(2026) 28 Ecc LJ 81–95
doi:10.1017/S0956618X25101075

ELS Ecclesiastical Law Society
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

ARTICLE

Discovering Anglicanism – ecclesiology at Lambeth Conferences 1867–1998

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Abstract

This article explores how some scholars have defined Anglicanism, before examining the institutions that have unified Anglicanism internationally throughout its history. It explores a number of classical statements of authority in Anglicanism, and explores how rapid cultural, liturgical, and demographic change from the 1950s challenged the unspoken assumptions on which these statements rested. These left Anglicanism facing less coherence, just as Global North Anglicanism was losing confidence due to the religious crisis of the 1960s. The article then explores the factors that led to the crisis of 1998 which weakened those institutions, a situation that continues to the present day. Finally, the article offers some thoughts on the future and the enduring, if unfashionable, importance of patriarchs as leaders in churches today.

Keywords: Anglican Comununion; Archbishop of Canterbury; authority; legal history; reform

Introduction

The first words used by Alan Stephenson in the most substantial academic study yet produced of Lambeth Conferences were simply: what is Anglicanism?'.[1] While the Thirty-Nine Articles might arguably provide a confessional basis for the Church of England, the Anglican Communion is not a confessionally defined body – indeed, an early act of many provinces on gaining self-government was to scrap all reference to the Articles.

Nor does Anglicanism exist by dint of some formal structure or legal incorporation – Anglicanism was a well-recognised concept long before the creation of the Anglican Communion Office in 1960. Anglicanism emerged not by intent, but by accident, as a result of political developments, geographical expansion, and responses to theological crises. It has consequently always resisted comprehensive definition.

Two very different attempts to proactively and self-consciously give Anglicanism an international institutional coherence in the 1960s both still exist, but neither of them achieved the authority or the prominence their proponents had initially

[1] A Stephenson, *Anglicanism and the Lambeth Conferences* (London, 1978), 1.

hoped for. It was not these but strong relationships and a shared ecclesial culture which ensured the Communion avoided a schism in the late 1980s over the issue of women bishops – over an issue that would inevitably result in some Anglicans refusing to accept as valid sacraments received by some other Anglicans. Instead, in the last years of the twentieth century, a near schism did develop over the issue of homosexuality, which crystallised the depth of cultural difference between different parts of the Communion, and which remains active and could yet splinter the Anglican Communion, even if it is an issue where provinces could in practice remain siloed from one another.

This article is split into five parts. First, I will explore how some scholars have defined Anglicanism. Secondly, I examine the institutions that have kept Anglicanism together internationally throughout its history, and offer a periodisation for Anglican Communion history. Thirdly, I will consider a number of classical statements of authority in Anglicanism. Fourthly, I explore how rapid cultural, liturgical, and demographic change from the 1950s challenged the unspoken assumptions on which these rested. These left Anglicanism facing less coherence, and the Global North was impacted by the more general crisis of confidence in Western Christianity from the 1960s; strangely in the same decades the Anglican Communion developed a comprehensive and seemingly robust set of institutions. Finally, I will explore the factors that led to the crisis of 1998 which weakened those institutions, a situation that continues to the present, before concluding with some thoughts on the future and the enduring, if unfashionable, importance of patriarchs as leaders in churches.[2]

What is Anglicanism?

How might one attempt to answer Stephenson's question: 'what is Anglicanism?'

One possible answer is to define Anglicanism relationally, in particular with reference to the Archbishop of Canterbury. The 1930 Lambeth Conference stated:

> The Anglican Communion is a fellowship, within the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, of those duly constituted dioceses, provinces or regional Churches in communion with the See of Canterbury ... [3]

Another way of answering the question is culturally. Owen Chadwick, writing in 1992, defined Anglicanism in terms of a shared derivation of doctrine, not even necessarily of any presently shared doctrine:

> a body of bishops all in communion with the See of Canterbury, in various parts of the world, not necessarily having English as their first language, some of them unable to speak English; but with their doctrine derived from

[2] Global South and Global North can be contentious terms but they have an economy of expression and reflect one important cleavage in world Anglicanism. Patriarchs, in today's Anglican context, need not necessarily be men.

[3] *Resolutions of the Seventh Lambeth Conference*, §49.

> the Reformed doctrine of the English sixteenth century, and their worship developed out of the English prayer book.[4]

Without a comprehensive set of definitional first principles, Anglicanism has thus tended to be defined instead by a testing of the limits of what can legitimately fall within its compass. Henry McAdoo, Archbishop of Dublin from 1977 to 1985, said a key question in setting Anglicanism's boundaries was how theological development can and should occur: 'what are the legitimate limits of diversity and what legitimizes them?'[5]

The institutional architecture of global Anglicanism has tended to evolve in response to three interlinked factors: greater geographical reach; this, in turn, created greater distinctiveness of Anglican provinces from one another, whether in terms of institutional set-up, churchmanship, or culture; and both of those factors generated theological crises which tested the limits of what was containable within Anglicanism.

Periods of international Anglican institutional history

One can identity five periods in the institutional history of global Anglicanism, with some overlap between them.

In the first period, there was no such thing as Anglicanism, only the Church of England and its outposts that existed wherever English communities formed, temporarily or permanently, overseas. Only the Church of Ireland was in full communion with the Church of England while also having autonomy from it, and that autonomy was nominal more than real.

By the time the Church of Ireland's autonomy had been snuffed out formally in 1801, the second period had begun, in which a number of Churches emerged beyond Britain and Ireland, in communion with the See of Canterbury but independent from it. The first of these was created as a result of the American Revolution by Episcopal Protestants who found themselves living in an independent republic. For a brief period, the English refused to consecrate new bishops for a 'rebel' church, and its first self-chosen bishop, Samuel Seabury, was consecrated by Scots bishops – themselves not yet in full Communion with Canterbury. Yet, within three months of that consecration in November 1786, an Act of Parliament was passed to give the Church of England legal authority to consecrate a foreigner, and the next two bishops for the nascent United States were consecrated by the Archbishop of Canterbury in the Lambeth Palace Chapel. Significantly, synodical government would be a hallmark of the independent American Church from the start, with clergy and laity having equal right to ecclesiastical legislation. [6]

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[4] O Chadwick, 'Introduction' in Roger Coleman (ed), *Resolutions of the Lambeth Conference 1867–1988* (Toronto, 1992), i.

[5] H McAdoo, 'Spiritual Freedom and the Corporate Nature of Faith' in Stephen Sykes (ed), *Authority in the Anglican Communion: Essays Presented to Bishop John Howe* (Toronto, 1987), 80.

[6] Stephenson (note 1), 10, 12–13.

Later that year, Charles Inglis of Nova Scotia was consecrated the first overseas imperial bishop. In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, dioceses in colonies with substantial White settler populations would seek and gain autonomy while remaining in communion with Canterbury. By 1867, there were nearly fifty bishoprics in the Empire outside the British Isles.[7]

As with the United States and unlike the Church of England, synodical government was a hallmark of these Churches from a very early point, with New Zealand, Australia and Canada all establishing synods before 1857. Robert Gray of Cape Town's failed attempt to call a South African synod with lay delegates was one of the crises which led to the calling of the Lambeth Conference in 1867. Other causative crises were the failure to get parliamentary time for legislation formalising Australian and Canadian church autonomy, and two further South African-originated controversies: the Long Judgement of 1865 which formally disestablished the Church of England outside the motherland;[8] and the complex Colenso crisis relating to questions of theology, ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and the autonomy of Anglican dioceses in the Empire beyond England. Although desire for some sort of pan-Anglican Conference had been building from the SPG sesquicentenary in 1851, it took this succession of crises to overcome the widespread loci of resistance to any such gathering being called.[9] Another pre-requisite was technological change, as sail gave way to steam on the high seas, enabling greatly reduced travelling times.[10]

Michael Marshall argues that a slower-burning crisis came in the shape of the diversification of Anglican belief and practice beyond the two-century-old Broad Church consensus from the beginning of the nineteenth century, especially in the High Church dioceses of New Zealand and South Africa.[11]

In the run-up to the first Lambeth Conference, the possibility of both a global Anglican synod and a global Anglican court were explicitly explored and rejected.[12] For long decades afterwards, a gathering commitment to the concept of an Anglican Communion was concretised only in the shape of the Archbishop of Canterbury as the focus for intercommunion and, through him, the Lambeth Conference which he convened. Despite the repeated formal disavowals of prelatical autocracy, all Communion-wide gatherings of Anglicans in this period remained solely attended by bishops, with the exception of the highly informal Pan-Anglican Congress of 1908.

This began to change in the 1950s, when a fourth period can be identified, characterised by a diversification of Anglicanism's instruments of communion. Intercontinental air travel and telephone calls allowed Anglicans to speak with one another and to meet more frequently. Richard Chartres has quipped that the Anglican Communion 'was invented by Geoffrey Fisher and the B.O.A.C.'.[13] Two

[7] Ibid, 11–12.

[8] *Re Lord Bishop of Natal* (1864) III Moore, PC, NS 115 (Privy Council).

[9] Stephenson (note 1), 13–15, 19–23.

[10] Chadwick (note 4), 'Introduction', iv.

[11] M Marshall, *Church at the Cross-Roads: Lambeth 1988* (London, 1988), 17, 20.

[12] J Howe, *Highways and Hedges: Anglicanism and the Universal Church* (Toronto, 1985), 60–61; Stephenson (note 1), 37, 114–115.

[13] C Podmore, 'The Development of the Instruments of Communion' in Jeremy Morris (ed.), *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Volume IV: Global Western Anglicanism, c.1910-present* (Oxford, 2017), 289, 298–299.

pan-Anglican Congresses were called in 1954 and 1963, involving priests and lay people as well as prelates. Leaders of mission agencies from different countries were able to meet more frequently, and direct international diocese-to-diocese contacts flourished. The Anglican Communion was finally given a full-time secretariat, albeit a small one, in 1960. In 1971 the Anglican Consultative Council or ACC, created at Lambeth 1968 with bishops, clergy, and laity as members, met for the first time. Partly in response to some of its decisions, Lambeth 1978 resolved to have the Primates meet as a group on their own on a regular basis for the first time, taking some authority away from the laity and clergy not merely to the episcopate, but the top rank of the episcopate.[14]

At Lambeth 1988, the Primate of All Ireland, Robin Eames, first identified as the 'instruments we have of communion and decision making' the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council, and the Primates' Meeting.[15]

Ironically, not much more than a decade after this quartet of instruments was identified, a fifth period in the history of international Anglicanism began, one characterised by impaired communion and the breakdown of instruments. Although the 1998 Lambeth Conference revealed a deep fracture in the Communion, it was initially followed by a period of institutional quiet. This ended with the consecration of the openly gay and partnered Gene Robinson as Bishop of New Hampshire in 2003. This period has been marked by the failure of Archbishops of Canterbury to invite some bishops to Lambeth, citing the need to preserve unity – notably Robinson himself in 2008 – as well as boycotts by some bishops and even entire Provinces in both 2008 and 2022.

Statements on authority

Perhaps the most significant attempt to define Anglicanism was the famous Chicago–Lambeth Quadrilateral. The Chicago Quadrilateral was not an attempt to define Anglicanism at all, but had been adopted by the US Bishops in 1886 as a contribution to the possibility of church reunification.[16] It argued that four elements comprised the essentials of the deposit of faith which would need to be retained in any scheme for church unity. These were accepted with only minor amendments at Lambeth 1888, and were the Scriptures as 'containing all things necessary to salvation' and the rule and ultimate standard of faith; the Nicene Creed as 'sufficient statement' of the Faith; the two dominical sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper 'ministered with unfailing use of Christ's words of institution and of the elements ordained by Him'; and the historic episcopate, locally adapted. [17]

Resolution 49 of the 1930 Conference added three specifically Anglican riders to the Quadrilateral. These were that Anglican dioceses, provinces and churches

[14] Ibid, 298–299.

[15] *The Official Record of the 1988 Lambeth Conference*, 14–15.

[16] J Woolverton, 'The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral and the Lambeth Conferences', *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, vol 53 (1984), 97–98.

[17] *The Chicago Quadrilateral; Resolutions of the Third Lambeth Conference,* §11.

were by definition in Communion with Canterbury; that its member churches were particular or national churches with territorial integrity; and that they were bound together not by a central or legislative authority, 'but by mutual loyalty sustained through the common counsel of the bishops in conference'. It further looked forward to the ultimate reunion of Christendom, and stated that their understanding of 'the Catholic and Apostolic faith and order' was 'generally set forth in the Book of Common Prayer', without defining the role of the Prayer Book more tightly.[18]

A particularly interesting paragraph in the 1930 Conference official report discusses what would happen if the freedom of Anglican member churches to regulate their own 'observances and discipline' caused 'divergence to the point even of disruption'. In that case, it stated:

> it is clear that the Lambeth Conference as such could not take any disciplinary action. Formal action would belong to the several Churches of the Anglican Communion individually; but the advice of the Lambeth Conference, sought before executive action is taken by the constituent Churches, would carry very great moral weight.[19]

The longest and arguably most significant statement on the Anglican understanding of authority was produced by the Committee on the Anglican Communion, a sub-group of the 1948 Lambeth Conference. The 1948 Statement positively celebrates the dispersed nature of authority in Anglicanism, specifically referenced as a Christian alternative to the totalitarianism of the Nazis and Soviets.[20] Yet it recognises that such dispersed authority may result in insufficient coherence. It posits a question that would become acute towards the end of the twentieth century:

> Is Anglicanism based on a sufficiently coherent form of authority to form the nucleus of a world-wide fellowship of Churches, or does its comprehensiveness conceal internal divisions which may cause its disruption?[21]

The Statement rejected any peculiar authority as being vested in the Archbishop of Canterbury, giving him instead a 'leadership' role, while the Church of England is merely 'one of those tributary streams, influencing the life of the main river of the Anglican Communion'. It therefore represents a milestone in the globalisation of Anglicanism. It underscored previous rejections of a formal primacy of Canterbury, and for any judicial or legislative instruments of the Communion; Lambeth was to remain an advisory body, and it repudiated 'centralized government' or 'a legal basis of union'.[22]

[18] *Resolutions of the Seventh Lambeth Conference*, §49.

[19] *The Lambeth Conference 1930: Encyclical Letter from the Bishops with Resolutions and Reports* (London, 1930), 154.

[20] *The Lambeth Conference 1948: The Encyclical Letter from the Bishops; together with Resolutions and Reports* (London, 1948), 84.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid, 83–84.

Instead, with the individual elements supporting it being in 'organic relation to each other', authority:

> is distributed among Scripture, Tradition, Creeds, and the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments, the witness of saints, and the consensus fidelium, which is the continuing experience of the Holy Spirit through his faithful people in the Church. It is thus a dispersed rather than a centralised authority having many elements which combine, interact with, and check each other; these elements together contributing by a process of mutual support, mutual checking, and redressing of errors or exaggerations to the many-sided fullness of the authority which Christ has committed to His Church. Where this authority of Christ is to be found mediated not in one mode but in several we recognize in this multiplicity God's loving provision against the temptations to tyranny and the dangers of unchecked power.
>
> This authority possesses a suppleness and elasticity in that the emphasis of one element over the others may and does change with the changing conditions of the Church. The variety of the contributing factors gives to it a quality of richness which encourages and releases initiative, trains in fellowship, and evokes a free and willing obedience.[23]

The statement emerged from context which would soon afterwards cease to exist. The following decades would see the Communion lose much sense of liturgical unity even as its rapid growth saw it enjoy much greater cultural diversity. In the procession from the final service of the 1958 Lambeth Conference, Geoffrey Fisher was moved to see near him Reginald Owen, Archbishop of New Zealand, who had been at Oxford with him, and later headmaster of Uppingham when Fisher was his opposite number at Repton.[24] Men from such a socially narrow world would not for much longer rule such vast swathes of the Anglican world, and that would have challenges as well as many blessings. While it had weaknesses, this social homogeneity had provided a glue which facilitated the acceptance of theological diversity.[25]

The tumultuous 1960s and their foreshadowing in the 1950s

By 1954, improvements in long-distance travel and the wealth of the Episcopal Church enabled the holding of an Anglican Congress for the first time since 1908. It took place in Minneapolis, and its Presiding Officer was not Archbishop Fisher, but Henry Sherrill, Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, reflecting a gathering shift in power towards the wealthy and then rapidly growing Anglicanism of the United States.[26] Reflecting that ecclesiology was changing as much as technology,

[23] Ibid, 84–85.

[24] E Carpenter, *Archbishop Fisher: His Life and Times* (Norwich, 1991), 475–476.

[25] E Radner, 'The Anglican Communion and Anglicanism', in Jeremy Morris (ed), *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Volume IV: Global Western Anglicanism, c.1910-present* (Oxford, 2017), 316.

[26] Podmore (note 13), 288.

the Congress invited one priest and one lay person from each diocese and missionary district as well as its bishop, with a total of 657 delegates from all continents. The Minneapolis Congress proposed the creation of a permanent Anglican Communion Secretariat for the first time.[27]

It was Lambeth 1958 which finally sanctioned permanent Anglican Communion structures that were not part of Lambeth Palace. One was an Anglican Consultative Body which, although it consisted of primates, could be attended on their behalf by clergy or laity (the first lay representation on a formal inter-Anglican body); and the Anglican Congress experiment was to be repeated in 1963.[28] Stephen Bayne, the energetic Bishop of Olympia in the United States, took up post as Anglican Communion Executive Officer in 1959, and had established a small Office in London by 1960.[29] Bayne, judged by George Bell as an 'outstanding figure' was a man of ability and also boundless energy, who in his five years as the Anglican Communion's Executive Officer covered a greater distance than that from the Earth to the Moon and back.[30]

The centrepiece of Bayne's work was the Toronto Anglican Congress of 1963.[31] It adopted a policy of Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence (MRI), which attempted to create a stronger Anglican central structure along with substantial transfers of resources from richer to poorer churches. The globalisation of Anglicanism was well advanced by this stage, with only ten of the Communion's 330 dioceses remaining in a direct subordinate relationship to Canterbury or the Episcopal Church saving those in England and the USA, the remainder having been gathered into self-governing national or regional Provinces.[32] Bishop of Ohio, Nelson Burroughs, said that at the Toronto Congress, 'For the first time it dawned on us that the Anglican Communion is no longer an English Church'.[33] The only Anglican Province not to send a delegation was China's Chung Hua Sheng Kung Hui, by that point being forcibly incorporated into the pan-Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement.[34]

These were years of rapid change in race relations. In 1954, although the Southern African House of Bishops, for example, remained all White, Johannesburg's sole clerical representative at Minneapolis was Bertram Joseph Lehlohonolo Moloi, a sign of emerging change.[35] By Lambeth 1958, 'there were now many African national bishops' from West and East Africa, while three years later, Solomon Oduaiya Odutola, representing the retiring Primate of Western Africa, became the first Black

[27] J Zink, 'Changing World, Changing Church: Stephen Bayne and "Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence"' (2011) *Anglican Theological Review*, 250.

[28] *Resolutions of the Ninth Lambeth Conference*, §61, 68.

[29] S Bayne, *An Anglican Turning Point: Documents and Interpretations* (Austin, 1964), 7, 11.

[30] Zink (note 27), 250.

[31] Podmore (note 13), 291.

[32] S Bayne (ed), *Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence with Related Background Documents* (London, 1965), 1–2.

[33] D Cox, *A Vision to Fulfil: 'Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence' in the Anglican Communion* (STM thesis, Yale Divinity School, 1987), 126.

[34] P Whiteley, *Frontier Mission: An Account of the Toronto Congress 1963* (London, 1963), 6.

[35] S Peart-Binns, *Ambrose Reeves* (London, 1973), 144–145.

African to attend an African Anglican archbishops' meeting.[36] In the large parts of Africa without significant White settler communities, a social colour bar that still existed in the 1950s had eroded almost completely by the early 1960s.[37] African Anglicans already outnumbered North American Anglicans by 1963, although these were years of optimism in most of the Anglican world with rapid church growth also taking place in the new suburbs of the UK, USA and Australia; in the last of these, growth had been 'explosive'.[38] This was, paradoxically, also an era of self-doubt, where Anglicans worried about how to make their witness 'more relevant to the world's needs', particularly in the Global North where there was a sense that advances in both material and social science were making Christianity irrelevant.[39] The general mood of the Congress might be summarised as a nervously irrational exuberance: it was a Congress full of ideas, often contradictory, channelling the energy of a body experiencing some of the most rapid growth in its history yet somehow fearing the world was about to leave it behind.

MRI was the final Congress statement. Initially drafted as an appeal for missionary capital funds for newly independent Provinces, it transmogrified into something more grandiose, stating: 'what we are really asking is the rebirth of the Anglican Communion, which means the death of many old things'.[40] Rather than a fundraising appeal, this was 'a communication – a manifesto, a summons, a challenge, a proposal' at a point in history when Bayne could write, without any sense of irony:

> The cost in money is the least important price-tag, for money is not a very rare commodity, and Anglicans have quite a lot of it.[41]

So Bayne asked for £5 million over five years for a small central secretariat and eight regional officers based in different parts of the world.[42]

MRI ultimately spread itself too thinly with ideological imperatives pulling in different directions; Anglicanism was, all at the same time, to respect local variation, to become a coherent worldwide entity, and to dissolve itself ecumenically for the greater good of the Church, while also respecting Muhammad and Marx as divine messengers. This was to be delivered largely through personal relationships between Anglicans, directed only by a worldwide staff consisting of a tiny central secretariat and eight regional officers, who would also facilitate the replacement of hitherto substantial mission agency funding for newly self-governing churches in the Global South from general Global North church funds. Even someone as gifted and energetic as Bayne could not turn these contradictions into a coherent direction of travel. Zink's assessment is that 'MRI's long-term impact was relatively minimal' to the point of meriting but passing mention in recent histories of Anglicanism.[43] Yet it

[36] S Peart-Binns, *Archbishop Joost de Blank* (London, 1987)137, 140.

[37] K Ward, 'Christianity, colonialism and missions' in Hugh McLeod (ed), *The Cambridge History of Christianity, Volume 9: World Christianities c. 1914-c.2000* (Cambridge, 2006), 86.

[38] S Bayne, 'Organizing for Action' in Philip Jefferson (ed), *The Church in the 60s* (Toronto, 1963), 112, 114.

[39] Ibid, 117.

[40] Bayne (note 32), xiii, 8.

[41] Ibid, x, xvii.

[42] Ibid, 2–3.

[43] Zink (note 27), 260.

did ensure what was still the very recent establishment of a permanent secretariat for the Anglican Communion was embedded and secured.

David Cox noted the irony that MRI expressed a synthesis of faith and culture in the very year in which it began to unravel, for a huge and sudden crisis of confidence was about to undermine Western Christendom.[44]

The ACC and the Primates' Meeting

The revolutionary spirit of the decade reached its peak in the summer of 1968, coincidentally while the Lambeth Conference was meeting. While the Conference shared in some of the breathless rhetoric, there was an enormous gap between that and what it actually did, which was to invent mundane new institutions to cope with rapid growth, diversification, and the implications of the substantial transfer of power over the preceding twenty years to national and regional churches in the Global South.

Its most significant act was to set up the ACC, a permanent body much smaller and therefore capable of meeting much more frequently than the Lambeth Conference; it consisted of a bishop, a priest, and a layperson from each of the larger provinces, and a bishop and a priest or layperson from each of the smaller ones, therefore enshrining permanent and guaranteed lay representation in the higher councils of Anglicanism for the first time.[45] It would have the power to co-opt additional members, including women and youth members.[46] It retains essentially the same composition and brief into the 2020s. It was the first pan-Anglican body 'deriving its authority not from the Lambeth Conference nor from the Archbishop of Canterbury but directly from the Churches', and Colin Podmore argues this represented a 'profound shift in ecclesiology'.[47] Yet at its very first meeting, in Limuru, Kenya, in 1971, it took a decision with far-reaching implications that exceeded the limited degree of authority which this new body had yet established in Anglicanism's largely cultural and relational institutional framework.

By a narrow majority of 24 to 22, despite the opposition of the Archbishop of Canterbury, it replied to a request by the Bishop of Hong Kong by saying that he and any other bishop of the Anglican Communion who ordained women to the priesthood with the approval of their Province would have the approval of the ACC.[48]

It was as a result of this and other decisions that were perceived as being too radical politically or theologically for the broad mass of bishops across the Communion that the 1978 Lambeth Conference established a Primates' Meeting, gathering roughly every two years. At its inception, there had been a sense that the ACC, which reflected member churches' synods in having members from all three orders rather than merely bishops, would sooner rather than later obviate the need

[44] Cox (note 33), 227.

[45] *Resolutions of the Tenth Lambeth Conference*, §69; M Chapman, *Anglicanism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2006), 132–133.

[46] *Resolutions of the Tenth Lambeth Conference*, §69

[47] Podmore (note 13), 294–295.

[48] *New York Times*, 7 March 1971.

for the Lambeth Conference to meet as a separate body, let alone the Primates. As late as 1988, the Canadian Church's National Executive council stated that 'the Lambeth Conference is outdated and should be replaced by a strengthened' ACC.[49] Yet this once credible challenge to the centrality of the Lambeth Conference faded so rapidly that by 1994 the prominent Australian lay synodsperson and journalist, Muriel Porter, was decrying the impending 1998 Lambeth Conference as 'a triumphalist display of episcopacy' that reflected a 'major ... power shift ... in the world-wide Anglican communion during the past two decades'. She was among those who believed that the ACC's decision to approve women priests at its first conference 'sowed the seeds of its own demise' before it could establish itself.[50] It is telling that the one instrument of communion in Anglicanism created to intentionally express a theological principle is the instrument that most obviously and quickly exceeded the authority that member churches of the Anglican Communion were willing to cede to it.

Anglicanism proceeds through serendipity; the two serious attempts to create Anglicanism from above – MRI and the ACC – did have some real long-term impact but fell far short of that which their proposers had hoped for.

Anglican machinery and identity in the run-up to 1998

Anglican Communion central machinery remained trimly staffed in this period. In 1987, the Anglican Communion Secretariat in London employed just seventeen people to service the ACC, Primates' Meeting, Lambeth Conference (for which additional staff were of course brought in), and regional Inter-Anglican Networks.[51]

There was a sense that after several decades of rapid change, Anglicanism was heading for a period of institutional stability – hence it was at Lambeth 1988 that Robin Eames formally delineated four 'Instruments of Communion' which remain in place to this day. As noted earlier, this quartet consists of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the ACC, and the Primates' Meeting.

A classically Anglican ambiguity permeates the status of the Lambeth Conferences in this four-legged framework. Chadwick captured the subtlety by saying that the Conference's resolutions were not 'binding' in any province's body of law but were also more than 'not binding'.[52]

The Canadian theologian John Howe's 1985 discussion of Anglican ecclesiology begins: 'A family holds together largely through affection ... One importance of affection is that when people meet they like one another'. Therefore, Howe assumed that more frequent travel would mean that Anglicans in different parts of the world would get to like one another more, and that younger people especially found the traditional sources of division within Anglicanism irrelevant. Each Province was a member of the Communion by its own choice, and their independence was stated in their constitutions; they might turn to Canterbury for advice, but Canterbury

[49] *The Canadian Churchman*, June 1988

[50] M Porter, 'Laity in the Aisles' (1994) 5(4) *Eureka Street* 26–29.

[51] *Many Gifts, One Spirit: Report of ACC-7, Singapore, 1987* (London, 1987), 19.

[52] Chadwick (note 4), xvi–xvii.

would never give instructions.[53] The possibility that a Province might be expelled, or that Anglicans might discover on meeting more frequently that they did not like one another seems not to have been discussed. Yet that was part of what generated the great crisis of 1998.

The crisis of 1998

There were three factors in the 1990s which set the context for the 1998 Lambeth Conference. First, this was a decade when the impact of a number of demographic waves affecting different parts of the Anglican world became powerfully felt. The total number of Anglicans in Africa is estimated to have increased from 8 million in 1970 to 50 million in 2010, representing compounded growth of 60% per decade or 4.8% per year.[54] At the same time, the churches of the Global North experienced stagnation and in some cases rapid decline. Below this over-arching trend, it was mainly but not entirely the case in the last decades of the twentieth century that dioceses and provinces which were predominantly Evangelical had more positive numerical trends than those which were more Anglo-Catholic or Central; Anglo-Catholic or Central regions of the Global South, with a few exceptions, continued to record growth in this period, albeit generally less rapid than in more Evangelical areas, while those in the Global North generally shrank.[55] The net effect of these was to produce a Communion which was more Evangelical than before, where non-Evangelicals were less liberal than before, and where Evangelicals saw their growth as a sign of God's favour on their views and the decline of liberals as the consequence of their abandonment of godly teaching and Biblical truth. This idea would emerge from nowhere to become a prominent theme of Anglican statements from the Global South from around 1997.[56]

Secondly, a rapid drop in the cost of long-haul air travel and the emergence of the internet would see Anglicans get to know one another as never before. Those of like mind networked closely with one another, something seen at the enormous Dallas and Kuala Lumpur conferences of Anglican Evangelicals in 1997 and 1998. But those who had little in common suddenly couldn't avoid one another's views. Until the mid-1990s, it was easy for Anglicans in Lagos and Los Angeles, including even bishops, to know almost nothing about one another and so to approach the few occasions in which they did meet in a spirit of mutual goodwill. By 1998, the inboxes of African primates would resound every few weeks with an email from Jack Spong,

[53] Howe (note 12), 45–46, 49.

[54] T Johnson and G Zurlo, 'The Changing Demographics of Global Anglicanism, 1970–2010', in D Goodhew (ed), *Growth and Decline in the Anglican Communion: 1980 to the Present*, 37–44.

[55] D Goodhew, *Growth and Decline in the Anglican Communion: 1980 to the Present* (Abingdon, 2016), 11–13, 22.

[56] See for example J Adetiloye, 'The Place of Scripture in the Life and Mission of the Church in the 21st Century: Keynote Address at the Second Anglican Encounter in the South' reproduced in C Taiwo, *Joseph Abiodun Adetiloye: The Visionary Primate* (Lagos, 1999), 218, 243; ACC/LC/6, untitled files simply marked 'sections', Draft Report as at 3 September 1998: *Peter John Lee and John Shelby Spong, Catechesis: 'A Dialogue Between Believers'* – Section One, A Catechesis on Homosexuality.

the radical Bishop of Newark, New Jersey, demanding an end to belief in a literal afterlife or a personal God.

Thirdly, Spong's church, the Episcopal Church of the United States, had been wracked by ideological divisions since the late 1960s; these intensified in the 1990s, particularly over the issue of the acceptability of same-sex relationships for Christians.[57] There was an increasing resort to legal action among the warring parties in the Episcopal Church and mutual denunciations became increasingly bitter with little sign of any acceptance of good faith. This often felt like an acme for a whole range of issues that were increasingly dividing Americans into mutually hostile tribes. The sense of alienation from a mainly liberal national Church leadership was most acute among the Charismatic Evangelicals who were a small proportion of Episcopal Church congregations, but often ones that were rapidly growing. They began networking intensely in the mid-1990s with their confreres in other Global North Provinces, but also with African and Asian Anglicans with whom they had contact through missionary work.[58] It was probably as late as 1997 before they realised the emotive power that homosexuality had, especially in Africa. Yet, although no Westerners had been paying attention, there had been signs of this both at the 1988 Lambeth Conference and some 1990s regional Anglican conferences in Africa.[59]

That was the backdrop against which what had been a fairly anodyne holding motion on homosexuality at the 1998 Lambeth Conference was amended into the famous, or notorious, Lambeth I.10. It was passed by a 526 to 70 margin, with those in favour including some Western liberals who thought they were still voting for a holding motion and who signed a letter decrying the motion within a week.[60] The 88% vote in favour continues to be cited into the 2020s by those opposed to the acceptance of same-sex relationships as the definitive statement of mind of the Communion on this matter.[61]

Until Lambeth 1998, it was taken as read that Lambeth lacked any legal-juridical authority. At the 1988 Lambeth Conference, for example, Graham Leonard, the Bishop of London, was probably the most substantial and influential opponent of women's ordination in the Anglican world. He supported a compromise resolution in the matter because he understood the autonomy of Anglican Provinces as cardinal and therefore that the Conference simply could not restrain the American and New

[57] S A Kujawa-Holbrook, 'North American Anglicanism: Competing Factions, Creative Tensions, and the Liberal–Conservative Impasse', in J Morris (ed), *The Oxford History of Anglicanism, Volume IV: Global Western Anglicanism, c.1910-present* (Oxford, 2017), 366–372, 379–384.

[58] J Maiden, 'Renewing the Body of Christ: Sharing of Ministries Abroad (SOMA) USA and Transnational Charismatic Anglicanism, 1978–1998' in (2017) 51 *Journal of American Studies* 1260–1264.

[59] *Lambeth 1988 Official Record*, 205–214, 219–226; ACO:ACC/LC/31/1/E – Report of the Kenya Pre-Lambeth Conference, Mombasa, 7–10 May 1996 and Report of the Ugandan House of Bishops Pre-Lambeth Meeting, 13 July 1996, ACO:ACC/LC/31/1/E (misfiled) – Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion), Report of Pre-Lambeth Conference, 27–29 November 1996.

[60] *A Pastoral Statement to Lesbian and Gay Anglicans from Some Member Bishops of the Lambeth Conference*, 5 August 1988.

[61] Interview with Ron Ferris, 5 June 2023.

Zealand churches from consecrating women bishops as their Provincial synods had already voted to do so, telling the Conference:

> The starting point, I believe has to be the independence of provinces, their autonomy. This I believe is so deeply rooted in the Lambeth Conference that it is quite unrealistic for us to suppose that we can overthrow that.[62]

Yet, ten years later this autonomy was widely rejected when Resolution I.10 was treated as a policy with legal force presenting us with the impasse that persists to the present.

Conclusion

Relational and cultural bases for Communion can seem to be far too thin for the load they bear, a weakness of Anglican ecclesiology was already noted at Lambeth 1948. Since then, the shared culture and substantially common liturgies that provided the dual centres of gravity around which Anglicanism had formed itself have weakened tremendously. At the same time attempts to create a central authority or court have always foundered on the unwillingness of provinces to cede authority to pan-Anglican institutions that were more than consultative.

Yet, the Gordion knot of an issue is that homosexuality actually demonstrates why relational and cultural grounds for unity are, in practical application, stronger than confessional or institutional ones. They have the capacity to strain without breaking; to go through periods of renewal as well as times of thinness. Formal boundaries and red lines cannot necessarily be uncrossed once they have been crossed; relationships can always thaw. It is perhaps time to put a bit more faith in the institutional patrimony which has been bequeathed to us.

One possible solution is to go back to the 1930 Lambeth Conference which, as noted earlier, stated that in the event of a province exceeding the legitimate boundaries of diversity, formal disciplinary action would belong to the several Churches of the Anglican Communion individually rather than the Lambeth Conference. And, in practice, most of the Provinces have been unwilling to take such formal action beyond a relatively short and time-limited ban on Americans and Canadians, who still effectively bankroll the Anglican Communion, attending meetings that they are paying for. In any case, attitudes to homosexuality between the West and parts of Africa have continued to diverge dramatically over the last 27 years. A demand to Canadians – or Brazilians, or Scots – on homosexuality being driven by churches in countries where gay sex is a criminal offence is likely to land badly.

Let me add a final note on the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury in the Anglican Communion, and those who argue that this is a legacy of colonialism and imperialism. It might be. But equally rooted in a long-vanished empire are the roles of the Ecumenical Patriarch and the Bishop of Rome.

[62] *Lambeth 1988 Official Record*, 63–64.

The modern mind is hard-wired to seek structural or legal solutions for areas of disagreement. But modernity is ending. Faith in structures and institutions is eroding across the world; faith in democracy seems to be declining among the young even in its heartlands. These trends may reverse but we would be foolish to count on them doing so. Instead, people in very different sorts of countries are at the same time turning to leadership with personal authority, to strong men – if you will, to latter day patriarchs.

The moral authority of the See of Canterbury is particularly driven by its great antiquity, its presence at the creation of the Church of England in its post-Reformation form, from which the vast majority of Anglican Provinces derive their orders and apostolic succession. Canterbury is therefore the 'father' of almost all the other member Churches, which are branches of an extended family. If that all sounds very patriarchal, it is because it is.

Were the Archbishop of Canterbury to be replaced by a Supreme Primate elected or selected on another basis, it is unthinkable that they would carry the same moral authority as Canterbury, and in current circumstances, I very much doubt that the Anglican Communion would survive such a development. Whether one likes it or not, patriarchal authority still carries weight, so does the power of the name of an ancient See – and we suddenly find ourselves living at a time when people are demanding personally powerful leaders.

Ultimately, though, with goodwill, anything is possible; without it, everything is impossible. It is entirely possible for us to negotiate a way of living with our current divisions whether across the Anglican Communion or within the Church of England if people think it is worth doing so. The real question is whether we wish to remain in Communion with one another. And a legitimate test of that is whether Anglican Bishops can stand to spend a few muggy midsummer weeks together in some student halls of residence in Kent.

Cite this article: G Lynch, 'Discovering Anglicanism – ecclesiology at Lambeth Conferences 1867–1998' (2026) 28 Ecc LJ 81–95. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0956618X25101075