Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

A table of contents for *Anvil* can be found here:

Episcopacy and Communion: Church, Culture and Change[1]

MICHAEL J. NAZIR-ALI

There has been renewed interest of late in what are sometimes referred to as 'structures of authority' in the Anglican Communion. The preparatory papers for the forthcoming Lambeth Conference identify these structures variously as personal, collegial and communal. At the level of the diocese, the bishop acts as a focus of unity. He exercises his ministry collegially along with the ordained ministry and communally in synod. At the provincial level, the Primate is the personal focus of unity. Collegiality is exercised in the House of Bishops and the communal element is to be found in the provincial synod. At the international level, the Archbishop of Canterbury is freely recognised as a focus of unity. Collegiality is expressed in the Lambeth Conference and in the Meeting of Primates. The communal dimension is expressed in the meetings of the Anglican Consultative Council.[2] The difficulty with such a view is that it tends to see the bishops and the Primates as primarily juridical in their function and it also tends to institutionalize denominationalism at the expense of ecumenism. There are some who regard the exercise of authority, even ecclesiastical authority, as somehow inevitably coercive. The ARCIC Final Report can, therefore, speak of the bishops as requiring 'the compliance necessary to maintain faith and charity' in the life of the church.[3] John Skinner, on the other hand, is of the view that authority is related primarily to nurture and to the cultivation of the human personality. He offers the following definition of authority: 'that kind of structural reality, whether social or personal, which through nurture and cultivation enables individuals to become truly centred selves or persons, and thus, relatively free beings.'[4] Such a view of authority naturally regards coercion as a debasing of authentic authority, though it *does* allow for an exercise of authority which is not divorced from its nurturing, cultivating function and which is recognised as springing from this function. Anglicans have traditionally been wary of 'structures of authority' precisely because of their tendency to become juridical and institutionalizing at the expense of the charismatic and pastoral aspects of the Church's life.

---

1 This article was given as a paper at the Conference on 'Communion and Episcopacy' at Ripon College, Cuddesdon, 12-15 April, 1988.
2 *Working Papers for the Lambeth Conference, 1988,* W. D. Pattinson and Michael Nazir-Ali (eds.), Dogmatic and Pastoral Concerns, V. pp 32ff.
3 CTS/SPCK, 1982, p 74.
4 *The Meaning of Authority,* Lanham, Maryland, 1983 and 'Ideology, Authority and Faith' in *Authority in the Anglican Communion,* S. W. Sykes (ed.), Toronto 1987, pp 27ff.

Is this the time to introduce the notion of *communion* as more basic to the structure of the church than that of authority? For the early Church, certainly, the need for communion between the churches and their bishops is a primary concern. It is true, of course, that the apostolicity and catholicity of a church and its bishop have to be established first before communion can be recognized but once communion is recognized, each church, together with its bishop, is regarded as apostolic and as part of the Catholic Church. Even Cyprian with his high esteem for the *Cathedra Petri*, was a firm advocate of the equality of all bishops and would not easily tolerate Roman interference in the internal matters of the African province.[1] Lest the office of bishop become the locus of tyranny, Cyprian asks that a bishop be chosen by the bishops of a province *acting together* with the people of the see.[2] In this way communion between a bishop and his people, one see with another and among the bishops is affirmed and enhanced.

Communion between churches is a consequence of the mutual and commensurate recognition of catholicity in each other. It has to be mutual and commensurate for communion to result. From the earliest days, communion has been impaired, hindered and even broken by disagreements between churches or their leaders. Despite the great gains made by the ecumenical movement, this state of affairs is with us still. Sometimes, where communion is concerned, there is an asymmetrical relation between churches. Thus the Anglican Communion, for example, recognises the catholicity of the Roman Catholic Church and of the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox Churches but they do not recognise the catholicity of the Anglican Communion in the same way. This hinders communion between the Anglican Communion and these churches.

Catholicity and the Maintenance of Communion

But how is a mutual recognition of catholicity to take place, so that communion may become possible? In the primitive church catholicity was recognised, first of all, by a common adherence to Holy Scripture. According to Augustine, for example, the authority of Scripture is normative because the Church herself has recognised and confirmed it as such both for her own life and in her mission to the world.[3] For Augustine, the 'sense of Scripture' is preserved in the Rule of Faith, the Creed.[4] This is the minimum required for a person or a church to be recognised as Catholic. Two hundred years or so earlier, Irenaeus too writes of the necessity for a rule of faith in an age when not everyone could read the Scriptures for themselves. Illiterate Christians too must have the opportunity to be taught the basics

---

1 'On the Unity of the Church' in *Teaching Authority in the Early Church*, R. B. Eno (ed.), Delaware 1984, pp 84ff. See also *Letter 59 to Cornelius of Rome*, ibid., pp 87f.

2 Letter 67 to Christians of Leon, Astorga and Merida, ibid., pp 90-91.

3 *Against Faustus* XI.XIII.5, *On Baptism* 11.3.4 *Teaching Authority in the Early Church* pp 130ff.

4 *Faith and Creed*, ibid., p 132f.

of the Christian faith.[1] According to Tertullian, common adherence to the Rule of Faith is what distinguishes Catholic Christians from the heretics.[2] The late Professor Lampe, in his lectures at Cambridge, on the history of Christian Doctrine, used to say that in the early church there was a reciprocal relationship between Scripture and the Rule of Faith. The Rule of Faith was 'according to Scripture' but it also played a part in enabling the church to discern which writings were authentically apostolic in character and, therefore, to be included in the canon of Scripture.

As early as the first epistle of Clement, there is a concern that there should be an orderly succession to the apostolic ministry. Professor Henry Chadwick puts it in this way, 'Clement of Rome sees the duly ordained ministry as the embodiment of the principle that God wills order in his Church . . . This principle of order is linked for Clement with the idea of apostolic succession. The fact of a succession in ministerial commission is not asserted by Clement in controversy, but an agreed datum from which he argues for security of tenure of worthy ministers.'[3] The apostles had appointed bishops (or presbyters) and deacons and had stipulated that when these died they should be replaced by others. In Clement the appointment is made by the apostles, and after them, 'by other reputable men' with the consent of the whole church.[4]

Bishop Gore identifies these 'reputable men' with the 'rulers' (hēgoumenoi) mentioned elsewhere by Clement, and, together with the prophets mentioned in the *Didachē*, regards them as foreshadowing the office of bishop as it was to emerge in its fulness early in the second century.[5] By the time of Ignatius, this office is already well established in Asia and Ignatius, at least, regarded it as established in 'the farthest parts of the earth' as well.[6]

There is little by way of a doctrine of succession in Ignatius, but by the time of Irenaeus, apostolic succession is understood as the orderly succession of bishops in sees founded by the apostles. Such a succession, moreover, is understood as a guarantee of orthodoxy.[7] Both Gore and Lightfoot hold that such a succession of bishops is the norm in the time of Irenaeus and Tertullian who show no awareness of a time when it was not.

---

1 *Against Heresies* 1.22, III.4.2.
2 *Prescription against the Heretics* 36, 37. (Tertullian refers here to Gal. 6:16).
3 *Episcopacy in the N.T. and the Early Church, Preparatory Articles for the Lambeth Conference*, London 1978, p 213.
4 *I Clement* 42f in *Ministry*, Joseph T. Lienhard (ed.), Delaware, 1984, pp 24f. The position of such men would have been similar to that of the 'apostolic delegates', Timothy and Titus in the Pastoral Epistles.
5 Charles Gore, *The Ministry of the Christian Church*, London 1889, pp 276ff. 312ff.
6 Ephesians III:2.
7 Gore, op. cit., p 17. The position of James in Jerusalem is usually regarded as the closest parallel to the bishop in a see as far as the New Testament is concerned.

While other points of doctrine and order are discussed, this alone is regarded as given and is hardly ever referred to as a matter of controversy.[1] The Fathers repeatedly stress the *common* adherence of all the faithful to the Scriptures, the Rule of Faith and apostolic order. Definition of the Catholic Faith as that which has been believed by everyone, everywhere and at all times necessarily includes the notion of *sensus fidelium,* of the reception and the living by the Church of the apostolic preaching.

In the Anglican Communion, these elements of primitive practice have been preserved in different ways. The Lambeth Quadrilateral, for example, sets them out as the conditions under which there can be a mutual recognition of catholicity *between* the churches of the Anglican Communion and other churches. It is no less true, however, that these conditions also govern the relations that exist between churches *within* the Anglican Communion. Essential elements of primitive practice are also preserved in the way in which metropolitical authority is exercised in the Anglican communion,[2] the association of dioceses and of the college of bishops of a province with the process of electing and consecrating a bishop and in the emergence of synodical government.

The Exercise of Authority

While there is fairly general agreement among Anglicans about the *sources* of authority (the report from the 1948 Lambeth Conference speaks of authority being dispersed between Scripture, Tradition, Creeds, the Ministry, the witness of saints and the *sensus fidelium*)[3], there is much less agreement on *how* sources of authority are to be interpreted in the contemporary world and in diverse cultures. There is also the question of *how* authority is to be exercised. The ARCIC Final Report, for example, regards the authority of ordained ministry as a matter which is not merely that of delegated function. Although Christian ministers share the priesthood of all believers and, in a particular sense, represent the people of God at the Eucharist, there is, nevertheless, an element of authority in Christian ministry which is sacramental and inherent. Some Anglicans would relate such authority to the 'grace of orders'.[4] Against this, there is a widespread view in certain provinces of the Anglican Communion that bishops and clergy must always make decisions along with their laity. In the case of bishops, the notion of bishop-in-synod has been developed which restricts the office of bishop, apart from a few residual functions, to

s040

1   *Ibid.* p 307.
2   *The Iberian Churches,* Report to the Archbishop of Canterbury by a commission appointed to consider the application of the Lusitanian Church and the Spanish Reformed Episcopal Church for integration into the Anglican Communion, 1980, p 8.
3   'The Meaning and Unity of the Anglican Communion', in *Authority in the Anglican Communion,* S. W. Sykes (ed.) Toronto 1987, pp 284ff.
4   CTS/SPCK, 1982 p 36 and pp 53f.

leadership *within* synodical bodies.[1] There is considerable potential for tension between the view which would restrict *episcopē* to the bishop and the rest of the ordained ministry and one which sees this *episcopē* being exercised by synodical bodies in which the bishop and other ministers have leadership, to be sure, but no decisive voice.

As far as the hermeneutical question is concerned, the report of the Inter-Anglican Doctrinal Commission, *For the Sake of the Kingdom,* returns again and again to the insight that culture and context are vitally important for our understanding and interpretation of both Scripture and Tradition. Our context supplies the 'Reason' which is brought to our study of Scripture and the Christian Tradition. Different contexts will highlight the significance of different aspects of Scripture and Tradition. It is to be noted that in their use of Reason in this way the commissioners are at least questioning the traditional Anglican understanding of Reason as that which is common to all humanity, providing a common frame-work for all thought. The Report, rather, emphasises that 'Reason' is what 'makes sense' in a given context and varies, therefore, from culture to culture and from context to context. The universality of the Gospel is due to its capacity to appeal to a wide variety of cultures and situations rather than to a supposed 'common mind' possessed by the whole of humanity. We are not reduced to utter relativism, however. Just as the Gospel affirms and highlights aspects of a culture, so also it has the capacity to judge other aspects of the same culture. On the one hand, our culture enables us to 'make sense' of the Gospel, on the other, the Gospel reveals to us what is not in accordance with God's purposes in our culture. Also, the universality of the church compels us to consider carefully how our fellow Christians in other cultures and contexts receive the Gospel and order their lives by it. Such mutual sharing and listening between Christians and churches can lead to an enrichment or even a correction of their own particular perspective.[2]

It is of critical importance that the 'horizon' of Scripture (including all kinds of scholarship in languages, anthropology, archaeology and literary criticism which assist us to place Scripture in its original context) should be allowed to meet the 'horizons' of our contemporary world.[3] It is only when such a meeting occurs that the life-giving power of the Scriptures will become apparent in the transformation of human lives and societies. The very plurality of our contexts has made a reaffirmation of the particularity of the Bible and its normativeness for us crucial. It is to be noted that it is the normativeness of the Bible that is important, not any one interpretation of it. We must also reiterate the point made so often by the Fathers that the Universal Church herself has recognised the authority of Scripture for the ordering of her life and faith. Such a view of Scripture should not in any

---

1   See, eg, K. S. Chittleborough, 'Towards a Theology and Practice of Bishop in Synod', in *Authority in The Anglican Communion* pp 144ff.
2   *For the Sake of the Kingdom,* ACC 1986, particularly ch. 7.
3   See further A. C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons,* Paternoster, Exeter 1980.

way restrict the work of scholars and theologians. Indeed, if Scripture is normative for the life of the Church, it is all the more necessary that we should be assisted in arriving at an understanding of it that takes full account of scholarship and of theological reflection.

We have seen how mutual listening and sharing between Christians and churches helps us to arrive at a more 'rounded' appreciation of the Christian Faith than our solitary perspective would permit. Tradition enables us to listen to what Christians and the Church throughout the ages have to say about the Bible, the sacraments and the Christian Life. Tradition then plays a very important part in helping us to understand what God is saying to us today. It is not to be received uncritically, of course, and, most importantly, it is not static. Authentic development in Tradition is possible provided it is in fidelity to scriptural truth and 'makes sense' in our context. But how are we to decide what is authentic development and what is not, whether a development is truly 'according to scripture' and necessary for the mission of the church? In this connection, the so-called doctrine of reception is sometimes invoked. It is held that particular developments in belief or practice of significance to the whole church, often arise in a particular part of the church and it is only very gradually that the whole Church receives them as authentic developments in Tradition. The same process which leads to the reception by the whole Church of a belief or practice can also lead to the rejection by the Church of a belief or practice if it is established that it is not in accordance with the 'mind of Scripture' and is at variance with the fundamentals of Tradition. In the divided state of the Church, there is also the problem of how a particular matter is to be received by the whole Church. At any rate, it needs to be said that in a fellowship of churches, such as the Anglican Communion, a development cannot be regarded as finally 'received' until it has been 'received' as authentic by every church in that fellowship. It is understood that the process of reception and the emergence of consensus may continue even after official reception of a development. Such an understanding of reception requires that those involved in the promotion of a particular development should, in humility, recognise its provisionality until the process of reception is complete. It also requires those who would be guardians of Tradition be open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in the authentic development of that Tradition.[1]

The Anglican Principle

We have seen how the traditional requirements for catholicity are maintained in the Anglican Communion. It is also clear, however, that these requirements are understood and appropriated by the churches in the light of their contemporary situation. This is not merely incidental but is in

---

1 Report of the Primates' Working Party on *Women and the Episcopate*, pp 43f.

keeping with what has been called the *Anglican Principle*.[1] The Anglican Principle, which is preserved in the classical formularies of Anglicanism, is simply that each local church must be allowed to be the Catholic Church in that place.[2] It must express its catholicity both in continuity with the Church down the ages and in an idiom appropriate to its own cultural, political and economic situation. It is true that the principle has its origins in the emerging consciousness of nationhood in England in the 16th century. This, in itself, was part of a wider phenomenon in the whole of Western Europe, a phenomenon, moreover, not unrelated to the event of the Reformation.

It is true also that the identification of the Church with the Christian Realm in those days made the emergence of a national church inevitable. None of these factors, however, whatever their historical interest, are integral to the principle itself. Huntington seems to have thought, in fact, that the embodiment of the principle in the English Church had a distorting effect on the principle! His articulation of the Quadrilateral was an attempt to liberate the principle from the trammels of the Established Church of England. Whatever the merits of Huntington's case, it is true that the principle has to do less with the civil religion of emergent European nations and more to do with the universality of the Gospel and its capacity for translation into the idiom, thought-forms and life-styles of a wide range of cultures. The Gospel has always had this universal appeal and in the early years of Christian history, spread rapidly in all directions. Certainly, for apologetic reasons, the early church was often tempted to view its expansion as from Jerusalem to Rome. Such stylization is sometimes found even within the New Testament, in the Acts of the Apostles, for example. It is true, nevertheless, that Christianity had spread, very quickly, into regions well beyond those of the Roman Empire; into Persia (that great rival super-power to Rome in those days), India, Armenia, Ethiopia and so on. The reception of the Gospel by whole cultures and its assimilation into these cultures resulted, however, in an identification of the Gospel with particular cultures and this often obstructed the Gospel's penetration of other cultures. In the last two hundred years or so there has been another great expansion of Christianity into many diverse cultures. The emergence of the Anglican Communion as a worldwide fellowship and its numerical growth is due, in part, to this expansion. It has to be said that in the spread of Anglicanism, it has often been what Huntington calls 'the System' which has been exported rather than the

---

1 The term seems to have been used first by William Reed Huntington in his book, *The Church Idea: An Essay towards Unity*, 4th ed., New York 1899. Huntington was quoted in this connection by J. Robert Wright in his paper, *Heritage and Vision* written to mark the centennial of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral in 1987.

2 See, for example, article XXXIV of the Articles of Religion and also the Preface to the 1662 BCP.

principle commended. The result has been a proliferation of the very 'accessories' which were, for Huntington, distorting the essentials of Anglicanism. There were some missionaries, of course, like Roland Allen, who did not want the 'accessories' of Anglicanism exported but pleaded for the emergence of churches which were self-supporting, self-governing, self-propagating and 'at home' in the surrounding culture.[1] By and large, however, the mentality both of the colonising and the colonised peoples was such that 'the System' was exported on a large scale, often effectively obscuring the principle.

Unity and Ecumenism

The commitment of the Anglican Communion to catholicity should create within it an impetus towards Christian Unity. The Quadrilateral has stood for Anglican readiness to negotiate for unity on the basis of Scripture and the common inheritance of Christian Tradition. The commitment to contextualization too leads towards unity. As Christians of different traditions find that they are interpreting the Gospel to particular cultures in similar ways, they will begin to ask why they should continue to do very similar things separately.

Liturgical renewal is a case in point. Painstaking research into the life of the ancient Christian churches has made possible the recovery, translation and publication of many primitive liturgies; along with the emphasis on the participation of the whole congregation in worship which has been characteristic of the Liturgical Movement, this has greatly inspired the work of liturgical revision. The need for simplicity in worship as well as the use of contemporary idiom have also been factors in the emergence of modern liturgies. Different Christian churches have found themselves converging in the matter of a consensus on liturgy.

In this connection, it may be worth reminding ourselves that the roots of the Ecumenical Movement are to be found in the realization by the churches that the task of mission to the world is obstructed and harmed by the divisions between Christians. In this sense, the movement comes from the grassroots. It is true that in recent years, and particularly since the spectacular entry of the Roman Catholic Church into the movement, the emphasis has often been on international bilateral and multilateral dialogues. While these have been valuable in clarifying many questions of doctrine and order, it remains true that it is only at the local level where Christians realize their need for unity for the sake of mission that ecumenism becomes an urgent matter.

---

1 See, for example, Roland Allen's, *Missionary Methods, St. Paul's or ours?* London 1912. There has been a revival of interest recently in Roland Allen's work. An Inter-Anglican, trans-Pacific consultation was held in Hawaii in 1983 at the initiative of Bishops Frensdorff and Edmond Browning of ECUSA. A report was published entitled *Setting Free the Ministry of the People of God.* (ed. Gerald Davis and others), Forward Movement, Cincinnati 1984. A Roland Allen reader, *The Compulsion of the Spirit,* (ed. David Paton and Charles Long), Grand Rapids, 1983, has also been published. There is some similarity between Roland Allen's ideas and those of the so-called Three-Self Movement of China. Allen, of course, served as a missionary in China 1892-1902.

The actualization of the Anglican Principle in the 16th century took the form of a national church for the English people. This model has been adopted by the many Anglican provinces and, where Church Union has occurred, it has been adopted as the model for a united church. Is it necesary or even desirable, however, that the principle should be restricted to an embodiment in national churches? At a recent conference of young Anglicans from all over the world, fears were expressed that a restriction of the principle to a national church would lead to a situation where a dominant culture or tribal group imposes its understanding and expression of the Christian Faith on the whole church. Delelgates from England were particularly insistent that the principle should be embodied at different levels, including the congregational. They felt also that in some parochial situations, a particular cultural group becomes dominant. The liturgy, music and devotion of the church in that situation comes to be expressed in the idiom of the dominant group. In such a situation, how are those in alternative cultures to be reached and when they are reached how are they to express their faith and devotion? It was felt that the organizational structures of the church should be such as to permit diversity in patterns of worship, music, language and even theological expression without sacrificing catholicity. The Bishop (or the parish priest in a parochial situation) would provide a focus for unity and also a point of departure for authorized diversity.[1]

It has always been difficult, of course, for a bishop to be both a focus of unity for his people and also to exercise a prophetic ministry *contra mundum* as it were. Sometimes, as perhaps in Southern Africa and East Asia today, a bishop must exercise his prophetic ministry even at the cost of sacrificing his rôle as a focus of unity. In other situations, a bishop may need to emphasis much more his rôle as a focus of unity and to put his prophetic ministry at the service of this rôle.

In a rapidly developing situation, there are new dangers to the bishop's rôle as focus of unity for his people both in the expression of their unity locally and in representing to them the unity of the wider church. The faithful are increasingly aware that the ways in which bishops are elected reflect 'worldly' rather than 'Gospel' concerns and standards. In some parts of the world, leading criteria for choosing bishops have less to do with furthering the life and mission of the church and more to do with class considerations and with maintaining the *status quo* in terms of church-state relationships. In other parts of the world, the office of bishop is becoming associated with power politics, with corruption and with nepotism. The centralization to be found in the Roman Catholic Church reduces the risk of corruption and nepotism significantly but it also affects the prophetic ministry of bishops. The situation in the Anglican Communion reflects much more closely the state of affairs in the early history of the Church.

---

1 See further *Love in Any Language,* A report of the International Conference of Young Anglicans, ACC, 1988, pp 16ff.

This is not a matter for complacency, however. Class-ridden episcopal benches, power struggles, corruption and nepotism are sapping the strength of the Anglican Communion in several vital locations and have done significant harm to the cause of Christ in many situations.

The Anglican Principle has been seen to lead to an emphasis on locality, on the appropriateness of the church in each place to the culture and the conditions of that place. It leads also to a consciousness of catholicity, an awareness that we belong to a world-wide company of believers. Neither all local churches, therefore, nor a universal communion can be finally defined in terms rooted in the experience of a particular church. In this sense the term 'Anglican' is as anomalous as the term 'Roman'.[1] Successive Lambeth Conferences and the present Archbishop of Canterbury have reiterated the provisionality of the Anglican Communion.[2] The Anglican Communion regards itself as part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church and seeks to promote unity between Christians on the basis of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral. The 1920 Lambeth Conference notes that Anglo-Saxon traditions cannot continue to be determinative for a world-wide communion which is also seeking union with other Christians. The Communion must become less Anglican and more Catholic and should not seek for any bonds of unity which are not common to catholic Christianity.[3]

The matter is of more than academic interest for two reasons. Since the 1931 Bonn Agreement with the Old Catholic Churches, the churches of the Anglican Communion have entered into agreements of 'inter-communion', 'communion' or 'full communion' with various churches of non-Anglican origin (in addition to the Old Catholics, the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of India and the Philippines Independent Catholic Church). Representatives of these churches attend meetings of the Anglican Consultative Council though without voting rights. A number of their bishops will be present at the Lambeth Conference, 1988 as non-voting participants. Since 1947, Anglicans in the South Asian sub-continent have entered into Union with Christians of other traditions. 'Communion' or 'full-communion' has been established only gradually between the churches of the Anglican Communion and the Church of South India, partly because of the question of the unification of ministries. This question was addressed more satisfactorily, from the Anglican point of view, by the

---

1 Professor Nicholas Lash in his address to ACC-7 set out the extent to which Roman 'monoculture' has been imposed on those churches which are in communion with the Bishop of Rome. *The Unity we seek,* pp 18ff.

2 A useful summary of the statements issued by Lambeth Conferences is to be found in *The Emmaus Report,* the report of an Anglican Ecumenical Consultation, ACC, 1987, ch. 1 pp 9ff.; also the Archbishop of Canterbury's address to the participants of the pre-Lambeth, St Augustine's Seminar, held at Blackheath, London, 29 July-7 August, 1987.

3 Quoted in *th Emmaus Report,* p 11.

scheme for Church Union in North India and Pakistan with the result that 'full communion' has been established with the churches of North India, Pakistan and Bangladesh rather more easily. These United Churches are members of the ACC. A representative number of their bishops will attend the Lambeth Conference as full members. ACC-7 asked that all their bishops should be invited to future Lambeth Conferences and that their presiding bishops should be invited to Primates' Meetings.[1] One reason for encouraging the full participation in Anglican Councils of those United Churches where Anglicans have entered into union with Christians of other traditions is to counter apprehension in many Anglican circles that Church Union at a regional or national level will lead to a loss of identity for Anglicans involved in a scheme of Church Union. It is to be hoped that other denominational or confessional bodies will also be able to 'own' united churches in this way. Indeed, in some cases they have already done so.

The question of what it means to be in full communion, however, has a wider significance than simply the inclusion of united churches in Anglican Councils. It is also about more than sacramental hospitality and the interchangeability of ministries. It must be about mutual consultation and even common decision-making on certain matters. If there is to be regular mutual consultation between churches in full communion, it is clear that an instrument would be needed to foster this process. Should an instrument emerge which serves world-wide communion in this way, it would be important ultimately that it should not be paralleled by narrower, denominational structures at the universal level. In other words, the universal aspect of Anglicanism, (and of any other denomination involved in the relationship), should be subsumed in any instrument which emerges to serve churches in full communion with each other in this way.[2]

The Union of Anglicans with Christians of other traditions in the United Churches and the Anglican Communion's relationship of full communion with churches of non-Anglican origin such as the Old Catholics and the Mar Thoma, raises a question about the place of Canterbury in a family of churches in communion with each other. In the Anglican Communion the Archbishop of Canterbury is a focus of unity and has a rôle in gathering the communion for mutual consultation and advice. Some Anglican provinces define themselves constitutionally as being in communion with the See of Canterbury. It is clear that an ancient see which commands such loyalty should continue to be 'important' in a family of churches in full communion which includes what is the Anglican Communion today. But could the criteria for belonging to such a family of churches be extended to include communion with other principal sees such as Utrecht and Calcutta or Madras as well as Canterbury? This would acknowledge both the new reality of united churches where Anglicans have entered into union with other

---

1 *Many Gifts, One Spirit,* report of ACC-7, ACC 1987, pp 93f.
2 *The Emmaus Report,* ch. 2, p 41.

Christians as well as the non-Anglican origins of certain churches now in full communion wih the churches of the Anglican Communion. Such a model would be somewhat reminiscent of the honour accorded to the sees of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and (later) Jerusalem in the early church. It needs to be remembered, of course, that even such a wider fellowship of churches would remain provisional as it continued to seek unity with other Christians.

Roman Catholics generally have considerable difficulty in understanding how a Communion of Churches (such as the Anglican) can be held together without a legal infrastructure.[1] Anglicans generally find Roman Catholic centralism extremely oppressive. Is there another way besides those of Roman centralism and an extreme view of provincial autonomy that one sometimes finds in the Anglican Communion? It needs to be said, first, that while provinces may need to be autonomous *legally,* for political or constitutional reasons, this need not imply theological or moral autonomy as well. The Eastern Orthodox Churches are autocephalous but it is difficult to imagine that different such churches would make fundamental changes in Faith and Order, even if such changes were seen as consonant with Tradition, without the agreement of all the churches. The Oriental Orthodox have, perhaps, an even looser organization but there too it is doubtful if one church would feel able to make substantial changes in its doctrine, discipline or worship without there being a consensus on such matters among the churches.

Unity in Fellowship

The term *koinōnia* (fellowship, communion or participation) has once again become a way of speaking about the church. John Booty in his addresses to a recent meeting of the House of Bishops of the Episcopal Church in USA used a definition first formulated by John Knox: 'The Church is a fellowship in the love of God whose mission is to be an ever-widening sphere of an ever-deepening reconciliation'. Indeed it is often said that the unity-in-fellowship of the Church is rooted in the unity of the Blessed Trinity itself. In his farewell discourse, as recorded in St. John's Gospel, and also in his High Priestly prayer, Jesus certainly speaks of the Union that exists between the Father, the Son and Spirit who is sent by the Father and testifies to the Son. He asks, in his prayer, that the unity of the Church should be like the unity of the Blessed Trinity. Sometimes, however, in relating the unity of the Church to the unity of the Godhead, social analogies are applied to the Trinity.[2] The tradition of the Social Analogy goes back to the Cappadocians who enunciated it in a form which excluded tritheism. In some of its modern forms, however, safe-guards are not employed as rigorously with the result that tritheism becomes a real

---

1 See, for example, *The Tablet,* 23 January, 1988, p 79.
2 An instance of this is to be found in the *Working Papers for the Lambeth Conference, 1988, Ecumenical Relations,* p 3.

danger. When 'Person' is understood in its modern sense as a centre of autonomy and when the 'personalities' in the Trinity are invested with impermeability, accompanied by an inadequate treatment of coinherence, it is then that tritheism needs to be guarded against.

It is interesting, in this connection, to note that the Oriental Orthodox, and especially the Copts, who have lived for centuries in an Islamic milieu, refuse to use the term 'person' in relation to the Trinity. They continue to use the Arabic Aqnūm (pl. Aqānīm). Modern Copts cite the missionary obligation of the church to the Muslim as one reason why it should be especially on its guard against tendencies to tritheism. Despite its rejection of social analogies as a way of speaking of the Trinity, Oriental Christian thought bases its ecclesiology firmly on the unity of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.[1] Islām too, with its rigorous insistence on the unity of God (Tauhīd), teaches that the unity of the ummah (the muslim people) is to be based on the oneness of Allāh. In Hinduism, on the other hand, while the doctrine of Trimūrti (three aspects of God: Creator, Preserver and Destroyer) was developed specifically to synthesise major cultic traditions, it has not been able to counter the sectarian tendencies of popular religious sentiment. In other words, the existence or lack of social analogies in relation to the deity does not necessarily affect the unity of a religious community.

While the category of *koinōnia* may be an inappropriate way of speaking about internal relations within the Godhead, it remains a scriptural way of speaking about the Church. The *ARCIC Final Report* is right, therefore, in employing it as a major way of describing the Church. It is right also in pointing out that it is important not only to maintain *koinōnia* within the local church but also between churches.[2] It may be that its understanding of what is required to maintain *koinōnia* within a church and between churches is excessively juridical. We have seen that there are different models for maintaining *koinōnia* both in Christian history and in contemporary times. Not all of them emphasise juridical structures. All do, however, require common adherence to apostolic faith and practice and some way of coming to a common mind on issues which affect the whole family of churches and are not of merely local significance. For our part, we must stress both fidelity to apostolic tradition *and* the possibility of authentic development in that tradition.[3] In our divided state, it may be that development regarding an aspect of Tradition may occur in a particular ecclesial tradition. Eventually, of course, it would have to be received as authentic not only by the particular tradition in which it first arises but by the Universal Church as well. A proper view of *koinōnia* would also

---

1   Maurice Assad, 'Mission in the Coptic Church: Perspective, Doctrine and Practice', *Mission Studies* (IAMS), 1987, pp 27-28.

2   pp 52ff.

3   cf. Cardinal Ratzinger's treatment of apostolic tradition, ecclesial traditions and development in *Church, Ecumenism and Politics,* Slough 1988, ch. 4.

demand that churches which are properly autonomous, should, nevertheless, reach a common mind on important matters which affect them all.

The ARCIC Final Report points out that *koinōnia* is essential for the Church not just for its own sake but so that the Church as a whole and Christian people generally can be equipped to bring the 'authoritative word of Christ' to the world. It is essential, in other words, for mission.[1]

Christian unity is part of the proclamation of the gospel of reconciliation. It may be, as the commemorative card for the opening of Inter-Church House says, that 'the walls of separation do not rise up to heaven'. The Church, however, is called to be a foretaste and a sign of the Kingdom of Heaven now and here. Our differences cannot be perpetuated in the name of an 'invisible' or 'eschatological' unity.

A Pakistani Christian poet living in the United Kingdom has this to say in his address to Christian leaders:

'From the highest heaven, we have fallen into deepest humiliation,
Why do you not rekindle these burnt out moons?
Every household is in schism from the rest,
Why do you not demolish these walls of hate?' Sharar[2]

The Rt Revd Michael J. Nazir-Ali is Assistant to the Archbishop of Canterbury and Co-ordinator of Studies for the Lambeth Conference.

---

1 op. cit., p 53.
2 Ṣalīben Zinda Hain, Hyderabad Deccan, 1981, p 127.