

AN ANGLICAN UNDERSTANDING OF AUTHORITY

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The title suggested for this paper is *An Anglican Understanding of Authority*. The use of the indefinite article was justifiably deliberate. Were there but one definitive Anglican understanding of authority one would need only to find a textbook in which that understanding is articulated or codified. More has been written on the subject than I could possibly have read in the time available to me. I might well have changed the title to *One Anglican's Understanding of Authority*.

The word “authority” has many meanings. For one trained in the law it has two primary meanings. First, it means the rule, whether found in the common law, in the statute books or in judicial decisions, upon which one relies when giving an opinion or making an argument. A judge says to counsel, “What is your authority for such and such a proposition?”. In religion and theology that question becomes, “What is your authority for your belief, your doctrine, your teaching?” In that context we are speaking of sources of authority.

Secondly, for a lawyer, “authority” means jurisdiction or power or capacity. In that sense, in the Church the questions are: “Who has authority to make rules?” “Who has authority to make decisions about belief, doctrine and teaching?” In other words, “What are the structures of authority?”

I propose to discuss Anglican authority in both of those senses - sources and structures.

It is almost trite to say that the sources of authority for Anglicans are Scripture, Tradition and Reason. It is helpful to look at some historic Anglican documents, starting in the 16th century with the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion. The Sixth Article entitled *Of the Sufficiency of the holy Scriptures for salvation* says **“Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be**

required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.¹ In the name of the holy Scripture we do understand those Canonical Books of the Old and New Testament of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church.” The Article also accepted the Apocryphal Books to be read for example of life and instructing of manners but not to establish any doctrine.

Article VIII commends the Nicene, Athanasian and Apostles' creeds to be received and believed as provable by Scripture. Article XXV declares that the Sacraments of Baptism and the Supper of the Lord are ordained by Christ in the Gospel and it recognizes the five lesser Sacraments.²

Article XX entitled *Of the Authority of the Church* declares that **“The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith.”**

In the 19th century we find the version of the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral as adopted by the Lambeth Conference of 1888 stating:

That, in the opinion of this Conference, the following articles supply a basis on which approach may be by God's blessing made towards home reunion:

(a) The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as ‘containing all things necessary to salvation’, and as being the rule and ultimate standard of faith.

¹ The Article does not say that everything which can be read in scripture ought to be believed but rather what a plain reader cannot find in the text cannot be required of one as an article of belief.

² Confirmation, Penance, Orders, Matrimony and extreme Unction.

**(b) The Apostles' Creed, as the baptismal symbol; and the Nicene Creed, as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith.
(c) The two Sacraments ordained by Christ himself — Baptism and the Supper of the Lord — ministered with unfailing use of Christ's words of institution, and of the elements ordained by him.**

(d) The historic episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of his Church.³

In the mid-20th century a Committee Report to the 1948 Lambeth Conference said these things:

Authority, as inherited by the Anglican Communion from the undivided Church of the early centuries of the Christian era, is single in that it is derived from a single Divine source, and reflects within itself the richness and historicity of the divine Revelation, the authority of the eternal Father, the incarnate Son, and the life-giving Spirit. It is distributed among Scripture, Tradition, Creeds, 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 centralized authority having many elements which combine, interact with, and check each other; . . .⁴

The Report said the Christian religious experience is *described* in Scripture, *defined* in Creeds and in continuous theological study, *mediated* in the Ministry of

³ The Primates Meeting in 2000 issued a communiqué that included this statement: We believe that the unity of the Communion as a whole still rests on the Lambeth Quadrilateral; the Holy Scriptures as the rule and standard of faith; the creeds of the undivided Church; the two Sacraments ordained by Christ himself and the historic episcopate. Only a formal and public repudiation of this would place a diocese or Province outside the Anglican Communion. Resolution IV.2 of the Lambeth Conference of 1998 reaffirmed the Quadrilateral as a basis on which Anglicans seek the full, visible unity of the Church and recognized it as a statement of Anglican unity and identity.

⁴ *The Meaning and Unity of the Anglican Communion*, found as an Appendix in *Authority in the Anglican Communion*. Edited by Stephen W. Sykes. Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1987.

the Word and Sacraments, and *verified* in the witness of saints and in the *consensus fidelium*.

Next I refer to the Virginia Report produced in 1997 by the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission partly as a response to a resolution of the 1988 Lambeth Conference. In Chapter 3 of the Virginia Report we find under the heading **The Anglican Way: Scripture, Tradition and Reason:**

3.6 Anglicans affirm the sovereign authority of the **Holy Scriptures** as the medium through which God by the Spirit communicates his word in the Church and thus enables people to respond with understanding and faith. The Scriptures are "uniquely inspired witness to divine revelation", and "the primary norm for Christian faith and life".

3.7 The Scriptures, however, must be translated, read, and understood, and their meaning grasped through a continuing process of interpretation. Since the seventeenth century Anglicans have held that Scripture is to be understood and read in the light afforded by the contexts of "tradition" and "reason".

3.8 In one sense **tradition** denotes the Scriptures themselves, in that they embody "the tradition", "the message", "the faith once delivered to the saints". Tradition refers to the ongoing Spirit-guided life of the Church which receives, and in receiving interprets afresh, God's abiding message. . . .

3.9 Properly speaking "**reason**" means simply the human being's capacity to symbolise, and so to order, share and communicate experience. It is the divine gift in virtue of which human persons respond and act with awareness in relation to their world and to God, and are opened up to that which is true for every time and every place. Reason cannot be divorced either from Scripture or tradition, since neither is conceivable apart from the working of reason. . . . The appeal to reason then becomes what people - and that means people in a given time and place - take as good sense or "common" sense. It refers to what can be called "the mind of a particular culture", with its characteristic ways of seeing things, asking about them, and explaining them. If tradition is the mind that Christians share as believers and members of the Church, reason is the mind they share as participants in a particular culture.

3.10 Anglicanism sees reason in the sense of the "mind" of the culture in which the Church lives and the Gospel is proclaimed, as a legitimate and necessary instrument for the interpretation of God's message in the Scriptures. Sometimes Scriptures affirm the new insights of a particular age or culture, sometimes they challenge or contradict those insights. . . .

3.11 The characteristic Anglican way of living with a constant dynamic interplay of Scripture, tradition and reason means that the mind of God has constantly to be discerned afresh, not only in every age, but in each and every context. . . . Sometimes the lived experience of a particular community enables Christian truth to be perceived afresh for the whole community. At other times a desire for change or restatement of the faith in one place provokes a crisis within the whole Church. . . .⁵

While the Scriptures are a constant they are subject to study and interpretation in every age. There are some who argue that Tradition is also a constant, that it refers only to ancient tradition. Archbishop Michael Ramsey said that antiquity is regarded as a guide to the understanding of Scripture. He quoted St. Vincent's definition of the church's authority in antiquity - that the church's understanding is directed by "what has been believed everywhere, always, by all." Therefore, Archbishop Ramsey said, "the interpretation of Holy Scripture is to be found in what Christians, the members of the church, believe always, everywhere, and by all." The devotion to antiquity, he said, gives a certain archaic flavour to Anglican theology. But, he continued, Anglicanism makes an appeal to reason. "Reason increases and enlarges human understanding of divine revelation through its own workings, so long as reason is used in humble dependence upon the God who gave it."⁶

⁵The *Virginia Report* is no more than that. It has not been accepted or affirmed by any group other than the Commission that prepared it.

⁶ *The Anglican Spirit*, Dale Coleman, ed., Cowley Publications, Cambridge, 1991, pages 26 to 33.

He said the division of emphasis among Scripture, Tradition and Reason “is entirely healthy if kept a matter merely of emphasis, but it can become partisan and divisive if pursued recklessly. So we occasionally witness not just the appeal to Scripture, but a kind of scripturalism, and any ‘ism’ can be dangerous. Scripturalism is not the same thing as the appeal to Holy Scripture. Traditionalism is not the same thing as the intelligent appeal to tradition. And rationalism can be a very evil thing when it involves a worship of reason, and forgets that reason is concerned with great mysteries requiring awe, wonder, and even cleverness. Reason itself is a gift of God; its use can be corrupted if our dependence on God is forgotten. So we in our study of Anglican tradition must pursue the ways that the appeal to Scripture, Tradition, and Reason can still mutually enrich each other.”

Among Scripture, Tradition and Reason, the documents to which I have referred all give a place of primacy to Scripture. The creeds, sacraments and the liturgical worship of the church are but expressions of the doctrine, beliefs and teachings of the church found in Scripture, Tradition and Reason.

Those three elements have been variously described as a triangle, a triad, a three-legged stool and three-ply yarn. Such analogies illustrate the difficulty of keeping the three in tension or in balance. If one leg of the stool is missing, it collapses. If the legs are of uneven length, the stool wobbles unsteadily. A triangle is a rigid geometric form - you cannot lengthen or shorten one side without altering the length of one or both of the other sides. If we think of a right-angled triangle, then if Scripture is the ultimate and fundamental source of authority Scripture must always be the hypotenuse - the side of greatest length.

The lengths of the other two sides - Tradition and Reason - depend on whether one considers Tradition as fixed and unchanging or as something that is constantly being developed by the application of Reason. If the latter, then what is revealed by Reason in one generation becomes part of Tradition for succeeding generations.

J. Robert Wright in a paper presented at another ecumenical forum in 1990⁷ suggested that scripture, tradition and reason which Anglicanism endeavours to hold in tension represent three different but major Christian answers to the question of authority over several centuries of Christianity in the West. He said:

The first approach has been to locate authority within the Holy Scripture, as if the truth contained therein were univocally obvious to anyone who reads it. A second approach has been to find the source of authority within the individual testimony of the Holy Spirit as perceived by each true believer in prayer, who is in this way supposedly enabled by private guidance to distinguish among contradictory interpretations. And a third approach has resorted to the calm certainty afforded by the institutional church, which is thought by those who follow it to offer a collective wisdom that is presumably more objective.

Wright summarized the Anglican approach as follows:

In the Anglican use of this triad, holy scripture is generally understood as the fundamental source of Christian revelation, the new testament complementing and completing the old, then tradition as the gradual unfolding of the scriptural truth through the pages of history, and finally reason (including experience) as the most satisfactory way in which the former two sources can be appropriately evaluated and measured. And yet Anglicans would be reluctant to rely upon any one of these three sources by itself, for scripture alone, devoid of the collective and developing interpretation of the church, might result in an individualistic and unhistorical fundamentalism; while tradition by itself could easily

⁷ *The Sources and Structures of Authority in the Church*, an Anglican paper for the second Anglican/Oriental Orthodox Forum, March 1990.

result in an uncritical conservatism and reason on its own can end in the sheer rationalism of individual judgment.

A recent contributor to an on-line discussion posed this question:

Could it be that where Tradition and Reason are ignored, you get extreme Evangelicalism, where Reason and Scripture are ignored, you get extreme Catholicism, and where Scripture and Tradition are ignored, you get extreme Liberalism?

The Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada, Archbishop Michael Peers, says the image of three-ply yarn is a helpful description. He says:

. . . it speaks of the three as somehow entwined with each other in mutual reinforcement. Each adds a particular potency to the total and, in turn, receives strength from the others. We say yes to *Scripture* of course, - we accord it primacy and hold it central. But scripture is not disconnected from the other two. It needs tradition so that it is grounded in the history out of which it was born, and it needs reason in order to speak authentically in the context in which we live. So we say yes to *Tradition*. But tradition is something alive, something formed and reforming. . . . Dr. Eugene Fairweather said that tradition, whatever else it may mean, does *not* mean that what has not been done cannot be done. Tradition is not static. It needs both the ancient texts for grounding, and reason - imagination - to give it life. And so we look to *Reason*. Reason is both the discipline of thoughtful inquiry and the freedom to explore. But it needs both Word and tradition to give it a strong and faithful underpinning. This is not just a nice formula - these three, woven together as they are, form a lively, even playful partnership. It is the kind of partnership that fosters communion. It allows and makes room for spirit and life. We could say of these three, that they are hospitable to one another. And they model the hospitality that is at the heart of communion.⁸

⁸ *Power in the Church: Prelates, Confessions, Anglicans*. The Arnold Lecture, December 6, 2000, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

The practical problem, of course, is that the Anglican triad, triangle, three-legged stool or three-ply yarn does not solve the problem of contradictory interpretations. While two or more Anglicans may agree on what Scripture says about a matter of belief and about what theologians have traditionally said about the same matter, they may by their individual application of Reason to the scriptural and traditional data, reach different conclusions.

Which brings us to the question - What are the Anglican structures of authority?

In the days after the Reformation but before the Age of Colonialism, authority in the Church of England rested with the ordained ministers, especially the bishops, subject to ultimate authority of the Crown in Parliament.

When Britain established and expanded its colonial empire, the colonists expected to have the ministrations of the church available and chaplains accompanied or followed them. Local churches were established and eventually bishops were appointed and sent to the colonies. After thirteen American colonies declared their independence, what is now the Episcopal Church of the United States of America (ECUSA) came into being. After British colonies were granted independent legislatures in the 19th century, it became clear, as a matter of law, that the churches in the colonies were distinct from the Church of England and that the laws applicable to the Church in England did not apply to colonial churches and their dioceses. It was during the same period that synods began to develop - synods in which the bishops began to share authority with clergy and laity. Synods were established in colonial and overseas dioceses; then dioceses came together to form what we now call "Provincial Churches". There are today 38

Provincial Churches in the Anglican Communion.⁹ There are also extra-provincial dioceses and churches in Bermuda, Cuba, Portugal, Spain, Sri Lanka and the Falkland Islands.¹⁰ Some of the Provincial Churches are confined to a single nation as in Canada; some are part of a nation - e.g. there are two Provinces in India; and some Provinces encompass churches across international boundaries as in the Provinces of Central Africa, West Africa, the West Indies, and indeed ECUSA.

Each of the 38 Provinces consists of a number of dioceses. The diocese, with its bishop, is the fundamental unit of Anglican churches because we are episcopally ordered and led. Each diocese may have a synod and each Provincial Church may have a provincial or central assembly, be it called a General Synod, a General Convention or by some other name. Synods consult, deliberate and make laws. The involvement of laity and clergy, along with their bishops, in synods is a characteristic of Anglican church life. In most parts of the Communion bishops continue to have a distinct responsibility of oversight. In many diocesan synods the bishop's assent is required to validate the decisions of the synod. In the central assemblies of the Provincial Churches the bishops in some cases sit as a separate house or order; decisions respecting doctrine, worship and discipline may require adoption by a prescribed majority of each of the three orders of bishops, clergy and laity.

⁹ There are also internal provinces within some Provinces. For example, in ECUSA there are nine internal provinces, in the Anglican Church of Canada there are four and, indeed, in England there are two - Canterbury and York.

¹⁰ Until the recent General Convention of ECUSA the churches in Puerto Rico and Venezuela were also extra-provincial.

The several Provincial and extra-provincial churches make up what we call the Anglican Communion. David Hamid points out that it is significant that we use the theological word “Communion” to describe ourselves rather than a word such as Federation or Alliance or Association. He explains:

Communion is a translation of the biblical word *koinonia*. It means fellowship, participation. It is a word that is used to describe theologically the nature of the relationship of the three persons within the Holy Trinity: the relationship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Its theological meaning has to do with love, with loving, interdependent relationship, with equality, with giving and receiving, with sharing life. When extended to the Church, we are to understand that the Church is in communion because of the way that she is related to, and gifted by, the Holy Trinity, and receives those same qualities from the life of God the Holy Trinity. . . . It underlines the truth that the fundamental nature of the Church is relational: she is related to God, her members are related to each other, and our churches are related in a community of interdependent, participatory relationship. . . . It includes generous forgiveness of one another’s faults, and, as a result, being open and generous in our relationships.¹¹

How are the Provincial churches organized and how is the Anglican Communion organized? What structures in the Provincial Churches and in the Communion, if any, have and exercise authority in what Article XX called “Controversies of Faith”? Who, applying Reason, can discern the appropriate interpretation of Scripture and Tradition? Who can discern and discriminate between what Geoffrey Rowell has called “legitimate developments and distorting corruptions”¹²?

¹¹ *Church, Communion of Churches and the Anglican Communion*. A paper presented to the Anglican Communion Legal Advisers’ Consultation. Canterbury, March 2002.

¹² *Interpreting Authority: Tradition*. Unpublished essay.

Although the basic unit of Anglican churches is the diocese, as a general rule only Provincial Synods or assemblies have authority with respect to doctrinal development. Absent a Communion wide consensus on an issue, and absent a decision at the Provincial level, a diocese may opt to fill the void. This is an application of the concept of subsidiarity, i.e that activities should be carried out at the lowest level at which they can be effectively undertaken. The report of a Group that reviewed synodical government in the Church of England¹³ says the concept of subsidiarity had its classical formulation in an Encyclical letter of Pope Pius XI in 1931 which said that

it is an injustice, a grave evil and a disturbance of right order for a larger and higher association to arrogate to itself functions which can be performed efficiently by smaller and lower societies.

A Task Force that reviewed jurisdiction in the Anglican Church of Canada with respect to doctrine and discipline stated a variation of the concept:

The confederal nature of our church means that undesignated powers rest with the dioceses and/or diocesan bishops. This seems to suggest that when it is unclear at what level a matter should be decided, the power to decide it should rest at the diocesan level unless the ‘mind of the church’ deems it to belong at another level. In short, when jurisdiction in a contentious matter is not specified, it will be decided at the highest level that has the will to decide it.

The Gift of Authority, the statement issued by the Anglican - Roman Catholic International Commission in 1999, said “The maintenance of communion requires that at every level there is a capacity to take decisions appropriate to that level. When those decisions raise serious questions for the wider communion of churches, synodality must find a wider expression.”

¹³ *Synodical Government in the Church of England: A Review*. The Report of the Review Group appointed by the Standing Committee of the Church of England. London: Church House Publishing. 1997 at page 15n.

Resolution III.3 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference affirmed the principle of subsidiarity as it had been articulated in the Virginia Report - i.e. that “a central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed at a more immediate or local level” provided that those tasks can be adequately performed at such levels.

What are the structures of the Anglican Communion? Do they have any authority? We speak of four instruments of unity - the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conferences, the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates Meeting, the last two being very recent developments.

The Archbishop of Canterbury is the bishop of the diocese of Canterbury which, as the oldest See in the Church of England, has primacy within England and, by extension, throughout the Communion. To be in communion with the See of Canterbury is a visible sign of Anglican unity. The Archbishop's Primacy of honour among the bishops of the Communion is evident in his chairing of the Lambeth Conferences and the Primates Meetings. But he does not have any jurisdiction outside the Church of England.

The Lambeth Conferences have been held approximately every ten years since 1867. They are meetings of the bishops of the Anglican Communion. Sir Owen Chadwick in his Introduction to the published resolutions of the 12 conferences from 1867 to 1988 traces the origin, development and growth of the Conference. The Conference has no authority and was only allowed to be founded on that basis. However, he writes:

It was impossible that the leaders of the Anglican Communion should meet every ten years and not start to gather respect; and to gather respect is slowly to gather influence, and influence is on the road to authority. [The Conference] continued to have that absence

of legal authority which some of its founders wanted and which of necessity was denied to them.

Decade by decade the Conferences have built up a substantial body of resolutions which touch many aspects of church life. The resolutions are not binding on the Provincial churches because those Churches have their own synods in which the clergy and laity share with the bishops in the formulation of church rules.

Eventually it was recognized that since the Lambeth Conference meet only every ten years there needed to be a representative committee to give advice between Conferences. Thus the constitution of the Anglican Consultative Council was approved by the 1968 Lambeth Conference. David Hamid succinctly describes the Council and its functions:

The Anglican Consultative Council was set up to share information, to advise on inter-Anglican relations, agreed policies in world mission, and collaboration, dialogues and relations with other Christian Churches, and inter-Anglican communication. It is the only body in global Anglicanism that has a constitution and legal standing. It meets every three years.

Every province of the Communion is assigned from one to three members, depending on its population. As the Council is made up of bishops, other clergy and laity, some say that this is the “synodical” instrument of global Anglicanism, inasmuch as the whole people of God are represented. This is an analogy that cannot be taken too far, since there are not bishops, clergy and laity from each province, only from those with a right to three members. Furthermore, not all Anglican jurisdictions are present. The extra-provincial Churches have no voice or vote, unless a member from one of those Churches happens to be made a co-opted member. So the [Council] is not entirely representative of the Communion, and some evolution is clearly still required to make it so.

The Primates Meeting resulted from resolutions of the 1978 Lambeth Conference one of which advised member Churches not to take action concerning issues which are of concern to the whole Anglican Communion without consultation

with a Lambeth Conference or with the episcopate through the Primates Committee.

The membership of the Primates Meeting, of course, is confined to bishops - those who are the Primates or Presiding Bishops of the several Provincial Churches. David Hamid says that, "In practice, the Primates Meeting, as a meeting of *bishops* does provide a way for the global episcopate of the Anglican Communion to be consulted, in a limited, but somewhat representative way, between Lambeth Conferences. It is thus a useful instrument for individual Primates to test out regional concerns within the wider Church."

Thus when we look for a common expression of the mind of the Church at the international level, we find that the structures of the Communion, the instruments of Anglican unity, are only consultative. David Hamid asks these questions:

Do the Churches of the Communion need, not only to be able to consult with each other, but to be accountable to each other in order to grow in the Gospel together? In certain cases, do the Churches of the Communion not need to act and move together as a sign of unity in this broken and fragmented world? Is the Anglican principle of provincial autonomy taking on a more secular understanding, coloured by a latter-day culture of individualism and "doing one's own thing" rather than some ecclesiological rule or doctrine of the Church? Does the reluctance to consider authoritative decision-making at the level of the Communion mean that divisive issues are being addressed effectively and authoritatively at the provincial level? As the Communion faces more and more divergence on key issues, does the reluctance to deal with authority at the Communion level mean that the future shape of the Anglican family will be less a Communion and more a loose federation?

Authority in the Anglican Communion has perhaps never been more challenged than today. Controversies around issues of human sexuality, specifically the

ordering of practising homosexuals as priests and bishops and the blessing of same-sex unions, raise serious questions of authority and of unity.

ECUSA at its recent General Convention approved the election to the episcopate of an openly gay priest. While the Convention stopped short of calling for the preparation of rites of support and blessing of same-sex relationships, it recognized that local faith communities, i.e dioceses or parishes, are operating within the bounds of the common life of the Episcopal Church as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions. In the Anglican Church of Canada such a liturgy is authorized and used in one diocese - the General Synod of the Canadian Church has not yet pronounced on the issue.

In Canada the issue is becoming more acute because of the almost certain prospect of the legal definition of marriage being changed shortly, either by legislation or by judicial decision, to include unions of persons of the same sex. The question for the Canadian Church in that event becomes not whether to bless same-sex unions but rather whether to bless same-sex marriages or even change its marriage Canon and liturgies to allow the solemnization of same-sex marriages. How will the Church respond to a change in the legal definition of marriage?

The Virginia Report (at para. 3.38) said:

A balance is held between denying any power of compliance or control while upholding the need for loyalty to the fellowship expressed in restraint imposed by virtue of belonging to the Communion. No one part should act without regard for the others.

The Lambeth Conference of 1998 said it could not advise the legitimizing or blessing of same sex unions nor ordaining those involved in same gender unions.

The Anglican Consultative Council in September 2002 affirmed a resolution calling for individual dioceses in the communion not to take unilateral action or adopt policies that would strain “our communion with one another.” The Primates Meeting, which does not take votes or adopt formal resolutions, said in a pastoral letter in May 2003:

The question of public rites for the blessing of same sex unions is still a cause of potentially divisive controversy. The Archbishop of Canterbury spoke for us all when he said that it is through liturgy that we express what we believe, and that there is no theological consensus about same sex unions. Therefore, we as a body cannot support the authorisation of such rites.

And, indeed, two months earlier the Theology Committee of the House of Bishops of ECUSA had said:

Because at this time we are nowhere near consensus in the Church regarding the blessing of homosexual relationships, we cannot recommend authorizing the development of new rites for such blessings.

It is not many years since the question of ordaining women to the priesthood was a matter of great controversy in the Anglican Communion. The Lambeth Conference of 1948 said the experimental ordination of a deaconess to the priesthood in the Diocese of South China would be against Anglican tradition and order and would gravely affect the internal and external relations of the Anglican Communion. In another resolution the same Conference said that while it was aware that in some quarters there was a desire that the question of such ordinations be reconsidered, the time for further formal consideration had not come. But by 1978 the Conference was declaring its acceptance of member Churches which did and did not ordain women, urging all to respect the convictions of others. Will the Communion will be as tolerant and resilient with respect to local decisions around issues of sexuality?

The search for *consensus fidelium* in matters of controversy is an ongoing one. It is not determined by majority votes in synods or General Conventions. Canon Kim Murray, who chaired the Canadian task force on jurisdiction, wrote in a paper he prepared for that group, “to say that the resolution of debates about doctrine, discipline or worship belongs to a General [Provincial] Synod is not adequate and may place matters best dealt with in a long-term consensual process of informed discussion into the dubious judgment of a majority vote at the end of divisive and largely uninformed debate.”

In summary then, authority, in the jurisdictional sense, remains in the structures of the Provincial Churches and the global structures of the Communion facilitate consultation, respect and partnership. The *Virginia Report* suggested that in order to keep the Anglican Communion living as a dynamic community of faith, structures for taking counsel and deciding are an essential part of the Communion’s life. However, efforts to make any structures of the Communion a centre of authority have thus far been resisted. The need for a wider expression of synodality seen by the authors of *The Gift of Authority* has yet to be fulfilled.

The last Lambeth Conference asked that the Primates' Meeting include among its responsibilities positive encouragement to mission, intervention in cases of exceptional emergency which are incapable of internal resolution within provinces, and the giving of guidelines on the limits of Anglican diversity in submission to the sovereign authority of Holy Scripture and in loyalty to our Anglican tradition and formularies. The Conference recommended that such responsibilities should be exercised in sensitive consultation with the relevant provinces and that, while not interfering with the juridical authority of the provinces, the exercise of those responsibilities by the Primates' Meeting should carry moral authority calling for ready acceptance throughout the Communion.

At the moment Anglican eyes are on the Primates Meeting. Will it assert authority and, if it does, will that authority be accepted throughout the Communion? Is it in the Primates meeting or in some yet to be developed structure that we will find the wider expression of synodality called for in *The Gift of Authority*?

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