

THE GOSPEL AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Anglicans and Christian Unity

1.

Given the title and theme of this conference, I begin with a brief comment on Michael Ramsey's approach to Christian unity by Geoffrey Wainwright, himself a distinguished ecumenical theologian, a Methodist who has been prominent in the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and the dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church. *"From his earliest ministry, [Michael Ramsey] stood for unity in the truth, and any rapprochement, any scheme, must pass this test. But his Catholic Christianity of its very essence drew him to unity. Catholicism had always held the vision of the 'one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic church,' of a unity which is not mere camaraderie, much less a federation of communions who preserve their independence and agree to differ, but that of an organic whole, the Body of Christ. It is animated not by expediency, or even mutual goodwill, but by the very life of Christ flowing through its members."*¹

This could serve as an appropriate observation on the Anglican contribution, at its best, to the quest for full visible unity.

I originally thought of entitling this lecture *"All Round, Every Level and By Stages."* This phrase sums up what I have understood to be the "official" Anglican policy, and has dominated my thinking during most of my life as an ecumenically engaged priest and bishop.

But of course "official" Anglican policy is not the whole story. Although "Anglican" refers to a denominational tradition represented by a world confessional family, "the Anglican Communion", many who claim Anglican patrimony do not belong to the Communion. Nor does the Communion itself possess a clear legal or constitutional structure. "Anglican" designates the forms of Christianity which have developed directly or indirectly from Ecclesia Anglicana as reshaped by the English Reformation. As well as the words and actions of the official organs of the Anglican Communion or its member churches there have been private initiatives, some of which have had some degree of official acknowledgement and others which have been undertaken in more or less opposition to the hierarchy.

There are, it seems to me, broadly three narratives of Anglican ecumenism. There is the official story of monarchs, prelates and, more recently, synods and formal dialogues. There has been a largely evangelical story of collaboration between missionary societies in different denominations. There has been much less well-known story of private ventures, especially among those of definite conviction, either Catholic or Evangelical, seeking (or even proclaiming) unity with the like-minded elsewhere. "Anglicans and Christian unity" must include these stories as well - which means of course this will be a very superficial survey! Please forgive me if I do not say much about the formal dialogues or schemes of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as I imagine they are relatively well-known, or can at least be easily researched.

¹ *Geoffrey Wainwright "Michael Ramsey and Ecumenical Theology"* in Gill R & Kendall L. (edd.) *"Michael Ramsey as Theologian"* 1995 p.66

One initial word of warning: to talk of the need for unity presupposes a state of division, and can imply that the task is to restore a unity that has been lost or to create one that does not exist. Ecumenism would then become a matter of negotiation rather than revelation. As Ramsey himself put it: *“the work of Christian unity has become increasingly to be seen not as the bringing together of ecclesiastical systems as they stand over against one another but as the renewal together of Churches in every part of the world in holiness, proof, and mission.”*²

I do not deny the need for dialogue for the sake of better understanding and mutual correction, but the methods of restoring unity when it has been broken must conform to the nature of unity itself, which is in turn an expression of the nature of the Church. The Church and her unity are a matter of faith, not for negotiation.

2

I cannot avoid the painful question of the beginning of the schism between England and Rome. A key aspect of the English Reformation was of course the royal supremacy. Fisher and More died to oppose it. Gardiner compromised with it. Cranmer initially supported it, but ultimately gave his life in opposition to it, as had Fisher and More, albeit for different reasons. Although the royal supremacy is irrelevant for most Anglicans worldwide today, this principle has led to two enduring features of Anglicanism which have potential ecumenical implications.

First:

a close dependence on the local state or culture. This is a double edged sword. It can help the rooting of the church but it can also lead to different approaches in different parts of the world with the risk that churches become less recognisable to each other. At the same time, the lack of any central authority or universal canon law means that even if agreements are reached in dialogues between Anglicans and other confessions at the global level they only apply if they are endorsed by provincial synods.

Second:

the possibility of the subordination of the Church to political control. This was bad enough under a monarch who was nevertheless regarded as “God’s anointed” and answerable to the King of kings. How different that looks when that divinely ordained monarchy has been transformed into a parliamentary democracy subject to the will of a majority of its population who do not see themselves so accountable. If you doubt the seriousness of what I am saying, just think of how often in recent years threats have been made to the Church of England and its General Synod over such issues as women bishops and same-sex marriage. Even where churches of Anglican tradition are not “Established”, the same principle can be reflected in a slavish subordination to local culture and the Zeitgeist.

On this latter point, hear some wise words from Charles Brent, the American bishop who played a pivotal role in the formation of the Faith and Order Commission following the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910: *Nationalism began to eat into the body of Christendom four hundred years ago and has continued to work until Christianity has been nationalized instead of the nations being Christianized. The law of the state has become to the average citizen the embodiment of God’s moral requirements. In some countries the Church is little better than a vassal of the state in-stead of its converting power. Until the churches unite we shall have to move as men grievously wounded—*

² Ramsey A.M. in Bill EGW (ed) *Anglican Initiatives in Christian Unity* SPCK 1967 Introduction vii,viii

*haltingly, lamely, without a supernatural and final guide in the moral and spiritual movements of the time. We shall be unable to invite the nations to walk in the light of the Kingdom of God and in this way bring their glory and honor, together with that of their rulers, into it.*³

In the sixteenth century a political question – is England a single and complete “imperium”? – coincided with a wider theological turmoil involving a myriad of voices, conservative and reformist. Both the facts of the Reformation and their interpretation have been disputed ever since and have led to the notorious complexity of Anglican tradition so well summed up by Aidan Nichols: “...owing to the nature of its historical origins the Church of England is really three churches rolled into one. It is at one and the same time a Church of a classically Protestant stripe, a Church of a recognisably Catholic stripe, and a Church of a Latitudinarian or what would later be called ‘Liberal’ stripe.”⁴

Michael Ramsey made a similar point when he wrote in the book from which this Conference takes its name, *“Amid the convulsions of religion in Europe in the 16th century the English church had a character and a story which are hard to fit into the conventional categories of continental Christianity. The Anglican was and is a bad Lutheran, a bad Calvinist, and certainly no papist.”*⁵

Henry VIII’s dynastic ambitions and Thomas Cranmer’s reforming zeal created a perfect storm. How little it would have taken for things to have gone differently. But things are as they are. Both those who claim that nothing fundamentally changed and those who think the discontinuity with the Catholic past to have been absolute are entitled to their pious opinions, but the reality was more complicated and has coloured Anglican approaches to unity ever since. From the perspective of unity this diversity has positive and negative aspects. The muddles which have left the Church of England in its present form have enabled Anglicans to look in different directions and their approaches to unity inevitably reflect their views of the Reformation.

Fr Nichol’s pithy analysis says it all: Catholic, Protestant and Latitudinarian Anglicans have different ecumenical aspirations because they have different understandings of the church and of the place of their own ecclesial community within the *Una Sancta*.

Michael Ramsey however saw comprehensiveness in a more positive light: *“‘Catholicism’ and ‘Evangelicalism’ are not two separate things which the church of England must hold together by a great feat of compromise. Rightly understood they are both facts which lie behind the church of England and, as the New Testament shows, they are one fact. A church’s witness to the one Church of the ages is part of its witness to the gospel of God.”*⁶

Neither however was Aidan Nichols totally dismissive of the contribution Anglican diversity could make. Although he considers any corporate reunion of Rome and Canterbury “a chimera” he could envisage a *“selective union, on a basis comparable to that of the Eastern Catholic Churches. Such a selective union could include the Evangelical emphasis on the primacy of preaching the Atonement as the answer to human sin, and the historic Latitudinarian high respect for rationality as a candle in the house of the Lord, though, naturally, its predominant basis would lie in the Catholic elements of Anglicanism brought to the fore by the Caroline divines, the Restoration high churchmen and the founders of the Oxford Movement.”*⁷

³ Charles Brent: from *The Authority of Christ*, a sermon preached 24th November 1925 preached at the Consecration of Dr E.M. Stires as Bishop of Long Island in St Thomas’ Fifth Avenue

⁴ *“Anglican Uniatism: A Personal View”* in Cavanaugh S. (ed.) *Anglicans and the Roman Catholic Church* p.76 and in Woodruff M. (ed.) *Anglicans and Catholics in Communion* p.57

⁵ Ramsey, A.M., *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (second edition 1956, Third impression 1990) p.204

⁶ Ramsey, op.cit. p 204

⁷ Nichols, op. cit. in Woodruff p. 57, Cavanaugh p. 76 cf Nichols, A. *The Panther and the Hind* 1993 pp.177,178

The question of Christian unity has been pressing for the Church of England ever since the 1530s, but at different times different Anglicans have seen unity very differently. The collection *“Anglican Initiatives in Christian Unity”*⁸ has excellent papers on relations with all major confessional groupings, Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant. George Tavard’s classic study *“The Quest for Catholicity”*⁹ tells the story from one perspective.

I return briefly to the theme of “all round” ecumenism - wittingly mocked by Ronald Knox in his Anglican days: *“within a century at most we shall make the Church of England true to her Catholic vocation, which is, plainly, to include within her borders every possible shade of belief, Quod umquam quod usquam quod ab ullis.”*¹⁰

Just in case anyone has missed the allusion, Knox’s final words are a parody on the criterion articulated by St Vincent of Lerinum for doctrinal discernment when Scripture is unclear: *“all possible care must be taken that we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all.”*¹¹

This criterion has been claimed by Anglicans and Roman Catholics against what each saw as the innovations of the other. Both are often unaware that Vincent was writing in part against St Augustine’s doctrine of grace! His point however is that unity in truth is both synchronic and diachronic and that in the words of Augustine himself, *“securus iudicat orbis terrarum”*.¹²

It is easy to mock the aspiration to all round ecumenism, because, although it may not necessarily imply indifferentism, it may in practice lead to it. To want unity with everyone could imply the impossibility of unity with anyone (except that is those who share the same indifferentism). Critics are right to challenge the consistency of Anglican responses to different ecumenical partners.¹³

But although this question is posed in a particularly sharp and direct way to Anglicans, it is a valid question to ask of all churches who are engaged in dialogues with multiple partners. Every dialogue is shaped by the principal issues at stake. The issues vary, and attempts to identify common ground give each dialogue a particular “flavour.”

This is a particular problem for official initiatives. It may be relatively easy for partisan individuals and groups to find areas of agreement with like-minded ecumenical partners. Their problem is rather how to clarify their relationship with other parts of their own church. Institutionally, however, a “comprehensive” church needs to ensure there is a coherent integrity about its various dialogues.

3

Some of the earliest official Reformation initiatives were, perhaps naturally, towards Continental Protestant churches, and after the death of Queen Mary many expected that the influence of the returning exiles and the memory of the martyrs would lead to the triumph of Reformed theology. This prompted however a strong reaction especially by those who wished to assert the divine origin of the episcopate and the apostolic succession.

⁸ Bill E. (ed) *Anglican Initiatives in Christian Unity* 1966

⁹ Tavard, G. *The Quest for Catholicity: A Study in Anglicanism* 1963

¹⁰ Knox, R. *Reunion All Round* 1914 ad fin.

¹¹ Vincent of Lerinum, *Commonitorium* 2.6

¹² C. *Epist. Parm* III,iv,24. These words were instrumental in Newman’s conversion. See *Apol.* 1865 116-117

¹³ Cf my essay *Consistency in Dialogues: An ecumenical imperative and an Anglican problem* in Podmore, C. (ed.) *Community - Unity - Communion* 1998 pp.156-163

By the early seventeenth century serious dialogue, albeit of a polemical kind, was taking place with Rome¹⁴. Lancelot Andrewes had a famous correspondence with Cardinal Bellarmine. Other remarkable contacts took place. In 1634, Cardinal Francesco Barberini sent Gregorio Panzani¹⁵ on a mission to England where he not only investigated the state of the Roman Catholic community, but also had three meetings with Richard Montagu, Bishop of Chichester who probably overstated the readiness of several of his colleagues for corporate reunion. The Benedictine Leander à Sancto Martino (otherwise John Jones) had known Archbishop Laud from their time together in Oxford. In 1634 he was sent on a mission by Pope Urban VIII to open diplomatic links with England. He gave a very positive report of the state of the English Church and the possibilities of reunion. In the same decade another English convert, the Franciscan Franciscus à Sancta Clara (aka Christopher Davenport), sought to demonstrate the compatibility of the XXXIX Articles with Catholic doctrine - two centuries before Tract XC!¹⁶

Given the break with Rome, it is not surprising that from quite an early date overtures were made to the Eastern Churches, rooted in the same ancient traditions and yet resistant to the juridical claims of the Papacy. A particular impetus had a slightly curious genesis in that Archbishop George Abbot's approach in 1617 to Cyril Lucaris, patriarch of Alexandria and later Constantinople, was motivated by their shared Calvinist sympathies!¹⁷

In later generations a similar anti-papal instinct would lead to discussions with Gallican leaders¹⁸ and later still to relations with the Old Catholic and other anti-papal movements in Catholic countries, especially Spain and Portugal¹⁹.

Attitudes to Protestant non-conformists in England varied considerably over the centuries. There were periods of overt persecution, but generally the options seemed to be comprehension - trying to find a way of including dissenters in the national church - or toleration until, beginning from the later part of C19, friendlier overtures began to be made.

During the nineteenth century two distinct strands of Anglican approaches to unity emerged. For the Tractarians unity was ecclesial, sacramental and visible. For Evangelicals collaboration in mission was more important and many sat more lightly to questions of church order.

4

I turn now to some Anglican contributions to the quest for unity rarely mentioned in the conventional narrative²⁰. One such contributor was a former Anglican, Ambrose Lisle Phillips²¹. He was convinced that in order to be true to itself, the Church of England must be reunited with Rome.

¹⁴ On this period and its relevance to ARCIC, see Langham M. *The Caroline Divines and the Church of Rome* 2018

¹⁵ Berington, J. (tr. & ed.) *The Memoirs of Gregorio Panzani* 1793
(<https://archive.org/details/a603107100panzuoft>)

¹⁶ An accessible and very readable account of Anglican-Roman contacts can be found in Tavard G.H., *The Quest for Catholicity* 1963 Other sources are Pusey's *Eirenicon*; J.Robert Wright's essay "*Anglicans and the Papacy*" in McCord P.J., *A Pope for All Christians* 1976 pp.176-209; and Jones, Spencer., *England and the Holy See* 1902

¹⁷ See Runciman S., *The Church of England and the Orthodox Churches in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* in Bill E. (ed) *Anglican Initiatives in Christian Unity* 1966.

¹⁸ Sykes, N. *From Sheldon to Secker* 1959 p.114ff. Gres-Gayer, J. *Paris-Cantorbéry 1717-1720* 1989

¹⁹ Cf Lambeth Conference 1888, Resolution 15

²⁰ See e.g. Yelton, M. *Anglican Papalism* 2008

²¹ Purcell, E.S. (de Lisle E. ed.) *The Life and Letters of Ambrose Phillips de Lisle* 1900

He believed that correct understanding of the formularies²², of the history and of the present trajectory of the Church of England would lead inexorably to an overwhelming desire for catholic unity. Confident in these convictions, he always hoped for corporate rather than individual conversion. Phillipps may well have been naïve, but he was charitably naïve and lived in the hope that what was dreamable in Christ was possible. He thought, as Francis of St Clare and the author of Tract XC had thought, that the 39 Articles of Religion and the decrees of the Council of Trent were compatible.

He and other promoters of the Association for Promoting Christian Unity such as the Anglican George Frederick Lee²³ in the middle of the century were deeply disappointed when, partly as a result of the influence of Cardinal Manning, the Holy Office banned Catholics from participation in the association.

Lee's rather weird later history, including his involvement with *episcopi vagantes*, should not blind us to the ground breaking nature of the Association's vision.

Another hugely important figure in this story was Fr Paul Wattson²⁴, who inaugurated the Church Unity Octave in 1908 while he was still an Anglican. His vision was of prayer for reconciliation of with the Holy See and chose the dates 18th January (the Feast of the Chair of St Peter) and 25th (The Feast of the Conversion of St Paul) with this in mind.²⁵

In 1907 Wattson published *Prince of the Apostles: a study*. This was based on articles he had written with his friend the English priest, The Revd Spencer Jones, Rector of Batsford with Moreton-in-Marsh, for Wattson's journal *The Lamp*. The stall is set out uncompromisingly: *the purpose of the following volume is to present to Anglo-Catholics a careful study of the prerogatives of St Peter, as Prince of the Apostles, and the relation we shall assume to the apostolic see of Rome in order to save the Anglican Communion from a relapse into the same unhappy conditions of unbelief and worldliness which succeeded the Laudian revival and the era of the Caroline divines. Unless some new forward impulse can be given to the Catholic revival of the last century, reactions towards this destructive criticism and bald rationalism is inevitable, and this new volume is designed as a contribution to the solution of the grave problem that confronts the Catholic wing of the church at the present hour.*²⁶

5

I return now to the "official history".

The Oxford Movement began with an assertion of the independence and spiritual identity of the Church. This led to an emphasis on the Church as instituted by Christ and led by His Spirit. It entailed fresh thinking about the relationship between the separated parts of the Church.²⁷ Despite

²² i.e the Book of Common Prayer, the Ordinal and the 39 Articles of Religion

²³ Brandreth, H. *Dr Lee of Lambeth* 1951

²⁴ The founder of the Society of the Atonement

²⁵ Eventually this was merged with a Protestant Pentecost devotion for unity and the Universal Week of Prayer for Christian Unity proposed by Paul Couturier in 1935. In 1941 the Pentecost prayer was moved to the January dates.

²⁶ LaFontaine, Charles V. *Father Paul Wattson of Graymoor and Prayer for Christian Unity*
The Catholic Historical Review Vol 67, No 1 (Jan. 1981) pp. 31-49

²⁷ Several of the Tractarians and their sympathisers wrote on the theme of unity; to mention but two, Henry Manning, while still an Anglican and Archdeacon of Chichester, wrote a book on *The Unity of the Church*

hostility the Oxford Movement transformed the face of the Church of England in a remarkably short space of time.²⁸

An indication of how successful the Tractarian agenda has been was the emphasis laid on unity at the first Lambeth Conference in 1867, *"...we desire to express the deep sorrow with which we view the divided condition of the flock of Christ throughout the world, ardently longing for the fulfilment of the prayer of our Lord: "That all may be one, as Thou, Father art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me"; and, lastly, we do here solemnly record our conviction that unity will be most effectively promoted by maintaining the faith in its purity and integrity, as taught by the Holy Scriptures, held by the primitive Church, summed up in the Creeds, and affirmed by the undisputed General Councils, and by the drawing each of us closer to our common Lord."*

Unity has been a theme at every conference since. In 1888 the Conference the goal was acknowledged as 'corporate reunion' and 'organic unity' and the first version of the so-called (Chicago-)Lambeth Quadrilateral was affirmed²⁹. In 1897 the expression 'visible unity' first appears in a Lambeth Resolution (34), and it is described 'a fact of divine revelation' – in other words not a pragmatic or political reality but a matter of God's will belonging to the very reality of the church itself. In the light of this vision of the goal, the 1908 Conference stated that, *"in all partial projects of reunion and intercommunion the final attainment of the divine purpose should be kept in view as our object; and that care should be taken to do what will advance the reunion of the whole of Christendom, and to abstain from doing anything that will retard or prevent it"*

Perhaps the most well-known was the 1920 Conference with its *"Appeal to All Christian People."* It included the famous "Quadrilateral" a list of four fundamental elements necessary for the full visible unity of the Church.

The Conference envisaged a unity in which *all the treasures of faith and order, bequeathed as a heritage by the past to the present, shall be possessed in common, and made serviceable to the whole Body of Christ. Within this unity Christian Communion now separated from one another would retain much that has long been distinctive in their methods of worship and service.*

Since then successive conferences have not only expressed their commitment to unity, but have received reports on state of the various dialogues and ecumenical relations involving the Communion or its member churches.

They have made many impressive ecumenical pronouncements and Anglicans helped shape the modern ecumenical movement throughout the twentieth century, not least through their influence on the Faith and Order Commission and its undergirding of the World Council of Churches. It is hard to imagine that without Anglican insistence the vision of unity embodied in the constitution of the Council would have been so thoroughly Eucharistic and organic. The extent to which the Council has heeded and embodied Anglican concerns has undoubtedly made Orthodox participation easier and

(1842), and the Roman Catholic Ambrose Lisle Phillipps published his essay *"On the future unity of Christendom"* in 1857

²⁸ By the time of the first Lambeth Conference, in 1867, a petition was submitted urging the bishops to restore communion with Rome; it was signed by 5500 people, including 1000 clergy! The Conference itself made a remarkable statement about the need for unity.

²⁹ This was a light editing of a resolution by the House of Bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States of America meeting in Chicago in 1886 which owed much to William Reed Huntington (1838-1909) and his book *"The Church-idea; an Essay toward Unity"*

has in turn facilitated collaboration of the Roman Catholic Church with the Council as well as its full engagement in the work of the Faith and Order Commission.

Anglicans have over the years built up a substantial corpus of principles and approaches to questions of church unity which, taken together, suggest a more coherent and developing view than is often recognised. In this the interrelationship between the universal and the regional is fundamental both to Anglicans' self-understanding and to relations with other Christian communities.

Note the intimate link between unity and mission, and the central role of prayer in the process. Note too the refusal to separate ideas about Anglican unity from their ideas about the unity of the Church as a whole. In other words, although Anglicans have never claimed to be the whole of the Church or even its purest manifestation, they have consistently asserted that Anglican ecclesiology is an authentic representation of the Catholic doctrine of the Church, and therefore that the unity between Anglican churches must not betray any essential principle of ecclesiology as they see it.

It is a sad irony that in the immediate wake of the 1920 Conference the Malines Conversations, which might be thought to have been thought to be a practical consequence of this appeal hovered between the private and the semi-officially connived at! I commend to you Mark Vickers' engaging study of what happened next, *Reunion Revisited*.

The official ambivalence towards the Malines conversations is illuminating and illustrates what seems to me to be some of the principal lessons of Anglican engagement with ecumenism. First, the diverse character of Anglicanism shows that it is possible for a Christian community to hold together tensions that are elsewhere seen as opposites. What it does not show is how far such a diverse community can be a "church in the proper sense." The challenge cuts both ways. Second, being such a diverse community has forced Anglicans to look in different directions and in order to retain some sense of its own identity to articulate principles of unity to apply both to its own life and to that of the universal Church. Experience cruelly demonstrates however that at least at the present time this easier said than done. I do not believe that that means the principles are wrong, but that the diversity of Anglicanism as it has developed (far beyond the simple Catholic, Protestant and Latitudinarian analysis of Aidan Nichols) is too wide even for these principles to govern its own life. Still less is it possible for the Communion as a whole to fulfil what as recently as 1998, the Lambeth Conference could affirm as "*the Anglican commitment to the full, visible unity of the Church as the goal of the Ecumenical Movement.*"³⁰

The current frustration of the course set in motion by the Malta Report and the establishment of ARCIC following Michael Ramsey's famous meeting with Pope Paul VI in 1966 illustrates the same problem. So too does the failure to achieve unity with the English Free Churches. An Outline of a Reunion Scheme for the Church of England and the Free Churches in England was published in 1938 after a long prehistory dating back to the earliest Lambeth Conferences. This scheme for a 'united Church of England' was overshadowed by the Second World War but almost immediately after the war, the then Archbishop of Canterbury (Geoffrey Fisher) suggested in 1946 that the English Free Churches might 'take episcopacy into their system'. This appeal could be heard in different ways. Some, who evaluated it positively, saw it as a practical step towards aligning the structures of the divided churches in order to make further steps towards fuller unity possible. Others, more negatively, saw it as an attempt by Anglicans to impose their own polity on others, or as a means of correcting supposed defects in the ministries of other churches. Later of course the Anglican-Methodist reunion scheme also came to nothing despite AMR's enthusiastic support.

³⁰ Lambeth Conference 1998, Resolution IV.1 Commitment to full, visible unity

Of course there have been advances, but as befits a Communion structured around provincial autonomy, they have usually been regional agreements, even when the partners are themselves members of world confessional families.

The 1920 Lambeth Conference recommended the authorities of the churches of the Anglican Communion 'in such ways and at such times as they think best', formally to invite other churches within their areas to join in discussion along the lines of the principles laid out in the Appeal. This resolution envisages a 'variable geometry' in ecumenical relations as differing circumstances suggested different applications of the same principles. This led to the encouragement of regional agreements and what might be described as a variable geometry.

The question of consistency was again to the fore, and, conscious that some of its recommendations might be thought by some to stretch Anglican polity to its limits, the Conference went on to state that it could not 'approve of general schemes of intercommunion or exchange of pulpits', and expressed other significant reservations.

6

Recognising the inevitability that progress towards unity would be untidy, the 1998 Lambeth Conference introduced the expression "bearable anomalies" into the ecumenical policy of the Anglican Communion. This concept presupposed a commitment to full visible unity. The Conference "*recognises that the process of moving towards full, visible unity may entail temporary anomalies, and believes that some anomalies may be bearable when there is an agreed goal of visible unity, but that there should always be an impetus towards their Resolution and, thus, towards the removal of the principal anomaly of disunity.*" This makes clear the Anglican conviction that any steps along the road must be compatible with the ultimate vision. Being clear about this frees us for some flexibility about steps along the road. The 1998 Lambeth Conference used the expression 'bearable anomalies' to describe irregularities which can be tolerated provided there is agreement not only in theory but also in terms of practical next steps about the goal of visible unity. This concept does not of course justify new church-dividing actions that are deliberately taken in full knowledge of their consequences for unity³¹. For those who believe that the principle of provincial autonomy extends to matters of faith and order this may not be a problem, but for those who believe that *securus iudicat orbis terrarum*, there most certainly is.³²

7

I think Anglicans can be quietly proud of their forebears in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in both the official and the alternative narratives for their contribution to thinking about the nature of unity and its requirements.

The Lambeth Conferences have shown a consistent attempt to balance the concerns of Faith and Order, Life and Work and the wider concerns of mission. So it was that Anglicans warmly welcomed the establishment of the World Council of Churches in 1948 with a special regard for the continuing distinctive role of Faith and Order, whose centrality to the work of the WCC remains critical for the confidence of many churches in the Council. Anglicans were later to welcome the adherence of the Orthodox churches and the missionary movement to the Council as well as the new opportunities

³¹ Cf Cardinal Kasper's address to the Bishops of the Church of England 2006 and the Lambeth Conference 2008.

³² Cf Tillard, J.M., "pluralism stops being in harmony with the essential nature of the church when it is no longer based on a unity of faith, of sacramental life, and of mission. It belongs to the identity of the local church to be a group which does not retreat behind its own particularity and transforms this into an absolute."

for collaboration with the Roman Catholic Church, all of which were signalled at the New Delhi Assembly of 1961.

New Delhi also articulated a vision of unity particularly welcome to Anglican ears. Usually cited as 'all in each place united to all in every place', the New Delhi statement deserves fuller quotation: *"as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such ways that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people."*

You may hear the papal timebomb ticking away at the heart of that statement.

The New Delhi statement was enriched by the unity statement of the next, Nairobi, meeting in 1975: *"The one Church is to be envisioned as a conciliar fellowship of local churches which are themselves truly united. In this conciliar fellowship, each local church possesses, in communion with the others, the fullness of catholicity, witnesses to the same apostolic faith, and therefore recognises the others as belonging to the same church of Christ and guided by the same spirit."*

If New Delhi had a whispered hint of papacy, Nairobi balanced it with conciliarity.

If Anglicans can be proud of their ecumenical utterances and their contribution to the thinking of the Ecumenical Movement, I do not think they can be as proud of their record in turning that contribution into concrete acts of reconciliation. This is probably an inevitable consequence of the diversity to which I have referred. One has, moreover, to consider the effect of the combining of provincial autonomy with that of democratic governance.

The difficulty, it seems to me, has not therefore been for Anglicans, officially at any rate, an inability to speak clearly about the marks of the one Church. The difficulty has been rather how to translate that conviction into action. Here however we must say that Anglicans are not the only ones to have failed in this respect! It does however raise the serious question of whether Michael Ramsey's vision of a "church" destined to wither away is coming to fulfilment. Has, in fact, the role of "Anglicanism" been to be for the Catholic Church not so much a model as a herald of unity, an ecclesial example of "Do as I say, not as I do."

John Hind
Oxford 25th April 2018