*, the practice (described by this author elsewhere) invites participants to read, meditate, share, and pray in turn, a form of Scripture engagement liturgically embodying ubuntu.<sup>4</sup> Parishes can put this practice into action now: the free Difference Course (Anglican Alliance) offers guides and facilitator notes, allowing any local congregation to start a kin-focused small group this season.<sup>5</sup>

This vision already shapes the practice and witness of many Global South Anglicans. In Southern Africa Archbishop Desmond Tutu spoke of ubuntu, “I am because we are,” as the moral grammar of Christian community. Similarly, the Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches’ 2013 Nairobi Communiqué hopes that we meet as one family at the Lord’s Table, bound by a common baptism. These ideas parallel the hope of Ugandan primate Stephen Kaziimba who has declared the church to be a household of households sharing salt and light across Africa, though he fears the colonial ideas within Anglicanism.

The 2008 Lambeth indaba process, which gathered bishops in conversational “families” instead of adversarial blocs, shows that shifting from managerial Anglicanism to gospel-centered kinship is not some Western ecclesiological novelty, but an echo of the Majority World’s theological imagination. And the 2022 Lambeth Call on Discipleship confirms it, noting that “priority must be given to the voices of indigenous leaders,

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4. Lambeth Conference, *Lambeth Bible Study: Walk, Listen, Wonder* (2022), 3. Accessed at <https://www.lambethconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Lambeth-Bible-Study-Walk-Listen-Wonder.pdf>

5. Anglican Alliance, “Difference Course” (n.d.) Online course. Accessed 9 July 2025. <https://difference.rln.global>

women, young people, and the laity” in shaping the next season of our common life.<sup>6</sup> (Lambeth Calls Study Guide, 2022, p. 11).

### **Nota bene on implementation**

It is worth a brief aside to anticipate readers who will want to skip the arguments of this essay to get to a blueprint or rubrics for the kind of implementation we can “make happen.” That task will need to be done. But it is not the task of this essay. The diagnostic work before us is to identify how the widespread Western-industrial language of Anglicanism obscures the apostolic and creed-given reality that Anglicans are already one Body in Christ. This initial work of diagnosis and exposure makes way for the more technical work to follow from theologians, canonists, and liturgists across the Communion to dream and imagine locally rooted and globally coherent practices. What this essay refuses is any reform of the instruments that would trade the apostolic unity-in-diversity of Anglican conciliar life for some uniform managerial efficiency. Moreover, such forms have been widely rejected by the wider Christian communion; most recently, this is exemplified by the Windsor Report. I note here that the mother church of Lambeth and Canterbury joined the rest of the communion in Africa in not granting the report authority.

### **How the Proposals Fall Short**

As presented, the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals, while rightly affirming some key biblical, theological, and Anglican elements of conciliarity, would not simply reformulate but actively dissolve the sacramental and doctrinal interdependence of provinces in visible conciliar forms. They would trade the conciliar life of Anglicans as one Body in Christ visible in interdependence for the contractual relationships of autonomous (not interdependent) provinces cooperating by choice for an end or goal.

Loosening visible conciliar interdependence, even for the noble goal of shared life, would actively dissolve the sacramental and doctrinal interdependence of Anglican provinces in favor of a contractual network of autonomous provinces. By defining “belonging” in a covenantal but less distinctly Anglican way, it would shift our understanding of belonging from one of sacramental and doctrinal interdependence to a contractual network, where membership in a global association is purchased by signing on to the limited aims and objectives of mutual interest. It would, in a word, dissolve the apostolic character of Anglican unity.

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6. Lambeth Conference, “Lambeth Calls Guidance and Study Documents” (2022), 22; accessed at <https://www.lambethconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Lambeth-Calls-Study-Guide-English.pdf>.

Thus, by replacing the mutual-gift logic of a shared family table with a self-selected pact of “partners in projects,” the Nairobi–Cairo scheme would exchange the flesh-and-blood kinship of one baptized Body for a co-dependent governance arrangement in which provinces relate not as sisters, brothers, and siblings but as non-governmental organizations bound by the next memorandum of understanding.

Moreover, this is a realistic perspective on how some provinces have disregarded geographical provincial boundaries and seek to normalize this state of affairs, rather than addressing the very real problems it has created regarding kinship and broken bonds within the wider Communion family.

The proposals deliberately use words that suggest similar ways of ordering reality. “Affiliate,” for instance, suggests membership in a club or organization with goals and values distinct from one’s own; many belong to Rotary not because one is a Rotarian by vocation, but because it furthers one’s career. “Full fellowship” is a contractual term in international law, a set of arrangements based on shared interest. “Central secretariat” and “network identity” in a Catholic sense move us not to catholicity or *koinonia* but towards a managerial ecclesiology and even nationalism.

### **From Canterbury to Polycentrism: What Is Proposed and Why It Matters**

At the heart of the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals lies an attempt to navigate deep theological disagreements—most acutely, on human sexuality—without further schism. Rather than reaffirming shared apostolic teaching or conciliar authority, the proposals promote structural redefinition. They advocate shifting our Communion’s self-understanding from being bound by full communion with the See of Canterbury to a more generalized “historic connection.” This represents a marked departure from the Chicago–Lambeth Quadrilateral (1886/1888), which identified the Scriptures, the sacraments, the ancient creeds, and a common episcopate as non-negotiable signs of interdependence. Nairobi–Cairo proposes, in effect, to dilute that bond, exchanging a covenantal fellowship for a looser partnership grounded in ancestry rather than shared sacramental life.

One potential source for such theological ballast for the turn toward polycentric leadership implicit in the proposals is the common apostolic witness and conciliar practice of the churches of the first millennium. As Grieb notes in her interpretation of Richard Hooker, ecclesial authority is by its nature authority arising out of right reason interpretation of Scripture done in and through the visible order of the church.<sup>7</sup> A rotat-

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7. A. Katherine Grieb, “Richard Hooker and the Enactment of Scripture,” in Cynthia Kittredge and Hugh Page, eds., *Anglican Enactments of Scripture* (forthcoming 2025), 92–97.

ing presidency/polycentric model, therefore, if it still faithfully expresses Hooker's vision, would not be a way of side-stepping Hooker, but would rather exemplify his vision—if and only if it can uphold the identity of teaching and the sacramental character of the episcopate. Polycentricity must not lapse into “fragmentation,” but must reflect the practice of the ancient councils, in which no one bishop presided but all the bishops interpreted together on the common ground of a common teaching and Eucharistic life.

During a visit to dear friends in Ghana, I was invited to preach at the Founders' Day celebration for the Cape Coast Diocese in West Africa. On that day, we held a massive gathering and then laid a wreath on the grave of the chaplain to the English slave fort who brought Anglicanism to Ghana. For an Anglican from the American South who has worked to deal with our slave-owning history in the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, I did not understand. My dear brother, Bishop Victor Atta-Baffoe—then the dean of the seminary there—was present with me on that occasion. Our senior brother the late Daniel Allotey, then bishop diocesan, said to me, “Without the colonists, we would not have the gift of Anglicanism. Our history is complex. You must remember that we, too, sold our African brothers and sisters into slavery.”

Our history is indeed complex. Removing the Archbishop of Canterbury as a symbol of that complex history and future will not erase the reality of past actions committed in God's name by the church, nor will it safeguard the church from future mistakes.

To return to the proposals, they recommend a rotating presidency for the Anglican Consultative Council and the elevation of the role of the Primates' Meeting—effectively creating a new center of leadership, removed from traditional ties to Canterbury. They propose embracing “differentiated communion” as a lasting ecclesial norm. This would legitimize relationships with breakaway churches, such as the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA), by emphasizing shared heritage over present accountability. It is essential to recall at this point that the Anglican Communion has not officially ratified the Instruments of Communion but rather has been using the terms as if they had been approved. A key question then becomes, should the Communion's provinces approve the new organization, or will the “Instruments of Communion” ratify the new norm? We might also ask whether the current system already adheres to the idea of differentiated communion through its interdependent language. Moreover, do the proposals create a power shift from convener language at the center of our lives to regulatory language?

To be sure, the architects of the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals act out of a sincere pastoral concern to preserve communion and reduce institutional

strain; that intent is worthy of gratitude even as we must test whether the proposed cure may imperil the patient.

### A Philosophical Detour: Objectivism in the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals?

Beneath the Proposals lies a subtle but telling philosophical impulse. Two passages are especially revealing:

Each Province retains the freedom to pursue its own canonical, pastoral, and missional priorities, provided only that it affirms the historic bonds that have characterized our Anglican story.” (§2.3)

Full communion should no longer be conceived as juridical conformity to a central norm but as a voluntary affinity of mutually beneficial partnership.” (§4.1)

Both sentences privilege *voluntary choice* and *self interest* over sacramental interdependence. The appeal to autonomous provinces acting from their own “priorities,” and the confidence that a managerial design can displace sacramental bonds, echo the political ethic of Objectivism advanced by Ayn Rand.<sup>8</sup> Objectivism exalts rational self interest and treats voluntary association as sufficient glue for social order.

Transposed to church life, this mindset prizes provincial liberty and contractual affinity over the mutual submission demanded by sharing one baptism and one Eucharist, by sharing our kinship family (with all its good and troubled past). Further evidence of this drift appears later:

In a polycentric Communion the instruments exist to facilitate cooperation; they do not exercise binding authority over the consciences of member churches. (§5.4)

The future requires us to imagine Communion as a network—flexible, adaptive, and resilient—rather than as a single organism. (*Nairobi–Cairo*, §1.6)

These lines recast *koinonia* in the idiom of systems engineering (“network,” “resilient,” “adaptive”) and explicitly deny any binding claim on conscience. Such rhetoric signals an underlying conviction that the good of the whole will emerge spontaneously from the rational choices of its parts—a classically Objectivist trust in unregulated exchange. We have seen this pattern before—in the Virginia Report (1997) and the Windsor Report (2004)—each importing a Western managerial logic that prioritized structural “solutions” above theological consensus and which ultimately failed to secure Communion-wide reception.

A Communion built on Objectivist premises risks becoming a marketplace of ecclesial consumers rather than a *koinonia* of those who “contin-

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8. Notably in Ayn Rand, with Nathaniel Branden, *The Virtue of Selfishness: a New Concept of Egoism* (New York: New American Library, 1965).

ued in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Anglicans have traveled this road before; we should not tread it again.

While well-intentioned, these structural revisions would risk undermining the theological coherence of the Communion. Anglican ecclesiology has never rested solely on affinity or heritage; it is rooted in sacramental theology, episcopal oversight, and conciliar discernment. To treat historical connection as sufficient for communion is to exchange a living, accountable fellowship for a federation of theological divergence. I also suggest they ignore the vast numbers of First Peoples and tribal dialects our church holds within the family.

Consider someone for whom I have the utmost respect, Bishop Te Kitoi “Kito” Wiremu Pikaahu. The Communion and I have both learned from his leadership and wisdom, rediscovering a different way of listening and being present as an interdependent whole. Using *te reo Māori* in our Anglican *whānau* (extended family) is no polite flourish; as Bishop Kito keeps insisting, it names the truth that Christ’s body in Aotearoa beats with many hearts and many tongues, so every voice must find its pitch in the Gospel. Pikaahu tells how, when his translation team struggled to render the opening “Servant God” of an English collect, they finally stripped the phrase back to the plain yet spacious “E te Atua” literally translated “O God.” “We looked at that for a long time and just couldn’t find a good way of saying that... so in the end we kept it simple.”<sup>9</sup> Such moments, he says, show how fidelity to Māori thought-worlds is often a return to the living core of language.

He also honors elders whose decades of ministry let them sense when a word truly fits: “They had the experience of ministering to people in Māori who were having the experiences the prayers were talking about. That’s how they could find the words for those prayers.”<sup>10</sup> Today, the same instinct guides his leadership of the new Māori Bible-translation oversight group, a project explicitly aimed at producing Scripture that “speaks to younger generations” and therefore “sounds like home” to every reader.<sup>11</sup> (Bible Society New Zealand, 2023). In Pikaahu’s vision, then, speaking, praying, and singing in *te reo* is never ornamental; it is daily discipleship—

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9. Quoted in Julianne Clarke–Morris, ‘Praying Anew in Te Reo Māori.’ *Anglican Taonga*, 7 December 2020; accessed at [https://www.anglicantaonga.org.nz/news/tikanga\\_maori/hkmoa\\_collects](https://www.anglicantaonga.org.nz/news/tikanga_maori/hkmoa_collects)

10. Ibid.

11. See Bible Society New Zealand, “A New Māori Translation of the Bible.” June 13, 2023; accessed at <https://biblesociety.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/A-New-Maori-Translation-of-the-Bible.pdf>

honoring each other's language as we honor each other's God-given place in the shared *whakapapa* (ancestral genealogy) of redemption.

We might well find similar concerns with the proposals among many of the ancient peoples who are our family members. How might we think differently about the systematic stresses and strains we face? What gifts are present among us that have not yet been adequately received or even invited to offer, given the domination of Western influence in the present Communion structures and in the Global South, both of which are very much swayed by predominantly white, wealthy, and privileged people?

### **Recovering Anglican Markers: Holiness, Apostolicity, and Conciliar Unity**

Because Anglican polity, worship, and doctrine are inseparable, the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals attempts to redefine holiness in a way that validates deep moral disagreement as acceptable within the same Communion. Yet, as the Anglican history gathered within *Love's Redeeming Work* illustrates, holiness in the Anglican tradition is not a disembodied virtue. It is incarnated through common prayer, shaped in sacramental life, and lived out in ethical witness.<sup>12</sup> The holiness we share is not simply a matter of individual experience but a collective vocation of fidelity to Christ. That is the center.

Likewise, apostolicity cannot be reduced to the existence of bishops in apostolic succession. Gerald Bray rightly highlights that apostolicity involves faithfulness to apostolic teaching and the structures that safeguard that teaching within the church.<sup>13</sup> A Communion that accommodates doctrinal incoherence under the name of unity risks becoming a communion in name only. As the Book of Common Prayer reminds us, the church is apostolic because it continues in the apostles' teaching and fellowship (BCP 1979, 854).

Michael Ramsey warned against ecclesial arrangements that prioritize institutional survival over theological integrity. During the 1968 Lambeth Conference, he cautioned the bishops that unity without truth, or fellowship without fidelity, would not satisfy the Gospel imperative. Instead, he encouraged a pattern of patient, faithful dialogue grounded in the authority of Scripture and the communal pursuit of holiness.<sup>14</sup>

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12. Geoffrey Rowell, Kenneth Stevenson, and Rowan Williams, eds., *Love's Redeeming Work: The Anglican Quest for Holiness* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), xviii–xix.

13. Gerald Bray, *Anglicanism: A Reformed Catholic Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2021), 103–4.

14. Peter Webster, "Archbishop Michael Ramsey and the Lambeth Conference," *Anglican and Episcopal History*, 91(2) (June 2022), 152–175.

Carol Gallagher, my colleague in the House of Bishops and a member of the Cherokee Nation, once suggested to me in a conversation that we don't spend enough time on things. Our Western life often seeks quick solutions to problems that require thoughtful consideration, prayer, and open discussion over time. This is great wisdom, and sometimes our proposals for life together arrive quickly with only a few hours spent on something as important as governance, which will change the life we have known as a Christian tradition for over 400 years and will affect our tradition for hundreds of years to come. Why are we trying to solve this in a triennium or even a decade? We do this to fix only a problem that exists in our immediate vision, without considering our ancestors or future generations.

### **A Viable Way Forward?**

#### **A Critical Analysis of the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals**

What does all this mean for “normal” faithful Anglicans, in the pews, at the altar, and in the pulpit? For many lay Anglicans, the dispute over the use of instruments of communion or constitutional changes may feel distant and overly theoretical. These issues can seem far removed from the day-to-day realities of parish life. But the proposed changes would have concrete consequences for our spiritual lives. A shift in the definition of our Communion would impact who can be a bishop, how clergy can move from one province to another, and whether the sacraments and liturgies we use are recognized and mutually accountable across the Anglican Communion.

The See of Canterbury, as currently understood, has not been a source of authoritarian control, but a center of convergence, much like the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15. Rejecting Canterbury's role might be a welcome rebuke for some political critics. But it also removes a point of common reference and recognition. Decentralization may offer more flexibility. But at what cost to coherence and shared discernment? The role of Canterbury (outside of the formal structural roles) is one of convener.

The practical consequences come fast and hard. Licenses to ordain, recognition of episcopal orders, mobility of clergy from province to province, and even hospitality of the Eucharist with fellow Anglicans are all grounded in an overlapping web of mutual sacramental recognition. At its core this is Nicene in nature, and deeply rooted in ancient forms of relationship. A “network of mutual interest” would have no canonical infrastructure to enforce these mutual recognitions and could leave any local parish in a vulnerable position, unsure who is or isn't qualified to stand at the altar to preside or to confirm the baptized.

The human costs are not gender-neutral. The Lambeth Safe Church Call notes that “One in three women around the world will experience physi-

cal or sexual violence.” It calls on “every province to safeguard in its canon law and processes in a way that ensures there are policies, procedures and protocols that are well known, are being implemented and provide true accountability.”<sup>15</sup> The Sustainable Development Call has noted that “[Climate] disasters have a vastly disproportionate impact on women, young people, and indigenous peoples,” and “invites us to imagine all the earth-keeping work women do across the Anglican Communion and with whom we need to work.”<sup>16</sup>

Structural experiments that fail to take those human realities into account entrench injustice rather than undo it. Sometimes, convening together, especially when we don’t want to, and setting the agenda of discussion, even when we don’t want to participate, are powerful. The Western part of our church has not been particularly eager to undertake this work, despite our siblings around the world asking us to do so. It is a defining familial relationship that offers an invitation (which reveals our kinship), and the reception of said invitation (which reveals our kinship) that is importantly all woven together. Will that weave hold in a new structure? We must remember, I think, that the Lambeth Conference was not established as a body to legislate.

Perhaps some of what we are looking for exists in the manner of what it means to gather, pray, worship, share the sacraments, and be together, as a way of combating the Objectivist culture that sees the individual production of economic goods as the only desired outcome. For too long, we have thought that a meeting’s purpose is production. The Conference, as it was originally intended, was to gather the family of Anglican bishops without legislating anything. It was meant for kinship, not political gamesmanship. We might ask what it means to resist the culture at this moment, rather than following it.

Consider this: any blurring of the distinction between full communion and ecumenical dialogue (especially with schismatic Anglican groups) would undercut efforts to maintain mutual accountability. The Episcopal Church’s full communion agreements with the Old Catholic Churches of Utrecht, the Mar Thoma Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Moravian Church, the Church of Sweden, the Philippine Independent Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Bavaria demonstrate that visible unity does not require compromise with our Anglican identity. We have within the Communion many other models of

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15. Lambeth Conference, “Lambeth Calls: Guidance and Study Documents” (2022).

16. Lambeth Conference, “Lambeth Calls: Guidance and Study Documents” (2022), 47.

robust theological dialogue with clear ecclesial boundaries. They provide an alternative to Nairobi–Cairo’s structural pluralism.

### **Historical Memory and Ecclesial Integrity: Lessons from Lambeth**

The Lambeth Conferences have been pivotal moments of shared discernment and theological development for the Anglican Communion as a whole. From the 1888 Quadrilateral to the 1920 “Appeal to All Christian People,” the conferences have served as way-points in the development of our understanding of communion, doctrine, and mission. The Lambeth model has always been conciliar—not curial—in its vision of governance. It has also been blind to the wide diversity of languages and cultures that are a part of our life together.

Recent research from Paul Avis and Benjamin Guyer emphasizes this rich heritage. In their volume *The Lambeth Conference: Theology, History, Polity and Purpose*, they show that the conference was never intended to be a legislature or an instrument of command but a spiritual locus of theological encounter. The conference “operates,” Avis and Guyer write, “based on consent” rather than coercion and thus takes the form of mutual obligation rather than juridical enforcement.<sup>17</sup> (Avis and Guyer 2017)

The kind of conciliarity that this vision assumes is at risk under the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals, which would turn the Primates’ Meeting into a superstructure without a proportional role for clergy and lay input. If the Nairobi–Cairo plan were enacted as written, the voice of diocesan synods and parish councils would be a diminished influence in the life of the Communion, in contrast to the Anglican ethos of widely shared discernment. Instead, the new arrangement risks becoming a top-down directive system that could easily devolve into an alliance of provincial self-interests. So, while on the one hand we feel the struggle and push-pull of self-interest now, the new structure would provide a means for those self-interests to utilize official structures to the gain of a few over the many. Would the Proposals create more of an issue rather than solve the problem of familial relationships?

The architects of family systems theory—Murray Bowen, Salvador Minuchin, and Edwin Friedman—offer us some insight here. What may be needed for our life together is to imagine the Anglican Communion not as a loose federation of institutions but as a global household of kin. Bound by baptism and nourished at the same table, our provinces share one story even as each bears its own cultural charisms. A family-systems lens reveals that healthy households endure by weaving two graces: belonging that

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17. Paul Avis and Benjamin Guyer, *The Lambeth Conference: Theology, History, Polity, and Purpose* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017).

honors every relative, and self-differentiation that allows each voice to speak without anxiety, steering the project of Anglicanism.

When we name the Communion as kinship, we pledge to the disciplines that keep an extended household elastic amid strain—cultivating non-anxious leadership, speaking truth in “I” voice rather than blame, resisting “triangulations”, and renewing the shared rituals and stories that remind us to whose family we belong.

### **Discerning a Healthy Way Forward**

Instead of succumbing to reaction or defensiveness or taking an offensive political approach, we Anglicans are being providentially invited into a time of deeper reflection. Any genuine way forward must preserve the sacramental and doctrinal covenant that is the Communion, not trade it away for administrative efficiency or centralized control. The way forward lies not in structural innovation for its own sake, but in spiritual renewal.

We need to recommit to concrete practices that make our unity real: shared prayer and common catechesis, together with regular mutual theological formation. This could resemble a standard theological curriculum for bishops and clergy across the Communion, drawing from Anglican sources, as the Theological Education in the Anglican Communion (TEAC) initiative attempted 20 years ago. Provincial seminaries and diocesan clergy formation programs could partner with one another to deepen shared understandings of the sacraments, episcopacy, mission, and Scripture. This has been recognized as a weakness in the Communion—the last three Archbishops of Canterbury have sought to improve our formation. This is harder and so left untried, while we have sought a technical, structural response instead.

The Instruments of Communion could also be restored to their pastoral and spiritual task. They should not be wielded as weapons of exclusion or enforcement, but re-grounded in practices of prayer, Scripture, and mutual discernment. The Anglican Consultative Council could be enlarged to include more lay voices. This would help reinforce the conciliar ethos that has been so central to our tradition.

### **Approaching Breakaway Groups with Theological Clarity and Spiritual Charity**

Dialogue with breakaway groups is important. Reconciliation is, after all, the Gospel imperatives. “We call on all Anglicans to seek ways to restore relationships with all those with whom we are divided.”<sup>18</sup> Echoing that mandate, the Lambeth Call on Reconciliation implores the Archbishop

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18. Lambeth Conference, “Lambeth Calls: Guidance and Study Documents” (2022).

of Canterbury “to refresh the conversation with the Churches of Nigeria, Rwanda, and Uganda, seeking a more full life together as an Anglican family of churches.”<sup>19</sup>

If new relationships with these provinces and breakaway churches are indeed Godgiven and so possible, they must be ordered in a way that is ecumenical, not in a *de facto* communion. Historical examples of full communion covenants both inspire and caution. The Episcopal Church’s full communion relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, for example, was established over decades of theological dialogue, mutual recognition of ministries, and agreement on the essentials of the faith and sacramental life, while preserving the institutional integrity and distinctiveness of the interdependent voices. Our response must begin with building local relationships and a collaborative mission.

Anglican–Methodist conversations in the U.K. and the U.S. have borne fruit in covenants affirming a shared apostolic faith without demanding merger. These examples remind us that reconciliation is possible. But it is not a cheap grace. Genuine reconciliation will demand shared accountability, theological coherence, and a commitment to mutual discernment.

### **Finally, Kinship**

Communion is never manufactured in the workshop of human rigor; it is born in the generous life of God. Our first kinship is vertical: before we belong to any structure or party, we belong to the Triune God who has already bent low to gather a household in the Son and knit us together by the Spirit. That gift precedes every ordinance.

Only when our hearts rest in that prior belonging do we discover one another—saints and sinners alike—as siblings already tethered to the same mercy. I am leaning on St. Augustine of Hippo here. From this shared adoption, a lateral communion unfurls, not as the fragile product of our purity codes but as the steady overflow of God’s own hospitality.

Augustine’s North African field still speaks to us today. Watching wheat and tares sprout side by side, he refused the Donatist impulse to weed the church by hand, as the IASCUFO points out. Sacraments, he insisted, originate in Christ; the priest is no more than a trembling server passing bread that is already holy. If the harvest belongs to God, the presence of flawed ministers cannot annul grace. Secure in that conviction, Augustine could nudge estranged neighbors toward reunion—sometimes firmly, always with the confidence that kinship existed before they remembered it. His wisdom cuts through our contemporary anxiety: fidelity is not the fruit of tighter fences but of deeper roots in the love that enfolds both wheat and weed until the final harvest.

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19. *Ibid.* at 28.

For Anglicans wrestling in Nairobi and beyond, the temptation to perfect our systems is strong to fight the perceived brokenness of our neighbors. When we start there, the question quickly hardens into a demand: “Are you pure enough to belong?” The answer is inevitably “Not yet,” and a communion of kinship collapses under the weight of anxious striving. However, if we begin where Augustine began—facing God first—the field appears differently. We stand on identical ground: sinners held fast by the same grace, citizens of the kingdom before we are ever architects of its earthly patterns. Here, the energy once spent on building systems and borders is released for the slower, braver work of living together, trusting that the Spirit, not our institutions, will make the harvest good.

So the task for this moment is neither new machinery nor more calibrated ledgers, in my humble opinion. It is a renewed gaze toward the God who has already crossed every distance to make us family. Anchored there, we can resist both the despair that doubts communion is possible and the pride that imagines we can engineer it ourselves. We shape our common life, yes, but as grateful inheritors, not anxious architects—people who gather at a table where the bread is Christ’s before any hand, clean or trembling, ever breaks it.

I remind us of Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12 (vv.14–20):

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot were to say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear were to say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body.

Paul’s image of the church as one body with many members insists that the foot cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor the eye to the ear, “I have no need of you.” Each part is indispensable because the Spirit knits them into a single, living organism. That same logic still confronts us whenever any group, by power, wealth, or geography, acts as though another part of Christ’s body is optional.

I am grateful to have spent a brief moment with Kenyan theologian Esther Mombo, thanks to our shared communion relationship. More importantly, I am a follower of her wisdom. She presses Paul’s point from African soil. She observes that everyday faith communities across the continent “are held together by women,” even though patriarchy often muffles their voices.<sup>20</sup> In her wider scholarship, she argues that honoring such hidden

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20. “Born into Ecumenism, Esther Mombo says African Christianity is ‘Young

labor is not a matter of courtesy but of ecclesial survival: when the gifts of the overlooked are sidelined, the whole-body limps.<sup>21</sup>

Read side-by-side, Paul and Mombo expose the same theological truth: communion is not a voluntary alliance of self-sufficient provinces or social groups.

It is a God-given kinship in which every member's flourishing is bound to the others. Koinonia, then, is more than structural cooperation; it is the Spirit's own life circulating through diverse limbs, compelling us to listen, share resources, and bear one another's wounds. When that circulation is blocked by contractual thinking, managerial fixes, or hardened hierarchies, the body shows symptoms of spiritual hypoxia. The cure is not further fragmentation but deeper reception of the gift already given: a communion in which the weakest are treated with the greatest honor, until the whole body can say with one voice, "God has so arranged the members...that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another" (1 Corinthians 12:24-25).

This is the true meaning of God-given koinonia and the measure by which every ecclesial proposal must ultimately be judged. God has arranged the body. And, if we cannot come to the same table as our brother, humbly asking for grace, then we must self-examine. This self-examination cannot be with Objectivist eyes, but rather with the eyes of God in Christ Jesus, who gazes upon us all from the vantage point of his Cross.

### **Conclusion: Stewards of a Shared Holiness**

We have traveled a long way together—from the cruciform kinship revealed at the foot of the cross to the structural anxieties shaping the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals—yet several matters still call for deeper discernment. Can a contractual network really safeguard apostolic teaching when belonging becomes a matter of negotiated affinity? Whose voices will be amplified and whose muted once visible bonds of conciliar interdependence loosen? How will sacramental recognition work on the ground if a communion without clearly shared orders unsettles pastoral mobility and eucharistic hospitality? What becomes of Canterbury as a living, complicated memory of colonial encounter if we remove it from our shared grammar? Where, finally, is the moral horizon for reform if the engine driving change is managerial fatigue rather than missionary hope?

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and Vibrant,™" World Council of Churches, November 5, 2019; accessed at <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/born-into-ecumenism-esther-mombo-says-african-christianity-is-young-and-vibrant>

21. Mombo, *Call to Reconciliation: African Women's Theological Reflections* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2019).

Even in posing those questions, this essay has tried to keep the pastoral soil visible. It insists that kinship comes before contract, that Scripture must lie open in common hands, that digital fellowship can rehearse sacramental life, that Lambeth can be renewed as a table instead of a tribunal, and that family-systems wisdom can help us quarrel without splintering. These practical threads are not decorative; they are the pastoral scaffolding that will stop any structural renovation from collapsing on the very people it means to serve.

My thesis stands: the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals should be weighed through a Scripture-shaped lens of kinship, because they risk exchanging the sacramental and doctrinal interdependence of historic Anglican conciliarity for a voluntary contract among autonomous provinces. Such a swap would dissolve the household Christ entrusted to us at the cross and replace blood-bought kinship with mere memoranda and networks. I have argued for another way: a conciliar life that privileges marginal voices, girds teaching with apostolic integrity, and refuses Western managerial fixes in place of sacramental union, offering practices—such as Bible study, digital fellowship, and a re-humanized Lambeth—that demonstrate this household vision is not utopian but eminently doable. If we find the courage to remain at one table—patient, repentant, fiercely hopeful—our Communion can yet become what it already is in Christ: a family of households, sharing salt and light across the earth, bound not by contract but by the bread that makes us kin.

*Justin S. Holcomb*

## Global Theology and the Anglican Communion: A Theological Grammar for Receiving The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals

### Introduction

The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals urge the churches of the Anglican Communion to reclaim their oldest ideals, found in Scripture and in the ancient faith of the church, and to respond properly to God’s gift and call of unity in Christ, even when that unity is wounded by disagreement and division. This essay offers a theological grammar for receiving The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals. Rather than re-litigating every structural recommendation, I seek to interpret and commend the Proposals’ summons to seek the “highest degree of communion possible” (§3, §§31, 39, 100), its “dogged refusal to give up on one another” (§45), its call to “engage in the search for truth together” (§48), and its retrieval of a given faith and order (§15). I appreciate the aspirational vision that calls Anglicans to receive God’s gift of unity in Christ and to walk together amid real disagreement. In my visits across the Communion, I have seen both the longing for such unity and the pain of its absence. I argue that two practices are indispensable for that reception: *theology in context* and a *ruled reading* of Holy Scripture.

A primary challenge for the global Anglican Communion is maintaining theological and ecclesial unity without suppressing the diversity that arises from its broad cultural, linguistic, ethnic, geographical, and regional reach. As §69 puts it: “Sharing our joys and sorrows, and extending mutual commitments where we can, is a sign and foretaste of maturing, interdependent communion that reflects a normative New Testament pattern.”

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This also names the “ultimate insufficiency of Anglicanism,” set within a church that is “polycentric... never simply centralized” (§69).

How can the Anglican Communion recover its theological coherence without sacrificing its catholicity? In a world increasingly marked by fragmentation and polarization, the church serves as a sign and witness of the unity given in Christ—grounded in the gospel and rooted in the historic faith: “A dogged refusal to give up on each other, to remain in relationship despite deep and significant disagreement, can be a remarkable witness to the power of Christ to bring unity in a divided world, and a foretaste of the day when all things in heaven and on earth will be brought together under Christ (Ephesians 1:10)” (§45).

The Anglican Communion faces significant theological and ecclesial challenges: growing doctrinal fragmentation, contested views on biblical authority, and the challenge of maintaining unity across a global church. It stands at a moment that is both restless and graced. Restless—because fractures and cross-pressures are real. Graced—because this is precisely the kind of moment in which the Lord teaches his church again to sing the old song of the gospel—Jesus Christ crucified and risen for us—with renewed conviction. The right key is theological, not managerial: theology in context that retrieves the catholic center for the sake of mission, joined to a ruled reading of Holy Scripture confessed in the Creeds and prayed in common. (These ideas will be explored further in what follows.) From that vantage point, I receive the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals hopefully: not as an occasion for institutional self-assertion, but as a prompt to become more clearly what the gospel already makes us—a global fellowship gathered by the Lamb “from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

The proposals’ leitmotif—walking together toward the *highest degree of communion possible*—sets the horizon for what follows: grateful reception of what we share, honest speech about differences, and patient differentiation where needed. Its moral center is §45’s dogged refusal to give up on each other; its intellectual posture is §48’s call to engage in the search for truth together. Read this way, the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals commend non-coercive commitment. To move toward that horizon, the path forward is theological: theology in context joined to a ruled reading of Holy Scripture.

### **Renewing the Instruments: Structural Modesty, Theological Audacity<sup>1</sup>**

The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals are less a new constitution than a retrieval and restatement of a confessed center—catholic and apostolic faith and

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1. The IASCUFO document itself uses this wording as its subtitle: “**Renewing the Instruments of the Anglican Communion.**” See Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order (IASCUFO), “*The Nairobi–Cairo*

order nourished by common prayer—paired with practical suggestions for diversified leadership. They call the Communion to order its common life around Scripture, the Creeds, the historic episcopate, and common prayer—naming a “given faith and order” (§15)—and then to align the Instruments to serve that center, so that bishops teach and discern collegially, primates help tend communion through calling and convening, and councils (ACC) coordinate for mission. In this light, the Proposals represent less reinvention than a re-centering of unity in confessed truth for the sake of worship, discipleship, catechesis, mission, and evangelism.

In practical terms, the proposals sketch a clearer differentiation among the Instruments of Communion. The Lambeth Conference is the bishops’ gathering for common counsel in matters of faith and order. Lambeth’s service here is chiefly theological and formational—bishops gathered for common counsel to teach, clarify, and exhort rather than legislate. The Primates’ Meeting—with the Primates’ Standing Committee in an enhanced convening role—serves to tend the bonds of communion when they are strained, not to police the churches. The Anglican Consultative Council, per its Constitution, consults, coordinates, and facilitates the Communion’s common work across the provinces and regions. Its remit is mission—consultation and coordination, not doctrinal adjudication (§72; §§82–89). This structural modesty serves theological audacity: communion is safeguarded not by committees but by a shared rule of faith proclaimed, prayed, and taught. This includes stronger regional collaboration—polycentric leadership gathered to a common rule.

The proposals honor the historic ministry of the See of Canterbury while decentering any single province as gatekeeper, recommending broadened, shared calling-convening-presiding so that “the leadership of the Communion looks like the Communion” (Executive Summary; §85). The point is neither repudiation nor nationalism, but catholicity: a polycentric pattern that reflects growth “from every tribe and language.” The Proposals preserve the Archbishop of Canterbury’s “historic and pastoral service”—“the ministry is personal...invited to serve, encourage, and persuade”—and affirm that “the See of Canterbury...stands as a symbol of the apostolic character of the Anglican Communion” (§86; see also §§78, 97).

The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals clarify how to speak truthfully when communion is impaired. Rather than papering over serious disagreements, they commend honest naming of differentiation and patient accommodation within a framework of degrees of communion (§§31–39), as we seek the highest degree of communion possible (§3, §§31, 39, 100), refuse to

give up on each other (§45), and engage in the search for truth together (§48). This truthful speech is exercised across the Communion and its Instruments with free association, variability, regionality, and mutual accountability in view (§§60–71).

Provinces teach and pastor locally; the Communion confesses together. Structural variability and regional free association create pastoral space for local application within the shared rule—Holy Scripture, the Creeds, the dominical sacraments, and the historic episcopate—while mutual accountability addresses innovations through common counsel, reception, and, where needed, patient differentiation (§§31–39; 60–71). The Proposals thus make room for diversity ordered to a confessed center, not to a single cultural gatekeeper. Here a ruled reading comes into its own: the Creeds, catechesis, common prayer (as embodied in the classic prayer books) are not rivals to Scripture but scaffolding by which diverse cultures receive and proclaim the same gospel.

The proposals' quietly radical note is a the call to re-center the ordinary means of grace—Word, sacraments, and prayer. Common Scripture, Baptism, and the Eucharist—together with common collects and catechesis—will do more for unity than communiqués ever could. A recognizable family likeness then returns—even across wide cultural distance (§15; echoes throughout). In the gospel proclaimed, in Baptism, and at the Lord's Table, the church receives communion as gift. Structures only serve what Christ gives by these means of grace.

Anglicanism thus stands at a moment of renewal in which reclaiming its catholic and evangelical<sup>2</sup> heritage is not nostalgia, but the ordinary way God strengthens proclamation, ministry, mission, worship, evangelism, doctrine, and discipleship (§3; §15; §§31–39).

### **Theology in Context: Receiving the Polycentric Vision of The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals**

The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals envision a Communion that receives and confesses one faith across many cultures, languages, and regions—a diversified, regionally shared, polycentric body ordered to a confessed center (§15; §§31–39). The leitmotif of “the highest degree of communion possi-

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2. By “evangelical” what is meant is not a voting bloc or a U.S. sociopolitical label but the historical use of the term—gospel-centered convictions for churches regardless of denomination gathered by the Word and sacraments around the person and work of Jesus Christ. “Evangelical” names the trans-cultural, trans-epochal impulse to center faith and practice on the *euangelion*—Scripture's witness to salvation by grace through faith in Christ—spread by preaching, catechesis, sacraments, and mission from the early church through medieval and Reformation renewals to the global church today.

ble” presumes patiently “accommodated differentiation” within a shared confession.<sup>3</sup> Read this way, theology in context is not relativism but the reception of the one gospel in diverse settings, accountable to the church’s common faith.

By broadening who calls, convenes, and presides, the Proposals signal that “the leadership of the Communion should look like the Communion,” a structural expression of polycentric reception (Executive Summary; §85). In this frame, context does not finally determine doctrine; rather, diverse provinces receive, interpret, and (where needed) correct one another within a confessed rule (§3, §§31–39; 60–71).

The proposals pair structural variability and free association with mutual accountability (§§60–71). That pairing is the working space for theology in context: regions may speak pastorally to local conditions, yet remain tethered to the given faith and order—Scripture, the Creeds, the historic episcopate, and common prayer (§15).

A contextual-yet-ruled catholicity serves mission: a global church that speaks with many local accents, yet with one apostolic faith, becomes credible witness “in a divided world,” refusing to give up on one another while engaging in the search for truth together (§§45, 48).

#### **From Every People to Every People<sup>4</sup>**

From the start, the church has received one faith in many places; the gospel’s spread and reception have always been polycentric—and theology in context names that catholic and evangelical practice while guarding it from both relativism and hegemony.

Christians in the West might assume that missionaries, especially those from Britain and the United States, brought the gospel to Asia and Africa. Sharing this broad assumption, some Christians risk throwing out the baby of essential Christian faith and practice with the bathwater of Western prejudice, while others see “contextualization” as a pretext for relativism and syncretism. I propose that theology in context is a third way that is sensitive to regional diversity as well as to unity in “the faith once and for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3).

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3. The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals (Advent 2024), Introduction §3 (“accommodate differentiation patiently and respectfully”) and §31 (“accommodating degrees of differentiation with a spirit of patience”); see also §§32–39.

4. This section is based on “From Every People to Every People: Theology in Context,” in *Prophet, Priest, and King: Christology in Global Perspective*, edited by Michael S. Horton, Elizabeth W. Mburu, and Justin S. Holcomb (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Academic, 2025), ix–xiv.

Christianity not only emerged in the Middle East, but also spread quickly through central Asia, Africa, and India, beginning with the apostles. Armenia was the first country to adopt Christianity officially in 301. About a decade later the Christian apologist Arnobius could celebrate that the gospel

has subdued the fires of passion, and caused races and peoples and nations most diverse in character to hasten with one accord to accept the same faith. For the deeds can be reckoned up and numbered which have been done in India, among the Seres [China], Persians, and Medes; in Arabia, Egypt, in Asia, Syria; among the Galatians, Parthians, Phrygians; in Achaia, Macedonia, Epirus; in all islands and provinces on which the rising and setting sun shines.<sup>5</sup>

A wide door was opened in China by Emperor Taizong in the seventh century when he embraced Christ through an Assyrian missionary, Alopen, who gave him the Scriptures.<sup>6</sup>

During roughly the same period, missionaries were making inroads among European tribes. Consequently, our collective memory is (or should be) broader and deeper than the history of Western Christianity. This is not in any way to diminish the significance of the modern missionary movement; but it is to affirm that being catholic and evangelical today requires appreciation for the diversity of voices that have propagated the movement from the beginning.

Thus, when Asian and African Christians bear witness to this evangelical catholicity, they neither adopt wholesale nor reject distinctively Western developments of Christian faith and practice. The global church has its own stories to bring to the family reunion, both ancient and contemporary, not only receiving important legacies of Western Christianity but enriching the whole body of Christ in our day.

The opportunity for the Anglican Communion is expressed well by Arnobius above: to draw upon that fruit of more ancient missionary movements that “caused races and peoples and nations most diverse in character to hasten with one accord to accept the same faith.”

The lodestar for this vision is the scene Revelation 5:9-10:

And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

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5. Angelo Di Berardino, ed., *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 500.

6. Di Berardino, ed., *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*, 1:501.

This song celebrates the Lamb whose blood ransomed people from every tribe on earth (cf. Daniel 7:14; Revelation 7:9; 14:6). God the Son assumed human nature to be the savior of the whole world, and he is building new humanity around himself through the preaching of the gospel, making disciples from “all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Soteriology and ecclesiology are bound up together. It is a hymn of praise that leads to mission. They have not made themselves anything, but “you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God.” Doctrine is for doxology, and doxology fuels discipleship. In jubilation we find the proper voice for our mission. At present, Christ’s kingdom may appear weak, divided, and oppressed not only by external threats but within the church itself. Yet the eschatological goal is settled: “They shall reign on the earth.”

This vision savors the rich biblical truths that unite Christ’s body in all times and places while understanding how those truths are mediated through very different cultural-linguistic horizons. Even at an interpersonal level, doctrines such as original sin, Christ’s vicarious atonement, or the Trinity can be misunderstood because of divergent experiences. How are sin and atonement heard in a shame-based culture as opposed to one that is individualistic and relativistic? How is the biblical teaching of one God in three persons received in a culture shaped by rigid monotheism, as opposed to one influenced by polytheistic traditions or secular individualism? In an increasingly globalized world, one does not need to travel great distances to have many cross-cultural encounters. And while the cross-pressures may be different, we know that our confession of Christ clashes with all of our cultures. Believers share more in common with each other, across all distances and eras, than they do with their non-Christian neighbors.

Framing sound doctrine cannot be left up to one part of Christ’s body in one part of the world at one moment in time. The antidote to an overreliance on Western sources is not rejection but participation. Given the legacy of colonialism, such participation has been too often more an appearance than a reality. Yet the health of the whole church and its global mission depend on this becoming a more evident reality. Many cultures in the majority world are closer to the world of the New Testament than Western societies. Our different contexts help us to engage in that mutual edification and reproof to which Christ’s body is called. The church’s mission depends on addressing these complexities, not by diluting doctrine, but by expositing it in ways that maintain its biblical integrity across cultures.

Rather than simply applying theology to cultural contexts, what is needed is a theological sensibility that calls the church to exegete Scripture and its doctrines together from distinct cultural backgrounds. The Anglican Communion, with its presence in various cultural, ethnic, and linguistic

settings, is uniquely positioned to embody this vision. This calls for an approach that resists the temptation of “contextual theology” that merely adapts doctrine to cultural pressures and instead insists on theology in context—an approach that acknowledges cultural particularities while maintaining biblical and theological fidelity.

Much of modern theology simply assumes its northern European and American contexts. Even “contextualization” tends sometimes to conform to Western anthropological and hermeneutical models that elide the specificity of both one’s cultural context and Christian theological discourse. The hermeneutical relationship is often described as a “fusion of horizons.”<sup>7</sup> But we have sufficient warnings from the apostles to expect that the encounter will be often more like a “clash of horizons.”<sup>8</sup> Scripture itself warrants a “hermeneutics of suspicion,” reminding us that we all, not only as individuals but as cultures, are prone to suppress the truth, consciously or unconsciously, in favor of our prejudices.<sup>9</sup> Yet because of God’s common grace, no culture is as corrupt as it can possibly be. Our differences allow us to see weaknesses in each other’s expressions of faith, as well as our own, and to glean wisdom from brothers and sisters whose contributions we may have overlooked.

On the one hand, theology in context resists the illusion of a “theology from nowhere.”<sup>10</sup> Every culture has biases, and only by acknowledging our cultural biases can we test them against the authority of God’s Word, the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Some of these biases will be seen to nourish healthy correctives to the biases of other cultures; others will have to be challenged. Not only analysis of our own time and place

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7 See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. J. Weinsheimer and D. G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2006), 305.

8 See Paul Ricoeur, “The Hermeneutic Function of Distanciation,” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), esp.132–38.

9 As Merold Westphal writes, “In order to take seriously the noetic effects of sin, Christians need “to incorporate a hermeneutic of suspicion into their thinking, and in such an effort, postmodern analyses can be helpful and illuminating (without being atheistic).” See Merold Westphal, ed., *Postmodern Philosophy and Christian Thought* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1999), 3. See also Justin S. Holcomb, “Investigating Metanarratives and Theology,” in Justin S. Holcomb and Glenn Lucke, eds., *For the World* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2014).

10. This phrasing paraphrases two sources: Stephen B. Bevans’s claim that “there is no such thing as ‘theology’; there is only contextual theology,” *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. & exp. ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002), 3; and Thomas Nagel’s account of the “view from nowhere,” *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

is required but also the rationale of the great teachers of the past for doctrines we hold together. Theological retrieval for the sake of renewal is essential. This approach returns again and again to the wells of the Jewish prophets and apostles, drinking deeply from the wisdom of the ancient Christian teachers, many of whom were from the Middle East and Africa.

On the other hand, this approach avoids reversing the authority of Scripture and culture. The goal is not an African theology, a Latin American theology, an Asian theology, a South Asian theology, a European theology, a Middle Eastern theology, a Pacific theology, an Indigenous theology, a North American theology, or any other culturally bound theology, but a catholic and evangelical theology that exhibits clearly the particular cultural obstacles, as well as correctives to reception, interpretation, and application of Christian doctrines. We do not need a contextual theology tailored to specific sociopolitical concerns (with its myriad sub-groups) but a theology of the Trinity, Christology, ecclesiology, soteriology, and eschatology—rooted in Scripture and enriched by diverse voices within the church.

By embracing this approach, the Anglican Communion can offer a theological vision that is neither reactionary nor accommodationist but deeply biblical, creedally and catechetically grounded, and globally engaged. This is the catholic and evangelical horizon the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals assume when commending a polycentric Communion ordered by a confessed rule of faith and common prayer, not a single cultural center.

Read in light of the proposals, this polycentric reception holds only insofar as it is ruled by the Communion’s given faith and order—Scripture, the creeds, the historic episcopate, and the common prayer. We turn now to the method that secures that center: theology in context joined to a ruled reading of Holy Scripture.

### **Ruled Reading: Receiving the Given Faith and Order**

In §15, the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals state: “Anglican churches presumed from the start that a given faith and order was available and could be specified.” Until 1930, the Church of England’s ordered life commonly supplied the measure for most Anglican churches, while the 1662 Book of Common Prayer and Ordinal were doctrinally preeminent and the Thirty-Nine Articles functioned as a convenient touchstone.<sup>11</sup> Since the 1888 Lambeth Conference, the Quadrilateral—Holy Scripture, the creeds, the dominical sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and

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11. While I personally affirm the Thirty-Nine Articles, this account centers the shared rule on Scripture, the creeds, the dominical sacraments, and the historic episcopate. The Articles are thus received as a historical Anglican witness, rather than a Communion-wide touchstone.

the historic episcopate (locally adapted)—has provided a constant point of reference for what belongs to the church’s faith and order. A ruled reading means that Scripture governs the church’s doctrine and worship through this confessed rule: we read the Bible with the creeds, within the church’s sacramental and episcopal life, and in the grammar of common prayer.<sup>12</sup> This is not a rival to Scripture but a form of obedience to it; the rule safeguards catholic breadth without doctrinal relativism. Authentic indigenization is neither mimicry nor relativism but the gospel received in local idiom under the church’s confessed rule.

In continuity with this, Anglicanism has long practiced a ruled reading of Scripture: receiving and testing doctrine in the church’s common prayer and creedal confession, within the historic episcopate. These resources are not rivals to Scripture but faithful expositions of its teaching. For example, Article VIII explicitly affirms that the Nicene, Athanasian, and Apostles’ Creeds are binding because they can be proved “by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture.” Anglican theology, therefore, has never sought to dismiss tradition; it subjects it to biblical authority while valuing its role in shaping doctrine and worship.

This ruled reading retrieves our catholic heritage while remaining faithful to the biblical, Christ-centered, and evangelical convictions at the heart of our historic witness. It enriches theology, worship, and mission—not as nostalgia, but as a promising path for the future.

This approach upholds the sovereign authority of Holy Scripture while honoring the church’s received grammar: the creeds, common prayer, and the church’s historic formularies. Ruled reading fits Anglicanism’s own instinct, where the Word rules faith and life, the gracious promises of God are proclaimed, and the gospel, creeds, and common prayer anchor our worship.

Theological retrieval is not antiquarianism; it is a constructive way to deepen clarity today. When Anglican theology veers toward being uncritically progressive, historically untethered, or culturally captive, a ruled reading charts a path forward—recognizing Scripture’s ultimate authority while receiving the wisdom of the church’s historic confession and prayer (§15; §§31–39). In concrete terms, a ruled reading resists doctrinal min-

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12. Michael Allen and Scott Swain, *Reformed Catholicity: The Promise of Retrieval for Theology and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2015), at chapter 4 (“A Ruled Reading Reformed: The Role of the Church’s Confession in Biblical Interpretation”), 95-116.

imalism, corrects theological revisionism, and heals ecclesial isolationism by returning us to the church's received rule of faith and worship (§15; §§31–39; 60–71).

With a global family marked by broad theological, cultural, and liturgical diversity, a retrieval model—anchored in creedal fidelity yet allowing appropriate diversity in expression—offers Anglican churches a path to recover a theological identity rooted in historic Christianity rather than fragmenting into doctrinal experimentation (§§31–39; 60–71). Structural variability and regional free association make pastoral room; mutual accountability safeguards the center (§§60–71).

The proposals thus encourage Anglicanism to root its catholicity in biblical fidelity and apostolic witness—not institutional uniformity—so that a shared rule of faith and worship gathers a diverse global family without demanding strict, exhaustive conformity on every point (§15; §§31–39; 60–71). With roughly 85 million members across 42 autonomous provinces, such retrieval—creedal fidelity with appropriate diversity of expression—offers a credible path beyond fragmentation (§§31–39; 60–71).

What the proposals sketch structurally—the Instruments serving a creedal and liturgical center—is simply this ruled reading given institutional form. Read this way, a ruled reading both enables inculturation and sustains accountability across provinces (§§60–71). If churches in the Anglican Communion sought to ground their identity by such a ruled reading, it would enable proper accountability one to another alongside their inculturation and indigenization.

The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals offer markers for evangelical and catholic inculturation of the gospel with “one visibly united fellowship” in view (§§76, 91): seek the highest degree of communion possible while speaking truthfully about differentiation (§3; §§31; 39; 100), refuse to give up on one another (§45), and engage in the search for truth together (§48). Received in this key, the proposals are retrieval, not revolution—a confessed center robust enough to carry real diversity, and a hopeful way of walking together in a divided world.

### **Conclusion: Toward the Highest Degree of Communion Possible**

Some may fear that The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals will create a centralized curia; others may think it is too soft. A confessed-center approach resists curialism, and ruled reading practiced in truthful communion is stronger than *laissez-faire* pluralism.

The Anglican Communion is at a moment when theological retrieval is necessary for renewal. If it drifts into doctrinal incoherence, we risk losing the very framework that has sustained it for centuries. We need a way forward that is deeply biblical, creedal, and missionally engaged. This is not

about nostalgia, but an approach that anchors the church in the gospel, strengthens fidelity to the historic creeds, and equips a global, culturally diverse Communion.

I receive the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals as retrieval rather than innovation: a call to order our common life around a confessed center—Holy Scripture, the sacraments, the creeds, the historic episcopate, and common prayer (§15)—and to seek the highest degree of communion possible while speaking truthfully about our differences and patiently accommodating differentiation (§3; §§31; 39; 100). In this key, theology in context names a catholic, polycentric reception of the one faith, and ruled reading anchors that reception in the church’s rule of faith and worship. Renewed Instruments that serve (not supplant) this center—Lambeth’s collegial counsel, Primates tending the bonds of communion, ACC’s consultative service for mission—can sustain inculturation with accountability (§§60–71; 72; 82–89; 96–98). The vision awaits the time; durable communion grows by patient, staged reception rather than instant system-building. Refusing to give up on one another (§45) and engaging in the search for truth together (§48), we bear a hopeful witness to Christ’s reconciling power in a divided world. The proposals offer truthful ways to name impairment and seek repair without collapsing into either relativism or schism.

Received in this key, The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals provide the Communion with a way to walk together—without denial or coercion—toward the highest degree of communion possible.

*Pierre Whalon*

## Nairobi, Cairo, and “away to the ends of the earth”

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)<sup>1</sup>

The International Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith, and Order (IASCUFUO) has put forth a report entitled “The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals,” commissioned by the Anglican Consultative Council in 2023 to consider changes in “structure and decision-making to help address our differences in the Anglican Communion.”<sup>2</sup> The Commission has asked the four Instruments of Communion to examine and comment on previous drafts, and now is asking for wider consideration of their work.

This paper will argue that the changes recommended in these Proposals are not fit for purpose: the recommendations simply put distance among protagonists and would empower primates to act like an Anglican curia. What is needed instead is a framework for intensive conversations around those differences that engage Anglicans at every level, from the pew to the pulpit to synods to the Consultative Council.

### **What they said**

First, it must be said that the members of the Commission have worked long and hard to try to come with changes that could possibly move the Communion along from its current impasse, and they deserve our respect and gratitude. They begin by reviewing and inspiring themselves from

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1. ἔσεσθέ μου μάρτυρες (you will be my witnesses). The verb is the second person future plural. However we witness, we shall be his witnesses, for better or for worse. Only by forswearing Christ completely can we avoid being his witnesses.

2. ACC-18, res. 3(a), quoted in Proposals Foreword, p. 3.

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Lambeth Conferences resolutions, especially the 1930 Encyclical Letter and the 1920 “Appeal to All Christian People.” As they note, these continue to shape the approach to faith and order in the Communion, as well as ecumenical relations. The 1963 Toronto Congress’ “Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence” ignited the rapid growth of the Communion from then on, going from 17 to 44 “national churches.” The African churches in particular have accounted for a great deal of this growth.

Behind these touchstones of identity for the Commission lies the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, promulgated by the Episcopal Church House of Bishops in a meeting in Chicago, Illinois, in 1886 and refined by the 1888 Lambeth Conference. It was the first real ecumenical outreach by the churches of the Communion, setting forth “foursquare” terms for “Christian Reunion”: the Scriptures, the Apostles and Nicene Creeds, the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, and the “historic episcopate, locally adapted.”<sup>3</sup>

It is worth noting here that the Church of England became independent of the Roman Catholic Church not because of doctrinal differences (though these emerged eventually) but rather as the result of a political struggle for power. The seeds of the Anglican Communion were planted with the emergence of the Scottish Episcopal Church in the early eighteenth century in soil broken by the plow of Reformation, and came to first fruition when members of the Church of England in the American colonies were stranded after the defeat of the British Army at Yorktown, Virginia, in 1781. These people, left to fend for themselves, created a new church that sought (and still seeks) “upholding and propagating the historic Faith and Order as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer.”<sup>4</sup> Again, a church whose specific shape is the result of a political struggle.

Since the Elizabethan Settlement, there has been an awareness of the fragmentary character of a church that developed out of a political, not doctrinal, struggle. The Commission quotes part of a famous passage in Michael Ramsey’s *The Gospel and the Catholic Church*:

For while the Anglican church is vindicated by its place in history, with a strikingly balanced witness to Gospel and church and sound learning,

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3 See John F. Woolverton’s classic discussion, “The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral and the Lambeth Conferences.” *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 53, no. 2 (1984): 95–109. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42974763>.

4 Preamble, Constitution and Canons of The Episcopal Church. And see the “Primer” in “Re-membering and Re-imagining: Essays on The Episcopal Church,” page 341ff, at <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/dfms/re-membering-and-re-imagining-essays-on-the-episcopal-church/>

its greater vindication lies in its pointing through its own history to something of which it is a fragment. Its credentials are its incompleteness, with the tension and the travail in its souls. It is clumsy and untidy, it baffles neatness and logic. For it is sent not to commend itself as “the best type of Christianity,” but by its very brokenness to point to the universal church wherein all have died.<sup>5</sup>

Already in 1930, the Communion was moving away from its origin in England, and to a lesser extent, America. The Commission quotes the 1930 Encyclical Letter:

Every church of our Communion is endeavoring to do for the country where it exists the service which the Church of England has done for England — to represent the Christian religion and the Catholic Faith in a manner congenial to the people of the land, and to give scope to their genius in the development of Christian life and worship. As the churches founded by our Missions in India, China, Japan or Africa, more and more fully achieve this purpose, they may, in many ways, grow less and less like to each other and to their Mother [i.e., Anglo-Saxon], and, in consequence, less and less Anglican, though no less true to Catholic faith and order.

Inculturation so defined is the Anglican genius. Cultures change as well, and so the perennial question is how to recognize that a particular church is still “no less true to Catholic faith and order.”

### Grasping the nettle

That recognition is a measure of communion, full or not. As divisions have appeared since the 1970s, first around the ordination of women and then the full inclusion of gay and lesbian people, the ecumenical term “seeking the highest degree of communion possible” has appeared in inter-Anglican conversations, the Commission notes (§31). While a “doctrine of reception” (again an ecumenical term) has helped the Communion continue to live together as more and more provinces have approved the ordination of women, there has been less “receiving” the marriage of same-sex couples and ordination of people in those marriages. Resolution 1.10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference—since then considered by many as the “official teaching of the Communion”—would seem to preclude that:

This Conference:

- a. commends to the church the subsection report on human sexuality;
- b. in view of the teaching of Scripture, upholds faithfulness in marriage between a man and a woman in lifelong union, and believes that abstinence is right for those who are not called to marriage;

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5. Proposals, §60, p. 26. I have published a fuller quotation, found in Michael Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (Carol Stream Ill.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 188.

- c. recognizes that there are among us persons who experience themselves as having a homosexual orientation. Many of these are members of the church and are seeking the pastoral care, moral direction of the church, and God's transforming power for the living of their lives and the ordering of relationships. We commit ourselves to listen to the experience of homosexual persons and we wish to assure them that they are loved by God and that all baptized, believing and faithful persons, regardless of sexual orientation, are full members of the Body of Christ;
- d. while rejecting homosexual practice as incompatible with Scripture, calls on all our people to minister pastorally and sensitively to all irrespective of sexual orientation and to condemn irrational fear of homosexuals, violence within marriage and any trivialization and commercialization of sex;
- e. cannot advise the legitimizing or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions...<sup>6</sup>

For several reasons, this has become the official teaching of the Communion for a number of its churches, especially the largest ones in Africa. This despite the fact that no other Lambeth Resolution has ever been considered binding. The heart of the matter is section (d), which rejects "homosexual practice" as "incompatible with the Holy Scriptures," and yet despite what some would consider fighting words, requires that all Anglicans minister to such folks and "condemn irrational fear of" them.<sup>7</sup> The first clause is what is usually quoted to condemn those churches that do allow same-sex marriage and ordinations of people in them as "unbiblical" and much worse. The second, as the Commission concedes, is hardly heard: "for many within the Communion, the criminalization of homosexual acts, including punishment by imposition of the death penalty, supported by Anglicans in some countries, amounts to a sinful refusal of Christ's justice." (§42)

Isn't supporting the execution of people whose crime is love "incompatible with Scripture"? Looking at a map of the countries criminalizing homosexuality (not always just "practice"), these are almost all Muslim-majority nations, or at least with very significant Muslim populations.<sup>8</sup> Several do not criminalize women at all. Twelve call for the death penalty; six actually impose it. In countries like Nigeria, where Muslim extremists routinely attack and kill Christians, being in support of gay and lesbian people can be physically dangerous. And in some other countries,

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6. <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1998/section-i-called-to-full-humanity/section-i10-human-sexuality?author=Lambeth+Conference&year=1998>

7. If this is a teaching, it is required.

8. <https://www.humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/map-of-criminalisation/>

Anglicans are derided as “the gay church” by Muslims because of actions taken elsewhere.

The role of U.S. conservatives in stoking the fires is striking, especially in Uganda.<sup>9</sup> Each year on October 29, Episcopalians remember dozens of Ugandan martyrs, including a missionary bishop, James Hannington. These martyrs have been held up as part of the reason Ugandans hate homosexuality. Hannington and his companions was murdered by King Mwangi II, who feared the expansion of Christianity. They were joined in their witness by many other African Christians, among whom were several young boys who had refused to submit to Mwangi’s sexual advances.

Mwangi himself was bisexual, having 16 wives, as well as a pedophile. Before his death, he converted, repented, and was baptized—as an Anglican. But that part of the story is less well known. Americans, including many Episcopalians, came to Uganda to get support for their opposition to progressives at home. In fairness, they were also attracted to the extraordinary witness of thousands of Ugandan Christians martyred by the dictator Idi Amin, including Archbishop Janani Luwum, personally murdered by Amin in 1977.<sup>10</sup>

Americans stoked the already-present canard that homosexuality is a consequence of decadent Western mores, and it was being imported into Africa. This is contrary to all anthropological studies, but it hit the nerve of the well-deserved resentment of colonialism. Across the continent, politicians promise to root out such “un-African corruption.”

Homophobia is the real Western import, however. In Africa, it followed the building of the British Empire.

In light of this history, it is regrettable that the Commission did not choose to remind people of the subsection on human sexuality *following* the text of Resolution 1.10, whose words are still very much relevant now.

We have prayed, studied and discussed these issues, and we are unable to reach a common mind on the scriptural, theological, historical, and scientific questions which are raised. There is much that we do not yet understand. [...]

The challenge to our church is to maintain its unity while we seek, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to discern the way of Christ for the world today with respect to human sexuality. To do so will require sacrifice, trust and charity towards one another, remembering that ultimately the identity of each person is defined by Christ.

9. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/africa-us-christian-right-50m/>

10. This writer was deeply influenced especially by an encounter with Bishop Festo Kivengere, an outstanding apostle of the East Africa Revival. Two years after Archbishop Luwum’s martyrdom, Bishop Kivengere was giving a talk entitled “I love Idi Amin.”

There can be no description of human reality, in general or in particular, outside the reality of Christ. We must be on guard, therefore, against constructing any other ground for our identities than the redeemed humanity given to use in him. Those who understand themselves as homosexuals, no more and no less than those who do not, are liable to false understandings based on personal or family histories, emotional dispositions, social settings and solidarities formed by common experiences or ambitions. Our sexual affections can no more define who we are than our class race or nationality. At the deepest ontological level, therefore, there is no such thing as “a” homosexual or “a” heterosexual; therefore there are human beings, male and female, called to redeemed humanity in Christ, endowed with a complex variety of emotional potentialities and threatened by a complex variety of forms of alienation.

It is to all human beings, threatened by this alienation, that we are sent to be Jesus’ witnesses. And as noted, the biblical text is clear that, one way or another, we *shall* be witnesses. What kind is always the existential question.

The Commission gives one answer (at §45):

A dogged refusal to give up on each other, to remain in relationship despite deep and significant disagreement, can be a remarkable witness to the power of Christ to bring unity in a divided world, and a foretaste of the day when all things in heaven and on earth will be brought together under Christ (Ephesians 1:10).

This reveals, I think, the commendable message the Commission wants to convey, and persuade.

### Some theology

The Commission considers each of the four Marks of the Church in turn. This puts into sharp relief the divisions among Anglicans.

To their credit, the Commission members did not restrict their deliberations to ecumenical or Anglican statements. Of note is drawing upon Augustine’s handling of the Donatists and Richard Hooker’s attitude toward the Roman church. This latter was irenic, despite pointing out that despite her “grievous abominations,” the Church of Rome persists in sufficient truth to still be the church. Augustine insisted that the Donatists’ desire for “purity” ignores that reality of the church as the field of wheat and tares, Matthew 13: 24-30. An enemy has sown weeds in the master’s wheat field, and the wheat and weeds are growing up together. Attempting to pull up the weeds would bring the wheat up as well, and so that sorting must be put off until the harvest. Both the weeds and the wheat must tolerate each other until then.<sup>11</sup>

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11. For one in-depth discussion of Augustine’s reinterpretation of Donatists’ reliance on Cyprian that highlights the work of the Trinity in Baptism, see

With this backdrop, the Commission summarizes fairly the two positions at the root—or least the presenting issue—of division. §41 lays out the objection to same-sex marriage:

...to celebrate and bless the relationships of non-celibate same-sex couples in the church is to bless what Scripture and the tradition of Christian teaching has always called sin. In this case, such blessing marks a departure from the proper and holy ordering of sex and sexuality. As the union of a man and a woman, holy matrimony is a sign of the nuptial relationship between Christ and the church and is a union of the two distinct parts of created humanity... which has the potential to bring new life into the world and sustain the human race.

The affirmation of same-sex marriage argues that

the refusal of the church to bless committed same-sex relationships perpetrates an unholy offence against the love of Christ and a rejection of persons made in God's image, whose natural affections are understood to be innate rather than chosen. The sin described here is against charity, the more when committed same-sex relationships reflect some of the goods of marriage, such as faithfulness in mutual support, companionship, and the nurturing, if not begetting, of children (§42).

It would have been very helpful for the Commission to have given consideration to the treatment of the same question in the Roman Catholic Church. The late Pope Francis gave permission for a limited, non-liturgical blessing of same-sex couples, and others “in irregular situations.” He rooted this in pastoral concern:

... the church avoids any type of rite or sacramental that ... imply that something that is not marriage is being recognized as marriage.

Nevertheless, in our dealings with people, we must not lose pastoral charity, which should permeate all our decisions and attitudes. The defense of objective truth is not the only expression of this charity; it also includes kindness, patience, understanding, tenderness, and encouragement. Therefore, we cannot become judges who only deny, reject, and exclude.<sup>12</sup>

The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a “Declaration,” *Fiducia supplicans*, that described what blessings mean in a pastoral context, not just a sacramental one.<sup>13</sup> Signed by Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández,

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Adam D. Ployd, “The Unity of the Dove: The Sixth Homily on the Gospel of John and Augustine’s Trinitarian Solution to the Donatist Schism,” *Augustinian Studies* 42:1 (2011) 57–77. Available at [https://www.academia.edu/4479718/The\\_Unity\\_of\\_the\\_Dove\\_The\\_Sixth\\_Homily\\_on\\_the\\_Gospel\\_of\\_John\\_and\\_Augustine\\_s\\_Trinitarian\\_Solution\\_to\\_the\\_Donatist\\_Schism?nav\\_from=31ffd7cb-d552-4f5f-be41-7f46ee875f6a](https://www.academia.edu/4479718/The_Unity_of_the_Dove_The_Sixth_Homily_on_the_Gospel_of_John_and_Augustine_s_Trinitarian_Solution_to_the_Donatist_Schism?nav_from=31ffd7cb-d552-4f5f-be41-7f46ee875f6a)

12. Francis, *Respuestas a los Dubia propuestos por dos Cardenales*, ad dubium 2, d.

13. [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/)

the head of the dicastery, the Declaration distinguishes between blessings in a sacramental context, such as the nuptial blessing, and others outside a liturgical sacramental context. Clergy are asked to bless “all sorts and conditions” of people, as well as symbolic objects, after all. The former is said to be “descending,” the latter, “ascending.” The meaning of the blessings of couples in “irregular situations,” including same-sex couples,

not only has an ascending value but also involves the invocation of a blessing that descends from God upon those who—recognizing themselves to be destitute and in need of his help—do not claim a legitimation of their own status, but who beg that all that is true, good, and humanly valid in their lives and their relationships be enriched, healed, and elevated by the presence of the Holy Spirit (§31).

The reactions ranged across the board, of course. Some Catholics had already declared that Francis was a heretic. The African dioceses’ reaction was more restrained: firmly remaining in communion with the pope yet deciding that such blessings “would cause confusion and would be in direct contradiction to the cultural ethos of African communities.”<sup>14</sup>

There have been traditionally four categories of church reactions to gay and lesbian couples. The first is rejection, the second is limited acceptance, the third pastoral exceptions, the fourth full acceptance. The Vatican’s Declaration lies between limited acceptance and pastoral exception, perhaps. One could wish that 1998 Lambeth I.10 could have been as well-conceived. “Homosexual practice as incompatible with Holy Scripture” is vague. That this is thought to be Anglican teaching is dismaying, on the compositional level alone, never mind as exegesis.<sup>15</sup>

In any event, if there be danger of carving millstones for those practicing full acceptance, what about those “judges who only deny, reject, and exclude,” in the late pontiff’s words?

### What to do?

The Commission does not despair. “The hard-won achievements of the multi-ecclesial landmark Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1999, 2019), for instance, or the Anglican–Oriental Orthodox statements on Christology and the Holy Spirit, demonstrate that long-enduring disputes can be overcome.” (§44) It needs to be pointed out, however, that these are not *moral* questions, but deep *doctrinal* disputes.

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[rc ddf doc 20231218 fiducia-supplicans en.html# ftn11](#)

14. <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2024-01/cardinal-ambongo-secam-africa-blessings-homosexual-couples.html>

15. A great deal of ink has been spilled since, either to defend this sentence or else to show that, in light of the Scriptures, it does not make sense exegetically.

Katherine Sonderegger, a member of the IASCUFO, presented a paper at a symposium on church disagreements at the Virginia Theological Seminary on January 13 and 14, 2020. Entitled “The Grammar of Communion,”<sup>16</sup> Dr. Sonderegger asked that we revisit the Windsor Report, in particular, its emphasis on “subsidiarity and matters *adiaphora*.” The two seem paired: “some members of the U.S. and Canadian churches have treated homosexuality as a matter indifferent, and subject to local custom, determination, and culture.”

This is certainly how I remember the discussion at the House of Bishops meeting at General Convention 2003. Many bishops voting to approve the election and consecration of Gene Robinson argued both publicly and in private that the Diocese of New Hampshire had every right to choose their bishop, despite his union with another man that could not be officially solemnized as a marriage. In every other respect, Robinson was certainly an exemplary candidate for the episcopal office and was widely known and respected.<sup>17</sup>

Windsor repudiated this ideal, pointing out that such a decision needed to be considered at the highest councils of the Communion, as had happened with the ordination of women, especially to the episcopate. After all, Episcopal bishops at their consecration are told, “With your fellow bishops you shall share in the leadership of the church throughout the world.” (1979 BCP, 517), and take a vow to “share with your fellow bishops in the government of the whole church” (518). Moreover, a majority of Episcopal bishops at Lambeth 1998 had voted in favor of I.10, and only five years later a majority also voted to approve the election and consecration of an openly gay man.<sup>18</sup>

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16. Katherine Sonderegger, “The Grammar of Communion,” in Robert Heaney, Christopher Wells, and Pierre Whalon, eds., *When Churches in Communion Disagree* (Living Church Books, 2022). It is available online at <https://livingchurch.org/covenant/the-grammar-of-communion/>

17. As I was then bishop in charge of the Presiding Bishop’s jurisdiction in Europe, I did not have a vote, so I did not think I should speak. I still regret that.

18. Allow me to state that I fully supported then and now the ordination of LGBTQ persons to the three orders, based on my reading of the Holy Scriptures. What I remember was that we bishops provoked the ensuing storm by not grasping that we were ignoring the responsibility of leadership of the church throughout the world. In Europe I had many occasions to meet bishops of other provinces, most of whom were all too happy to point this out to me. The Iraq war was raging, and a frequent comment was “George Bush and Gene Robinson for us is the same thing.”

Sonderegger pointed to an historical doctrinal conflict in the Roman church during the seventeenth century, which came to be known as “the difference of schools.” She is worth quoting at length:

[It involved] the debate among Spanish theologians over the delicate matter of divine knowledge of future contingent events. This debate embroiled some of Rome’s most skilled dialecticians: Bañez the Thomist, Molina the Jesuit, Cardinal Bellarmine, and two sophisticated papal theologians, Clement VIII and Paul V. The debates over middle knowledge, future contingents, effective grace, and omniscience and human freedom stretched over *decades*. [...] It has been called the most conceptually sophisticated ecclesial debate in the history of the church...

In the aftermath of this debate, no resolution was reached. This is well worth pondering, as it was hardly a theologoumenon — merely *adiaphora*. These theologians debated the very nature of God, the *scopus* and perfection of his knowledge, the workings of his victorious grace, and the freedom of his creatures as they looked into a world filled with duties, with ambiguities and possibilities, and an impenetrable veil drawn across the future. At this level of doctrinal seriousness, no final verdict was reached. The painful calumnies, the calls for inquisition and condemnation, the relentless polemics, personal and ecclesial: these had to stop. But the explosive argument between Thomists and Molinists — or, perhaps better, between two ways of receiving the heritage of the sainted doctor — needed now be regarded as a “difference of the schools.” The phrase bespeaks an insoluble difference *in the midst of unity*.<sup>19</sup>

It would seem that in the providence of God, the Anglican Communion has stumbled into such a difference of schools. “We need the conciliar expression of these debates, as the church has always had in her long history. There are deep, sophisticated, and vital positions to develop on both sides of this issue, and perhaps several more in the interstices,” says Sonderegger.

### Doctrinal or moral?<sup>20</sup>

It is a truism that while doctrines, especially credal ones, are formal norms of belief, moral questions are almost always contextual. The Lord’s injunction to love one another is a formal norm of moral behavior, while other rules of moral behavior are so-called material norms. Context is required for interpretation.

For instance, the commandment, “Thou shalt not kill”—in modern translations “You shall do no murder”—is clearly contextual. It is subject to interpretation, as the perennial issue of pacificism attests, as well as the

19. Sonderegger, “The Grammar of Communion.”

20. See Mark Edington’s essay “Culture is not Doctrine” in this collection for a forceful argument about confusing doctrinal and cultural norms.

morality of the death penalty (cf. Romans 13:4). Remarriage after death of a spouse or divorce from one has been a fraught question as well, as Henry VIII could attest. And although monogamy has been universally upheld by Christians since the beginning, the Latter-day Saints had no trouble justifying polygamy from the Scriptures (and rejecting the practice on the same grounds).<sup>21</sup>

To claim that the question of the full inclusion of same-sex people in the life and work of the church is a moral one that follows from the formal norm of the love Jesus commands is not so simple. First, is this a doctrinal question? If marriage is regarded as a sacrament, even a “sacramental rite,” as the 1979 Book of Common Prayer says, then clearly there is such an issue.<sup>22</sup> However, Article XXV states that it does *not* have “like nature of Sacraments...for [it has] not any visible sign or ceremony ordained of God.” If marriage is not a matter of doctrine, but rather (as John Calvin insisted) an “ordinance” of God, not divinely instituted by Christ, on a par with “agriculture, architecture, shoemaking, hair-cutting, legitimate ordinances of God, but they are not sacraments”<sup>23</sup>—is it purely moral? Or is the gender of a marrying couple just a matter for a particular church’s discipline?

Of course, what makes this debate so volatile is that it is about sex and human sexuality. Sonderegger writes:

There are elements that emerge out of contemporary U.S. culture, itself a fractured and decidedly unintegrated polity when it comes to practices, norms, and ideals of human sexuality, including homosexuality. To marry all of this with religious piety is perhaps a more explosive mixture than any of us envisioned.

Indeed. It brought about a schism.

### Changing the Instruments?

While the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals do express hope that such public debate will take place (and be more sophisticated than to date), the Commission goes on to set forth possible changes in Anglican self-understanding that might allow room for such discussions to happen fruitfully.

21. See <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/polygamy-latter-day-saints-and-the-practice-of-plural-marriage#:~:text=Today%20church%20members%20honor%20and,marriage%20and%20remain%20a%20member>.

22. I have argued that marriage is in fact a sacrament, in *Holy Matrimony, in Made in Heaven? How God Acts in Marriage* (Kindle Direct Publishing, 2016).

23. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV.1936, 37; ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), vol. 2, 1482.

They propose a revised version of statements that appear in many provinces' constitutions (at §80):

The Anglican Communion is a fellowship of autonomous episcopal churches bound together by their shared inheritance, mutual service, common counsel, historic connection with the See of Canterbury, and commitment to seeking full communion one with another and with the wider church.

However, we need to ask why these proposals seem congruent with positions taken by the Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches<sup>24</sup> in their "Covenantal Structure."<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the Commission commends it "as a helpful contribution to the discernment of doctrinal and ethical truth within the Anglican Communion" (§56).

The watering-down of the role and authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury is a mirror image, perhaps, of the watering-down of the status of the Thirty-Nine Articles by Lambeth 1968,<sup>26</sup> which the GSFA lifts up in their covenant. There is some irony, perhaps, that in rejecting the leadership of the (or just one particular?) Archbishop of Canterbury, they quote Canon A5 of the Church of England:

The doctrine of the church...is grounded in the Holy Scriptures, and in such teachings of the Ancient Fathers and Councils of the church as are agreeable to the said Scriptures. In particular, such doctrine is to be grounded in the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, The Book of Common Prayer, and the Ordinal. (1.7)

The Commission calls for a re-ordering of the Communion's life:

...we believe that, to proclaim Christ faithfully to all nations, Anglican churches need to re-order their common life on the foundation of truth and grace to which the Bible and the English Reformers bore witness (Matthew 28.18-20; Ephesians 2.20). (2.1.3)

Two of the twelve "Ordinary Members" of the GSFA are not part of the Anglican Communion, the Anglican Church of Brazil and the Anglican Church of North America. These are of course schismatic bodies, the former associated with Robinson Cavalcanti, sometime Bishop of Recife, and the latter with Robert Duncan, sometime Bishop of Pittsburgh. The GSFA itself proclaims itself out of communion with

those churches that allow the blessing of same-sex relationships or purport to solemnize same-sex marriages in their doctrine and practice or admit to

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24. <https://www.thegsfa.org/about-us>

25. Available at [https://assets-global.website-files.com/64c7520a09b851a-dae283880/64f6cf1ea4f7e1c49c0619c3\\_GSFA%20Covenantal%20Structure%20\(adopted%20on%202015%20Oct%202021\).pdf](https://assets-global.website-files.com/64c7520a09b851a-dae283880/64f6cf1ea4f7e1c49c0619c3_GSFA%20Covenantal%20Structure%20(adopted%20on%202015%20Oct%202021).pdf)

26. <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1968/resolution-43-the-ministry-the-thirty-nine-articles?author=Lambeth+Conference&year=1968>

holy orders those in same-sex unions, and those churches that pursue other significant departures from Biblical teaching. (2.1.6)

Of course, Anglican provinces can pursue full communion relations with other churches, ecumenical relations, for instance. The Porvoo Communion comes to mind. The members of the Global South Fellowship can do so as well. (§69) However, for the International Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order to hold the GSFA’s covenant up as “helpful” is tone-deaf at best, and at worst, deliberately insulting to the Anglican churches they say they are not in communion with now. “Division is inevitable,” they write (§57)—so must we all get used to it?

Is not division the sign of the work of the Evil One?

### What to salvage?

The division has already happened. The question is, now what?

The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals do have some ideas about the Anglican Consultative Council. Presently the Archbishop of Canterbury is the president, and the ACC elects its chair. Eliminating the presidency of the Archbishop (and the attendant confusion it can generate) would be a wise move to consider. However, continuing the presidency with a primate elected by the Primates’ Meeting only perpetuates the confusion. Moreover, and much more seriously, the proposal in §84 continues:

*It would mark a natural and fitting next step (a) to introduce a rotating presidency of the ACC between the five regions of the Communion, elected from the membership of the Primates’ Meeting by the same; and (b) for the Primates’ Standing Committee to play a part in the calling and convening of both Primates’ Meetings and the Lambeth Conference. (emphasis in original)*

This is a completely unnecessary move that grossly inflates the Primates’ Meeting and its Standing Committee. There is nothing “natural and fitting” about compounding the present president-chair confusion by adding an elected president—and a bishop other than Canterbury, to boot. The ACC is perfectly capable of running itself now, under its Chair.

Worse, this move would create a kind of curia for the Communion, composed of primates. The fact that some primates have regularly boycotted the Primates’ Meeting, not to mention the past two Lambeth Conferences, hardly commends this six-year super-archbishop role (in hopes of bringing them back to the table?). Not to mention that said primate would have to balance the role of archbishop of a province as well as the Communion role, which is precisely the dilemma the past several Archbishops of Canterbury have faced. The complexities of calling, organizing, and financing the Lambeth Conference will only become ever more unwieldy—and who then would be boycotting it to make some point or other?

The Archbishop of Canterbury should continue to be the one to call the Lambeth Conference, with the help of the Anglican Communion Office and its Secretary-General. (As we are discussing reforms, this would be an opportune moment finally to define clearly the relationship between the two, as the Windsor Report requested twenty years ago.) Canterbury should also represent the Communion to other churches, as the Ecumenical Patriarch does similarly for the Orthodox churches, despite the real strife among their member churches. We might rather strengthen the ACC's role in terms of the perennial issue of unity in diversity, since it is a legally incorporated deliberative body representing laity, clergy, and bishops of the entire Communion.

Is there any reason to insist that all member churches must say in their constitutions that they are “in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury” as the *sine qua non* of belonging to the Communion? It is only tradition, after all. To be part of the Anglican Communion however is defined *officially* by membership in the Anglican Consultative Council, according to its constitution.

### Instruments?

It is perhaps time to let go of “instruments of unity” or later, “communion,” as terms for the Communion.<sup>27</sup> What effects communion among us is the Holy Spirit, in the image of the perfect communion of the Father, Son, and Spirit. The Five Marks of Mission, an important gauge of the ways in which we witness to the risen Lord to the ends of the earth, are much more effective to guide us in our life and action together.<sup>28</sup> It is regrettable that the IASCUFO did not choose to reflect upon them in their proposals.<sup>29</sup>

The history of the Instruments since the 1998 Virginia Report is essentially an attempt to create a framework for controlling divisive issues. This has not worked. The Commission seems to be trying to find new ways to bring back into the fold those churches that hold themselves apart, by shuffling the Instruments instead of simplifying them.

The temptation to go *ad fontes*, like the Reformers looking back at the ancient “undivided” church, is strong; but the 1662 Book, the Thirty-nine Articles and the Books of Homilies, are not capable of guiding the world's churches in this century. Progress that Anglicans have made with the

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27. Since first hearing the term, I cannot help but think of surgical instruments...

28. <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx>

29. Nor do the Marks appear in the GSFA's Covenant.

Roman Catholic Church precludes reviving language about the papacy’s “detestable enormities,” for example.

That said, the study of our liturgical and theological history is vital to knowing not only who we are, but where we are going. The works of Richard Hooker are too little known today, for instance.

The Anglican Communion is not just the ecclesial residue of the British Empire. Yes, it began with the establishment of separate Anglican jurisdictions in Scotland and in the United States. And even then, for the first fifty years of the American church’s existence, some in the Church of England were unsure of its orthodoxy—or even of the possibility that Anglicanism could exist outside the British Isles. Yet it was exactly its distinction from the first Anglican church that served as the impetus for other churches, for it proved the possibility of being Anglican without being British. And while missionary societies of both churches sent laborers out who helped bring many of the provinces of the Communion into being, it is also true that other Anglicans have helped birth other provinces. Apollo Kivebulaya, a Ugandan, began preaching in Goma, in what is now eastern Congo (DRC), and thus launched the Province de l’Église anglicane du Congo. Two men from Barbados, the Reverend James Humble Leacock and John Duport, founded what is now the Diocèse anglican de Guinée. There are other stories as well to show that all is not just colonialist expansion.

The Commission is to be commended for its sensitivity to the very real remnants of colonialism in the Communion, both English and American. Progress is happening, slowly. At the last Lambeth Conference, materials from the Anglican Communion Office were for the first time available in French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic, besides English. The growing use of other languages is also a move away from the colonialist heritage, although too many English speakers continue to expect it of the whole Communion.

### **And finally...**

As noted, IASCUFO is trying to speak to and commend the Global South Fellowship of Anglicans and other associations such as GAFCON that have developed in the past thirty or so years. The question for The Episcopal Church is not so much that other churches of the Communion entertain relationships with the Anglican Church of North America. It is whether ACNA wishes to entertain an official relationship with *us*.

At its founding in 2008, and in the declarations leading up to that, one of the stated purposes of that church was to replace us as the province of the Communion in the United States, along with the Anglican Church of Canada. Several of our bishops have informal relationships with their ACNA counterparts, and that is well and good. However, the fact that the

GSFA includes as members not only the Anglican Church of Brazil but also ACNA, and declares itself out of communion with us, and the Anglican Church of Canada, the Anglican Episcopal Church of Brazil, the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia, the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, the Anglican Church of Korea, and the Church of South India, remains a real and neuralgic obstacle. The recent consecration of an ACNA priest, Darrell Critch, as Bishop of Mahajanga, Madagascar, a diocese of the Church in the Province of the Indian Ocean, as well as ACNA clergy employed by the Church of England's Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe, are signs of the growing presence of the ACNA in the Anglican Communion, although the church officially remains for now outside of it.

If the plan is still eventually to replace The Episcopal Church and others in the Communion, then IASCUFO's proposals are irrelevant. It is not just the camel's nose under the tent anymore, but the camel starting to stand up.

To summarize then, pushing Canterbury into the historical cupboard, while bringing the Articles of Religion back out, is a bad idea on the face of it. That some provinces were displeased with Archbishop Justin Welby, or will be with Archbishop-elect Sarah Mullaly, is not sufficient to make such a change. The Articles are still valuable, of course: Article VI is clearly present in the ordination vows of all Episcopal clergy, for instance. But they mainly address sixteenth-century controversies rather than those of today. Eliminating the presidency of the Anglican Consultative Council is a much better way to strengthen our only democratic institution than to create a rotating super-archbishopric. The Lambeth Conference should still be called by Canterbury with the help of the Anglican Communion Office. The Primates' Meeting should occur at regular intervals, and all the primates should be expected to attend.

We are no longer in 1998, when the issue was the full inclusion of gays and lesbians. Since then, to "LG" have been added "BTQI+". Today's issues around sexuality—and underlying theological anthropologies—are ever more complex, more difficult. It is to the ends of *this* earth, twenty-seven years later, that the Risen Jesus is sending us now, as witnesses to his Cross and Resurrection. What kind of witnesses are we today? How should we consider our task in this time of war, rumor of war, authoritarian governments, persecutions, schisms, and the unending pollution of this Earth, our only home?

What remains vital—however we rejigger structures—is preserving the faith that animates our witness. And not just preserving it, but also broadening and deepening it. The earliest "creed" is "Jesus Christ is Lord" (1 Corinthians 12:3, Romans 10:9, Philippians 2:11), and that is what we all need to lead with. What we all believe is summed up in the two creeds,

and it is expressed in how we worship. How should we proclaim what we believe is the most important question, since people will naturally compare what we say to how we behave. And that truth should bring all of us up short: too much of the present controversy is not really about purity of doctrine or purity of intent but power. That compromises the witness of all Anglicans, South or North.

Dr. Sonderegger’s call for deeper communal theological reflection is therefore urgent:

I would not want to pre-judge any of the careful theological positions that might be developed; but I do believe that they could be held in respect, with intellectual integrity, and above all with Christian charity. There is far too little of any of these virtues in our current debate or in our current silence.<sup>30</sup>

How can Anglicans come together to develop careful, respectful theological positions that can inform our life and witness? We should ask the International Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith, and Order to consider that question in fresh new ways.

May the Spirit guide us all into the way of peace, to form us “by our very brokenness” as authentic, convincing witnesses to Jesus.

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30. Sonderegger, “The Grammar of Communion.”

## Twelve Theses on IASCUFO's Nairobi–Cairo Proposals

1. As is always true of ecumenical questions, we all have grown too accommodated to our divisions. That churches representing a majority of Anglicans in the world consider themselves in “impaired” communion with The Episcopal Church and other churches of the Communion should cause us to lament. Furthermore, we are living in an epoch in which, as is often said, the center of gravity of the Communion, as of worldwide Christianity, has moved to the global South (see for example Philip Jenkins’s writings). Settling into our divisions is to fail to discern the time.
2. After more than a decade of struggle, there is a general perception among the majority of Anglicans of the global South that, in the wake of Lambeth 2022, the Instruments of Communion are in serious need of reform. As IASCUFO documents in the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals, the four Instruments agree with this assessment! This does not mean that there is no communion, since we still share at table and font, and bilateral and personal connections continue to be important. Still we cannot keep doing the same thing and suppose there will be a better outcome.
3. Our goal ought to be achieving the highest degree of communion possible, a phrase developed by the Communion in the last thirty years amid its debates about both women’s ordination and questions of marriage and sexuality. At the same time member churches are free to associate with one another, and hold one another accountable, for example doctrinally, as they wish. We and they claim the tradition of Anglican ecclesial autonomy. The Instruments themselves do not seek to impose procedures to compromise this autonomy.

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The Right Reverend Dr. George Sumner is bishop of the Diocese of Dallas.*

4. The idea of a covenant sought to build on the Biblical foundation for the idea, while including the theme of voluntary association. When this idea emerged from the Instruments, as if “from above,” this associational aspect was lost sight of, and as a result the largest and most powerful churches of the Communion — on all sides of our disputes — declined to take it up. But now the idea has re-emerged from the Global South Fellowship, as if “from below.” Both the primates and IASCUFO have seen this as a positive development, one which deserves more debate and dialogue as a way forward.
5. Another way to describe our moment is that of postcolonialism. On this the global North and South agree. This is what lies behind the advocacy of a revised and polycentric structure. But of course now comes the harder work of letting go of some control.
6. It is important to recognize how modest the step we would be taking actually is. The proposals of Nairobi–Cairo, put forward both by IASCUFO and the Standing Committee of the ACC, with the support of the former Archbishop of Canterbury, envision a wider sharing of leadership across the Communion, equally across all five regions. Given that each member church will continue to have an equal say at meetings of the ACC and Primates, a Province like The Episcopal Church has the same vote as the Church of Nigeria, which is perhaps forty times larger.
7. Membership in the Anglican Communion is a technical and legal matter set forth in the Constitution of the ACC, which the proposals remind us of repeatedly. Members can only be added by vote of the Anglican Consultative Council with the agreement of two thirds of the Primates. Nairobi–Cairo underlines and defends this process. Nothing about this would change. In fact, the proposal provides a rationale for updating the antique 1930 description of the Communion.
8. While Nairobi–Cairo marks a significant and welcome contribution, it ought to come as no surprise to North Americans. It takes up concepts like “differentiation” and “communion across difference” familiar from our own discussions about a common future. These ideas are placed alongside a rich scriptural ecclesiology of shared life in Christ on the way to genuine and full unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. Those who find this vision and summons less than satisfying will need to proffer alternative views that are no less theologically, scripturally, and historically robust. As ever, we need more theology, not less, as a response to the summons to reason together (Isaiah 1:18).
9. Another hard truth is that the See of Canterbury has become, for many, a symbol, of disunity. At the same time, we all recognize the

apostolic weight of its tradition, as well as its missional resonance. The proposals balance modest reform with preservation. In a sense the next archbishop is freed to minister on behalf of both the Church of England and the Communion in new ways, to become a witness to the resurrection, which is after all the nature of all apostolic ministry.

10. Applying all of this to our unhappy divisions at home, we ought, at some point in North America, to seek ecumenical rapprochement with the ACNA. “America,” and the USA in particular, is still widely seen abroad as arrogant, inflexible, and divisive. “Conservatives” and “liberals” in the United States must repent of a lack of charity. All should seek out common ground on the new terrain we inhabit culturally—for example, concerning human dignity over against technology.
11. Meanwhile, we must always place our structures in service of “mutual responsibility and interdependence in the Body of Christ” (Anglican Congress, Toronto, 1963), not least in order to address the urgent work of evangelism in the declining churches of the West. We need to focus our attention where growth is taking place, for example in immigrant churches. The globe is here, and it is a sign of hope!
12. The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals do not present a full or final answer to any of our problems. It sketches provisional next steps in service of Christian love and reconciliation. It should inspire renewed patience, humility, and forgiveness, all of which are difficult but essential to cultivate. We might try some receptive ecumenism, in which each side expresses gratitude for the attention to Scripture and evangelism on the one hand, and the passion for social justice and welcome on the other. To set forth such appreciations is not to paper over real disagreement, but place it in a more charitable light.

In the meantime, let us all maintain our welcome of the baptized to the Lord’s Supper, which is an earnest of the unity which *is real in Christ now* and will one day be ours fully, by God’s amazing grace, in the Kingdom.

*Mike Angell*

I've read the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals. I've read them slowly, with the kind of attention you give to a letter from someone you love but who keeps hurting you. And I've read them with the weight of Sunday mornings in my bones, the weight of preaching grace to people who aren't sure they're welcome.

Because here's the thing: every time the Anglican Communion makes a move that feels like punishment or exclusion—especially directed at the Episcopal church—I see the ripple effects in my pews. LGBTQ+ folks, who have already risked so much to walk through our doors, start asking again: Do I belong here? Is this church safe? Is this Communion mine too, or just *theirs*?

The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals talk about “walking together at a distance.” I understand the theological nuance. I question the ecclesiological gymnastics. But from the parish where I sit with people in grief, in transition, in recovery, in pastoral moments of owning who they are and what the church has done, it feels like another way of saying, “We're not sure we want you at the table.”

And that's traumatic.

The relationship between The Episcopal Church and the wider Anglican Communion is now layered with years of trauma. Not just disagreement. Not just theological diversity. Trauma. Years of being told we're too much, too fast, too affirming, too American. Years of being invited to the table only to be told we can't speak, or vote, or stay.

The proposals suggest structural changes. Reimagining Instruments of Communion. Differentiated communion. I don't believe giving the Primates' Meeting more power is the answer. The communiques issued by the Primates have been a primary source of harm. I'm not sure the proposals around structure will make much difference. Trauma doesn't heal with new polity. Trauma heals with honesty. With openness. With gentleness. I'm skeptical of calls to replace the authority of the Archbishop of Canterbury, especially now that the first woman appointed is about to begin.

I don't need the Communion to agree with me. I don't need it to affirm every decision we've made. But I do pray that it will stop hurting the people I serve. I pray it will stop making them feel like theological problems instead of beloved children of God. I do pray for a process of listening and apology.

So if this is the beginning of a new conversation, as the proposals claim, let

it be a real one. Not just among Primates and theologians, but among parish priests and lay leaders and LGBTQ+ Anglicans who keep showing up even when it's hard. Let it be a conversation where we name the trauma, not just the polity. Where we speak plainly. Where we listen deeply.

Because the Communion isn't just an idea. It's people. And people are hurting.

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*Deon K. Johnson*

## Walking Together on the Emmaus Road: A Response to the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals

### **Introduction: How I came to love this church**

I love this church! I love the Anglican Communion. I have been shaped and nurtured, encouraged and strengthened by the gift of Anglicanism. My ancestors, through enslavement and freedom, found hope in the Anglican Church and their hope now resides in me. I come to this conversation not first as a bishop, nor as a liturgist, nor even as a participant (and at times the subject) in Communion-wide debates, but as a child formed in faith by his grandmother.

It was my grandmother who first taught me how to pray, who brought me to church, who made sure I knew that God loved me before I ever had words for doctrine or polity. Her Book of Common Prayer and her Bible were her most treasured possessions. Through her, I encountered an Anglican faith that was embodied, relational, and deeply rooted in daily life.

She read Morning Prayer at the beginning of each day, and gave thanks to God for the day past in the poetry of Evening Prayer. My grandmother was a member of the Mother's Union, the Church Army, and the Choir. Church was not an abstraction. Being Anglican was not a doctrine; it was a community that held us, corrected us, nourished us, loved us, and sent us back into the world to love and serve.

That formation, quiet, persistent, and faithful, set me on a path shaped by the Anglican Communion long before I could name it as such. Scripture read aloud, sacraments faithfully celebrated, a church that held together word and table, justice and mercy. These were the means by which God

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sparked faith in me. I did not inherit Anglicanism as an ideology; I inherited it as a way of walking with God and with one another.

I now serve as Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri, and I do so as the first openly gay bishop in the Anglican Communion of African descent. I do so also as an immigrant and a parent, a husband and a son. These identities are not incidental. They shape how I hear both the pain and the promise within the Nairobi-Cairo Proposals. I speak not from the margins of this Communion, but from deep within its life; formed by it, sustained by it, and committed to its flourishing.

### **The Instruments of Communion: Not broken, but misused**

The Nairobi-Cairo Proposals begin with the assumption that the Instruments of Communion are broken and in need of renewal. I wish to suggest a different diagnosis. The Instruments of Communion are not broken; rather, they have been co-opted—used in ways that exceed their original purpose and distort their relational intent.

Historically, the Instruments were never designed to function as juridical authorities. The Windsor Report (2004) itself affirms that the Instruments “do not have authority over the provinces” but exist to “express and foster the interdependence of the churches” (§106). They were meant to serve communion, not police it. Yet in recent decades, these instruments have been employed by some to discipline provinces whose prayerful discernment has led them to decisions others find objectionable, particularly regarding the ordination of women and the full inclusion of LGBTQIA+ Christians. This singular focus on gender and human sexuality runs the risk of reducing the theology of the Church to solely be concerned the area between the navel and the knees rather than seeking to faithfully follow Jesus.

Autonomy, one of the defining characteristics of Anglican ecclesiology, has been selectively honored. Provinces have been sanctioned for exercising their discernment, while others have impaired communion unilaterally, sometimes declaring whole provinces unfaithful, without equivalent consequence. This asymmetry has not preserved unity; it has undermined trust.

### **Autonomy, Context, and the work of the Holy Spirit**

Anglicanism has long held that the gospel is proclaimed and embodied within particular cultural and historical contexts. The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral affirms both catholic continuity and local expression. Provinces are entrusted to discern how the unchanging gospel is faithfully lived within changing contexts, guided by scripture, tradition, and reason.

The inclusion of women and LGBTQIA+ people in all orders of ministry emerges from this very process. These decisions are not departures from Anglican faithfulness but developments within it, rooted in careful biblical interpretation, deep theological reflection, and the lived witness of faithful people whose lives bear the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23).

To characterize these developments as communion-breaking misunderstands the Anglican way. Disagreement has always been part of our shared life. What threatens communion is not diversity of conviction, but the refusal to remain in relationship across that diversity.

### **Unity is not uniformity: The gift and discipline of difference**

One of the enduring strengths of Anglicanism has been its refusal to collapse unity into sameness. From its earliest days, the Anglican way has held together difference and coherence, insisting that fidelity to the gospel does not require uniformity of expression, culture, or theological emphasis. Unity, in our tradition, has never meant agreement on all things, whether small or great. It has meant a commitment to remain in relationship even when agreement proves elusive.

Scripture itself resists a uniform church. At Pentecost, the Spirit does not erase difference but sanctifies it: “Each one heard them speaking in the native language of each” (Acts 2:6). The miracle is not that everyone spoke the same language, but that the gospel was proclaimed in many tongues. Diversity, held together by the Spirit, becomes the means by which God’s reconciling love is made known.

Yet in recent years the Anglican Communion has increasingly behaved as though unity requires doctrinal or moral uniformity, particularly around questions of gender, sexuality, and authority. When provinces are told—implicitly or explicitly—that their place in the Communion depends upon conformity to a particular theological position, unity is reduced to compliance. This is not communion; it is coercion.

Saint Paul offers a different vision. Writing to a divided community, he insists that the Body of Christ depends upon difference: “If all were a single member, where would the body be?” (1 Corinthians 12:19). To say to another part of the body, “I have no need of you,” is not an act of faithfulness but a denial of the Body itself. Unity is not preserved by severing relationship; it is deepened by staying present to one another in love, humility, and patience.

Anglican unity, at its best, has been covenantal rather than contractual, rooted in promises to walk together rather than in conditions for belonging. It is precisely this covenantal imagination that we are in danger of losing when uniformity is elevated over relationship. Unity does not require

that we agree on every theological question. It requires that we refuse to walk apart simply because we do not.

**Deepening, not replacing, our common life:  
Communion as relationship**

If the challenge before us is not primarily structural but relational, then the work of the Anglican Communion in this moment is not to replace its common life, but to *deepen* it. No reconfiguration of the Instruments of Communion can substitute for the slow, faithful work of building trust, sharing life, and attending to one another's flourishing across difference as we follow Jesus.

Much has been said by senior leaders about a fractured or broken Communion. Yet for most Anglicans, communion is not experienced primarily through statements or resolutions. It is lived in relationships.

Across dioceses and provinces, Anglicans continue to walk together in mission. We feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the imprisoned, and welcome the stranger (Matthew 25:35–36). Companion relationships—many now informal—continue to shape parishes and dioceses. These relationships endure not because we agree on everything, but because we recognize one another as members of the same Body of Christ.

The Anglican Communion Covenant process reminded us that communion is sustained by “bonds of affection.” These bonds are not theoretical; they are relational, sacramental, and deeply human. They persist even when institutional relationships are strained, because the Spirit continues to bind us together in Christ.

One of the clearest signs that our communion is not broken is found in the many companion relationships that continue to shape Anglican life around the world. These relationships often persist quietly, beyond formal agreements or institutional oversight, sustained by prayer, friendship, and shared mission. They reveal a truth that our debates sometimes obscure: communion is not declared; it is lived.

In the Diocese of Missouri, we have been blessed by a companion relationship with the Diocese of Lui in South Sudan. Formally, this relationship—which ended in 2020—lasted for ten years; informally, it continues still. Through shared ministry projects, mutual care, and a deep respect for one another shaped by years of walking together. Our congregations pray for one another. We share stories of joy and struggle. We remain connected across vast distance through visits, correspondence, and increasingly through digital means and social media.

What is most striking about this relationship is not what divides us, but what sustains us. Questions of human sexuality and women's authority—so often treated as Communion-defining issues—have not been central to our shared life. Instead, our relationship has been grounded in a mutual desire for flourishing: for peace, for stability, for faithful witness, for the well-being of our people in contexts shaped by vastly different realities.

We are Anglicans living in profoundly different circumstances. The Diocese of Lui ministers amid ongoing political instability, economic hardship, and the long shadows of conflict. The Diocese of Missouri ministers within a very different social and cultural landscape. And yet, we recognize one another as kin in Christ. Our communion is not sustained by agreement on every issue, but by a shared trust that God is at work in and through one another.

This is what the Anglican Communion looks like when it is allowed to breathe, when we move beyond the headlines, when we move beyond statements and declarations. It is relational rather than reactive. It is grounded in prayer rather than pronouncement. It attends to the actual lives of God's people rather than abstract disputes. It reflects the Anglican Consultative Council's long-standing emphasis on mission, mutual responsibility, and interdependence in the Body of Christ.

If we are serious about renewing the Communion, then we must ask how our structures can serve and strengthen these lived relationships rather than overshadow them. The goal of communion is not control, but connection. Not enforcement, but encouragement. Not uniformity, but mutual upbuilding.

Deepening our common life will require us to invest in spaces of encounter, storytelling, and shared ministry. Especially among those who differ most from one another. It will require us to listen attentively to voices from the margins and to name honestly the power dynamics that shape whose experience counts as authoritative. And it will require us to trust that the Holy Spirit is already at work in the relationships that bind us together, even when our institutional life struggles to keep pace.

In the end, communion is not sustained by documents alone. It is sustained by people who choose, again and again, to pray for one another, to care for one another, and to recognize in one another the presence of Christ. This is not a secondary expression of Anglican unity; it is its very heart.

### **Walking the Emmaus Road**

The story of the risen Jesus walking with the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35) offers, I believe, not simply a comforting resurrection narrative but a profound ecclesiology for the Anglican

Communion in this moment. It is a story about what faithfulness looks like when clarity is absent, when consensus has collapsed, and when grief and confusion shape the road ahead.

The disciples are walking away from Jerusalem. Their hopes have been shattered. They do not agree on how to interpret what has happened, nor do they know what comes next. And yet, Jesus draws near and walks with them. Notably, he does not immediately correct them, rebuke them, or demand that they arrive at a shared understanding before he joins them. He begins with a question: “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” (Luke 24:17). Jesus honors their experience by listening.

This posture of accompaniment is striking. The risen Christ chooses relationship before resolution. He does not insist on agreement as a precondition for communion. He does not abandon them because they are confused, mistaken, or divided in their interpretations. Instead, he walks alongside them in their uncertainty, allowing understanding to unfold gradually, relationally, and in God’s time.

For the Anglican Communion, this is a crucial insight. We often behave as though agreement must precede walking together, as though communion can only be sustained once differences are resolved. The Emmaus story suggests the opposite: that walking together is itself the context in which truth is disclosed. Understanding emerges not through separation, but through sustained presence.

As they walk, Jesus interprets the scriptures, reframing their story within God’s larger purposes. But even then, recognition does not come through intellectual clarity alone. It comes later, at table, in the breaking of the bread. Communion—shared life, shared nourishment—becomes the moment of revelation. The disciples recognize Christ not because all their questions have been answered, but because they have remained in relationship.

This has profound implications for our life together. The Anglican Communion does not need to resolve every theological disagreement before it can remain faithful. What it needs is the courage to stay on the road together long enough for Christ to be revealed among us. Our temptation has been to walk apart when disagreement becomes uncomfortable, to declare the journey impossible unless others see as we see. The Emmaus story reminds us that Christ often meets us precisely in the discomfort of unfinished understanding.

There is also a humility in this story that we would do well to recover. The disciples are certain they know what has happened and they are certain that it has ended in failure. Yet they are wrong, not because they are faithless, but because they cannot yet see the full picture. Jesus does not

shame them for this. He walks with them until their hearts are ready to receive a deeper truth. In the same way, we must approach one another with the humility that recognizes our own partial vision. As Saint Paul reminds us, “Now we see in a mirror, dimly” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

For LGBTQIA+ Anglicans—and for all who have been marginalized within the life of the Church—the Emmaus road has often been a long one. Many have walked it carrying wounds inflicted not by disbelief, but by exclusion from full participation in the life of Christ’s Body. Yet even here, Christ has walked alongside us, often revealed in unexpected companions, in communities of welcome, and in the persistent call to remain faithful to a Church that has not always known how to recognize us.

The Emmaus story also speaks to power. Jesus, the risen Lord, does not dominate the journey. He does not control the narrative. He allows himself to be invited: “Stay with us” (Luke 24:29). Communion is not coerced; it is chosen. Likewise, the Anglican Communion cannot be sustained by declarations, sanctions, or structural enforcement alone. It must be sustained by mutual invitation, by a shared willingness to remain at the table together, even when doing so is costly.

Finally, the Emmaus Road does not end in isolation. Once the disciples recognize Christ, they return to Jerusalem, to the community, to shared witness, to renewed mission. Walking together leads not to paralysis but to renewed energy for proclamation and service. When communion is lived as accompaniment rather than agreement, it becomes a source of life for the world God loves.

Perhaps this is the call before us now. Not to demand certainty where God invites trust. Not to insist on uniformity where God delights in diversity. But to walk together, listening deeply, breaking bread faithfully, and trusting that Christ is revealed along the way.

In a time of uncertainty, the Anglican Communion may not yet know exactly where it is going. But like those first disciples, we can know this: our hearts may yet burn within us as we walk together, because the risen Christ has not abandoned the road and has not abandoned us.

### **Truth, reconciliation, and a postcolonial Communion**

The Anglican Communion continues to live with the legacy of colonialism; not only as historical memory, but as an ongoing influence on how authority, voice, and belonging are negotiated within our common life. These dynamics shape whose theology is presumed normative, whose discernment is trusted, and whose faithfulness is questioned.

It is important to be clear: historically, the Instruments of Communion were never designed to function as juridical authorities. As the Windsor

Report affirms, they “do not have authority over the provinces” but exist to “express and foster the interdependence of the churches” (§106). Anglican ecclesiology intentionally disperses authority, holding provincial autonomy together through consultation, relationship, and mutual accountability. No instrument was ever meant to define orthodoxy for the whole Communion.

What is at stake in the Nairobi-Cairo Proposals is not the repair of a broken system, but the risk of fundamentally altering this inherited balance. While the Instruments themselves were not created to adjudicate orthodoxy, the proposals would, in practice, move us toward a Communion in which certain bodies—or coalitions within them—are empowered to determine the boundaries of theological legitimacy, while others are expected to comply. This represents a significant shift from communion sustained by mutual discernment to communion maintained through enforcement.

Such a move cannot be separated from our colonial inheritance. When theological judgments arising from particular cultural and political contexts are treated as universally binding—while discernment arising from other contexts is disciplined or dismissed—we risk reinscribing patterns of domination rather than embodying mutuality in Christ.

This dynamic is especially visible in debates over women’s authority and the full inclusion of LGBTQIA+ Christians. Provinces that have discerned these developments through prayer, Scripture, and lived experience are often framed as threats to communion, while those that unilaterally impair communion are described as defenders of orthodoxy. The resulting asymmetry reveals that the deeper issue is not disagreement alone, but power: who is authorized to discern, and who is expected to submit.

A renewed Anglican Communion will therefore require a work of truth and reconciliation. This includes naming where authority has been exercised coercively rather than collaboratively, listening seriously to voices long marginalized, and acknowledging that theological development and contextual discernment have always been part of Anglican life. Fear of change, of loss, of diminished authority, must be addressed pastorally rather than juridically.

The Instruments of Communion can play a vital role in this work, but only if they are reclaimed as spaces of encounter rather than control. Their vocation is not to enforce conformity, but to hold the churches together long enough for trust to grow and for the Spirit’s leading to be discerned together. Authority, in an Anglican context, is exercised with one another, not over one another, in service of the whole Body of Christ.

**Conclusion: Choosing to walk together**

The Anglican Communion is, at its best, like my grandmother's faith: lived in relationships, expressed in care and service, and made real in the ordinary acts of discipleship. It is in these relationships—diocesan companions, parish partnerships, and friendships across continents—that communion is most faithfully preserved. The Instruments of Communion, the formal structures, are tools for expressing this life, not substitutes for it. The true glue of our fellowship is relational, spiritual, and lived.

If we are willing to walk together in this way—attentive to one another, patient in our differences, humble in our partial understanding—we may yet discover that the Spirit is already at work among us. The Anglican Communion does not need uniformity to endure. It needs courage, trust, and love: the willingness to choose presence over separation, accompaniment over enforcement, and relationship over judgment.

I return, finally, to the lesson of my grandmother. She taught me that faith is not measured by certainty, authority, or control, but by the willingness to remain present, to walk with others even when the way is unclear, and to trust that God is faithful.

I remain committed to the Anglican Communion—not because it is easy, but because it is Christ's Body. I believe the Holy Spirit continues to work through our disagreements, our diversity, and even our failures.

Unity does not require us to agree on all things. It requires us to walk together, trusting that Christ walks with us. Like the disciples on the Emmaus Road, we may not yet know where we are going, but we can know this: Jesus is with us, and in walking together, our hearts may yet be strangely warmed.

*Ian T. Douglas*

## Thoughts on the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals

The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals of the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith, and Order (IASCUFO) are, on one level, a faithful effort to embrace an increasingly postcolonial Anglican Communion. The proposals, if enacted, while attempting to advance a postcolonial vision for the Anglican Communion, would lead to an increasing centralization of power in the Primates' Meeting and its Standing Committee. By imbuing the Primates with more power, the proposals move away from a genuine postcolonial sharing of authority and power, particularly with lay people, women, and other orders beyond bishops, in an increasingly plural Anglican Communion.

### Background to the Proposals

Since the Virginia Report of 1998, there has been a desire to instrumentalize unity in the Anglican Communion. It was the Virginia Report of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission (IATDC) that first introduced the idea of the Four Instruments of Unity, now referred to as the Four Instruments of Communion, i.e. The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council, and the Primates' Meeting.<sup>1</sup> Some members of IATDC believed that articulating stronger structures for the Anglican Communion would help to address a perceived problem of increased differences in the Anglican Communion while at the same time fostering greater ecumenical opportunity, particularly with Roman Catholic Church.

In practice, the Four Instruments of Communion, especially the Primates' Meeting, have sometimes tried to enforce unity through structural responses to increasing diversity in the Anglican Communion, especially, in recent

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1. <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/150889/report-1.pdf>

*The Right Reverend Ian T. Douglas retired in 2022 as bishop of the Diocese of Connecticut.*

decades, on such matters as women’s ordination and human sexuality. Recall, for example, that the first Lambeth Conference in 1867 was called to address increasing diversity because of missional contextualization precipitated by Bishop John Colenso’s embrace of Zulu culture in Natal. Unity and communion are not, however, “instrumentalized.” They are a gift from God that the Body of Christ is called to embrace and manifest. Attempts to enforce unity by articulating “limits of Anglican diversity”<sup>2</sup> do not foster wholeness in the Body of Christ. Imposed communion through structures and instruments is contrary to the gift of diversity at the heart of the triune God.

The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals have the subtitle “Renewing the Instruments of the Anglican Communion.” The question, however, is: do the instruments really need to be renewed? Unity and communion are best realized in relationships across differences in service to God’s mission. Some examples of how Anglicans have come together in the *missio Dei* are found in our common efforts to address the AIDS crisis and global debt relief in the 1980’s and 1990’s, and current commitments to preserve the sustainability of creation through the Communion Forest initiative of the Anglican Communion Environmental Network,<sup>3</sup> as well as increasing cooperation across the Anglican Communion in promoting safe church and combating gender based violence.<sup>4</sup> The Anglican Consultative Council, in particular, has been most helpful in lifting up and supporting the many networks of the communion that exist to foster participation in God’s mission.<sup>5</sup>

The perceived difficulty that has led IASCUFO—one of the few ongoing commissions of the Anglican Communion—to seek to renew the Instruments of Communion is because one of the instruments, namely the Archbishop of Canterbury, is becoming increasingly problematic as an Instrument of Communion or a focus of unity. The fact that the church of England is moving, although slowly, to the fuller inclusion of LGBTQI people in the church through their “Living in Love and Faith” initiative, and that former Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby at the Lambeth Conference 2022 recognized the validity of Anglican churches that fully include gay and lesbian people, is untenable to Anglican churches that hold a more traditional view of human sexuality. And the appointment of The Right Reverend Dr. Sarah Mullally as the next Archbishop of Canterbury

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2. See 1998 Lambeth Conference Resolution III.6 on the Instruments of the Anglican Communion. <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1998/section-iii-called-to-be-faithful-in-a-plural-world/section-iii6-instruments-of-the-anglican-communion.aspx>.

3. <https://acen.anglicancommunion.org>

4. <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/gender-justice.aspx>

5. <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/community/networks.aspx>

causes additional problems for churches that do not support women's ordination. The real crisis for Anglican churches that hold a more conservative view on human sexuality and women's ordination is that the former Archbishop of Canterbury embraced greater diversity on matters of human sexuality<sup>6</sup> and the next archbishop will be a woman.<sup>7</sup> Those in the Communion who have historically, and perhaps romantically, looked to the Archbishop of Canterbury as an Instrument of Unity, and the Church of England as a point of shared identity, are now leading the charge to decentralize Canterbury. The reason behind Resolution 3(a) of ACC-18 that has given rise to the Nairobi–Cairo proposals is that the Instruments of Communion are no longer able to hold the Anglican Communion together, if indeed they ever could.<sup>8</sup> The inability of the Instruments to hold the Anglican Communion together is a centerpiece of the recent declaration by GAFCON's Primates Council that GAFCON is now "The Anglican Communion."<sup>9</sup>

### Overview of the Report

Opening with an expanded Table of Contents, the report begins with a brief forward by the Chair of IASCUFO, The Right Reverend Dr. Graham Tomlin, a list of the members of IASCUFO, and an Executive Summary. The Introduction of the report lays out the purpose of the paper. It references the enabling resolution of ACC 18 and notes the problem of the Church of England's "Living in Love and Faith" for some churches of the Communion while not mentioning the challenges as a result of Archbishop Justin's embrace of churches with different perspectives on human sexuality at Lambeth 2022. IASCUFO then gives a nod to the Global South Fellowship of Anglicans (GSF) and their "Covenantal Structure" as a possible helpful example for the future of Anglicanism. My hermeneutic of suspicion leads me to think the GSF is included here both to invite them into the structural conversation and bring back the idea of "covenant" relationships—previously advanced by the ill-fated Anglican Covenant.

The second substantive section of the report resurrects the Resolution 49 of the 1930 Lambeth Conference on the "nature and status of the Anglican Communion" as definitive of Anglican identity and authority. If one assumes the centrality of this resolution as a statement on the life

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6. <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-writing/speeches/lambeth-call-human-dignity-read-archbishop-justins-remarks>

7. <https://gafcon.org/communique-updates/canterbury-appointment-abandons-anglicans/>

8. [https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/513756/en\\_acc18\\_resolutions-and-statements-of-support\\_24.pdf](https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/513756/en_acc18_resolutions-and-statements-of-support_24.pdf)

9. <https://gafcon.org/communique-updates/the-future-has-arrived/>

and unity of the Anglican Communion (a large assumption), the need to update the resolution for these more diverse times becomes a key project of IASCUFO and of the proposals. See, for example, the paper's Appendix which is an exegesis of IASCUFO's proposed changes to the 1930 resolution effectively decentralizing the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the place of "national" churches in the life of the Communion. I will say more on this below.

The largest part of the report is Section III, which is a teaching on "The Marks of the Church." This section is tightly written and well presented. It explicates the creedal Marks of the church as Unity, Holiness, Catholicity, and Apostolicity. As a Commission whose brief is "unity, faith, and order," it is most appropriate that the proposals hang on an extended discussion of the Marks of the Church. Yet it is unfortunate that the report never mentions the Five Marks of Mission advanced by the Anglican Consultative Council over four decades ago and widely embraced across the Anglican Communion. Why go back to a Lambeth Resolution focusing on the church rather than the Communion's embrace of the missiologically focused Five Marks of Mission? This section I find to be yet another apologetic for the efficacy and importance of the Instruments of Communion to hold the Anglican Communion together.

The fourth section of the report puts forward proposals for ACC 19 (to be held from June 27 to July 5, 2026 in Ireland) and the other "Instruments of Communion" to consider. In general, these proposals seek to renew the instruments, especially the Primates' Meeting, while at the same time decentering the Archbishop of Canterbury with a postcolonial argument. I will take these proposals one by one.

### Proposals of Nairobi–Cairo

The proposals offered by IASCUFO in the paper fall into two groups, the first offer revisions to the 1930 Lambeth resolution with respect to the definition of the nature and shape of the Anglican Communion. The second set of proposals make specific recommendations as to the workings of the Instruments of Communion under a rubric of "broadened leadership."

#### *A. Changes to the Definition of the Anglican Communion*

While the narrative on the first proposals (§§73-81) makes the argument for changes to the definition, the changes are most easily seen in the highlighted and strikethrough version of the "description of the Anglican Communion" found in the Appendix to the report. I find it very interesting that IASCUFO is centering their proposal on Resolution 49 of the 1930 Lambeth Conference while not mentioning Resolution 48 of that same Conference, which states:

The Conference affirms that the true constitution of the Catholic church involves the principle of the autonomy of particular churches based upon a common faith and order...”<sup>10</sup>

This leads to the question: what is “faith and order,” and who defines it? Is faith and order limited to doctrine or is it something more than doctrine? My friend and colleague Mark Edington, bishop in charge of the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe, offers an astute discussion in this volume of how doctrine is articulated by the creeds and thus not inclusive of matters of human sexuality.<sup>11</sup> If one wants to elevate human sexuality to a primary place in the Anglican Communion, then one needs to have an expansive view of faith and order.

The first proposed change to the 1930 Lambeth Conference’s description of the Anglican Communion is to strike the words “in communion with the See of Canterbury” from the preamble. Ostensibly this is a postcolonial effort to decenter the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury as definitive for Anglican churches’ communion identity. The result, however, is that it opens the door for many “continuing Anglican churches” or “para-Anglican churches” to claim the Anglican mantle as their own. Perhaps that is a good thing, but it does mean that if this new description of the nature of the Anglican Communion is adopted then the Anglican Church of North America (ACNA) can claim to be as fully Anglican as The Episcopal Church. A limiting factor, however, is “The Schedule” of member churches of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) listed in the Articles of Association of the ACC.<sup>12</sup> One could argue that The Schedule is the closest official listing we have for member churches of the Anglican Communion.

The proposed updated description of the Anglican Communion offered by IASCUFO also deletes the reference to “national” churches and replaces it with “autonomous” and “local” in point (b). As a result, the historic ideal that there shall not be any overlapping Anglican jurisdictions in any one nation seems to be set aside allowing for more than one autonomous Anglican church to exist in any one locality. This too gives a new openness to the possibility of ACNA being fully recognized as an Anglican church alongside The Episcopal Church.

In point (a) of the definition, I find the addition of the words “seek to” and “distinct” to be helpful additions noting, humbly, that Anglican churches,

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10. <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1930/resolution-48-the-anglican-communion.aspx>

11. See Edington, “Culture is not Doctrine,” *infra* at 75.

12. <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/533535/ACC-Constitution-2024.pdf>

while desiring to uphold the catholic and apostolic faith, sometimes fall short of this ideal.

Point (c) has some additional changes that I find problematic. Striking the explicit 1930 language that Anglican churches are “not bound together by a central legislative and executive authority” allows for the development of just such a central authority in the future, and could lead to the Primates’ Meeting assuming some kind of quasi-curial status in the future. Also, the additions in point (c) of “shared inheritance,” “mutual service,” and “historic connection with the See of Canterbury” opens the door even wider for ACNA and other “continuing Anglican churches” to claim full status in the Anglican Communion. The new words of “seek interdependently to foster the highest degree of communion possible with one another” brings into the definition echoes of recent language of “walking together” as Anglican churches.

I do appreciate that in the note on the synodical nature of Anglicanism, the addition of “and others” to “bishops and others” recognizes the authority of lay people and clergy other than bishops in the governance of some Anglican churches.

Finally, the addition of the word “full” as in “full communion” in the final commitment paragraph echoes recent ecumenical covenants and thus reflects the ecumenical backdrop of this definition, perhaps with a desire towards closer relationship with the Roman Catholic Church.

### *B. Changes in leadership of the Instruments of Communion*

While the recommendations for structural changes are proposed under the banner of “broadening leadership” of the Instruments of Communion, it only does so in the narrow sense that the proposals decenter the Archbishop of Canterbury while giving the archbishop’s convening and agenda-setting power to the Primates’ Meeting, and more specifically the Primates’ Standing Committee. While this proposal would broaden power beyond Canterbury, in effect it reduces the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury by giving more power and authority to the Primates. Thus, the Primates end up with a more powerful and more central role in the Instruments of Communion.

The key change Nairobi–Cairo recommends (briefly presented in §84) is the elevation of a member of the Primates’ Standing Committee to assume the responsibilities, role, and function of the Archbishop of Canterbury as (1) the president of the ACC, (2) the president of the ACC Standing Committee, (3) the President of the Primates’ Meeting, (4) the call to work in conjunction with the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Standing Committee of the ACC to convene and host the Lambeth Conference, and 5) the authority to represent the Anglican Communion in global ec-

umenical gatherings and conversations. In effect Nairobi–Cairo proposes a parallel office to the historic place of the Archbishop of Canterbury in the Anglican Communion through the election of one of their own by the Primates’ Standing Committee.

As noted above, taking power away from the Archbishop of Canterbury and giving it to a member of the Standing Committee of the Primates’ Meeting disproportionately empowers the Primates’ Meeting and further advances the idea of that body assuming a more curial status in the Anglican Communion. And while this decentering of the office of Archbishop of Canterbury was imagined by IASCUFO before the appointment of Bishop Mulla as Archbishop of Canterbury, the timing of such a proposal quite unfortunately undercuts the office just as the first woman is about to assume the role of *primus inter pares*.

If the idea was to share the power of the Archbishop of Canterbury more equitably in an increasingly postcolonial Anglican Communion, then surely there were other ways of doing this besides giving more power to the Primates’ Meeting. A possible alternative direction would be to talk about *three* Instruments of Communion, rather than four, as follows:

1. The Lambeth Conference. The Archbishop of Canterbury could retain sole authority for the calling, invitations, convening, and presidency of the Lambeth Conference. This would give the Archbishop of Canterbury a key role in the Instruments while not elevating the office to be an instrument in and of itself. Also, from my experience as a member of the Design Group for Lambeth 2008, putting together a Lambeth Conference requires one key person who is responsible for making difficult decisions related to the Conference. Having three agents responsible for the planning and oversight of the Conference as Nairobi–Cairo recommends (the Archbishop of Canterbury, the New President of the ACC, and the Secretary General of the Anglican Communion) I believe is unworkable and will lead to chaos.
2. The Anglican Consultative Council. The ACC, as currently constituted, has an elected chair as well as the Archbishop of Canterbury as the president, *ex officio*. This is often problematic because having two similar officers (a chair and a president) leads to confusion as to who ultimately presides over the ACC and its Standing Committee; is it the elected chair of the ACC, or the Archbishop of Canterbury as president? There is another way. The ACC and its Standing Committee, governed by its Constitution, is the only legally incorporated body serving the whole Anglican Communion and is a registered charity in England. The ACC Constitution can be changed by action of the ACC. (See Rules 27.1-27.3)<sup>13</sup> If there was a genuine desire for the

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13. <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/533535/ACC->

leadership among the instruments to be more equitably shared, then the ACC Constitution could be changed to excise the duplicative, *ex officio*, role of the Archbishop of Canterbury as president of the ACC and president of the ACC Standing Committee. This would clarify the office of the chair of the ACC, and ground the chair’s authority to preside over the ACC meeting and the Standing Committee. In other words, the chair would serve as the “president.” Further and crucially important, as to definition of who is in the Anglican Communion, the “Schedule” of Members in the ACC Constitution would continue to be determinative.

3. The Primates’ Meeting. Following Nairobi–Cairo, the Primates’ Meeting could elect its own president from among its members and its Standing Committee. The president would call the Primates’ Meeting, preside over its meetings, and be responsible for follow up to the meetings.

If we were to go in this direction, the Anglican Communion would have three equal and complimentary convening bodies, each with their duly empowered presiding officers: the Lambeth Conference; the ACC with its Standing Committee; and the Primates’ Meeting. It seems to me that such a proposal represents a more equitable sharing of power and authority across Anglican Communion bodies and would diversify its leadership in a more just and equitable manner. Note for example that the current chair of the ACC is a lay woman from England, Canon Margaret Swanson; and the chair of the third and fourth meetings of the ACC was a laywoman, Mrs. Marion Kelleran, from The Episcopal Church.

Finally, as the historic first See in the Anglican Communion, the Archbishop of Canterbury as *primus inter pares*, could continue to represent the Anglican Communion symbolically and otherwise in global ecumenical gatherings and conversations.

### What is to be done?

IASCUFO in their “Suggestions for Next Steps” recommends that the appropriate instruments take their own actions, within their own bodies, to bring the proposals of Nairobi–Cairo to fruition. In a “pastoral letter” to the Anglican Communion in response to the to the GAFCON Communique of October 16, 2025 on the future of the Anglican Communion, The Right Reverend Anthony Poggo, Secretary General of the Anglican Communion, underscored the importance of the upcoming ACC-19 meeting in Ireland. In it, Bishop Poggo said:

At every level of the church (local, regional, and global), we cannot ‘neglect to meet together’, as it says in Hebrews 10:25, whenever possible. All

Anglican churches are ordered by canon law, constitutions and synodical structures that provide a collaborative system of governance by bishops, other clergy, and lay persons. In this way, the ‘houses’ of Anglican synods determine matters of doctrine, discipline, and order, and make decisions for the good of the whole. All Anglican churches are likewise invited to shape the Instruments of Communion, which rightly evolve over time, as those gathered seek to discern what the Spirit is saying to the churches. I urge them to send their representatives to the 19th meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council next year in Belfast, so everyone can participate in the decision-making. Those who are present are the ones who shape the outcomes and resolutions of meetings.<sup>14</sup>

Clearly this is an important time in the life of the Anglican Communion. With the Nairobi Cairo Proposals before us, with a woman appointed to the office of Archbishop of Canterbury, with the GAFCON Primates Council now claiming that their churches constitute the real Anglican Communion going forward, the importance of the upcoming meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council cannot be underestimated.

As evidenced by the work collected in this volume, The Episcopal Church, as a faithful constituent member of the Anglican Communion, is taking the IASCUFO proposals very seriously. The Ecclesiology Committee of the House of Bishops and a subcommittee of the Task Force on the Anglican Communion and Countering the Colonial Mindset, called for by the 2024 General Convention, are working closely together to gather various viewpoints on the Nairobi Cairo Proposals from across The Episcopal Church. A further development of this collection of essays, offering various theological, ecclesiological, pastoral, and missional perspectives on the Nairobi Cairo Proposals, will be shared with The Episcopal Church’s Anglican Consultative Council Members in preparation for ACC-19 in June 2026, as well as with our wider church and other Provinces of the Anglican Communion. In this way, our church’s ACC delegation will be well-briefed to carry forth The Episcopal Church’s various responses to Nairobi–Cairo.

As the churches of the Anglican Communion prepare for ACC-19 and consideration of the Nairobi–Cairo proposals, I urge ACC members to be attentive to the increase in primatial power and authority within the proposals. Let us be vigilant in advancing an understanding of Anglican unity and communion centered in the mission of God and the Anglican Marks of Mission and less so in structural instruments that disproportionately privilege bishops and primates. A more genuine possibility for an increasingly postcolonial Anglican Communion lies before us than that which is represented in the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals. Embracing the Marks of

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14. <https://www.anglicannews.org/news/2025/10/the-secretary-general-of-the-anglican-communion-shares-a-pastoral-letter.aspx>

Mission, let us celebrate our God given differences as a communion of churches bound together in our common service to the *missio Dei*.

*Paula D. Nesbitt*

## Sociological reflections on structural change to the Anglican Communion: The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals

The careful and articulate detail in which the Nairobi–Cairo proposals are set forth show an impressive amount of theological thought and scholarly work undergirding them. Yet, events of recent weeks (and months) have had significant bearing on the Anglican Communion, prompting a fresh reflection on the responsiveness of the proposals for the current and emerging needs of the Communion. Both the announcement of the next archbishop of Canterbury and the subsequent GAFCON statement of its plans to separate from the Anglican Communion and develop a distinct “Global Anglican Communion”<sup>1</sup> suggest a potential “stress test” on how the proposals might be perceived, and potential ramifications that may arise if these proposals are adopted and enacted.

My reflections come from a sociology of religion perspective, focusing on three areas: socio-historical context and behavior, ideology (theological belief), and organizational integrity. I contend that the politicization of the Anglican Communion processes for deliberation and the breakdown of goodwill over the past thirty years have necessitated adjustments to some of its procedures and practices. Ironically, this also has benefited the growth of a fresh understanding of purpose and mission, grounded in collegial regard for one another as a basis for unity that respects provincial differences of sociocultural context and belief. From this standpoint, I critique the proposed organizational restructuring as maintaining vulnerability to political ends and suggest an alternative way to maintain focus on

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1. <https://episcopalnewsservice.org/2025/10/17/gafcon-says-its-members-will-leave-anglican-union-to-form-rival-network/>

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mutual goodwill and trust as the fertile soil for living as the Body of Christ in the world into our mutually shared divine mission.

### Thoughts on the recent sociohistorical context of the Anglican Communion

Nearly three decades ago, the 1998 Lambeth Conference made it clear (to me as a researcher)<sup>2</sup> that the Anglican Communion would be organizationally challenged to cope not only with the growing multicultural constituencies of dioceses and provinces whose bishops brought differing concerns and aspirations, but also with the emerging politicization and strategic polarization by interprovincial networks as a means of seeking to be heard and, for some, to prevail. As an ecclesial institution of autonomous provinces, the Anglican Communion's viability had depended upon the goodwill of its members to find a collegial way forward through conflicts and disagreements that might emerge. Such a spirit had still been evident at the 1988 Lambeth Conference where contesting views stemming from differences of sociocultural context and theological belief had led to fresh listening and insight for some, as well as the need to ponder questions of unity and authority in an increasingly multicultural Communion. The ensuing Virginia Report, with both its structural introduction of the concept of the Instruments of Communion and its behavioral emphasis on churches listening to one another, offered an organizational leadership focus and a process for helping build a deeper understanding of the growing differences.<sup>3</sup>

By 1998, the collegial goodwill of bishops gathered for the Lambeth Conference could no longer be assumed, as some provincial alliances sought to achieve their own ends at the expense of open listening, discussion, and deliberation,<sup>4</sup> compounded by growing global inequities in the emerging postcolonial era. At times, these dynamics seemed to overwhelm the framework and processes of that Conference. A key behavioral outcome was a fresh sense of distrust that began to fracture the spirit of

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2. I was present as a sociological researcher and writer (holding a media pass) at the 1998 Lambeth Conference, and previously as a doctoral student gathering research for my dissertation in 1988. I also subsequently conducted field research at the 2008 and 2022 Lambeth Conferences.

3. "The Virginia Report: The Report of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission". London: The Anglican Consultative Council, 1997. <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/150889/report-1.pdf>

4. Miranda K. Hassett, *Anglican Communion in Crisis: How Episcopal Dissidents and their African Allies are Reshaping Anglicanism* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press), 2007; Stephen Noll, *The Global Anglican Communion: Contending for Anglicanism 1993-2018* (Newport Beach, CA: Anglican House Media Ministry), 2018.

goodwill and bonds of mutual commitment that had allowed the Anglican Communion to cohere organizationally, despite whatever differences might emerge. Several bishops whom I interviewed at the gathering seemed somewhat puzzled and wary of the partisanship they perceived.

Hardening differences of belief and behavior exacerbated social tension and distrust during the ensuing years, with some provinces refusing to be present if one or more other provinces might be in attendance. Strategic caucuses developed adversarial rather than cooperative agendas. In this milieu, the Windsor Report offered another structural attempt to ensure organizational and behavioral order through a proposed Anglican Covenant. Its final section provided a structure to hold the Anglican Communion together morally and organizationally by compelling provincial conformity at the expense of provincial autonomy and goodwill, resulting in wariness over organizational centralization and implementation as a political means to achieve partisan ends. Centralization and coercion could not be a unifying solution, as stated in the Nairobi–Cairo document, where they “sought to suppress division rather than accept its inevitability.” (§57)

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba’s introduction of indaba as a process for the 2008 Lambeth Conference arguably bought time for the Anglican Communion in several ways. Foremost, those who were unwilling to listen to different perspectives chose not to attend (or, in some cases, their primate did not allow them to attend). Second, with no voting, resolutions, or traditional plenary debate, there was no “victory” that any partisan effort could seek or claim.<sup>5</sup> Third, although the indaba format that had been adapted for use at the Lambeth Conference was unrecognizable to a number of African bishops I interviewed on-site, they were unanimous in saying that it was better than the process that had been previously used: they felt that they could share more fully about their own context, and that they had been heard. Behaviorally, indaba helped build (and rebuild) goodwill and trust among those who participated, including the possibility that they might be able to walk and work together despite strong differences. As the Lambeth Reflections document pointed out, “At a time when many in our global society are seeking just the sort of international community that we already have, we would be foolish to let such a gift fall apart.”<sup>6</sup>

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5. Juergensmeyer suggests that a theatrical framework lends itself to performative violence in order to achieve partisan ends such as getting the attention of those whom it perceives as dominant or powerful. See Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

6. Reflections Group, “Lambeth Indaba: Capturing Conversations and Reflections from the Lambeth Conference 2008.” August 3, 2008. [http://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/72554/reflections\\_document\\_final-.pdf](http://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/72554/reflections_document_final-.pdf).

Archbishop Justin Welby brought a fresh emphasis on reconciliation during his tenure, partly through “good conversation,” which depended on shared goodwill and a common commitment to mutually respect differences of belief.<sup>7</sup> Yet tensions continued to grow, not only with respect to gender and sexuality-related issues, but also the steadfast partisan commitments of some leaders to achieve their own ends through alliances and networks, such as GAFCON.<sup>8</sup> It also should be noted that several provincial leaders have been earnest members of such networks while also committed to the Anglican Communion. These parallel networks have served a range of purposes, not always contrary to the Communion.

More recently, decisions within the Church of England regarding gender and sexuality, concomitant with the Archbishop of Canterbury’s presiding role over the Anglican Communion, have exacerbated tensions at least partly because of the symbolism of the See of Canterbury as the institutional foundation of Anglicanism. It is my view that the Nairobi–Cairo proposals have been put forth as a means of addressing and alleviating this tension, particularly in relation to the historical and continuing role of the Archbishop of Canterbury as head of both the Church of England and a governing Instrument of the Anglican Communion.

### Sociological reflections on theological belief and unity

Sociologist Max Weber observed that emphases on doctrine typically emerge during moments of social conflict, including the process of developing rationalized forms of organizing and administering religious life. Dogma arises from the desire to preserve unity and purge external or divergent perspectives through decisions over which doctrines are to be deemed as orthodox.<sup>9</sup> The 1988 Lambeth Conference’s precipitation of subsequent discussions over unity and authority in the Anglican Communion, became yet more prominent in the wake of the 1998 Conference, continuing through our present moment.

From a theological and ecclesial standpoint, the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals’ Executive Summary understands the catholic unity of Anglicanism as recognizing that diversity as part of its fundamental fabric, stating that, “Augustine (and Richard Hooker after him) insists both on the priority of discerning truth and the necessity of contestation and argument in the

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7. However, it did not set forth a methodological process such as indaba or other listening and consensual format.

8. Stephen Noll, *The Global Anglican Communion*.

9. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1991), cited in Paula D. Nesbitt, “Doctrine,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglican Studies*, Mark D. Chapman, Sathianathan Clarke, and Martyn Percy, eds., 384-99. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 384-85.

church” (Proposals, p. 7). However, at times the document’s theological discussion of unity wavers between one that is organically unified in incorporating diverse faith understandings and experiences of Anglicanism, such as the many in One, and somewhat contrarily a view that emphasizes unity as oneness where divisions are problematized (III.[1]25-27).

Historically, common tenets of Christian faith have been represented through the development of creeds, which Anglicanism upholds while not requiring confessional uniformity to one particular interpretation or another. Apparent inconsistencies of understanding are not necessarily to be problematized (cf. Nairobi–Cairo document at §28), but rather can serve as a sign of a vital, living faith tradition that values humility in acknowledging humanity’s lack of omniscience and seeking to learn whatever wisdom may be offered through fresh voices, recognizing that deeper truths to be shared may underlie the surface articulations. Occasionally, uniformity may be achieved among differing voices through listening, discussion, and finding common ground where consensus is possible. More often, however, it is achieved through coercion, suppression, or a neocolonialist silencing of differing voices and understandings.

The Nairobi–Cairo document cites Archbishop Robert Runcie’s concern about emergent divisions expressed at the 1988 Lambeth Conference, noting the tensions between provincial autonomy and interdependence, fragmentation and unity (§30). Not addressed was the moral paralysis that occurs when different actors believe that their conflicting understandings of justice and God’s will are at stake. The indaba conversations at the 2008 Lambeth Conference helped open a window of listening to the earnestness of differing perspectives, and the contexts from which they had arisen. The indaba process presupposed that conflicting understandings could be valid in differing contexts, grounded in respect for the integrity of those persons holding different views. Through internal listening and understanding, mutual respect and trust had begun to form, illustrating that fragmentation need not be the outcome of autonomy so long as relationships, respect, and trust are maintained across differences.

Both Archbishop Rowan Williams, through the use of indaba, and Archbishop Justin Welby, through his call for good conversation as a path toward reconciliation, believed that it was possible to seek places of common ground and walk forward together even where strong differences and disagreements prevailed. Where differences have become divisive to the point of threatening the integrity of relationships, emphases on de-escalation and unification to maintain a sense of common identity across differences have served a vital purpose, to the extent that they haven’t suppressed the integrity of deeply held differences. Both Archbishops made remarkable contributions to strengthening the Communion through

listening and the inclusion of fresh voices that helped Anglicans in all sectors to understand better what they share across their many differences. The 2022 Lambeth Conference itself provided a significant stress test of whether unity as uniformity, or as diversity bonded through shared mutual respect and commitment to remain together, would prevail. The latter path made possible a new future together. The Lambeth Calls, Phase 3 of the 2022 Lambeth Conference, have been intended to bring the entire Anglican Communion into this process.<sup>10</sup>

Because the Anglican Communion consists of forty-two autonomous churches (Provinces) nurtured through Anglican tradition yet representing discrete geographical and cultural settings with different social histories of Anglican emergence or encounter (e.g. colonialism), a theological doctrine of unity needs to be sufficiently supple to be organizationally and institutionally viable if it is to be inclusive of the entire Communion. Our many contexts (e.g. historical, cultural, geographic, demographic, socio-economic, religious) mean that we each experience the common ground of Anglican tradition through slightly different lenses, which can offer invaluable contributions to understanding the greater, universal mission of God through Jesus Christ. The gospels offer numerous encounters between Jesus, a Jew, and people regarded as unclean or outside Judaism who seek, see, or witness to the healing and salvation he offers; they also help him enlarge his own understanding of his ministry to all who seek it (e.g. John 4:1-42).

Much has been made of concerns over those who have felt the need to walk at some distance, or to walk together but somewhat apart. Walking together may be easier for particular purposes such as mission commitments to discipleship, evangelism, safe church, or environmental integrity. The Nairobi–Cairo document expresses this effectively in §§32-33, and §§44-48, 57. Yet more extended or distant walks together on other matters needn't threaten unity so long as the as foundational dynamisms involve a commitment to staying in relationship, mutual respect for differing needs and beliefs, and mutual trust.

### **Organizational integrity of the Anglican Communion**

Two aspects of the Nairobi–Cairo proposals that potentially affect the organizational integrity of the Anglican Communion involve the dilemmas of (1) structural flexibility versus centralized control and (2) dual-role conflict

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10. See especially the Lambeth Calls on Anglican Identity, Christian Unity, Human Dignity, and Reconciliation, including their public webinars, notes for Bible study and other resources. <https://www.lambethconference.org/phase-3/the-lambeth-calls/>

of leadership. Both have a bearing on the viability of the restructuring proposals.

*Organizational flexibility versus control*

A theology of unity that presumes uniformity, when operationalized into organizational structure, inevitably will be applied in the development and justification of mechanisms to enforce conformity and exclude those viewed as deviant or heretical. Such mechanisms will further the risk of fracture in the Anglican Communion. Anglicanism's historical legacy of colonialism also has shown how imperialism can lead to the marginalization of those who differ from the dominant leadership's context and control. An organizational model that seeks to manifest the integrity of global Anglicanism's commitment to valuing the God-given human dignity of all persons must be sufficiently flexible to accommodate differences arising from varying sociopolitical, cultural, and theological contexts.

Sociologist Max Weber warned of what he viewed as the inevitable shift from religio-spiritual movements toward traditional and rationalized forms of authority and organization, including the emergence of bureaucratic layering that could eventually result in an iron cage of specialists without spirit.<sup>11</sup> Centralization and bureaucratization can create conditions for the emergence of a theology of unity understood as uniformity, which can constrict the spiritual creativity and value of new insights from voices not previously heard. Weber also pointed out that while a degree of organizational development was necessary for stability and endurance, a rational-legal framework capable of adapting to the representative needs of its constituencies and which also makes provision for spiritual impulse (charisma) within the organization, could be a viable combination.<sup>12</sup>

This is the unique beauty and spiritual grace of the Anglican Communion's organizational model as lived and expressed across its global purview. It is sufficiently flexible to adapt to changing global cultures as they grow into their own authenticities beyond the imperial vestiges of colonialism. Organizational integrity for a dynamic and flexible worldwide Communion can maintain its spiritual core without added layers of administrative control and governance that could come into conflict with its commitment to unity in diversity and ecclesiology of the Body of Christ in the world.

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11. Weber used the word charisma rather than spirit, as the latter tends to be understood largely through a Christian framework. See Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*; Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (T. Parsons, trans.). New York: Scribner, 1958.

12. Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, Guenther Ross and Claus Wittich, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

*Dual-role conflict*

The position of Archbishop of Canterbury has contained a dual role conflict from the outset of the Anglican Communion. Recognition as being in spiritual communion with the See of Canterbury legally sidestepped the established status of the Church of England and its political ramifications (e.g. for the Scottish Episcopal Church and subsequently The Episcopal Church). However, the dual roles of overseeing both a state church and matters of moral, spiritual, and ecclesial tradition for a Communion of autonomous churches across the world has increased the potential for conflicts of interest between the Church of England and what arguably might be appropriate for other provinces in the Communion. Historically such conflicts involved colonialism, such as the questions leading to the first Lambeth Conference (1867); more recently they have involved conflicting beliefs and practices related to gender and sexuality.

The Nairobi–Cairo proposals have clearly identified the complexity of the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the dual role as head of both the (established) Church of England and the Anglican Communion. Although that dual role has been navigated delicately by the incumbents over the years, recent discussions and proposals related to sexuality in the Church of England have made clear the potential conflicts of interest for some member provinces.

The proposals recommend that a new office of President of the ACC be elected from the membership of the Primates' Meeting (§84). Although this would alleviate the Archbishop of Canterbury's predicament of serving in a dual role, including any other provincial concerns over autonomous decisions made by the Church of England, it fails to address the dual role conflict that remains for whichever primate would become president. When a conflict of interest should occur, whose welfare must take priority? One's own church, or the Anglican Communion? This conflict is exacerbated for those primates of churches in countries where political situations or legal regulations might affect what a primate publicly can say, do, allow, or support on matters affecting the Anglican Communion.

Additionally, primates in cultures that hold different understandings of personhood and moral responsibility from those in cultures shaped by Enlightenment principles of individual autonomy and mutual tolerance potentially may be subject to internal pressures when making decisions that conflict with one's own cultural (and ecclesial) context. Similarly, primates from more individual-centered cultures can make assumptions or decisions that might be difficult or contextually inappropriate for other cultural contexts. The implications of this became evident through some of the indaba conversations at the 2008 Lambeth Conference.<sup>13</sup>

13. Personal interviews with bishops. Also see Reflections Group, "Lambeth

Moreover, the Nairobi–Cairo proposals are silent on gender and sexuality, evidently presuming that a primate elected to the presidency would be a heterosexual male. Should a primate elected to the presidential position identify with a gender or sexuality status other than heterosexual male, what would be the implications for those provinces that have taken an explicit stand against women’s ordination or any sexuality status other than heterosexual? The immediate “stress test” is upon us, both with the new Archbishop of Canterbury and the GAFCON announcement shortly thereafter that announced the formation of a rival “Global Anglican Communion.”<sup>14</sup> Although the authority of the office is formally distinct from that of the incumbent as a person, the legacy of fissures over refusing Holy Communion or boycotting Anglican Communion gatherings because of conflicts over belief and practice illustrate that some nevertheless view the office and incumbent as interrelated.

### **Sociological thoughts on the proposed restructuring**

Although it might be possible to address some dual role concerns through the development of ethics protocols, conflict of interest policies, and recusal agreements, perhaps other more parsimonious alternatives are available. For example, a shared leadership model consisting of a Leadership Group composed of the chair (and perhaps vice chair) of the Anglican Consultative Council Standing Committee, the Secretary General (who reports to the ACC), a member from Primates’ Standing Committee (elected, and/or perhaps rotating periodically by region), and the Archbishop of Canterbury as a standing member by virtue of both the historical and spiritual significance of that office, could capably serve as a representational body for Anglican Communion leadership, involving three of the Instruments of Communion (the Lambeth Conference is not an ongoing governing body beyond the timeframe of the conference itself).

Such a Leadership Group would represent differing areas of expertise, experience, office, and geography, as well as demographic characteristics, including at least one person (the Secretary General) who is not a current provincial primate. On matters of speaking or representing the Anglican Communion, they could decide internally through a consensus process who might hold primary responsibility, such as a moderator, which could rotate as changes occur in the makeup of the Leadership Group. Alternatively, two or more members could take on specific representative

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Indaba: Capturing Conversations and Reflections from the Lambeth Conference 2008”; Stephen Noll, *The Global Anglican Communion*.

14. David Paulsen, “GAFCON says its members will leave Anglican Communion to form rival network.” Episcopal News Service. October 17, 2025. <https://episcopalnewsservice.org/2025/10/17/gafcon-says-its-members-will-leave-anglican-union-to-form-rival-network/>

and speaking responsibilities according to concerns needing to be addressed or other considerations. Whether a single or plural moderatorship, any or all such persons would have representative authority, speaking on behalf of the Leadership Group and the constituent bodies that it represents.<sup>15</sup> This could ensure that the moderator would be understood as speaking representationally, rather than authoritatively as an individual or as primate of a particular province. In matters of urgency, or where the Leadership Group had not reached consensus, the moderator would speak provisionally until the matter had been sufficiently deliberated and a decision reached by the appropriate bodies. Should the Leadership Group be strongly divided on a matter, the moderator would make that clear in communications, and that discernment and deliberation would be continuing.

A shared leadership approach would invite substantial input from the primates. Moreover, it could include members from the laity, diaconate, priesthood, and episcopate, as well as from a wide range of geographic and demographic locations. Moderated leadership, speaking on behalf of both the Instruments and their overall Body, would have no other power or authority vested in that office, providing flexibility where cultural or legal contexts might create conflicts either of interest or practice.

The strength of the Anglican Communion has been its organizational integrity where different churches can be admitted into full communion while maintaining their distinct identity, beliefs, and practices, provided that they share sufficient common ground with Anglican tradition and a mutual respect for the spiritual dignity of the other member churches through God's grace. Both the Nairobi–Cairo proposals and my proposed alternative value the opportunity for Anglican Communion leadership to emerge from any province. They also are in synchrony and harmony with an Anglican Communion that seeks to move ever more into a mutually respectful and interdependent relationship with its provinces.

Although my proposed shared leadership model retains much of the flexible structure that more conciliar-oriented perspectives have argued as insufficient, it nevertheless provides sufficient checks and balances for ultimately manifesting goodwill while minimizing the prospect of partisanship, providing consensual deliberation and representational authority that are more likely to accommodate the fullness of the Communion. In the very messy field of collaborative decision-making and action comes

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15. An analogy can be made to the Episcopal Church's office of the Presiding Bishop, in that the primate has no authority to set policy outside of what is decided by the two Houses of General Convention or its interim body, the Executive Council. Such a model has served well to circumvent politicized pressures that more unilateral authority would encounter, as well as to create time and space for discussion and due process on matters of importance.

PAULA D. NESBITT

deeper understanding of one another and perhaps greater clarity over God's purpose for humankind and all creation.

*Mark D. W. Edington*

## Culture is not Doctrine

### **What our disagreements are—and are not**

The “Nairobi–Cairo Proposals,” as presented, are founded on a claim about both the fact and the source of division among the churches that comprise the Provinces of the Anglican Communion. While never defining with precision the nature of that division—other than pointing to topics seen differently by different churches—the document makes claims that are within the scope of examination by careful readers. While it is beyond argument that different provinces within the Communion hold varying—even conflicting—views on a number of matters, it is by no means self-evident that these disagreements necessarily justify “the fragmentation, or even the dissolution, of the Communion over the coming years,” in the words of the document’s Foreword.<sup>1</sup> To frame this in different words, the question that this paper brings to the consideration of the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals is whether the differences of view that motivate the writing of these proposals are in fact of such weight and ultimate concern to the Christian faith as to justify the doom-filled portent of the document’s Foreword—or whether, instead, those differences have been both mischaracterized and instrumentalized to serve some other purpose having little to do with the truth of Christian doctrine or the efficacy of its preaching in the different cultures, languages, and circumstances where Anglicans live and worship.

It is a serious charge indeed to assert that churches within a Communion are divided on matters of doctrine. A matter of doctrine is a necessity of the faith, and failing to both faithfully adhere to and consistently teach

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1. Graham Tomlin, Foreword, “The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals: Renewing the Instruments of the Anglican Communion” (Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith, and Order, Advent 2024, 3).

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any principle of Christian doctrine leads inevitably to the result that a church can no longer be recognized by other churches as an expression of fidelity to the gospel. It is exactly for this reason that the compass of what constitutes doctrine must be carefully and conservatively drawn; and it is equally for this reason that polemicists on either side of a given disagreement will, lacking in rigor, claim the status of “doctrine” for their own preferred position on a given matter.

But of course this is a misapprehension of those fundamental claims of faith that are the necessary foundation of Christian unity. To argue in this way is to abuse—and to diminish the significance of—those claims the truth of which is essential to the Christian faith, for it presumes to lift to the status of doctrine matters that are ultimately culturally constructed. The Nairobi–Cairo proposals themselves take note that “[q]uestions... arise about what is still shared, and about how properly to classify the seriousness of a given disagreement” (§32). But other than regarding virtually all present disagreements identified—and notably the understanding of the place in the church of persons created in the image of god who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, and queer (LGBTQ)—as having the status of existential importance for the future of the Communion, there is little precision offered by the document in “how to classify the seriousness of a given disagreement”—or even to acknowledge that the very name of the Commission, distinguishing as it does between “faith” and “order,” acknowledges that some matters have the status of the doctrine of the faith, while others—necessarily and ineluctably shaped by cultural circumstances—are, while significant, are limited to shaping the order of the church.

The Holy Scriptures present no evidence that Christ intended for his followers a single, uniform culture of ordered human society. To say it in different words, Christ intends for his disciples an agreed *faith*, submitting to God’s sovereignty and following a rule of life with the power to transform hearts by the law of love; but there is no evidence that Christ also expected or demanded of his disciples throughout the world a single, uniform, unchanging church *order*. On the contrary, in his earthly ministry Jesus held up for admiration the kingdom-reflecting behavior of people from a variety of cultures—Samaritans and Romans to name but two. When Christ prays that his disciples might all be one, that unity is not a conformity that would negate the diversity of God’s creation in humanity; it is instead a unity of submission to the two fundamental commandments to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Nowhere in such a hoped-for unity of Christ’s followers is a warrant given for one church to “lord it over” others,<sup>2</sup> or to mistake differences of social order for fun-

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2. Matthew 20:25.

damentals of faith. Because no two churches in the Communion are set within the same circumstances of culture or social mores, our churches not only may but must differ in their approach to matters of moral concern; as there is no universal human culture, there is no universal statement on detailed matters of moral concern that can be regarded as having the status of doctrine. To make such a claim would be to privilege one set of social preferences and cultural mores over another—which is, in the end, at the heart of colonialism.

It is also to be noted that debate and division over matters of sexual ethics are nearly as old as the church itself. Peter Brown, in his magisterial study *The Body and Society*, makes this point unambiguously, and in words that should cause all of us a moment of humility: “To its pagan critics, Christianity was a religion notorious for its close association with women;... Pagan conviction that Christians met in order to indulge in sexual promiscuity died hard. This was hardly surprising: by the year 200, every Christian group had accused its own Christian rivals of bizarre sexual practices.”<sup>3</sup> We should take care lest such a critique be made, someday, of our churches as well.

### Necessary distinctions

What then do our disagreements concern—and, more importantly, what status is rightly given to those disagreements? Are they really matters that rise to the level of doctrinal differences—and if they are not, then can we really justify threats of fragmentation, or breaking communion, or denunciations of one church by another? At the ground of this question lies another, more fundamental one, historically difficult for Anglicans to engage rigorously and consistently: what is—and what is not—to be regarded as having the status of doctrine?

No student of church history can seriously question that precision on this question has always been a matter of difficulty for churches that are the inheritors of Anglican tradition. One of the strategies Anglicans have historically employed to serve the interest of comprehensiveness—a *ne plus ultra* of the Church of England in its formative moment—was to resist rigor on what we mean when we say “doctrine,” seeing within it the danger of exclusivist stances. (Muddle is Anglican tradition for serious reasons.) Latitudinarianism served well to assure that the Church of England

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3. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 140.

could encompass, as far as possible, a religiously fractured nation. But four centuries later and more, the danger of this lack of clarity is shown plainly when it is bruited as though it were a statement beyond question that the view of a given Province on matters of social ethics is “contrary to doctrine.” The question that must first be asked in the case of any such disagreement is, What exactly do we mean when we say doctrine? Only then can we clarify with any rigor exactly how to “classify the seriousness of a given disagreement.” More narrowly, when bishops of our respective churches inquire of ordinands whether they will be loyal to the “doctrine, discipline, and worship” of Christ “as this church has received them,” do we know with any precision what we mean by the first of those categories? Would we, as bishops of the church, agree on that question? It is—at least in the long perspective of Anglican history—a vividly vague category.

### Anglicans and doctrine

The tale is often told that the first Lambeth Conference emerged, *inter alia*, in response to a crisis over the conflict between received Christian teaching on social ethics and local cultural practices in places where the church was arriving in the trunks of colonial officials. Bishop Colenso’s scholarly and sympathetic defense of the practice of polygamy as he had found it in Natal, published in 1855, scandalized Victorian social mores, and was but one factor in the first convening of Anglican bishops from around the world—a gathering that was regarded, at best, skeptically by many in England. But alongside and informing the first Lambeth gatherings, larger forces were simultaneously at work as scholars took up the task of defining and delineating the category “doctrine,” especially Newman (1845)<sup>4</sup> and von Harnack (1885)<sup>5</sup>. The urgency to clarify the terms of Christian Doctrine in the midst of the nineteenth century may be seen as a response by the church to bring clarity and rigor to its highest claims bring in the face of the challenge of the modern.

Needless to say, that challenge continues today, drastically amplified by the dehumanizing forces of artificial intelligence, the rise of authoritarian nationalism, and the deepening climate crisis. In the moment these response first emerged, Anglicans contributed a first statement of fundamental doctrine—with a view to establishing a foundation for ecumenical engagement and “home reunion”—by articulating the Quadrilateral. Whatever else may be said for it, it is a statement that is narrowly and conservatively drawn, setting out a *de minimus* statement of the charac-

4. John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London: J. Toovey, 1845).

5. Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* (1885), published in English as *History of Doctrine*, N. Buchanan, trans. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1901).

teristics by which two Christian churches can recognize each other, despite differences of culture, language, and worship, as churches called into a common shared mission by Christ, and who have, in consequence, every reason to seek communion with each other.

Readers of these essays will be well versed in the terms of the Quadrilateral, and they need not be rehearsed here. The point to be made here is that this summary statement of “the fundamentals of the Anglican Communion’s doctrine”<sup>6</sup> focuses narrowly on the foundations of doctrine, and neither presumes nor prescribes specific requirements for social order guided by Christian moral reasoning. To say that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are to be regarded as “containing all things necessary to salvation” does not at the same time privilege a specific approach to biblical theology, or demand a list of specific conclusions in social ethics to be derived from the study of the revealed word of God in Scripture.<sup>7</sup> To the contrary, the intent of the Quadrilateral is clearly to recognize that the few, essential statements of Christian faith (as contained in the Nicene symbol of faith) and of Christian sacramental theology (initiation through baptism and the sharing of Eucharist) are necessarily set within a variety of human cultures and social structures requiring “local adaptation”—in the episcopate, of course, but also in the engagement of the faith with the society within which it is called to proclaim the redeeming, redemptive, and reconciling kerygma of Christ’s gospel.

### Seeing and dealing with our differences for what they are

Other essays in this response address in a more focused way questions of ecclesiology and the meaning of “Communion” raised by the proposed changes to both the structures and the ethos of the Communion as set out in the Nairobi–Cairo document. Here we simply make this basic statement: The differences of view that have emerged between (and within) Provinces of the Anglican Communion are not differences on fundamental questions of doctrine. To accept that idea unquestioningly is to agree to subject the life and ministry of the communion to the weaponization of cultural differences that are now tearing apart not just the church but the societies and cultures which Christ calls us to serve and to evangelize; and we are poor disciples indeed if we permit ourselves to be entrapped

6. “Chicago–Lambeth Quadrilateral,” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago-Lambeth\\_Quadrilateral](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago-Lambeth_Quadrilateral), accessed 26 August 2025.

7. Readers will recall that Augustine, writing in *De Doctrina Christiana* a decade and a half after the second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople, never once mentions the creed in his treatise; for him, “Christian Doctrine” is about the right interpretation of Scripture, and notably about the discipline to bring to bear in distinguishing between what is to be read (and regarded) literally, and what is to be understood figuratively.

and divided by a wider social disease that is unquestionably the devil's work in our day. We have been given the gift of shared communion in a church that encompasses nearly the spectrum of the cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity in which God has chosen to express God's image and likeness. That is a precious treasure with which to be entrusted, and we are now being tested to see whether we are worthy of it.

Anglican tradition has never contemplated either the practice or the need for a magisterium, and it is by no means self-evident that any such development is in keeping with what has been the genius of our ancestors in the Communion. Statements of the Lambeth Conference have never been understood as having doctrinal status or substantive additions to the symbol of faith contained in the creeds, and I do not accept that such a development would be in keeping with any understanding of Anglican tradition. The Nairobi–Cairo document seems to contain contradictory ideas on this point, calling at one and the same time for a more rigid and prescriptive statement of Anglican faith—which, again, we feel contrary to the historic acknowledgment of global diversity that characterized the formation of the Communion itself—while at the same time making a bid for a loosening of the boundaries of what defines membership of a Province, such that nearly any gathering claiming to have a “historic connection” to the tradition (of which, certainly here in Europe, there are innumerable examples) could claim to be part of this Communion. Such a development would render meaningless any discipline that the idea of Communion entails, and would accelerate, rather than slow, the forces of fragmentation and dissolution.

We must acknowledge that the inescapable link between the worldwide spread of the Anglican church and the colonial project of the nineteenth century was in fact premised on the idea that a single culture was somehow superior to, or privileged over, others. We must equally give thanks that in recent decades this fact of our founding has been identified and critiqued, and that enduring traces of this sort of cultural privileging are being identified and interrogated. The careful reader will note, however, that in examining the ground of disagreement within the Communion, the Nairobi–Cairo document draws on a remarkably limited range of only two sources: The Church of England, and statements of the “Global South Fellowship of Anglican churches” (GSFA).

But the Church of England is nowhere established as the normative expression of the doctrine, and surely not the ecclesiology, of the Anglican tradition; it is rather one among many (and, in terms of ecclesiology, at least in some salient respects a minority of one). To regard it as such is surely an exercise in exactly that kind of cultural privileging that was the hallmark of colonial presumption. It is a weakness of the proposals that

the work and reflections of no other Anglican churches beyond that of England or those affiliated with the GSFA have been drawn upon in its considerations. It is difficult not to read this as yet another expression of colonial privilege—or of the idea that one vision of Christian ethics should have supremacy over others.

This church is among those within the Communion who have, as acknowledged by Archbishop Welby at the 2022 Lambeth Conference, arrived at a conclusion about the full inclusion of LGBTQ persons in the life and ministry of the church only after a long period of scriptural study and theological reflection. Yet we have not at any point insisted that others think as we do; we have not demanded that others navigate the tensions between scripture, tradition, and reason as we have; and we have not indulged the contrived culture of division and discord that surrounds us by breaking communion with any other Province of this communion. We believe our fundamental call to the faith as expressed in the creeds, and the reconciling purpose of God that excludes no one as revealed in Scripture, calls us to remain in communion even with—*especially* with—those who live and witness to Christ in cultures very different from our own. We do not expect them to hear God’s call in mission as we do, for the simple reason that we are each called in our own settings and circumstances to preach the truth of God’s love that transcends race, status, gender, and ethnicity (Galatians 3:28–29).

And we ask of the wider Communion this question: If there is indeed a doctrine of marriage on which we so fundamentally disagree, where then is our doctrine on other matters that are, in our estimation, greatly more pressing upon the humanity Christ came to save? Where is our doctrine of race, our doctrine of creation stewardship, our doctrine of human dignity in the onslaught of artificial intelligence, our doctrine of economic justice in the face of sinful economic disparities? Why have we succumbed to the blandishments of those who seek to draw us into the abyss of division and destruction that serves the interests of only those who benefit from our estrangement?

I conclude with the words of an Anglican theologian who has posited what I believe is an apt diagnosis of our moment. “The post-modern intellectual obsession with ‘body’ as it relates to the theorizing of sexuality and gender,” Sarah Coakley has argued, “[is a] subtle subterfuge, another evasive ploy” to deflect our attention from our culture’s longing for meaning in a moment that has seen traditional answers lose their power to explain and to comfort. And, Coakley avers, our present obsession with sexuality and gender might well be “fueling, as well as feeding off, more ‘popular’ manifestations of death-denial...screening us from political and social horrors we cannot face...[and diverting] us from the grinding pov-

erty of the world's dispossessed.”<sup>8</sup> If Coakley is right—and I believe she is—then at least we have been beguiled from the work we have been called to do in building the kingdom of God by accepting the culture's terms of disagreement as our own. That is always a danger for a church shaped by a theology that draws sustenance from a focus on the salvific force of the incarnation of Christ—and that danger alone is a reason to be wary of falling into the world's traps of estrangement.

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8. Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy, and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 156. On this last point, Coakley draws on Terry Eagleton, *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

## *Manoj Zacharia*

### *Why the Anglican Communion matters to this parish priest*

For many, the Anglican Communion appears remote: an institution for international gatherings or mission agencies rather than something that touches parish life. There are, perhaps, also perceptions that the Anglican Communion is a creation and vestige of mercantile colonialism. As financial and human resources at the denominational, diocesan, and parish levels become more constrained, perhaps our focus has become more insular, centering on internal congregational vitality and development—as if such a “congregation first” or a “denomination first” mentality is the panacea for institutional decline.

A critical question that could be raised, in this vein, is whether the America-first mentality that has shaken the global order has affected the church—or whether, conversely, the church has contributed to the rise of an America-first mentality? While not narrowly the subject at hand, our charism as a church is both tending to the local and the global as mutually reinforcing emphases embedded in our mission to “restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.” We proclaim the Christ who has broken down every barrier so that we may be restored to our full humanity, living into the image and re-claimed likeness of the Triune God, the source of creation’s beauty, diversity, and unity.

Thus, as a parish priest, I contend that for my parish, diocese, and denomination to flourish, the Anglican Communion is not a peripheral structure but a vital resource of identity, accountability, and mission. Ignoring or downplaying The Communion risks insularity; embracing it situates us within a living tradition. Edmund Burke captured the heart of this when he described society as “a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are dead, and those who are to be born.”<sup>1</sup> Anglicanism, like society itself, is a covenant across generations, places, and cultures.

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1. Burke, Edmund. *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 1790.

### *The Chicago–Lambeth Quadrilateral: Impetus for Communion*

The Episcopal Church has historically yearned for connection to the reformed-catholic ethos of its antecedent body. The Chicago–Quadrilateral (1886), affirmed at Lambeth in 1888, still provides a theological grammar of Anglican unity. Its four elements—Scripture, the Apostles’ and Nicene Creeds, the dominical sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, and the historic episcopate. Yet these together were not intended as a complete ecclesiology; we might cast them in Anglican vocabulary as “instruments for reunion.” The nomenclature of “The Episcopal Church” expresses the ecclesial ontological yearning for connection that embraces the diversity of the world and longs for unity.

By implication, at the parish level, the Quadrilateral emphasizes that our local identity is not self-invented. It is received through communion—unity—that embraces the local and the local that embraces the global consistently engaged in the interpretive project of praying the words of a common prayer book, reading scripture and affirming the ancient creeds. The local parish, as evinced in our structure, ideally embodies the loop of global and local through sacramental practice blessed by episcopal oversight that bridges the catholicity of the church in its embrace of the local and global, not as binary realities, but mutually indwelling. It links the smallest parish Eucharist to the global and historic church.

### *Relationality, Reciprocity, and Connectivity*

In a parish setting, it is the healthy relationships that enable its flourishing. The clergy, called to attend to the parish, are a symbol of the catholicity of the church, and enact the meaning of this symbol by tending to relationships. That vocational calling, in an of itself, is a prompting that links the local congregation to the global church. Thus, it is important that clergy are nurtured and bathed in the global relationships of the Anglican communion, denominational structures, and diocesan culture, because it is in that relational matrix that clergy can enable local parishes to embrace the multiple lived realities of their own context, and celebrate their distinct internal diversity. By contrast, a focus on insular relationships serves as instruments of cultural reification and ossification that ultimately leads to institutional death.

The Anglican Communion is not defined by a central magisterium but by relationships. Authority is mediated through consultation and recognition, rather than jurisdiction. As Rowan Williams has argued, Anglican identity is shaped by “communion before agreement, a theological stance that privileges relationship even amid difference.”<sup>2</sup> In parish life, this relational model translates into reciprocity. Mission is not unidirectional but mutual: congregations give and receive. Congregants give and receive from each other; congregations and dioceses give and receive from each other;

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2. Rowan Williams, *Anglican Identities* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2003).

dioceses give and receive from other dioceses, dioceses and the adjudicatory give to each other, the adjudicatory feeds and receives from the Anglican Communion. Ephraim Radner describes communion as a “third way” between autonomous congregationalism and rigid centralism.<sup>3</sup> It is fragile, but precisely in its fragility lies its theological witness: that unity must be continually sought, not imposed.

### *Diversity as Gift and Challenge*

Anglicanism thrives in diversity—liturgical, theological, and cultural. Paul Avis notes that Anglican polity institutionalizes diversity within a framework of communion.<sup>4</sup> That expression is a unique embodiment of catholicity. In parish worship, this diversity is made visible. When I served in the Diocese of Newark, my bishop, The Right Reverend Mark Beckwith, acknowledged that very diversity in the way we prayed the Lord’s Prayer. As celebrant, following the great Amen, noting the differences in piety and the diversity of languages of the parishioners, Bishop Beckwith would encourage worshipers to pray the Lord’s Prayer aloud using the “language of their heart.” This beautifully purposeful episcopal invitation enabled the local act of prayer to be woven into liturgy, reminding parishioners that Anglican identity is diverse, reformed, and catholic; using traditional language and contemporary language; global, and not national. That invitational act reminded me that diversity stretches communities, demanding patience, humility, and an openness to learning and being informed across boundaries. Such an act demands moving beyond the framework of insularity to embrace diversity.

### *Reverence for the Institution and Moral Responsibility*

The late patristics scholar Jaroslav Pelikan famously noted that tradition is the living faith of the death, while traditionalism is the dead faith of the living.<sup>5</sup> Anglicanism is fundamentally a covenant across generations. Such a covenant invites local parishes to treat the Anglican Communion’s institutions not as dispensable but as vessels of memory and wisdom. As vessels of memory and wisdom, parishes focus on the very act of worship—the transcendence of the individual ego in communion with others while preserving the self—with a reverence that is not rigid traditionalism but humility before the Spirit’s work across time. The fundamental embodiment of the boundary-crossing at the parish level is when we live into Jesus’ prayer that “they may all be one, so that the world may believe” (John 17:21) by engaging the mutually reinforcing structures of the local and the global through the opening ourselves to the embrace of global diversity. In an era when the United States has scaled back

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3. See Ephraim Radner and Philip Turner, *The Fate of Communion: The Agony of Anglicanism and the Future of a Global Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006).

4. Paul Avis, *The Vocation of Anglicanism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

5. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

commitments to global institutions—from climate accords to multilateral diplomacy—Episcopal parishes have a moral responsibility to witness otherwise. Communion life models covenantal interdependence, resisting nationalist insularity. Christian history reminds us that councils—Nicaea, Chalcedon, Constantinople—were interpretive spaces where diversity gathered for discernment. The Anglican Communion’s instruments (Lambeth, Primates’ Meetings, Anglican Consultative Council) continue this pattern.

### *Conclusion*

We live in a time where there is a desire to reframe global relationships from the perspective of the nation state. As a priest in a denomination that celebrates both the global and the local, it is my prayer that the conversations around denominational restructuring and congregational vitality and development also include the call to move beyond the insular. When parishes act as if they are independent franchises, they risk theological and missional impoverishment. It becomes a form of theological solipsism, and the consequence of such solipsism is stagnation. In other words, insularity substitutes local preference and a congregation first attitude that stands in contradiction to the openness of the gospel. Communion connection interrupts this narrowness by re-centering parishes in the wider body.

From my ministry, time and time again I have seen how the Anglican Communion becomes tangible in parish life whether they be in mission partnerships that expand horizons and deepen discipleship; liturgical exchanges that embody unity by actually celebrating that diversity of how those prayers are expressed contextually; pastoral humility is learned in cross-cultural encounters; and institutional reverence helps parishioners see the church not as a possession but as a trust to be stewarded across generations.

The Anglican Communion should matter to Episcopal parishes not as an optional add-on but as a theological and moral necessity. To neglect the Communion is to risk insularity. To embrace it is to enact Christ’s prayer, embodying a catholic witness that “they may all be one.”

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*William O. Gregg*

## Reflections in Response to “The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals: Renewing the Instruments of the Anglican Communion”

### Introduction

“The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals: Renewing the Instruments of the Anglican Communion” explicitly identifies this document as a “beginning” of a conversation, not an “ending.”<sup>1</sup> The proposals are part of a process that has emerged over time, arguably since 1867 and the first Lambeth Conference. In particular, the proposals are part of a conversation that dates from the 1990s publication of the Virginia Report. This current document is part of more recent ongoing conversations and debates about what the Anglican Communion is and how it is to function, precipitated by the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate, issues of human sexuality, and the exegesis, interpretation, and application of Scripture to daily life. The process is consistent with the character and nature of the Anglican tradition as a part of the Body of Christ that understands itself to be called and equipped by God to persevere in running the race set before us in love and service of God’s beloved in the world. The race is still on; we have not yet come to the Kingdom; we press on.

In light of the recent announcement from GAFCON, members of which were instrumental in producing the proposals, the context of the proposals may now have significantly changed. Some of those who have

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1. The Inter-Anglican Standing Committee on Unity, Faith, and Order (IASCUFO), “The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals: Renewing the Instruments of the Anglican Communion.” Advent 2024. §5.

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for nearly twenty years been distancing themselves from the Anglican Communion have now taken a clear and definite decision to leave the Anglican Communion and form what they have named The Global Anglican Communion.

Going forward, we shall have to live with the reality it has created. The dust, however, has not settled from the declaration of the Archbishop of Rwanda on behalf of GAFCON. According to David Paulsen, writing for Episcopal News Service (ENS), as of October 23, 2025 there is little evidence of Anglican leaders in GAFCON signing on to leave the Anglican Communion for the “Global Anglican Communion.”<sup>2</sup> It remains to be seen how significant this development will actually be.

That said, their decision to leave does not remove the questions of needed reform of the structures and processes of the Anglican Communion. Therefore, the proposals remain an important intervention to take seriously as we move forward in the conversations and process of reforms and renewal.

A major question facing the Anglican Communion today that the proposals seek to address is, “Who speaks and acts for the Communion, and how is this to be done?” This is a complex question in a tradition that has always counted it a strength that we are a Communion of autonomous Provinces of many voices. There is no body above the provincial level with the legal, moral, or juridical power and authority to give voice and action on behalf of the Communion as a whole. One cannot say, “The Anglican Communion thinks or holds that...,” for the simple reason that there is no Anglican Communion magisterium. There are no processes and structures for making binding decisions for doctrine, discipline, or worship for the Communion as a whole, including the four “Instruments of Communion.”<sup>3</sup> The authority of the instruments is moral suasion, encouragement, and suggestion. As important as this authority is, it is not binding.

Yet, these instruments can and do reflect and speak the range of thinking within the Communion at any particular time from the perspective(s) of the instrument speaking. The unity of the Communion as it speaks or acts through its instruments is not necessarily univocal as to the specific

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2. David Paulsen, “Little evidence that so far that Anglican leaders plan to join GAFCON in leaving Anglican Communion,” *Episcopal News Service*, October 23, 2025; <https://www.episcopalnewsservice.org/2025/10/23/little-evidence-so-far-that-anglican-leaders-plan-to-join-gafcon-in-leaving-anglican-communion/>, accessed October 24, 2025.

3. These four bodies are: the Archbishop of Canterbury, The Anglican Consultative Council, the Primates’ Meeting, and the occasional Lambeth Conference of Bishops.

ways it sees the Communion going forward, though at the core of these perspectives is a deep consensus around the essentials of the faith and the Communion.<sup>4</sup> The essentials are articulated in Scripture, the Creeds, sacraments and the Book of Common Prayer in its varied editions and languages. The essentials are secondarily expressed in documents such as The Chicago–Lambeth Quadrilateral,<sup>5</sup> and the five marks of mission.<sup>6</sup>

A second urgent question which the authors of the proposals seek to address is the even more basic question, “What is the Anglican Communion and how is it to function in the present day?” The context of the question is a recent history of negativity and deficit thinking, as evidenced in each of the sections of Chapter III in the proposals that speak to “divisions” but do not focus greatly on relationships or activities that are going well as positive, creative, and constructive dimensions, dynamics, and resources for the Anglican Communion.<sup>7</sup> This negative approach largely results in proposals that seek to apply technical fixes to adaptive challenges, and so, remain at a level of concepts and interpretations of our history, structures, and processes often with a string of biblical quotations woven into the fabric. These technical fixes do not address the profound underlying theological and practical issues that are at the root of dysfunction and anxiety in the Communion. This error is one of both content and method that focuses on changes in the structures and processes of the Communion that address power and authority to be vested in the Primates at the expense of the other three Instruments of Communion—to say nothing of the Provinces of the Communion.

The document starts in the wrong place (structural and procedural technical fixes) and fails to ask the right questions of theology in general, and ecclesiology specifically.<sup>8</sup> The document does not adequately address issues of the appropriate structures and processes relative to a Body of Christ ecclesiology and in relation to the real challenges and conflicts

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4. See §§25-30.

5. Book of Common Prayer (1979), 876f.

6. <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx>

7. There is a section in each of three of the subsections of Chapter III devoted to “Anglican divisions.” The fundamental approach of the proposals is from the perspectives of what is broken or not working. This is an unfortunate weakness that eventually shapes the proposals for reform and renewal more out of systemic anxiety and reactivity building on the good, the creative, and the common faith and work done throughout the Communion.

8. See the thoughtful response of Bishop C. Andrew Doyle, *supra*. Bishop Doyle’s application of a Family Systems framework is helpful in clarifying the issues, dynamics, and possible ways forward.

within the Communion that are both biblically<sup>9</sup> and theologically sound. Its solutions, therefore, are problematic and inadequate theologically, organizationally/systemically, and practically.

That said, I am not arguing that the proposals offer nothing positive. On the contrary, they should evoke throughout the Communion vigorous and, hopefully, fruitful conversations and debates. That is important and helpful. For example, the language and concepts of Chapter III often offer some positive understandings with potential for addressing the fundamental theological issues at stake, such as “How do we, with God’s help, make this part of the Body of Christ most healthy, faithful, and effective?” There is little direct connection between the concepts and the language of collaboration, unity, or constructive work which are the basis for the adaptive challenges the Communion faces.

### **An Ecclesiological Starting Point**

This essay argues that a fruitful starting point for addressing the questions raised by the proposals for the Anglican Communion is an ecclesiology grounded in Saint Paul’s image of the Body of Christ found in 1 Corinthians 12:12–31.<sup>10</sup> On this biblical foundation, I shall argue that the structures and processes of conciliarism are the most reasonable and practical to be engaged by the Communion to build forward into the future with a capacity to function effectively and to speak and act as a Communion to the world and within itself.

Historically, the default mode for discernment and decision-making in the Anglican tradition has been exercised through representative councils—*e.g.*, vestry, diocesan convention or synod, and General Convention, or General/National Synod, Provincial Synods, and (more recently), the

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9. It must be said that the document is quite adequately biblically grounded. The flaw of method is that strings of biblical citations are substituted for theology. There is theology in the proposals, but it is mostly implicit, assuming that a biblical citation suffices. This “proof texting” reflects a poor methodology. See §§25-26, p. 16.

10. See also Romans 12:4–21) and Ephesians 4.4-7, 11-15. We do well to read the preceding verses of 1 Corinthians 12. Here, Paul sets up the Body of Christ ecclesiology as directly flowing from his understanding of the work of the Spirit and the gifts God gives to God’s people. There is a correlation between the varieties of gifts and the multiple parts of the Body, each of which is gifted according to God’s will through the Spirit. Hope is the generative, creative, fruitful way of being in the world that sees the world, as Karl Rahner observed, as an already, everywhere engraced reality where we expect to find God’s presence and activity. It is being and doing love as service in the Name of Jesus that the person most fully realizes the *imago Dei* at the core of human being. .

four so-called Instruments of Communion. The process has been conciliarist by providing seat, voice, and vote for bishops, priests, deacons, and lay persons, though there are specific responsibilities, powers, and authority reserved to a particular order or structure of polity. What has consistently and intentionally not been a part of our discernment, decision-making processes, and structures is a clear locus of power and authority at the top which can speak or act “for the Anglican Communion.” Who will lead and how? Who will participate in leadership and how?

The argument of this paper will be that the Body of Christ model offers a biblical structure and basis for an ecclesiology that provides for both a clear head and parts of the body that have clear and distinct roles and functions for the good of the whole body, as we seek to love and serve the Lord within the particularities of the contexts of each Province of the Communion. Defined in these terms, there are clear boundaries and connections that protect the Communion from self-destruction, creating a viable and sustainable understanding of right relationships, collaboration, and constructive, creative, and generative ministries in love and service of the triune God.

### Conciliarism

Within the structures of the Pauline Body of Christ model of the church, the structures and processes of conciliarism present us with a viable and sustainable way of living together precisely as distinct parts of the one Body, whose Head is Christ, held in communion with God and one another by the Holy Spirit. Historically, conciliarism was a reform movement of the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries within the development of the role and function of the papacy. At its core, the issue was power: who had it, who wanted it, how it was used, and how it would be regulated.<sup>11</sup>

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11. While asserted and affirmed at the councils of Constance and Basel, conciliarism was formally condemned by Lateran Council V (1512–17) and again at Vatican Council I in 1870. In more recent times since Vatican II, the concept and practice of conciliarism has re-emerged in the concepts of “synodality” and “subsidiarity.” The process and spirit of Vatican II certainly picked up on the conciliarist idea as especially reflected in *Lumen gentium*, *Gaudium et spes*, and *Apostolicum actuositatem*. The broadening vision of church and engaging with other part of Christ’s Body is found in *Unitatis red-integratio* and *Nostra aetate*. The Conciliarist process and its implications in the Roman church are clearly seen in the recent synod of the bishops from the Roman Catholic Church in the Amazon and developments in Germany. While membership in the councils of the Church of Rome have remained limited to bishops, under Pope Francis the presence and participation of lay persons, especially as consultants, has been significant and the invitation to lay observers and presenters has substantially broadened the voices, male and female, in synods and various other meetings. However, who is officially a member of

The conciliarists argued for shared leadership and decision-making power which defined the balance of power between an ecumenical council (all bishops of the [Roman] church gathered) and the bishop of Rome. The Council of Constance decreed that ultimately decisions for or about the whole church had to be made by a legitimate council called by legitimate authority and representative of the church.<sup>12</sup> The decisions of such a council would take precedence over all other structures and procedures of governance and decision-making, including the bishop of Rome.<sup>13</sup>

The processes of conciliarism, already inhere in the Anglican understanding of church and its mode of operation, is the particular gift of this late medieval movement to us today. And yet, the proposals do not offer a “balance of power”. Rather, power is explicitly located in the Primate’s Meeting in such a way as to reduce the balance of power among the other Instruments of Communion, e.g., the election structure and process for the ACC of its own Presiding Officer is given to the Primate. The Archbishop of Canterbury becomes a sort of pastoral figurehead, who may exercise moral suasion and give advice and would have seat and voice in the ACC’s deliberations, but no vote.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, there is no structural provision at the Communion level for what the medieval conciliarists understood as an “ecumenical council. Nor is there provision in our structures and pro-

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councils and how they participate remains a striking difference between conciliarism in the Roman church and the Anglican church. See Joseph W. Tobin, “The Long Game: Pope Francis’s Vision of Synodality,” *Commonweal* (July 1, 2021), and Massimo Faggioli, “Synodality? What’s Synodality?” *Commonweal* (June 15, 2021). See also, the Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, “Synodality and Primacy in the second Millennium and Today,” (Rome: Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, 2023) accessed at <https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-orientale/chiese-ortodosse-di-tradizione-bizantina/commissione-mista-internazionale-per-il-dialogo-teologico-tra-la/documenti-di-dialogo/document-d-alexandrie---synodalite-et-pri-maute-au-deuxieme-mille.html>

12. See documents of the Council of Constance (1414–18) and the Council of Basel (1431), especially *Haec Sancta Synodus* (April 6, 1415), which is a controverted decree not recognized by the magisterium based on technical and canonical grounds. That said, it remains the textual origin of conciliarism.

13. At least within The Episcopal Church, it is noteworthy that this argument is reflected in our polity through the subordination of the whole church to the General Convention. In this limited sense, it is General Convention that speaks and acts for the whole of The Episcopal Church as the legitimately convened council constituted with the authority and power so to speak and act, but only in certain areas of the church’s life.

14. See the proposals at §79, §86, and (especially) §93.

cesses for a figure who has the authority and power to call such a council.<sup>15</sup> So the question is whether there is any existing body or Instrument of Communion that could serve as an “ecumenical council” to gather the Communion, and be given the authority and power to speak and act for the Communion?

The structure and purpose of councils, at one level, is about governance and therefore about the exercise of power—as before, who has it, who wants it, who uses it, and for what purposes. In the church, governance and power are properly tools for the good order of the church precisely to create, enhance, and sustain its faithful life and work in the world that God is giving it. The issue in the exercise of governance and power always involves, as it did historically, crafting a lively balance among interests, needs, wants, hopes, and dreams among participants that implement, promote, and sustain the purposes of the church: to proclaim the Gospel embodied in its head, Jesus the Christ, to sustain the sacramental and spiritual life of God’s people, and to love and to serve God’s beloved through its ministries.

For the church, governance is also always about balancing structures and processes, order and flexibility, faithfulness and discernment, with openness to the Spirit to preserve/conservate and to change/grow. Conciliarism is a participatory process of the whole church (clergy and laity) to discern God’s call or will and to make decisions about the life and work of the church in that context. Critical to an effective conciliar process and structure is for each part of the whole to be clear about their internal purpose and role and in relation to the whole. Without this clarity of purpose and role, the Communion would (continue to) suffer from confusion as a matter of process and of structure/organization. The Body becomes dysfunctional; relationships deteriorate within and among the constituent parts. Within the structures and processes of conciliarism, the deeper question to address is what ecclesiology might serve as the most effective, creative, and fruitful theological foundation for our self-understanding and actions (ministries) in our time?

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15. Nonetheless, since the first Lambeth Conference in 1867, it has been the prerogative of the Archbishop of Canterbury to invite the bishops of the Communion to gather, roughly every ten years. It is interesting to note that each of the “Anglican Congresses” between 1908 and 1971 were called and planned by different individuals and or bodies on an essentially ad hoc basis, according to the focus of the particular Congress. The ACC did not exist until 1968 and first met in 1971.

## Councils and conciliarism in the Anglican Context:

### An example

In the late nineteenth century, with the emergence of interest in other churches and world religions, the bishops of The Episcopal Church asked the question, “What do we need to see in order to affirm that another body is church?” The Quadrilateral that emerged from this, over time, has become an ecclesiological statement within Anglicanism that identifies four marks of the church.<sup>16</sup>

The adoption of the Quadrilateral, both in 1886 (the House of Bishops of The Episcopal Church) and 1888 (at the Lambeth Conference of that year), is an example of a conciliar process. After due deliberation and prayer, the bishops discerned God’s will and declared the truth that they discerned. A Lambeth Conference, however, is not representative of the whole (Anglican) church. The Quadrilateral does express what the bishops at that conference thought at that time. It is neither binding nor a magisterial teaching. We may, nonetheless, say that the Quadrilateral has been “received” over time by Anglicans throughout the world, and exerts informal authority as a common ecclesiological understanding within this part of the Body of Christ.<sup>17</sup>

Anglican thinking and acting is generally expressed through the legislative processes of councils in vestries, diocesan synods/conventions, and national and provincial assemblies, and non-binding resolutions from the ACC or Lambeth Conference. As we have seen in recent years, what we do is muddle along with an occasional “congress”<sup>18</sup> and Lambeth Conference every ten years or so, or the Primates’ Meetings and the triennial meetings

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16. The church, in the Anglican view, is where we find affirmation that: (1) Holy Scripture contains all things necessary for salvation and “rule and ultimate standard of faith.” (2) The Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds are the sufficient statements of the faith. (3) The two dominical sacraments, Baptism and Eucharist, are administered with Christ’s words of institution and the proper elements. (4) the Historic Episcopate, locally adapted. See J. Robert Wright, Ed. *Quadrilateral at One Hundred*, ed. J. Robert Wright (London: Mowbrays, 1988). These are not the same thing as the five marks of mission that address the fruits of living as a body that possesses the four dimensions of the Quadrilateral.

17. Reception is a technical term common in the Orthodox tradition. Matters of belief, faith, and doctrine are discerned and proclaimed in Synod by the Bishops and conveyed to the church to be received through a process of study, examination, debate, prayer, and discernment out of which ultimately emerges a consensus within the church about a particular doctrine, belief, practice, or person as a saint.

18. Interestingly, some talk of calling a congress emerged at Lambeth Conference 2022, as reported by Episcopal News Service on August 1, 2022.

of the Anglican Consultative Council and committees, task forces, and other organizations. The Communion is held together by what has come to be called “bonds of affection” and recognition as a member of the Communion by the ACC schedule of members and the status of being “in communion with the See of Canterbury,” all of which works until it does not work. It especially does not work when there is conflict or disagreement. There is no agreed upon structure or process to engage together as the Anglican Communion in constructive, creative, and generative ways to navigate through (serious) conflict in theology, articles of faith, discipline, liturgy, authority, or power. We find, therefore, that the Anglican Communion in recent years has turned in on itself with emotional reactivity that has only produced deeper division, ill-will, anger, and destruction among us.<sup>19</sup>

### The Body of Christ

I submit that at this time in the Anglican Communion, we would be well-served by engaging and developing Paul’s Body of Christ ecclesiology in this process of reforming definitions, structures, and processes. The Opening Sentences of the Liturgy of Baptism give us a biblical and theological affirmation and grounding in the essential unity of the church whose Head is Jesus Christ: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”<sup>20</sup> In Paul’s metaphor we find an understanding of church that is well suited to the processes and structures of conciliarism and the Anglican tradition as well as the needs of the Communion in response to God’s call to us in our particular contexts. Precisely as a body of many, diverse parts, we can engage governance, power, and discernment in our decision-making to implement faithfully our love and service of God in the world.<sup>21</sup> This theological conviction is the essential nature (*esse*) of the church as understood, experienced, and practiced in the Anglican Communion as one part of the Body of Christ, the church catholic. This one Body is composed of the many bound together sacramentally through Baptism, sustained by the Eucharist, and living in unity in Christ through the work of the Spirit.<sup>22</sup> We can see the diversity of the church in many forms, *e.g.*, in the various denominations, politics, ministries, and the differentiation

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19. See Doyle, *supra*.

20. Book of Common Prayer (1979), 299. See Ephesians 4.4-6.

21. See William O. Gregg, “What is Ecclesiology?” *Sewanee Theological Review* 61(2) (Easter 2018), 378–90.

22. See Resolution 9 of the 1930 Lambeth Conference (“Reunion of Christendom”), available online.

of holy orders and the laity as well as in the Anglican Communion.<sup>23</sup> This ecclesial diversity-in-unity reflects the diversity-in-unity of God's *esse*, revealed as Trinity.<sup>24</sup>

We also see the diversity-in-unity of the Body of Christ in the wide range of expressions and contexts within the Communion wherein the church participates in the mission of God. The particularity of the parts of the Body and their functions are not separate but distinct, always connected in the Spirit, and always necessary to the good of the whole Body. No one part can say to another, "I have no need of you."<sup>25</sup> This differentiation of the parts and functions are the condition of possibility for the church to proclaim the Gospel and participate in God's mission in love and service to the Lord.<sup>26</sup> No one part has everything that is necessary for God's redemptive work in the world. It is the Spirit who holds together the diversity-in-unity of the Body and empowers the church to live the life and do the work God gives it to do. The diversity-in-unity of the church opens for us creative, generative, and constructive ways for the Anglican Communion to build forward into the future.

The Pauline model that defines our ecclesial *esse* as one unified body of many parts provides a basis for effective and faithful engagement among us to define and authorize who may speak and act for the Anglican Communion and in what ways. There are, on this basis, at least three fundamental aspects to this conciliar process that may be identified:

1. We would be held together theologically by an ecclesiology of the Body of Christ as constituted through Baptism into Christ, fed through the Eucharist, and enlivened by the Holy Spirit, and of which, all the parts are necessary;

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23. This is consistent, I think, with the intent of Chapter III of the proposals.

24. It is important not to over-simplify diversity-in-unity. The concept of diversity-in-unity is historically and theologically a complex matter, often impacted by many aspects of context beyond an idea of structure. One might approach this concept in terms of systems; see, for example, Edwin Friedman, Murray Bowen, Michael Kerr on Family Systems theory.

25. I Corinthians 12.14-22.

26. On the Anglican understanding of participation in God, see Richard Hooker, *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* V.50, 56-57 (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), 207-09, 234-48; and A. M. Allchin, *Participation in God: A Forgotten Strand of Anglican Tradition*, (Wilton, Conn.: Morehouse-Barlow, 1988).

2. We would be held together sacramentally<sup>27</sup> by Baptism which makes us one and raises us into the new life of grace and the Eucharist that sustains us in our baptismal life;<sup>28</sup> and,
3. We would be held together politically by the commitment to participate in a conciliar process and structures as the Body in obedience to Christ our Head. What opens before us are the possibilities revealed in the intersection of Paul's understanding of the church as the Body of Christ, his understanding of the sacraments and the role they play in defining who we are and what we do, and giving us a biblical and theological grounding for our identity as a part of the Body of Christ in its catholic sense, as well as a basis for our mutual commitment as church to the Father through the Son in the Spirit expressed most clearly in the constituent parts of the Communion and as these parts meet in council and through our mutual accountability and responsibility manifested in stability, in the Benedictine sense.

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27. It is important for us to be mindful of the sacramentality of the church both as the People of God and as an institution. The Anglican Communion is an extended form of Christ's Body, the church, which is the primary sacrament of Christ in the world and through which Christ through the Spirit gives the sacraments to God's people. A Body of Christ ecclesiology and conciliarist structures and processes participate in the sacramentality of the created order and are the fruit of the sacrament of initiation (Baptism and Chrismation) and sustained by the Eucharist. Hence, the people of God who are the Body of Christ (the church) realize their identity in the sacramentality of the created order in general and specifically their identity born of baptism and sustained by Christ in the Spirit through the Eucharist. Our human, sacramentality is manifested at the core of our being precisely as *imago Dei*. Because we constitute the church in its Anglican form, together with the various manifestations of the Anglican churches, they, too, manifest their sacramentality through the structures and processes of the Anglican Communion. Hence, how we create, develop, and sustain ourselves and the Body of Christ in its diversity-in-unity is a sacramental reality the purpose of which is to be instruments of God's self-gift in love (grace), and all that that entails. When we receive the Eucharist, it is, then, as Augustine of Hippo said, "Be what you can see. Receive what you are." (Sermon 272)

28. See Book of Common Prayer (1979), 304ff. and 308, especially the collect after baptism. The vows of baptism vary throughout the Anglican Communion. The primary frame of reference here is the 1979 Book of Common Prayer of The Episcopal Church. The pattern of baptismal vows is similar. There is an affirmation of belief, often using the ancient Baptismal Symbolon (Apostles' Creed); a commitment to the life of the church; commitment to "repent and seek the Lord's forgiveness" when we sin; and to live a life in service of God's beloved, with God's help.

Even as comprehensive as this biblical, theological, structural, and procedural model is, the model will not and cannot simply resolve all tensions, differences, and conflicts, or speak or act in an absolute, infallible manner. What the Anglican Communion is and can be through this organizational structure and its processes of engagement is an effective, faithful part of the Body of Christ. We can be such a body as we engage a process of collaborative work among the parts of the Body of Christ that engages the differences and tensions as well as commonalities among us to build forward the life and work of the church. For this work, each part of the Body needs not only to be clearly aware of itself and its particular functions, but also of its connections within the whole system and how its particular function(s) contribute(s) to the life and work of the whole Body. Additionally, each part must be aware of and responsive to how the other parts of the body contribute to its life and work.<sup>29</sup>

Councils and conciliarism can create the structures and processes for the church system to function in such a way that each part of the Body has the best, most effective opportunity to offer and to actualize effectively its possibilities, gifts, and strengths for the life and work of the whole church and experiences itself most clearly as a holy diversity-in-unity. What is clear, in terms of Scripture, ecclesiology, and actual experience is that the church cannot be the church at any level or in any manner other than as a Body of many parts. Again, as Paul makes clear, no part can say to another, “you are not needed.”<sup>30</sup>

However, the Communion cannot fulfill its ministries if meeting in council occurs only in each particular part (ACC, Primates’ Meeting, Lambeth Conference, *etc.*), or without including the various working groups such as our ecumenical dialogues, in the conciliar process. Here we see a need to examine very carefully what the extent of participation in a conciliar process might or ought to look like for the Communion. Do we need to

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29. For a developed theology of the interrelationships among the parts of the body, see, for example, John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 1985); and *Communion and Otherness* (London: T&T Clark, 2006).

30. 1 Corinthians 12.20–21. The biblical teaching of Paul to the Corinthians is that the ecclesiology of the Body of Christ is God-given and that theologically, the unity of the Body is the work of the Spirit. This theological posture stands over against the notions of “degrees of communion,” “impaired communion,” and “highest degree of communion possible,” the language that animates much of chapter III of the proposals. The ecclesiology and biblical foundation that defines church in this model certainly does not allow for the refusal to participate in the Eucharist, or to refuse communion, or even to decline to attend, for example, a Primates’ Meeting or Lambeth Conference because theological, moral, or biblical disagreement.

create a conciliar event that goes broader and deeper into the life and work of the Communion and include, for example, representatives of the areas of work and ministries that are housed in the Anglican Communion Office? What is the role of the Anglican Communion Office and the Secretary General to the structures and processes of the Communion? How and when might they be incorporated? Ought we to have specific, regular conciliar gatherings that include a broader constituency than the regular gatherings of the Instruments of Communion? How often might these occur?

We need always to act and keep our focus on the fact that the head of the church is Jesus the Christ. Therefore, the while existing structures and Offices (Archbishop of Canterbury, primates, ACC, etc.) have legitimacy, they are subject to the head and are not the head. Yet, there is a clear and necessary need for a head of our church who, subordinate to Jesus the Christ, provides leadership that facilitates our participation in the *missio Dei* by the Communion and its constituent members. This leadership of facilitation to create and maintain clear definitions of the parts of the Communion must include the active participation of the whole the Communion: the Instruments of Communion, Provinces, dioceses, and parishes/missions; ordained and lay persons. The work of defining, reviewing, and mutual responsibility/accountability of each part within itself and to the other constituent parts of the body to maintain focus, effective ministry, and relationships of commitment to the Body of Christ and one another, transparency, and mutual responsibility in our life and work is essential. The Archbishop of Canterbury and primates as chief pastors have a special responsibility to facilitate and oversee these ongoing processes and to engage with all leadership for regular reviews for affirmation, continuation, modification, deletion of ministries, and creation of new efforts responding to new needs to which God calls us.

Yet, we must be clear, that episcopal oversight exists and is exercised only and always in the context of the whole Body of Christ. The operative terms here must be oversight that “facilitates,” and “collaborates” with the other leadership agents, *e.g.*, the officers and Standing Committee of the ACC (that importantly includes laity from across the Communion), the Anglican Communion Office, other agencies, committees, ecumenical dialogues, etc., and to review and evaluate their relation with one another through conciliar gatherings that have clear purpose to promote collaboration, co-operation, respect, and diversity-in-unity that best articulates and embodies the Anglican tradition and its expressions in the ministries of the Communion as a whole and its constituent Provinces, dioceses, and parishes. This review process would need to be scheduled for a regular pattern of occurrence, *e.g.*, every three years, and reporting across the Instruments of Communion and the Communion as a whole.

These reviews and evaluations can also be the means through which each constituent part of the Communion gives an account of what it has done over the review period, what it is doing, and what it plans to do. Hence, the Parts of the Body give an account of themselves internally and to the rest of the Communion. The Anglican Communion Office could be a proper resource for gathering and distributing the reviews. These reviews can also be a resource for the planning and implementation of the ministries of each part and of the whole, going forward to build and sustain a healthy, faithful, and effective Anglican Communion.

### **The Challenge Before Us at this Time**

To argue that it is important to keep in conversation and walk together as closely as possible in what is styled by some as “the highest degree of communion possible,” is all moot, indeed useless, if we do not gather. Once asked the question, “What keeps Anglicans together?,” Desmond Tutu responded, “We meet.” Meeting is the condition of possibility for us to grow spiritually and intellectually as well as in understanding and appreciation of our God-given diversity, and the particularity of our cultural, social, economic, political, religious contexts. Our meeting is grounded in the deeper theological and spiritual foundations of word and sacrament, creed, episcopal polity, and common prayer. The difficulty is that from very early on, the problems and issues have not so much focused on the foundational documents and claims, but too often become mired in rigid thinking, expression, and application that, as noted above, is anything but helpful to the wholeness, life, and ministries of the church.

Yet, I am not without hope. Institutions grow and change slowly with what is often an excruciating process of fits and starts, painful failures, and glorious successes. Jesus never promised that being part of his Body would be easy, nor is conciliarism a quick and easy process. Jesus did show us that we can be the one Body of Christ and that he will travel all of the journey with us, in us, and through us.

I would argue that the Anglican Communion portion of Christ’s Body already has, at least in some form, the parts it needs to be who God has created us to be: the of Archbishop of Canterbury, the Primates’ Meeting, the Anglican Consultative Council the Lambeth Conference, and the Provinces of the Anglican Communion (Provincial Synods, Provincial Houses of Bishops). At the Provincial level, there are the dioceses within each Province (bishops, diocesan conventions/councils/synods, parishes and missions), and the clergy, lay persons, vestries, and annual meetings). These structures are recognized in the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals.

Each of these components are the organizational structures of this part of Christ’s Body, the Anglican Communion, through which this part of

the Body of Christ lives through conciliar structures and processes. Each part, as Paul’s Body of Christ ecclesiology makes clear, has substantive work, influence, and capacities within the Anglican tradition in our day. At the Communion level, the ACC comes most nearly to being a “general council” of the Anglican Communion. The ACC is inclusive of all three holy orders and the laity, from all regions / provinces of the Communion, and most clearly functions in a broadly representative conciliar model.<sup>31</sup> It is possible to see the ACC, an existing, formal, and permanent body, as the logical heir to the occasional gatherings of the Communion in what have been called an “Anglican Congress” and in relation to the other Instruments of Communion. Indeed, facilitating these sorts of gatherings is explicitly a part of the remit of the ACC.<sup>32</sup>

31. “The role of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) is to facilitate the co-operative work of the churches of the Anglican Communion, exchange information between the provinces and churches, and help to co-ordinate common action. It advises on the organization and structures of the Communion, and seeks to develop common policies with respect to the world mission of the church, including ecumenical matters.

“The ACC can be seen as the most representative body of gathered Anglicans among the Instruments of Communion. It includes members of the laity, archbishops, bishops, priests, and deacons. Provinces send two or three representatives and select them in different ways. For the first time, at ACC-17, there will also be two youth delegates from each of the five regions.”

From the Anglican Communion Website, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/structures/instruments-of-communion/acc.aspx>, Anglican Consultative Council page, September 24, 2019.

32. There have only been four Anglican Congresses: 1907, 1954, 1963, and 1971. The first was focused on, “The Call of God and the Mission of the Anglican Communion”. The congress of 1963 adopted the theme, “Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence,” as the framework for how the Provinces would work together in common mission. The first four congresses were preceded by extensive Communion-wide participation so that when the delegates gathered, there was a broad and deep knowledge of or sense of the “mind of the Communion” on the matters before the congress. This sense of the Communion shaped the work of each Congress. The so-called St. Louis Congress of 1977 was a reactive event against the decisions of the Anglican Church of Canada and The Episcopal Church to ordain women deacons and priests. Rather than creating constructive ways forward and unity, it was destructive, judgmental, and divisive of the life and work of the Communion. The congresses would appear to be the occasional gatherings for the purpose of discussion, unity, strengthening mission and ministry, and forging by consensus the voluntary agreement among the Provinces of ways to work together throughout the Communion. Like all Communion structures, these gatherings have never had—nor were they intended to have—jurisdiction or binding legislative power for the whole Communion.

The Anglican Congresses held in 1908, 1954, 1963, and 1971 each produced a consensus at that time around the issues addressed, as demonstrated in their documents. It would be reasonable and useful for the Anglican Communion to look carefully at what worked to create these consensus in terms of their potential for the development and implementation of an explicit Body of Christ ecclesiology for the Anglican Communion using council structures and conciliar processes. The relational focus, especially manifested in the concept of “mutual responsibility and interdependence” (Toronto, 1963) is of major importance for developing the current structures and processes that enhance and sustain a healthy Anglican Communion.

The basic challenge to the Anglican Communion in terms of conciliarism and councils continues to be that at the “top.” As noted above, there is no working process or structure with the necessary power and jurisdiction to speak or to make binding decisions for the Communion. Nor is there any instrument authorized to convoke a general or “ecumenical” council of the Anglican Communion, as illustrated in the seemingly ad hoc convening and organizing of the pre-ACC congresses. Yet, the parts of the Body of Christ within the Anglican Communion can and do engage in conciliar processes for discernment, decision-making, and implementation of the life and work of the church at Provincial, diocesan, and parish levels. We know how to use these structures and processes already inherent in who we are and how we function. Moreover, there are many wonderful, creative, effective, and life-giving ministries done collaboratively across the Communion. We need, I think, to look closely at these and thoughtfully examine and make use of what has made these collaborative ministries work from the perspectives of a Body of Christ ecclesiology and conciliar structures and processes. How can we build on these effective works of love and service for the good of the whole Communion? Our church needs conciliar processes and structures *at the Communion level* for the Anglican Communion to function effectively.

Relegating these responsibilities to the primates is a solution much too narrow. It is merely a technical fix that avoids discerning and implementing the adaptive changes and theological grounding required for us to move forward in faithful, creative, generative, and effective ways. Moreover, shifting power, authority, and responsibility to the primates does not resolve the real and present risk of division and power struggles that obstruct the Communion from properly participating in the *missio Dei* as a Communion. This dysfunction also diminishes the participation of God’s people in the other parts of the Body of Christ at the Provincial, regional, diocesan, and parish/mission levels. The necessary work of broadening and deepening participation and balancing the exercise of power and authority can be done well in the context of a Body of Christ ecclesiology

that structures its processes through councils representative of the broad range of the people of the Anglican Communion.

At present, we find ourselves in a situation where each autonomous Province acts more or less independently (autonomously) of the other Provinces.<sup>33</sup> The Communion is fraught with the intended and unintended consequences of this autonomy. Decisions are made based on the contexts, choices, interpretations, and histories that are bound by the particularities of a specific part of the Body without a proper sense and engagement of the Communion as a whole. The ability to maintain unity in the context of diversity has been undermined by the multi-layered myopia and emotional reactivity within the systems of each Province and across the Communion. The conciliar activity that created the idea of mutual responsibility and interdependence of the Canterbury Project has been completely lost, at least in part, by the absence of clearly defined and theologically grounded authority, power, and jurisdiction that are recognized and accepted by the Communion as a whole.<sup>34</sup>

The Anglican Communion seems to be unable to see itself as nor to know how to function as a whole body of inextricably interconnected parts of which Christ is the Head. What is essential, therefore, is to recover the Pauline understanding and practice of church as the one Body of Christ into which we enter through Baptism. A fundamental part of the *esse* of the Body of Christ is diversity-in-unity held together in the Spirit, just as is the *esse* of God is diversity-in-unity. The foundation for being the Body of Christ is articulated in the various expressions of the marks of the church: The four essential dimensions of the church in the Chicago–Lambeth Quadrilateral (Scripture, Creeds, dominical sacraments, and the historic episcopate locally adapted), the four marks of the church found in the

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33. Sadly, we see this particularly in the dissolution of the principles and commitments made by the Anglican Congress of 1963 in “Project Canterbury: Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ” (MRI). In part, this was a response to the decisions of both The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church of Canada to ordain women to all Holy Orders. The further collapse of MRI has been experienced subsequently in the controversies about sexuality and especially the roles and functions of the LGBTQ+ persons among God’s beloved in both church and society. Let me be clear: there are not, I think, any innocents here. That is, fuel has been thrown on the fire from all quarters inadvertently and intentionally.

34. The point in the context of this discussion is that the theologies, ideas, and commitments of the Anglican Communion in 1963 and affirmed at Lambeth Conference 1968 have for the most part vanished. The Achilles heel of the Communion as a voluntary association of autonomous Provinces is precisely in its voluntary nature. The fruits of effectively rejecting the commitments of MRI are clearly to be seen throughout the Communion.

Creed (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic), the vows we make at baptism (to believe, to participate in the life of the church, to repent and return to God when we sin and seek God's reconciliation, to live a life that proclaims the Gospel, to seek and serve Christ in all people, to love our neighbor as ourself, to strive for peace and justice, and to respect the dignity of every human being), and the five marks of mission (to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom, to teach, baptize, and nurture new believers, to respond to human need by loving service, to seek to transform unjust structures of society, and to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth). Each part of the Body of Christ in The Communion is about the same work (*missio Dei*) in many different ways in its own particular contexts. Yet, we are one body in Christ in whom our diversity-in-unity is grounded and sustained by the Father through the Son in the Spirit.<sup>35</sup> It is the proper role, function, and first priority, of the conciliar structures and processes of our catholic polity *at every level* to facilitate the implementation of this reality as the way of life for all of us.

### **How might the Anglican Communion, as a Whole, Act and Speak?**

There are, I think, two fundamental levels to the matter of who speaks and acts for the Anglican Communion from the perspective of a Body of Christ ecclesiology. One level is that of structures; the other is that of process. However, to move forward constructively, with God's help, we Anglicans need also to re-examine and evaluate our fundamental understanding of the church, the Communion, and our current configuration, as is argued in the proposals.<sup>36</sup> We need to examine and evaluate how our current structures support and sustain creative, generative, and faithful

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35. Book of Common Prayer (1979), 299, and Ephesians 4.4–6.

36. There seems, according to press reports from Lambeth Conference 2022, little energy or interest in this piece of the needed work among the bishops present. This is unfortunate, especially if, as I would argue, the way forward is not about technical fixes to the Communion—tweaking and adjusting bit and pieces of structure or processes that leaves us essentially where we are. What is needed is serious, adaptive change that requires deep prayer, thought, examination of structures and processes, imagination, creativity, and risk. See, for example, Ronald Heifitz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998); Heifitz, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Business Press, 2009); Ronald Heifitz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Business Press, 2017). However, it does seem that the tone and process of Lambeth Conference 2022 has become remarkably conciliarist as bishops have shown a remarkable and hopeful willingness for conversation, listening, and respecting one another across differences. Fortunately, however, ACC-18 was not only interested, but took positive action that culminated in the proposals, for which we may be rightfully thankful.

life and work in love and service to God throughout the world. Looking at the encyclical from Lambeth Conference 1930 (among other Lambeth Conference documents) and other documents such as *The Virginia Report* (1999), *The Windsor Report* (2004), *The Anglican Covenant* (2009) and now the proposals (2024), now is the *καιρός* for bringing our conversations to fruitful, concrete review, reform, renewal, and reconciliation in anticipation of completing this work for now. Nothing less is adequate or appropriate.

In this work for Christ in the Spirit, one challenge is to move forward and release ourselves from the dark evils of our past.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, we must also bring forward the very best of our past to be sustained and renewed in the present as we build into the future. For example, we cannot afford to allow ourselves to become stuck in the past of our colonial histories and use our colonial past as an excuse for division or claim for special privilege or allowances or refuse to live out of our heritage as Anglicans because of a perceived vestige of the colonial period. Rather, God is inviting us to be faithful to God and one another in naming, owning, and releasing the real and brutal horror of our colonial histories as a part of the accounts of who we have become, consciously condemning the brutalities of our past and declaring, “Never again!” And equally, we need to give thanks for and celebrate the glorious gifts of God and the good we have done in our historical successes in love and service of God among God’s beloved. This positive and constructive part of our histories has also shaped who we have become and who we are. Now, we need to move forward together, with God’s grace.

The fact is that we are a product of the Church of England, which had no small role in the British Empire.<sup>38</sup> For the Communion, building forward

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37. Let me be clear. I do not mean here a kind of unrealistic and inappropriate “forgive and forget” scenario. It is critically important that we never forget our history. What I mean here is that we can and ought to choose not to allow the past to dominate and control us in the present. Our past is always a real and powerful part of our present. Our past has shaped who we have become and we suppress or forget our past at our peril. We can, and ought to choose to bring forward the best of our past, and realize and choose to leave parts of our past in the past.

38. The Communion in many ways is the ecclesiastical version of the Commonwealth of Nations, a consequence of the Empire as it dissolved. As with the Commonwealth, the long shadow of colonialism has been and is a challenge beyond which the now independent nations have had to work through and move beyond. The Commonwealth of Nations is, as we are, a voluntary network of autonomous, equal partners that work together, honoring and respecting one another to find creative solutions to both common and particular problems and challenges among themselves. At the center of

to new heights and depths has necessarily meant learning and living into a new reality in which colonialism is no longer the overarching power or motive in the relationships. Freeing ourselves as the Communion from the destructiveness of colonialism empowers us both to embrace the entirety of our history as it is, and to grow and to flourish in the present and future.

The second level is to create and utilize effective, faithful processes. Especially here the matters of power and authority come into play. We shall need to learn anew, under the direction of the Spirit, to open ourselves and to seek the grace in the tensions, disagreements, even conflicts among the parts of the Body as well as the creative energy among us to work together in common cause, embracing both as grace-filled opportunities and manifestations of God's mission in, among, and through us as this part of the Body of Christ catholic. At the same time, and with equal commitment, we must, as I said elsewhere, pay close attention to our successes and what is working well. We make a grave error if we think we learn only from errors and conflicts. What we do well and successfully must be mined for what it shows us about our capacity to build forward faithfully, creatively, generatively, and effectively.

This is no mere legislative or institutional process. This opportunity is the process of learning to live and work together because, as previously noted, we are bound to one another in the Spirit through Baptism and sustained by the Eucharist to be one Body in Christ. In the grace-filled tensions, we learn and practice respect for the dignity of every human being. In the grace-filled moments of collaboration we grow in love, appreciation, and respect for our differences and commonalities, and opportunities to live, work, and worship together. This work begins and continues in sustained gathering, in meeting, as Tutu reminded us, and includes the process of learning how each other speaks and articulates in word and action our faith, our lives, our societies, and our cultures in our love and service of God and God's people. We learn how to care more deeply for the hearts and souls of one another in ways that give life. We grow together in Christ as we repent and seek both God's forgiveness and one another's forgiveness. And we must forgive. Again, quoting Desmond Tutu, there is "[n]o future without forgiveness."<sup>39</sup>

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the Commonwealth is the monarch, who, as Queen Elizabeth II once noted about her role as Queen and Head of the Commonwealth, was not to rule, but to reign, to be the effective center and leader who gathers and holds the Commonwealth together. Perhaps this is something of the intention behind §85–§86 of the proposals on the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury that may also be helpfully applied to the others Instruments of Communion.

39. Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: An Image Book, published by Doubleday), 1999.

Conciliarism, in its most vibrant, faithful form and action can provide structures and processes for our work precisely as the Body of Christ<sup>40</sup> through our theological and faith commitments, our liturgical, spiritual, and sacramental life, and in the structures and processes of our polity as they exist. The question here is how best to use what we have by renewing, revising, changing what we have and creating what we do not have, and who we are with conciliar processes in each constitutive component of the Communion. Such a process will empower each Instrument and Province and agency of the Communion both to develop in healthily ways internally as to its identity, roles, and functions; and each Instrument, Province, and agency to become more capable of collaborating faithfully, creatively, generatively, and effectively with the other Instruments.

There are many questions to ask and explore, such as: How is the church and its life and work supported, sustained, and developed in the Anglican Communion now by the structures and processes of councils and conciliarism grounded in Paul's Body of Christ metaphor? How might councils speak and act for the church in the Anglican Communion? How can decisions of Communion bodies (*e.g.*, ACC, the Primates' Meeting, or the Lambeth Conference) be received by the Communion?<sup>41</sup> How are we most

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40. See the proposals at §§ 35-39. While generally positive, this section, "Making room for each other" is undone with the caveat of the misguided, at best, notions of "degree of communion," "highest degree of communion possible," and "walking together at a distance." These concepts are not Gospel, nor are they consistent with a Body of Christ ecclesiology or the practice of conciliarism. These notions are the fruit of anxiety and reactivity that seeks an easy out when there are difficulties, challenges, differences of exegesis, interpretation, and application of Scripture or theological differences. They are intentionally divisive concepts.

41. One might look, for example at the Australian system in which certain specific decisions of the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia must be adopted by each diocese in order to take effect in that diocese. Dioceses have the option to challenge decisions through a canonical court system. See the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia, Ch. V.30(a)(b) (c) and their canons, *e.g.*, Canon 17.6 (2007) regarding Holy Orders; Canon 3.5 (1981) regarding Holy Matrimony; and, *passim*. Something of this model was attempted with the Anglican Covenant. The problem here is the option to "opt out." The strength is that when a diocese may choose to opt out, they have not broken communion or placed themselves outside of the Anglican Church of Australia. The unity of the church is maintained. In this respect, the church in Australia differs from the Communion. Where there is conflict, as for example currently between the Diocese of Sydney and the Diocese of Wangaratta in the matter of a canon permitting the blessing of the civil marriage of a same-sex couple in the Diocese of Wangaratta, they are engaged in a canonical process that includes their commitment to continued communion

faithfully to live our diversity-in-unity in this part of Christ's one Body? Where do we agree? Where and how have we worked together successfully in the past and in the present?

Conciliar processes and structures form a methodology for building forward in the context of a Body of Christ ecclesiology in which power and authority are exercised by consent of the parts of the Body. Conciliar processes and structures can hold creatively the tensions among the interests of the Communion and those of its member Provinces. The issue is whether the members will agree to share power and authority for the good of the whole with flexibility and grace. This collaboration will involve both giving up some power and authority for the sake of the whole Communion and retaining some power and authority for the sake of each member Province. Moreover, conciliarism calls us to commit ourselves to one another with the priority always given to the "us" of the Communion. At the same time, the "us" of the Communion must always respect and support the particularities and needs of each member Province. There is a necessary and appropriate balance of power, authority, and jurisdiction between the Communion and the member Provinces. The conciliar process and Body of Christ ecclesiology commit the Provinces, as a Communion, to this "both/and." This relationship within the Communion also signifies commitment to ongoing conversation, discussion, debate, and discernment. In the context of conciliar processes and structures, it is possible for the Communion to speak and to act as a whole and preserve the inherent characteristic of Anglicanism to be a multi-vocal tradition of diversity-in-unity.

Anglicanism has never embraced the idea or practice of a formal magisterium, and for good reason. So, what can it mean for the Anglican Communion to speak *qua* Anglican Communion on an important matter? It seems to me that we know how to do this based on a proper understanding of the actions of the Lambeth Conference. That is, statements from the Lambeth Conference are properly understood to be the thinking or positions of the bishops of that Conference speaking at that time, without any intention that these statements be binding upon the Communion or a permanent pronouncement. This understanding allows the possibility for the Communion also to speak or act in a clear and defined way on a particular topic at a particular time without thereby creating an Anglican *magisterium*.

I have sometimes said that where there are two or three Episcopalians, there are six or eight opinions. From the perspective of a Body of Christ ecclesiology this is neither a surprise nor necessarily problematic. Multiple perspectives and understandings, and at times, real conflict is inevitable. In conflict and disagreement our unity in Christ through Baptism is most

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with each other within the Anglican Church of Australia.

tested and most vital. Our humility and trust are essential as we have substantive and sometimes difficult conversations, to develop deeper understanding, to resolve what we can, and to hold one another firmly yet gently in Christ where we cannot find resolution. The point of the exercise is to (re-)create and maintain right relationships, among us, with God’s help, especially where we encounter what seems to be the limits of our capacity to hold together.<sup>42</sup> Only as a last resort ought we turn to a judicial process of discipline to resolve egregious breeches of faith, trust, and relationship in our doctrine, discipline, and worship. Even then, the goal of such action is to sustain and deepen the relationships of God’s people in the diversity of the faithful in the unity of Spirit as the one Body of Christ, manifested through repentance, confession, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The proposals in §45 on conflict and maintaining connection, are spot on in saying that for us, especially in deep and significant conflict, we must sustain “a dogged refusal to give up on each other, to remain in relationship despite deep and significant disagreement” lest we close our hearts and minds to God’s grace.<sup>43</sup>

The reality of the Communion is that being faithful can and does look, sound, and act differently in different contexts. The reality of our diversity cannot be grounds for individuals or a Province to decide that they are in “impaired communion” or no longer “in communion” with someone or a

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42. In these situations it is important to have structures, processes, and people authorized to speak, mediate, and act on behalf of the Communion. What this could look like is provision for there to be a well self-differentiated adult in the room to facilitate with the parties navigating through the storm. I would note here, also the peculiar understanding of “differentiation.” As a technical term of family systems theory, “differentiation” is the process by which a person comes to define themselves in ways that empower them to function in healthy, constructive ways and to manage their emotional self effectively. A well differentiated person is focused, calm, mature, and operates out of his/her cerebral cortex and not out of the emotionally driven, flight/fight brain stem. In the proposals, “differentiation” is oddly used as a synonym for “divisions.” At its best, this is a grossly misleading use of the term. From a family systems perspective, a proper reading of 1Corinthians 12:12–31, and a Body of Christ ecclesiology, it is patently wrong.

43. The proposals at §45 (“Walking together at a distance”). This matter has been further complicated by the various reactions from GAFCON, GSFA, and other conservative groups, and especially the Archbishop of Nigeria, on the appointment of The Right Reverend and Right Honorable Sarah Mullaly, Bishop of London, to be the 106th Archbishop of Canterbury. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to address this particular matter in detail, I note it is a real and important factor to be addressed. See Paula D. Nesbitt, “Sociological Reflections on Structural Change to the Anglican Communion: the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals” *supra*.

Province and break our unity in Christ.<sup>44</sup> The processes of conciliarism do not require us always completely to understand each or to agree with each other.<sup>45</sup> Yet, it is part of our being the Body of Christ to be accountable and responsible to one another. In this way, we sustain our relationships and conversations in the diversity-in-unity of our being through our life and work among the member Provinces.

### **Implementation: A proposal for the process**

A primary flaw in the proposals is the hurried process of allowing only the period between ACC-18 and ACC-19 for the task of creating the proposals and then reviewing, analyzing, and producing an excellent, biblically and theologically grounded plan of reform for the Anglican Communion and how it works inclusive of the whole Communion. While there have been decades of discussion and reports, one must ask, “What is the hurry now?” What we have received requires thoughtful, careful response in less than eighteen months to a report of very dense, concentrated material. It comes out of complex and conflicted contexts and interests. It does not reflect the work of the whole of this part of the Body of Christ because it has not adequately included yet all the parts of this part of the Body of Christ, especially laity and the grass roots level of the Communion. The proposals are not the product of a conciliar process by the Communion,

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44. See, for example, Michael A. Ramsey, *The Anglican Spirit*, ed. Dale Coleman, (Cambridge, Mass.: Cowley Publications, 1991), 123 ff. See also John 17 on unity in Christ, as noted by Ramsey. The tragedy of the moment, including Archbishop Mbanda’s declaration is that, as in all tragedies, it did not have to happen the way it did. The tragedy of “breaking communion” or “excommunicating” one another has a long, sad history in the Christian West. To see and respond to Scripture differently, to understand human sexualities and relationships (of all types) may be occasion for disagreement, but I cannot see that such differences are justification for breaking the church. I am not saying here that there are no parameters around exegesis, interpretation, and application of biblical work, nor that there are not appropriate moral parameters for sexual behaviors. That is a different conversation and beyond the scope of the present study.

45. The level of agreement necessary can, of course, be a point of debate. In a healthy Communion, consensus would be the appropriate and realistic expectation to hold for ourselves. The point is to commit to a level of agreement that makes it possible for the Communion members to live and work together in diversity-in-unity. Diversity does not allow of uniform agreement or uniformity in all matters. In essentials, yes, there is to be unity. There are four “essentials” articulated in the Quadrilateral. Perhaps the level of agreement necessary is best expressed in the adage, “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials (*adiaphora*) liberty; in all things charity.”

but of a portion of the Communion working independently.<sup>46</sup> From the perspectives of a Body of Christ ecclesiology and the structures and processes of conciliarism, the reform of the Anglican Communion needs to be thoroughly grounded in the grass roots level across the Communion. Conversations with members of IASCUFO at regional, provincial, and diocesan gatherings throughout the Communion would be a helpful way to connect the superstructure of the Communion with the grass roots of the Communion—not only the “experts” but the full depth and breadth of faithful, practicing Anglicans.

As the most broadly representative body of the Communion the ACC has demonstrated its capacity to exercise reasonable and effective leadership. At this time, the Anglican Consultative Council is also best structured to serve the Communion as the basis for an “ecumenical council” or special Anglican congress<sup>47</sup> to be given the authority and power to create, adopt, and implement a reform of the Anglican Communion appropriate for the present and into the future. This reform would include devising a way or ways for the Communion to speak and act for the Communion as a

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46. One might take the view that, together with staff from the Anglican Communion Office, the proposals are another attempt by GAFCON and GSFAC to present and promote their vision of the Anglican Communion and present it for adoption by the ACC for the Communion. The problem here is one of timing and the apparent rush to push this through the ACC in spite of the fact that The proposals are a major substantive re-formation of not merely the structures of the Anglican Communion, but its very identity, definition, and meaning. Despite previous efforts, there is no indication that adequate time for review, reflection, debate, discussion, and reception of reform in general or reform as presented in these Proposals has been had throughout the Communion. As Richard Hooker argues in his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, while change inevitably occurs, and at times is necessary, such change needs to be done carefully, thoughtfully, prayerfully, and with clear and sound reasons that effect change that promotes and sustains the good of the whole life and work of the church. Cf. Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), Preface, 4.1–4, I.15.

47. It is important to make a clear distinction here. The terms, “ecumenical council” and “congress” are used to indicate an extraordinary meeting of the ACC in a specific, particular special session(s) with expanded participation to include the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Primates’ Meeting, and other such participants that would be appropriate for forming a broadly representative congress across the Communion, for a single purpose: to create the documents necessary and appropriate for the re-formation of the Anglican Communion and to be submitted to the whole Communion for consideration, consent, reception, and approval. Regular ACC business would be restricted to the ordinary meetings of the ACC in its triennial cycle.

whole.<sup>48</sup> I would suggest, therefore, that the way formally to implement this reform and renewal of the Communion would be for the Archbishop of Canterbury and the chair of the ACC to call for an Anglican congress at which each Province is represented by a deputation<sup>49</sup> of one each of, bishops (not primates), priests, deacons, and laity duly elected by their Provincial Convention or Synod.<sup>50</sup>

The implementation of this special congress would require careful planning as to content, structures, processes, and timeframe. That said, and given the history of conversations and documents, a time frame is essential. I would propose that the committee be given one year to do the pre-congress work.<sup>51</sup> At the end of that year, the committee would submit a report

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48. Speaking or acting “for the Communion” is not meant to imply or indicate that such speaking or acting is necessarily a unanimous position, statement, or action. There may be a consensus. There are at least three ways in which the ACC, if it were to hold this position might speak: (1) “It is the mind of the Communion...” at this time, which may be a positive or negative sense of the Communion on a matter; (2) “The Communion is not of one mind on...” at this time, as in the case of sexualities and the ways our LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters participate as ordained persons; (3) “This is a matter about which we cannot determine a position or conclusion at this time. It remains a matter of ongoing prayer, study, and exploration.”

49. I use the word, “deputation” intentionally. The Provinces would be asked to elect “deputies,” not “delegates” or “representatives.” The difference among these designations is that a “delegate” or, especially, a “representative” carry in their election an obligation of representing their electors’ will and acting specifically on their behalf in their interests. In order to create as unbiased a congress as possible, I call for the election of “deputies” who, while certainly mindful of the thoughts and interests of their Provinces, do not have an obligation to deliberate or vote with “instructions” or expectations from their electing Provinces or particularly to represent the positions and interests of their Provinces. A deputy votes according to their best discernment of what is in the best interests and needs of the body for whom the congress sits, that is, the whole Anglican Communion.

50. The initial population of this congress would be the already elected members of the ACC, with adjustments made by the election of appropriate additional deputies according to the formula for deputations to the congress. These additional members of the congress would not be members of the ACC when it meets as the ACC.

51. The time frame here is speculative suggestion. My point is that it is essential to wrap this process in a time frame less it extend for an indeterminate time and nothing gets done. I would anticipate a two- to four-year period for the completion of planning, meeting(s) of the congress, development and approval of reforms, conclusion of the congress and implementation throughout the Communion.

to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Primates' Meeting, and the Standing Committee of the ACC for review and response. The plan would be revised as appropriate or needed. The Archbishop of Canterbury and the chair of the ACC would then call for a special Anglican congress to convene in twelve months' time. I would propose that a representative planning committee be created that includes the Archbishop of Canterbury and the chair of the ACC, who would act as co-chairs, and three representatives from the Primates' Meeting, fifteen globally representative bishops (other than primates) from the most recent Lambeth Conference from each Province, and thirty broadly representative members of the ACC drawn from the current membership (inclusive of men and women, priests, deacons, and laity), and, *ex officio*, the General Secretary General as a liaison with the Anglican Communion Office.

The sitting members and officers of the ACC will form the membership of the congress with additional of members specifically to serve for the duration of the congress elected from each Province so that each deputation would have an equal number of seated members with voice and vote, regardless of the size of the Province. The each deputation would include three each from among its bishops (not to include the Primate) priests, deacons, and lay persons; and, members of the Primates' Meeting.

This initial meeting would have as its purpose, within the ecclesiological framework of the Body of Christ and conciliar structures and processes (1) to adopt rules of order and elect its leadership; (2) to establish a common understanding of the purpose of its work of reforming the Anglican Communion and agenda;<sup>52</sup> (3) to identify the specific areas and tasks for review, reform of the current structures and processes of the Communion; (4) to propose the creation of new structures and processes for the life and ministries of the Communion, *e.g.*, how urgent matters or crises can be best handled<sup>53</sup>; (5) to organize itself as to structure and process for work,

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52. "Reform" here is not intended to bind the congress within current structures and processes. Reform of the Communion means and intends for there to be creative, new thinking, ideas as well as restoration and revision of current structures and processes, and letting go of structures and processes that are no longer helpful or effective for the life and ministries of the Communion.

53. One approach to crises and urgent matters could be to designate that urgent matters and crises are to be brought to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Chair of the ACC (or their designees) who will then confer with the Standing Committees of the ACC and Primates' Meeting to develop and appropriate response from them to the Communion. Another option would be for the Special Congress to create a structure and process for responding to urgent matters and crises and charge the ACC and the Primates' meeting to create a permanent joint body that would respond in consultation with the

including document drafting groups, and reporting to, accountability to, and communicating effectively with the Communion on the status of its work; (6) to create a timeline for work to be done that will be overseen by the chair and president of the ACC or their designees; and, (7) to establish a working group for distributing draft proposals throughout the Communion, receiving responses, compiling and distributing responses throughout the Communion, and distributing the results of adoption or not of the final proposals. Following its initial meeting, the congress would recess (not adjourn).

Over the eighteen to twenty-four months following the initial meeting of the congress, acting through conciliar structures and processes and a Body of Christ ecclesiology, the working groups would devise and propose reforms and/or new creation of structures and processes, definitions of roles and functions, relationships among the various components of the Communion, and the ministries it discerns for the life and work of the Communion going forward for the effective participation of the Communion in the *mission Dei*. Not later than eighteen months after its initial meeting, the congress would reconvene for the purpose of refining its proposals for their distribution to each diocese of the Communion for review and response through provincial structures and processes. The Provinces, under the leadership of its representatives to the congress<sup>54</sup> would give appropriate consideration to the proposals,<sup>55</sup> gather responses, and forward a compilation of the responses to a working group established in the second session of the congress not later than four months after receiving the proposals.

Within three months of receiving the responses from the Provinces, the drafting working group would compile the responses and distribute them to the members of the congress along with a preliminary draft document

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Archbishop of Canterbury, the Chair of the ACC (if there continues to be one), and the Standing Committees of the ACC and the Primates' Meeting. Might there also be a role for the Anglican Communion Office, e.g., the Anglican Communion Office communications personnel?

54. At the invitation of the deputation, the Provincial Primate may be invited to participate in this phase of the reform process, for example, to issue a call to each diocese to respond, to assist in developing a process of effective consideration and response, and to gather and collate the responses to be forwarded to the congress.

55. "Appropriate consideration" intends that the dioceses of each Province be asked to distribute and design a process for critical engagement and conversation that will issue in critical responses to be collected within the Province and forwarded to the designated working group of the congress. The responses to the work of the second session of the congress will, therefore, come from the grassroots, broadly involving the whole Communion.

for the new, reformed body. Within six months of receiving the responses from the Provinces of the Communion, the congress would reconvene to deliberate and perfect a final draft of its proposals in the context of the Provincial responses and approve the proposals to be sent to the Provinces of the Communion for adoption. This final draft would be sent to the dioceses of each Province and the Provincial House of Bishops for review and adoption by such process as might be determined by each diocese and House of Bishops<sup>56</sup> within four months following the distribution of the final draft of the proposals to the dioceses and House of Bishops.

Results of the decisions of the dioceses and each provincial House of Bishops would then be reported to the Provincial Primate, who would forward the results to the officers of the congress who, in turn, would report them to the members of the congress and to the Communion.

Throughout the process of reform, the current structures and process of the Communion would continue in force for the life and work of the Communion. Upon adoption of the reformed Communion structures and processes, each Province would need to hold such elections as may be necessary for the initial meeting of the reformed/new Communion-wide body, which may continue as a reconstituted ACC or some other body. The final act of the congress would be to set a date for the initial meeting of this reconstituted or new body and the initial work that will need to be done, if not already articulated in the newly adopted reformation of the Communion.

As a practical matter, given the nature of institutions and the impatience of human beings, I think it would be necessary to commit to live with the newly reformed Communion for a period of six to nine years, with annual reviews. Adjustments and modifications would become allowable beginning in the fourth or fifth year in a manner determined by the ACC or newly constituted body to be received for action at the next meeting of said body. Such a radical shift in Anglican polity will require us to protect ourselves, as it were, from impulses to change or reject the new structures and processes too quickly. The Communion will need sufficient time to know how well the new mandate and constitution work to build up the Body of Christ and serve the life and work of the Communion and member Provinces. This commitment and patience are essential for making thoughtful, appropriate adjustments or revisions as may be needed.

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56. Given the magnitude of this reform of the Communion, it would be appropriate that the adoption of the proposals should require a supermajority from a diocese and from the provincial House of Bishops.

## Conclusion

The Anglican spirit, theological mind, and praxis has been from the very beginning one of diversity-in-unity. We see this essential quality first in Thomas Cranmer, who has often been unjustly criticized for being theologically confused and unfocused. On the contrary, he demonstrated in his writings a remarkable breadth of knowledge drawn from Scripture, the works of contemporary and historical theologians, as well as the Latin and Greek Fathers. Cranmer reflects a wide-ranging curiosity that explores various points of view and understanding with depth and seriousness that has characterized the Anglican mind and worldview. He did not need to have “the one right answer” all neatly in a tidy little package.<sup>57</sup> Spiritually, theologically, and practically, diversity-in-unity is of the essence of what Anglicanism is and how it functions. Anglicanism is not and never has been univocal. The closest we have come is perhaps the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Chicago–Lambeth Quadrilateral. Yet, even in these two documents, there is still debate about the meaning and relevance of the Articles and the breadth of possibilities in the Quadrilateral *e.g.*, the episcopate “locally adapted.” This innate range of diversity sits well within a Body of Christ ecclesiology, the structures of councils, and processes of conciliarism.

Such reform of decision-making structures and processes makes it possible to receive decisions of the various parts of the Body and honor both the particularities of the parts and maintains the unity of the Communion. This process will sustain healthy respect both where there is agreement and where there is disagreement.<sup>58</sup> I do not envision the creation of merely

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57. Still today we see across this flexibility and practicality across the whole of the Communion in the words of ministration of Communion in the 1559 Book of Common Prayer where the “Protestant” words of 1552 and the “Catholic” words of 1549 were deftly knit together in one sentence. We see the comprehensive nature of the Anglican perspective in the seminal work of Richard Hooker, *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polity*, where he notes, for example, that truth is truth, whatever the source. Rome has some of “the truth;” Geneva has some; and, Canterbury has some. A radical proposition for 1593, liturgically, we see the immense diversity of praxis found in the Catholic revival of the Oxford Movement and the Anglican Missal alongside “Virginia churchmanship” and the “Morning Prayer Parish” of Low church Anglicanism and renewal/Pentecostal influences. We see the breadth of Anglicanism in the present in the wide range of theologies, programs, and ministries throughout our seminaries, parishes, dioceses, and provinces.

58. I think that the Eastern theology and practice of reception used in the Orthodox churches provide us with a rich and realistic process that, in the context of councils and conciliarism, can give some form and direction to the Anglican Communion. It is a process that moves us away from some sense of urgency to “solve a problem” or “resolve disagreements.” It is a process

legislative structures and processes to produce constitutions, canons, rules and regulations, or a formal magisterium on the Roman model. Rather, a Body of Christ ecclesiology offers us a biblical and theological foundation on which to build quintessentially Anglican processes and structures through careful, intentional councils. In such a context, the Communion can engage through a reformed ACC, in prayer, word, and sacrament, and deliberations to discern our way through a topic or issue, and to be able to speak and act for the whole Anglican Communion on those matters at a particular time. This way of working together functions without necessarily imposing an absolute, permanent, juridical, or canonical statement on the Communion in part or on the whole. We can, as the Anglican Communion, in this context, speak and act for our time, and in classic Anglican manner, always retain a humility that leaves the door ajar for times to change, the Spirit to speak anew, and a new discernment, acting, and speaking to be necessary. It is in our DNA that it would still be the case that where two or three Anglicans are gathered there would be six or eight views or opinions. Yet, there would also be an agreed discipline and commitment to take seriously and obediently the statements and acts of the ACC for the Communion and receive those statements and acts as of the Communion for and of us.

This work will be fueled by prayer and sustained by Word and Sacrament as we daily come to God with God's people in our hearts,<sup>59</sup> seeking the Spirit's guidance for our life and work at every level of the Anglican Communion.

In the present moment, and within our particular contexts, the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals are another step in our holy adventure. Again, as the Introduction clearly states, the proposals are a *beginning*. They mark a new phase of the adventure, not an *end*. I do not think the suggestions in the proposals are ready for adoption at ACC-19 in March 2026, nor, if they truly are a beginning, do they need to be. This is not the *καρπός* for adoption. It is the *καρπός* for continuing the work, of going more deeply and broadly into the Communion to have further conversations not only with leadership at the top, but across the board at the grass roots level, the glorious breadth of the Communion and particularly among the Laity.

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that requires the church to step back and assume a posture and practice of waiting and openness to the Spirit. We would commit to a practice of patient, humble, prayerful discernment. This posture and practice also opens for us the possibility of thoughtful study, reflection, and conversation through which we discern God's will and invitation to us. Reception is a constructive process of discernment through which, in the Spirit, God's invitation and direction for our participation in God's Mission emerges—in God's time.

59. Michael Ramsey, *The Christian Priest Today*, (London: SPCK, 1972), 15.

There is no hurry. The *καίρος* will come and we shall know that it here and right to make the good decisions that are the fruit of our faithful work and in the power of the Spirit implement those decisions for the good of us all and the glory of God.

Through the work of the Spirit acting in councils, the Body of Christ may best hear and respond to God's call to the church to go into the world to love and serve God in fulfillment of our Baptismal vows. An ecclesiology grounded in the image of the Body of Christ offers the church the broadest, richest, most creative, and most generative model for the possibilities of its life and work. It is, I think, in the structures and processes of conciliarism that we find the most effective and practical means of holding in appropriate tension the particularity of the parts of the Body of Christ and the unity of the whole. For, though we are many, we are one, for there is "one body and one Spirit...one hope of [our] calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all...."<sup>60</sup>

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60. Ephesians 4:4-5.

*A. Katherine Grieb*

## Some Thoughts on Ecclesiology

I am grateful that the Ecclesiology Committee of the House of Bishops has shared its essays in process with the Task Force on the Anglican Communion and Countering the Colonial Mindset. Every single one of them treats highly complex topics at a high level of discussion. Each of them thanks IASCUFO for the work they have done and responds with a hermeneutic of generosity as to intention, even when there are concerns about the theological implications and foreseeable practical results of some of the proposals. The publication of these essays will be helpful to everyone connected in any way with the ACC Meeting in Belfast in 2026. My task here is to highlight some of their most important ideas and to add a few of my own in the process.

### **Introduction**

Ecclesiology matters. Some years ago I wrote a paper contrasting the two major ecclesiologies of the New Testament: the first is found in Paul (1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12) and in the Gospel of Matthew (13:24-30) in a parable attributed to Jesus. This first ecclesiology is mentioned in several of the papers in connection with Augustine and the Donatist controversy. Paul's analogy of the Christian community to the human body with its interdependent parts (society as a body was a common idea in the ancient world) occurs in a discussion of the gifts of the Holy Spirit: the gifts are varied but it is one and the same Spirit which inspires them all for the common good. Difference is both essential ("If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing?") and God-appointed, not humanly determined: (no part can decide it doesn't belong because it is not like another part and no part can decide that another part does not belong "I have no need of you.") In fact, humans are likely to guess wrong about which parts are more important (just try making it without your liver!)

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just as the Markan disciples were arguing about which one of them was the greatest as a response to Jesus' passion prediction. Paul concludes not with an appeal to become the body of Christ, but with the assertion "now you are the body of Christ." The "more excellent way" in the following chapter commends love as the basis for actions and reminds all the parts of the body of Christ that we see as through a mirror dimly, not clearly, so humility is suggested, like the joke about removing the log in our own eye in order to see better to remove the speck in the other person's eye.

Matthew's parable of the wheat and the tares/weeds warns those who volunteer to weed out the church that in their enthusiasm they will inevitably mistake which is which, and even if they don't, the process of uprooting the weeds will do irrevocable harm to the wheat as well. Even if the weeds were sown by "an enemy" perhaps even "the Enemy" of the church, the better wisdom is to let both grow together until the harvest/judgment; let God ("the Son of Man and his angels") do the sorting. There will be a reckoning, but much better that it is done by those who have the knowledge and the vision which we humans so obviously lack.

If Matthew's theology is described as a more "catholic" approach, trying to keep various different constituencies in the same church (probably itinerant radical disciples who wanted the church to keep the most stringent commands of the Sermon on the Mount and those who had houses, jobs and families and who had made their peace with a lower level of commitment), the Johannine theology of the letters and the Apocalypse might be described as more "protestant," less worried about keeping the church together than about making sure the church has maintained its focus, vision, and purity. I once heard a Baptist theologian explain that church separation was a good thing, a part of God's natural process, like mitosis (cell division) in plants. That's how the organism grows. And, so this argument goes by analogy, if the church or any part of it is cancerous, if it has received the mark of the Beast, if it is in league with the whore of Babylon, then the only faithful response is to call its members to "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues" ( Revelation 18:4) On the other side of the equation, the author of 1 John describes how now many antichrists have come, which is how we know that it is the last hour. "They went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us, but they went out, so that it might be plain that they all are not of us." (1 John 2:18-19). This ecclesiology can be found on both the "left" and the "right" of the church. From whichever direction it comes, there is less incentive to continue in dialogue and to strive to work out ways to walk together in spite of different points of view.

I am reminded of Richard Hooker's parish sermons and his argument with his Puritan contemporaries about biblical interpretation. Hooker consistently valued flexibility and pastoral care (practical theology) whether it was possible to find a scriptural warrant for his decisions or not, while his Puritan opponents refused to allow anything that was not expressly mentioned in and sanctioned by scripture. One important protestant reformation test about whether it was faithful to stay in the church or leave it was whether "the gospel was preached and the sacraments were duly administered." In my view, a version of this test is still being used in some parts of the Anglican Communion today: for example, if a church is allowing another understanding of marriage than the traditional one, that is not the gospel; and if a woman is presiding at baptisms and eucharists, then the sacraments are not being duly administered. In this view, it is not that the sacraments confer grace despite the unworthiness of the minister, as Article 26 of the 39 Articles asserted. It is that any priests ordained by a woman bishop are not recognized by them, because their orders are not considered valid. Nothing they do could therefore be valid, which is a kind of contamination argument.

### **First Comments about the Papers**

I would argue that all of the essays, whether written in support of the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals or opposed to them, show an awareness that both of these New Testament ecclesiologies are relevant to our ongoing discussion about "learning how to become the Anglican Communion," as Archbishop Rowan Williams put it, that God has graciously called us to inhabit. These papers prompted the following ideas for me.

#### *Postcolonialism*

What is the role of postcolonial thought in the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals document? (We should probably also be talking about neocolonialism, the mechanisms by which the more powerful nations of the world effectively still control those who used to be their colonies by trade agreements and debt management strategies that keep them weak.) We know that the effects of colonialism and especially the enslavement of many thousands of people over many years have caused all kinds of harm in subsequent generations, even after the empires were gone and the institution of slavery abolished. Genocide and racism were the original sins of our colonial ancestors in the US, imported from Europe and England as part of the doctrine of discovery. England still struggles with classicism with respect to former colonies, as some of us have experienced. (I hope we can also talk about the long history of tribalism and tribal violence, especially in African nation states, even with new postcolonial names. There are issues internal to all parts of the Communion that may be almost as damaging

as colonialism. In other words, all human beings are likely to commit sins against God and their neighbors. There is no group that is free of sin.) The questions we might ask are practical ones: (1) what will be the response of most of the world when we have finally (after almost 1500 years) chosen a woman to the Archbishop of Canterbury and then immediately reconfigure our polity at the highest level to disempower the Archbishop of Canterbury? (2) What is the likely outcome of a massive shift of political power, especially the power to convene, from one person (the Archbishop of Canterbury) to a group with rotating leadership (the Primates), given the various styles of leadership within that group, many of which are traditionally conservative, sometimes “royal,” and not much open to negotiation? Will the Primates be able to trust each other? Will there be cooperation or only competition? Will there be enough stability and predictability to govern wisely?

### *Populations and Power*

How important are the numbers of Anglicans in each province? If the numbers continue the way they’re going now, the largest provinces numerically will divide to make many more provinces and almost all of the primates will be from the global south, especially from Africa. Nigeria, Rwanda, and Uganda are among the fastest-growing provinces. Will it make sense then to re-name it an African Communion? What does the word “Anglican” mean in the Communion today? Will it become increasingly irrelevant? If the Archbishop of Canterbury is only a link to the historic past, does the equally English word “Lambeth” follow shortly after? Doesn’t the term “Anglican” also reflect a way of thinking and solving problems that privileges the rule of law, synodal debate, generous orthodoxy, and a peaceful resolution of problems? We have learned much from Ubuntu and other traditional African concepts and we should continue to do so! I worry that we may forget some of the things we have learned from John Jewel, Richard Hooker and others, who happened to be from England, who also thought carefully about governance and preferred styles of leadership. “Can anything good come out of England?” (I sense this paraphrase of Nathaniel’s question in some parts of the Communion.) Must the Anglican Communion renounce “England and all its works” as the source of our many problems today? I sincerely hope not! I hope we can recognize that England is more than the British Empire.

### *Doctrine*

What counts as doctrine? The quotation “In essentials unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things charity” has been attributed to Augustine of Hippo (but it might be from a 17th century Lutheran or Roman Catholic author). The ordinand’s promise in The Episcopal Church is to “uphold the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the church as this church has

received them” which, in my view, provides enough clarity to proceed, but not so much that new ideas are killed before they are tried. I also like the Declaration of Assent used in the Church of England for its careful balance: “I (name) do so affirm [the previous paragraph about the Church of England and its historic formularies, including the Thirty-Nine Articles, the BCP, and the Ordinal] and accordingly declare my belief in the faith which is revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds and to which the historic formularies of the Church of England bear witness; and in public prayer and administration of the sacraments, I will use only the forms of service which are authorized or allowed by Canon.” (Emphasis mine. The emphasized words recognize a balance between the importance of guarding the tradition and the need for the church to continually reform itself (*semper reformanda*). The statement also makes it clear what would actually get you in trouble: not thinking, not expressing ideas about reform, but using unauthorized rites in a public liturgy.

Does it make sense to describe doctrine as universal and ethics as contextual? I don’t think so. I think theology and ethics are too tightly interwoven for that. Both are inevitably contextual and we “recognize” one another when our local churches participate in universally shared teaching about both. What is the role of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, originally a way to “recognize” ecumenical partners who share key assumptions about theological reality? How does something become “doctrine” for us? For example, are the Five Marks of Mission doctrine? If they are not received by GAFCON, is that a issue for the Communion? In the absence of a judiciary body at the highest level of Communion, who decides what is “doctrine” at the Communion level? I think we should restrict the term “Doctrine” to refer to matters which are substantial and essential, not peripheral or unessential (*adiaphora*). So I was particularly interested in the discussion by Bishop Pierre Whalon quoting Dr. Kate Sonderegger, who has found at least one clear precedent in church history where an important and very difficult theological problem (divine foreknowledge of future contingent events) nevertheless did not divide the church. A matter can be essential (not *adiaphora*) and still not result in schism. Are there other precedents like that which can be appealed to by those who share the first more generous New Testament ecclesiology I described? Would that precedent even matter to Nigeria, Rwanda, and Uganda and others if the primary goal is not to stay together but to stay pure?

*What about the Archbishop of Canterbury?*

By which we might mean 597, the gift of the pallium and the Gospel book from Gregory the Great and all that? Or 1066 and Lanfranc’s Norman reforms, and Anselm, and Becket, and all that? The theological giants and the rich theological traditions of the previous, Church of England-led ver-

sion of the Anglican Communion—do they still matter? Are we throwing the baby out with the British imperialist bath water? (I would remind us here that the Nairobi–Cairo document’s claim to be acting in a postcolonial way is irrelevant to the discussion of the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury, because that office was established in 597, way before Anglicanism within the Roman Church was tied to a particular nation (the reformation) and even longer before there was any such thing as a British Empire (perhaps in 1789?). I will concede that there are still problems to solve: How important is the Church of England’s status as a national church? As an established church? (Rare if not unique in the Anglican Communion). The Archbishop of Canterbury at present has to take an oath of allegiance to the crown: there are only a few places outside of the United Kingdom where someone could do that, so for the immediate foreseeable future the Archbishop of Canterbury will be from the United Kingdom. The commitment of the next generation of English royalty to the Church of England, or to the Anglican Communion, is unclear. So the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals and the discussion they will provoke about the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury are still both relevant and timely, even if the “postcolonial” label seems anachronistic.

The real question in my mind is one that is raised by the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals themselves: Is it possible for one person to be the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Primus Inter Pares Leader of the Global Anglican Communion? The last two Archbishops of Canterbury have struggled valiantly to be both things at once and found it a difficult task. But the proposed solution worries me greatly: if the newly revised job description of the Archbishop of Canterbury is to sit in a rocking chair in the corner and be a symbol of the ancient history of the Communion, who would want to do that? Moreover, now that we have a new Archbishop of Canterbury who happens to be a woman, the prospect of reducing the office to nothing but a family heirloom is likely to be misunderstood (some others would probably say “or understood perfectly!”)

### *Breakaway Groups and Supplanters*

What about Anglican Church of North America and the Anglican Church of Brazil that have been welcomed by the GSFA which is not in communion with The Episcopal Church, the Church of England, the Church in Wales, the Anglican Church in Canada, the Episcopal Church in Scotland, the Episcopal Church in Brazil, among other “churches that allow the blessing of same-sex relationships?” How does any of this help The Episcopal Church and ACNA move forward in a way that does not forget the painful history we share? Some TEC bishops stopped accepting graduates from Trinity Seminary into their dioceses because there was a pattern of promising to obey their bishop, then six months later trying to take the

parish out of the diocese to ACNA. (There seemed to be an assumption that if you are fighting the devil, you don't need to play fair.) Now, the next generation or so, whether in ACNA or TEC, usually doesn't know much of that history, has not experienced pain of parish division and all those lawsuits, and can't imagine what all the fuss was about. But we would have many things to talk about before we simply re-joined.

### **Conclusion**

One more parable, this one from Archbishop David Moxon. While he was the Director of the Anglican Centre in Rome, he led some of us on a retreat to Assisi, the home of Saints Francis and Clare. He reminded us of the story of Francis and the wolf of Gubbio, which was preying on the livestock of the people of Assisi, who had their pitchforks and torches ready to kill him. Francis offered to talk to the wolf and they worked out a plan where the people fed the wolf and he stopped attacking their chickens. While we were taking that in, he commented that the Maori people teach their children that there are two wolves living inside each one of us: the sweet playful puppy and the killer predator grow up in us, side by side, each one seeking to reach maturity instead of the other. Inevitably one of the students asked, "Which wolf will win?" to which David Moxon replied, "Whichever one you feed."

I was struck by Bishop Doyle's attention to the language of business systems and self-interested federations that he traces to the Virginia Report's choice of the word "instruments" and that seems to be prominent in the Nairobi-Cairo document, and also his warning not to move to any proposed solution too quickly. Important decisions take time to think through all of their implications. We rush a decision on all these matters at our peril. Because ecclesiology really matters. Again, thanks for these excellent essays and for the invitation to be a small part of this important discussion.

*Scott MacDougall*

## The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals and the Point of Communion

### Preliminary Remarks

Before I offer my own engagement with the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals that the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith, and Order (IASCUFO) has asked the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) to consider, I would like to signal my agreement with arguments others have made about two important issues that I do not make here myself but that I think should be underscored—and that lie in the background of my own position.

### Postcolonial Intent Undermined

Among others, Ian Douglas, Paula Nesbitt, and Katherine Grieb, in their comments, correctly judge the proposals to fall short of IASCUFO's stated intention to shift the Anglican Communion in a postcolonial direction. Investing the Communion's primates with the powers the proposal would accord to them is inherently antithetical to that goal. As Douglas writes, "By imbuing the Primates with more power, the proposals move away from a genuine postcolonial sharing of authority and power, particularly with lay people, women, and other orders beyond bishops, in an increasingly plural Anglican Communion."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, if it is truly IASCUFO's desire that "the leadership of the Communion...look like the Communion" (§85), then instead of enhancing the already significant power of the ordained men who head most of the Communion's provinces, IASCUFO should suggest ways of amplifying the voices of the Communion's lay women who make up the majority of its members. Something akin to

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1. Douglas, *supra* at 63.

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the counterproposals offered by Douglas (61–62) and Nesbitt (73–75), for example, would be a more appropriate approach. If the ACC constitution were changed to create an empowered presidency and to require that that presidency rotate among the five suggested regions, as the proposals envision, it could further specify that the ACC president must not be a primate or—even better—must be a layperson. That would be much more consistent than the scheme outlined by the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals with both the remit that the 2022 Lambeth Conference gave IASCUFO to enhance lay involvement in Communion matters, and with an oft-stated commitment to postcolonial thinking and restructuring.

It is certainly true that a postcolonial Anglican Communion would be polycentric rather than continuing to be governed primarily from the Global North. But merely shifting power from Canterbury to a set of five global regions would not result in a postcolonial Communion. Even a cursory review of the literature on postcolonialism (Fanon, Mignolo, Said, Bhabha, etc.) would be enough to demonstrate the insufficiency of that by itself. A genuine postcolonial transformation requires an additional shift, a shift in ideology, a movement away from regarding power as something to accumulate and hoard toward an impulse to share it as widely as possible. The Anglican ecclesiological principle of dispersed authority, which understands that the work of the Holy Spirit is active at every ecclesial level and supports the strongly conciliar emphasis of Anglican ecclesiology at its best, is a component of our tradition we could call upon and develop to help us advance authentic postcoloniality in the Communion. It is also one that bears a striking contrast to imbuing the already-powerful with even more power, which is what the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals advocate—somewhat inexplicably—in the name of postcoloniality.

### **Ecclesial Purity Idolized**

In her response to the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals, Grieb refers briefly to a contrast she identifies between, on the one hand, ecclesiologies that are scripturally guided by the synoptic gospels and Paul’s letters, versus, on the other, those that are largely informed by the Johannine literature. The first, which she takes to be a more “catholic” option, faces honestly the inevitability of disagreement, brokenness, and even error in the church (which is always a *corpus permixtum* this side of the completion of all things), a condition that must be left to God to remedy, since human attempts to do so often make the situation still worse, while we are called to focus our efforts on being a community of fellowship and reconciliation. The second, a more “protestant” view, maintains that the church itself is charged with guarding and preserving its own purity, understood as theological and moral consonance with a religious ideal of its own devising but which is claimed to be established by divine command. I am largely

in agreement with Grieb about this. Moreover, the two ecclesiologies she describes are consistent with the underlying eschatological imaginations that animate them—the first holding a proper tension between the now and the not-yet, and the second reflecting the overly realized eschatology of the Johannine corpus.<sup>2</sup>

Another way of talking about the principle of catholicity that characterizes Grieb's first ecclesiological model is to refer to it as *communion*. Communion (*koinonia*) is a multi-dimensional relational reality. As it pertains to church, ecclesial truth is found in the quality of communion maintained within it as a direct effect of the dual commandment to love that sits at the heart of Jesus' proclamation and is demonstrated and sealed in the resurrection: communion between God and human beings, among and within human persons, and between humanity and the rest of creation. The community of disciples we call church is meant to exemplify and manifest this communion in its corporate life of worship, service, and spiritual formation. This is simply what it means to be church, according to this view.

By contrast, in the other view, the communion that God is and to which God calls us is not the highest principle. A specific understanding of ecclesial purity is. This is undergirded by the church-as-the-spotless-bride theme that is found in the Johannine literature. Although the central image is nuptial, its watchword is not love. It is unity. And that unity is cast as singlemindedness, agreement, uniformity about what it means for Christian community to preserve its theological and moral purity such that it remains worthy to be the bride of Christ. The problem, of course, is that no such agreement has ever existed. Where it has been claimed, it has come at the cost of silencing, ejecting, or, at an extreme, committing violence against parts of the church that have dissented from the supposedly universal consensus. This is a dangerous impulse. As Nesbitt attests, "A theology of unity that presumes uniformity, when operationalized into organizational structure, inevitably will be applied in the development and justification of mechanisms to enforce conformity and exclude those viewed as deviant or heretical."<sup>3</sup>

The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals stem from this second ecclesiological view, one that aims to achieve a juridically enforced purity in the name of unity rather than one that seeks to do the hard work of fostering authentic and costly Christian communion in and as the body of Christ. The proposals reflect this terminologically by continuing to refer to the four "instruments of unity" where earlier documents had called them the "instruments of

2. See Scott MacDougall, *More Than Communion: Imagining an Eschatological Ecclesiology* (London: Bloomsbury–T&T Clark, 2015).

3. Nesbitt, *supra* at 79.

communion.” Moreover, the proposals reference earlier documents that also champion efforts to solve the Communion’s problems by creating structures designed to limit the Provinces’ free exercise of theological and ethical conscience and virtually ignore those that advocate for enhancing the quality of relationality among the Communion’s churches, building upon and nurturing their organic unity of shared history, purpose, and mission, as the better—and more theologically apposite—approach. The proposals reference the Virginia Report twice in the body of the text and six times in its footnotes, the Windsor Report four times in the body of the text and fourteen times in its footnotes, and the Anglican Communion Covenant five times in the body of the text and six times in its footnotes. Meanwhile, the final report of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, entitled *Communion, Conflict and Hope*,<sup>4</sup> and even IASCUFO’s own previous report, *Towards a Symphony of Instruments*,<sup>5</sup> both of which counseled a recommitment to being a true communion of churches rather than imposing structural attempts to address a relational problem (as Virginia, Windsor, and—above all—the Covenant had), were referenced zero times in the text and a total of twelve times in its footnotes. By contrast, the Covenantal Structure proposed by the Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches—which, unlike *Communion, Conflict and Hope* and *Towards a Symphony of Instruments*, is not a document of an official Anglican Communion body—is commended in glowing terms twice in the proposals’ text, and is referenced three times in their footnotes. It is no accident that it shares a great deal in common with the outlook and recommendations of the Virginia and Windsor reports and the failed Covenant.

All of this is, unfortunately, entirely in keeping with the proposals’ core emphasis: advocating for creating constitutional definitions and structural mechanisms designed to enforce a narrow conception of ecclesial purity by silencing or expelling those who disagree with it rather than remembering what it means theologically to be a communion. Little thought is given to creating opportunities to practice living out that sacred ecclesial

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4. Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, *Communion, Conflict and Hope: The Kuala Lumpur Report* (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2008), <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/107645/IATDC-Inter-Anglican-Theological-and-Doctrinal-Commission.pdf>

5. Inter-Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith & Order, *Towards a Symphony of Instruments: A Historical and Theological Consideration of the Instruments of Communion of the Anglican Communion*, Unity, Faith & Order Paper No. 1 (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2012), <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/209979/Towards-a-Symphony-of-Instruments-Web-Version.pdf>

vocation together, especially when it is most difficult. A reasonable reading of the proposals, particularly when keeping in mind the histories of their antecedent documents and the arguments that informed them, is that the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals are the latest in a string of attempts to erect structures for empowering a segment of the Anglican Communion to enshrine its theological perspective as “the mind of the Communion,” which would pave the way for marginalizing or excluding provinces that do not demonstrate sufficient “unity” with that supposed consensus<sup>6</sup> and for inviting to Communion membership Anglican groups that have separated themselves from the Anglican Communion for the sake of preserving their chosen definition of ecclesial purity. As it was for the Anglican Covenant, this underlying motivation should be sufficient to counsel the proposals’ rejection. However, rejecting the proposals is not enough. A counterproposal should be offered. Gesturing toward a constructive counterproposal is the main intent of my commentary and the task to which I now turn.

### Recommitting to Ecclesial Communion

My view is that, as the most representative pan-Anglican body, the ACC should respond to the Nairobi-Cairo Proposals in three ways:

- First, by rejecting them;
- Second, by clearly and unambiguously demanding a halt to the ongoing structural and legalistic efforts to curtail the free exercise of the capacity for moral and theological discernment of the Anglican Communion’s provinces that have consumed far too much energy for decades; and
- Third and finally, by calling for a recommitment to the principle of communion, to the hard work of being a communion, and to the development and implementation of a range of initiatives designed to foster, nurture, and deepen communion on multiple levels.

The ACC can be helpfully guided in attending to these tasks by availing itself of the findings of *Towards a Symphony of Instruments*, and, above all,

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6. An excellent example of this is the decades-long insistence by partisans of this approach—including the drafters of the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals (see ¶32)—that Resolution I.10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference, which, among other things, decries same-sex sexual expression as “incompatible with scripture,” represents the “teaching” or “mind” of the Anglican Communion. Lambeth resolutions are neither Anglican Communion teachings nor expressions of consensus among Anglicans beyond those in the room at the time of their adoption. Yet this status is claimed for them precisely to provide grounds for denouncing the words or actions of those who disagree with them as being in error and out of unity with the Communion and therefore subject to denunciation and sanction.

*Communion, Conflict and Hope*. The Anglican Communion essentially ignored these reports when they were produced because they counseled a theologically rich but difficult approach to strengthening the Communion at a time when most of the energy for doing so was being poured into structural remedies, such as the Anglican Communion Covenant. We might conclude that this opportunity was missed simply because some significant figures in global Anglicanism took a legalistic and juridical approach to be more expedient, more in line with good managerial practice, and more likely to lead to the outcomes they personally favored. Although it was sidelined then, the work of those committees can and should be used now to frame a response to the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals that recenters communion as the highest ecclesiological principle, and which can make a start of bringing to an end to the juridical attempts to force conformity across the Communion in the name of unity that have plagued it for more than forty years.

Communion, not unity-as-uniformity and certainly not an arbitrary standard of moral or theological purity, is the essence of Christian community. *Communion, Conflict and Hope* provides a description of communion (*koinonia*) that demonstrates its centrality for ecclesiality:

*Koinonia* has to do with a fundamental connectivity between God, the world, and all living things, including of course human life. The African word “*ubuntu*” captures something of this primary oneness. In the Genesis story human beings are called “earthlings” or “groundlings” (Genesis 2). This underscores the fact that we are “of the earth” and are intrinsically related to other living things, the whole created environment and God. Such *koinonia* is encoded into the very being of creation. The story of redemption is a story of Christ rejoining people, races and the rest of creation. This is the good news which overcomes sin and broken bonds. There is no other community on the earth with a mandate to bear witness to the remarkable miracle of our oneness in the triune God. What is even more remarkable is that God invites the body of Christ to become the new experiment in the communion of the Holy Spirit.... [K]oinonia ... is nothing less than the way of creation, salvation and the life of the world to come.<sup>7</sup>

Communion is what the triune God is in Godself. It is what creation was made for and will ultimately become. It is why God took on the condition of the created order in the incarnation. It is what Jesus preached and exemplified in his ministry. It is the cause for which he was executed. It is the power by which he was raised from the dead. And it is what the community of Jesus’ disciples that we call church is meant to proclaim, manifest, and promote. The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals are not designed to foster communion but precisely the opposite: they are designed to con-

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7. *Communion, Conflict and Hope*, 72, n. 26.

centrate and consolidate power. This is the fundamental reason why they should be rejected.

*Communion, Conflict and Hope* calls the Communion's attention to the 1948 Lambeth Conference and its emphasis on dispersed authority in Anglican ecclesiology (§§17–18). Rather than centralizing authority and the exercise of power, authority is seen as dispersed throughout the church, horizontally and vertically, and truth—being one yet complex—must accordingly be discerned through relationship and bearing with one another in loving trust at those same multiple levels even, and especially, when disagreements and conflicts arise. This, the report acknowledges, is difficult. But it is also more generative and fruitful. It is far more in keeping with the gospel of Christ. It is what communion requires. And it is the opposite of what Nairobi–Cairo proposes.

Douglas applauds the proposals for explicating the creedal marks of the church at such great length, but questions why it is that the Anglican Communion's Marks of Mission are not examined, as well, given their clear applicability to the issues under consideration. Douglas concludes that they are disregarded because attending to them would undercut the force of the structural innovations that the proposals advocate.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, they would. This is because the Marks of Mission seek to advance communion in the church and in the world, the kind of communion that *Communion, Conflict and Hope* and *Towards a Symphony of Instruments* champion and, on account of that, are documents that the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals ignore almost completely.

Tellingly, the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals are, in line with likeminded documents before it, willing to envision some form of formal acknowledgment of various “degrees” of “impaired” or “broken” communion among its provincial members. While it has been the express desire of the Anglican Communion to proceed in its common life with the “highest degree of communion possible” since at least the Eames Commission in the 1980s, the proposals suggest that, given the reality of “new degrees of difference” between them (§6), preserving the unity of the Communion might require publicly marking what have been called “degrees of communion” among its constituent churches. As the proposals explain, “The reference to *degrees* here is borrowed from ecumenical theology, and refers to the fact that communion (*koinonia*) is not binary, yielding simple judgments of ‘in’ or ‘out.’ It rather touches upon several, interconnected aspects, actions, and commitments that can be more and less ‘fully’ shared with others.”<sup>9</sup> What seems to have been forgotten here is how important the ecumenical origin of this concept is. Churches exploring convergence across denom-

8. Douglas, *supra* at 66.

9. §31, emphases in original.

inational lines move—by degrees—through a process in which communion is increasingly achieved as work proceeds, resulting in the sort of “full communion” that now obtains between, say, The Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. The members of the Anglican Communion, in direct contrast, are *already* in full communion; hence, such a concept would be used to indicate not steps on the road to communion but steps down the path to division. This is antithetical to what “degrees of communion” means in ecumenical work. Even more crucially, it is the opposite of what communion is all about, of the call of Christ to live it, and of the commitment needed to maintain it.

Moreover, as *Communion, Conflict and Hope* observes, “Talk of broken communion has often been a form of exchange to gain rhetorical advantage and carries with it an all too facile notion of communion in the church” (§123). As the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals themselves recount, the Global South Fellowship of Anglican Churches primates claim that “the Church of England has chosen to break communion with those provinces [that] remain faithful to the historic biblical faith expressed in the Anglican formularies” (§7), though, of course, the Church of England made no such decision. Nor is it legitimate for churches of the Anglican Communion to take themselves out of communion on account of “actions by certain provinces that have provoked them” (§28). Using this kind of “stop making me hurt you” language exemplifies attempts to seek the sort of “rhetorical advantage” that *Communion, Conflict and Hope* describes. It is a tactic that ought to be theologically and practically denounced rather than being structurally facilitated by creating scales for measuring various “degrees of communion” between member churches.

None of this is new. The IATDC saw the same moves being made in the leadup to its 2008 report. As if addressing the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals directly, it wrote:

For various reasons, some participants in the present debates seem intent on loosening the links in the Communion by speaking of it in terms of a confederation, or becoming “cousins, not brothers and sisters” in Christ. Others have suggested that a constructive way forward may be to allow a form of associate status within the Communion. These proposals seem to amount to a refusal to accept the possibility of external criticism; theologically, they dilute Anglican fellowship from something grounded in covenant love, to a matter of historic association.<sup>10</sup>

Again, the answer here is to do the hardest thing possible when relationships are under strain: to double down on the commitment to that relationship despite the pain. It is to stay in communion rather than to walk away or create ecclesial distance by formalizing levels of relational

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10. *Communion, Conflict and Hope*, §105

impairment. We are required to do that precisely because it is hard and because of the witness it offers to the world and to God's call to it.

Of course, maintaining deep ecclesial communion presumes a commitment to communion on the part of the members. That commitment is what schemes such as the Anglican Communion Covenant and the Nairobi-Cairo Proposals call into question. They call it into question by continually providing parties that seem to be disinclined to do the hard work of communion with mechanisms for avoiding it. In the U.S. context, I would like nothing more than to see Anglican groups that left The Episcopal Church come back and I rejoice that that has been happening with some frequency of late. At the same time, it is reasonable to wonder at the advisability of making changes to the Anglican Communion that concentrate power in the hands of precisely that branch of the Anglican family that has shown itself most willing to marginalize, silence, or expel those parts of the Communion that do not share its views. A commitment to communion requires a process of reconciliation and trust-building where that has been, up to now, greatly lacking. As Grieb puts it, The Episcopal Church and the Anglican Church in North America, for example, "would have many things to talk about before we simply re-joined."<sup>11</sup> Without that, without a deep commitment to communion, making the changes put forward in the Nairobi-Cairo Proposals runs a real risk of throwing fuel on the fire of the adversarial weaponization of Anglican Communion processes over many years that Nesbitt catalogs in her essay. None of this would enhance communion. On the contrary, it would only further impair it.

Yes, we are the Anglican Communion. But at the end of the day, communion is not really something that we are. Communion is not really even something that we have, though we do speak in those terms. Ultimately, communion is something that we *do*. Communion is a practice.

Communion is not a steady state reality that one either has or does not have. It has to be nurtured through open and persistent conversation where there is mutual trust and forbearance, always thinking the best of the other, always hoping and praying for new ways of sharing in the riches of the Gospel. Sustaining communion is in fact a continual consultative process.

It is through such an endeavor that the Lord of the Church is graciously present and calling the church onward and upward.<sup>12</sup>

The presence of the Holy Spirit burns with the life-giving power of communion in Christian community wherever and whenever the quality of relationality between God and humans, within and among human beings, and between humanity and the rest of God's beloved creation anticipates here and now something of the fullness of communion that will be when

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11. Katherine Grieb, *supra* at 135.

12. *Communion, Conflict and Hope*, ¶114.

God becomes All in all. Being the body of Christ, there is no work that is more difficult or more meaningful in which the can participate. The Nairobi–Cairo Proposals should be rejected by the ACC because they are another attempt to replace the call to communion in the church with adversarial legalism and misguided managerialism. In place of the Nairobi–Cairo Proposals, the ACC should commit itself to recentering communion as the core value of the Anglican Communion’s polity and guiding ecclesiological and eschatological ethos, and it should work creatively to launch multilateral initiatives designed specifically to promote and enhance inter-provincial communion. Certainly, structural and definitional changes to the ACC constitution could eventually become part of those efforts. The specific changes being called for by IASCUFO at the present moment, however, should not be among them.