

Anglican Conciliarity: History, Theology and Practice

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I have been asked to help the Commission to reflect on the theology and practice of conciliarity in Anglicanism and I have been encouraged to draw on the legacy of the pre-Reformation conciliar movement. So first of all I look at the historical background, at the late medieval developments in the concept of conciliar authority which influenced the Reformation and have shaped the churches of the modern world. Then I consider some of the theological principles that underpin the conciliar approach to authority. Next I explore how conciliarity is embodied and expressed in Anglicanism, before moving towards some tentative conclusions. But before we embark on all that, what is meant by conciliarity?

A definition

Conciliarity is a way of ordering the life of the Church as a coherent whole. What drives conciliarity is a longing for wholeness, coherence and unity. The Church in this context is not understood merely as a collection of local congregations that may happen to come together from time to time for their mutual advantage. Rather the Church is understood in a strongly realist sense as the Body of Christ. Conciliarity stands for the whole body of the Church taking responsibility for its mission, where mission embraces doctrine, worship, ministry, discipleship and evangelism. Conciliarity invokes the authority that is dispersed throughout the whole body; it gathers and focuses that authority when the Church takes counsel for its well-being and the advancement of its mission.

Conciliarity provides the theological framework in which all baptised Christians, gathered by word and sacrament as a community, discharge their share of responsibility for the life of the Church according to their various callings. Conciliarity equates to what the Faith and Order Lima text of 1982, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, called the 'communal' dimension of ministry. Within it the other two dimensions, the collegial and the personal, find their place. So conciliarity provides the broadest context within which other expressions of oversight are located, like concentric ripples on a pond. The collegiality of bishops, with their special responsibility for doctrine, worship and ministry, with each other and with the presbyters who share oversight with them, is exercised within conciliarity. The personal dimension of ministry and oversight (for example, the primacy of archbishops) functions first within the sphere of collegiality and then within that of conciliarity. As the 1968 Lambeth Conference put it: 'the collegiality of the episcopate must always be seen in the context of the conciliar character of the Church, involving the *consensus fidelium*'.

Two models of authority

Two rival models of authority and governance in the Church have dominated Western Christianity for the past thousand years and continue to exist in tension today. We can call them ‘monarchical’ and ‘conciliar’ for short. The monarchical and the conciliar models of church authority are stereotypes and are not always found in their pure forms. Elements of each are found in most churches and there are grey areas where they overlap. Neither are these terms straightforward value judgements, so that the monarchical is always bad and the conciliar is always good. Monarchical authority embodies – but distorts – the important principle of primacy, of a personal ministry of oversight. On the other hand, conciliarity is not a panacea; it can become feeble and paralysed where there is a lack of leadership.

Although I am drawing a contrast between them and perhaps, therefore, unintentionally accentuating the differences, it is important to bear in mind that these two models have much in common. In fact they share a set of fundamental assumptions about the nature of the Church. Both are forms of Catholic Christianity; they each express in different ways a Catholic understanding of the Church. That is to say, they presuppose that, although the Church is ultimately a mystery hid in Christ with God, it finds visible expression as a universal, divinely ordained, structured community that is given stewardship of the means of grace. So both models recognise that there is an inescapable political dimension to the Church’s life, the dimension of authority.

The monarchical model

The historical exemplar of monarchical catholicism is the Roman Church of the later Middle Ages, in which full authority (*plenitudo potestatis*), untrammelled spiritual and temporal authority, was concentrated in the papacy. Accelerating claims for papal authority were challenged by the conciliar movement in the last quarter of the fourteenth century and for several decades afterwards, but were reasserted with a vengeance when the conciliar movement was effectively defeated in the mid-fifteenth century. An intensification of monarchical authority (in the form of Ultramontanism) marked the Roman Catholic Church’s reaction to the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the rise of nationalism. During the twentieth century, in spite of all that Vatican II said about episcopal collegiality, the papacy became more centralised, all-controlling and authoritarian than it had ever been.

However, the monarchical model of authority is not by any means confined to the history of Roman Catholicism. The history of the Church of England provides abundant examples in the form of high-handed monarchs such as Elizabeth I, James I and Charles I, autocratic archbishops like Bancroft and Laud, not to mention the innumerable company of pompous prelates and self-important parsons through the ages. But Rome remains the classic case of monarchical authority because its model of ecclesiastical governance received elaborate ideological undergirding over many centuries.

Monarchical Catholicism involves a descending ecclesiology with a pyramid structure. Authority flows down from the papacy through the hierarchy. The pope exerts (or claims to exert) unfettered control over the Church as an absolute monarch. In the period before the Great Schism of 1378 canon lawyers and theologians competed with each other to supply the popes with ever more inflated claims in order to bolster their power over against the emperor and other civil rulers. The pope was invested with God's power on earth and there were few theoretical curbs on his authority. There was no higher court of appeal than the pope, not even the emperor, for spiritual power included and exceeded temporal power. The pope could be judged by no one.

In the emergence of monarchical catholicism practical, political developments went hand in hand with the elaboration of ideology. Beginning in the second half of the eleventh century and continuing throughout the twelfth, the papacy was centralised and its administration was made more rigorous, so that the pope took direct control of the Western Church and promoted uniformity of practice, according to the Roman model, throughout the Church. Nomination to various ecclesiastical offices and benefices accrued to the papacy and thus so did a proportion of their revenues. By the thirteenth century papal power was at its height.

Attacks on the Church were already prevalent before the Great Schism; they were not inaugurated by this catastrophic failure of the hierarchy. Its very constitution as an hierarchical system was being widely challenged long before the sixteenth century. What was at stake was the nature of the Catholic Church as a political community, as an ordered society, and particularly its structures of authority. The papacy was evaluated as a human institution and its claims began to be unmasked as forms of human legitimation. This radical, subversive vision formed the premise for ever louder rumblings of discontent and opposition to ecclesiastical privilege and papal interference in Germany, England, Scandinavia and elsewhere in Europe and the legal and constitutional ideas that accompanied them. The conciliar movement in the western Church developed as a challenge to the monarchical structure and as a response to the disasters that it had produced: above all the Great Schism, but also the chronic failure to address urgent issues of reform.

The conciliar model

The conciliar element that was already latent in medieval canon law was given its opportunity by the Great Schism of 1378 which threw Christendom into an unprecedented trauma and was apparently insoluble. The schism was precipitated when the college of cardinals became disillusioned with their recent choice of pope, Urban VI, who had alienated them by his arrogance, irrational behaviour and violent temper. Unable to reverse what they had done, the cardinals elected a second pope, Clement VII, but Urban refused to concede. The fact that the same sacred college of cardinals had canonically elected two popes within the space of a few months sent a shock wave, whose magnitude we can hardly conceive, throughout Europe and resulted in a dual

system of popes, cardinals, curia and ecclesiastical allegiances, right down to the parochial clergy.

The empire was under weak leadership and was soon to be divided itself. The schism coincided with the social and economic consequences of the Black Death. It occurred, moreover, in the year specified by various seers as that in which Antichrist would be manifested on earth. Little wonder that the schism was often seen in starkly apocalyptic terms (that helps to put the current difficulties of the Anglican Communion into perspective!).

The general clamour for a council to reform, unite and heal the Church began to intensify. Therefore the need to forge a new constitutional instrument that would enable a council to be convened without the normal authority of the pope became urgent. A council should be called by the pope but that was plainly impossible. The cardinals were discredited and divided. The emperor was too weak to do so. From the University of Paris, Conrad of Gelnhausen and Henry of Langestein drew on earlier conciliar practice. They began to invoke the recognised principle that what affects all should be approved by all, and to apply it to the resolution of the schism.

Conciliar thought envisaged authority as both dispersed and focused. Fullness of authority is located in the whole body of the Church and comes to focus and expression in councils – local, provincial and general. The pope is not the source of this authority but its minister. Apologists for the conciliar ideal were able to claim that the conciliar model of Church governance long predated the monarchical model, since councils went back to the beginnings of the Christian Church, to the Council of Jerusalem described in Acts 15. Several General Councils took place before the emergence of papal hegemony in the Western Church. The Council of Nicea in AD 325 was the first General Council after Jerusalem. It was called by the Emperor Constantine who took an active role in its proceedings.

Conciliar theory originated in the fairly routine work of canon lawyers, but underwent accelerated development at the hands of theologians and political philosophers in the spate of writing on ecclesiology that occurred from the early fourteenth century onwards. Not the least of the predisposing factors was the resentment of the episcopate at direct papal intervention in support of the new mendicant orders of friars that traversed dioceses. While the bishops did not question the universal writ of the pope's authority, they maintained that their own jurisdiction was not derived from the pope. These ideological developments were compounded by the increasing weight given to national interests and, at the end of this period, by the rise of nation-state. Emerging nation-states, often supported by their episcopates, began to seek sovereignty and to claim imperial status for themselves.

Conciliar ecclesiology stands, therefore, for an alternative strand within Catholicism and for a different model of authority. Conciliar thought was given a radical expression by Marsilius of Padua and William of Ockham. Pierre d'Ailly, Jean Gerson and Nicholas Cusanus were the leading conciliar thinkers at, respectively, the council of Pisa (1409)

and the General Councils of Constance (1414) and Basel (1431). Conciliar authority was evoked as a response to specific and apparently insoluble problems in the Church. Its premise was that the institution had failed. The very office that was intended to maintain its unity had proved the cause of its fragmentation. As Pierre d'Ailly put it: 'a community is not sufficiently ordered if it cannot resist its own ruin and open destruction.' Conciliarism had a number of distinguishing characteristics.

First, conciliar thought held that the Church means the whole Church, not simply the clergy (it was not unusual in the middle ages for the clergy, the church of Rome, or even the pope to be called the *ecclesia*). It is the whole Church, the community of the faithful (*congregatio fidelium*) that is the source of authority. Its authority comes to executive expression in a representative way through councils, above all through a General Council.

Second, conciliar thought recognised national identities and aspirations, not in any fully modern sense but to an extent that was subversive of an undifferentiated idea of Christendom held together by central authority.

Third, conciliar thought endorsed a kind of subsidiarity in affirming the role of lesser councils and synods: conciliarity should be practised at every level and in every context.

Fourth, conciliar thought employed academic contributions, sometimes giving scholars a voice and a vote in councils, and gave a role (albeit a limited one) to the laity, particularly in the persons of civil rulers.

Fifth, conciliar thought invoked the common good as the criterion of decisions and laws. Influenced by Thomism, it held that law found its rationality in being suited to the nature of persons and communities. Law is given to serve the common good, which takes priority over the good of individuals. The whole takes priority over the parts. Natural law, inscribed in the created order, and divine law, revealed in Scripture, are in complete harmony and point to the common good.

Sixth and perhaps above all, conciliar thought promoted three principles of acceptable authority: constitutionality, representation and consent.

Constitutional principles

The three constitutional principles that are apparent in conciliar thought can be seen as explications of the old adage: 'What affects all must be approved by all.' This dictum goes back to antiquity: it was defined by the Christian emperor Justinian; it was incorporated in medieval canon law; it was invoked by the conciliarists and was still very much alive at the time of the Reformation, being quoted by Luther on occasion. It is regarded as an unquestionable axiom.

The principle of *constitutionality* means that the scope and limits of authority are laid down, agreed and acknowledged. This principle is incompatible with a strong form of monarchical authority. Structures of authority need to embody checks and balances. There were no constraints on the late medieval papacy (unless the pope became an outright heretic, in which case it was recognised by the canonists that he could be deposed by a General Council). Limits on authority serve the interests of those who are subject to that authority.

The principle of *representation* means that the authority of the whole body is exercised through its appointed representatives, since all the members of the body cannot physically come together for that purpose. A council consists of the representatives of the whole Church, whether *ex officio* like the bishops and abbots, appointed like the national delegations, or even elected.

The principle of *consent* means that the governed must agree to how they are governed and have a say in it. Authority is constrained by the need to obtain, in general, the consent of those subject to that authority. Laws that lack general acceptance lose credibility and ultimately lack legitimacy. People cannot be ruled, for an indefinite period, against their will. Authority has to carry conviction and be persuasive if it is to be effective.

Conciliarity and the Reformation

The conciliar movement re-united the Western church by unifying the papacy at the General Council of Constance in 1415, but it failed to effect the reforms which continued to cry out for redress for another century. The Reformation can be seen as a violent outburst of damned up conciliar aspirations. Continental and Anglican Reformers alike appealed to conciliar principles and urged that a free General Council should be called and presided over by the civil magistrate rather than by the pope. Luther and Cranmer both appealed to a future General Council. The calling of a Council was much in the air in the first half of the sixteenth century, but the Council that Luther and Cranmer appealed to turned out to be the Council of Trent! The Anglican Reformers and their successors, the seventeenth-century divines, have a great deal to say about the authority of councils. They uphold the classical conciliar ideal of a free and properly representative council to arbitrate on the points of dispute between the churches.

However, the Reformers were definitely not full conciliarists. Conciliarism as a movement had been defeated in the mid-fifteenth century. Setting out to curb the power of the papacy, the conciliarists had over-reached themselves and had been trumped by the pope. By the early sixteenth century conciliarism was a legacy, a living intellectual tradition, and a legend, rather than a political option. The Reformers invoked aspects of the conciliar tradition, but did not adopt it wholesale. They did not accept that General Councils were infallible, any more than popes were (Article XXI). Their supreme source of authority was not the General Council but the Bible. The role of a council was to interpret Scripture. They went further than the conciliarists in ceding ecclesiastical

authority to civil rulers, not simply to initiate the convocation of a Council, but (though it is hazardous to generalise) to govern and reform the Church. And finally, it goes without saying that they saw no role for an unreformed papacy in relation to a General Council. Councils should be convened and supervised by the civil magistrate (the only viable alternative to the pope).

Richard Hooker

Richard Hooker (1554-1600) praises the role of General Councils in maintaining and furthering communion between portions of the universal Church which Hooker portrays as like the seas and oceans of the world, contiguous with each other and often flowing into each other. These 'reverend, religious and sacred consultations', as Hooker calls General Councils, have their place among the 'laws of spiritual commerce between Christian nations'. General Councils are invoked by Hooker as 'a thing whereof God's own blessed Spirit was the author; a thing practised by the holy Apostles themselves; a thing always afterward kept and observed throughout the world; a thing never otherwise than most highly esteemed of, till pride, ambition and tyranny began by factious and vile endeavours to abuse that divine intention unto the furtherance of wicked purposes.' The grievous abuse to which councils have recently been subjected (by the papacy) should not cause us to despair of them, urges Hooker, but rather should spur us 'to study how so gracious a thing may again be reduced to that first perfection' (Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* [EP], I, x, 14).

Hooker holds to a basic principle of the conciliar tradition that power of governance is vested in the whole body and that consent is therefore necessary for its exercise in matters either temporal or spiritual. Church authority, like political authority, resides in the people, and the bishops exercise it on their behalf, just as the civil magistrate exercises political authority on behalf of the people. The interpretation of Hooker's political theory, like other aspects of his thought, is contested. What is beyond dispute is that Hooker adheres to the basic conciliar ecclesiology that sees the Church in organic and corporate terms, subordinating the hierarchy to the body as a whole and ordering authority by the principles of constitutionality, representation and consent, a General Council being the highest executive expression of the Church's authority.

In more modern times, that is to say around the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, some of the most distinguished interpreters of Anglicanism from an historical point of view, such as R. W. Dixon, Bishop Mandell Creighton and Neville Figgis CR, lamented the failure of the conciliar movement and attributed the tragic divisions and excesses of the Reformation to that failure. They agreed in seeing Anglicanism as an expression and continuation of the conciliar ideal, that is to say, of a reformed Catholicism in the area of authority.

Conciliarity in modern Anglicanism

Anglicanism recognises the authority of General Councils in principle and the creeds of the early councils are normative for Anglican belief. Anglicans would still wish to participate in a truly ecumenical General Council, if one were possible. However, a truly ecumenical General Council is not a realistic possibility today and is unlikely to become more feasible in the foreseeable future. A General Council is an expression of a Church already united in eucharistic communion and taking steps to deal with a common threat or challenge. Such eucharistic communion is, regrettably, not true of the fragmented Christian Church today. The pluralism of faith and practice in the Church is gathering momentum, not diminishing. The number of churches is increasing and the prospect of an ecumenical council could be entertained only at the cost of an arbitrary limitation of what constitutes a Christian Church. Anglican ecclesiology is sometimes noted for its realism. In this case, realism inhibits romantic fantasizing about the chances of a General Council that would adjudicate on controversial issues such as the ordination of women or moral questions of sexuality.

Anglicanism has operated in practice on the premise that, in the absence of a General Council, portions of the Christian Church must practice conciliarity as best they can. Anglicanism is not paralysed by the impossibility of a truly ecumenical council. It believes that provinces gathered into communions should act in a conciliar fashion within the limits imposed by the divisions in the Church. It sets out to extend conciliarity as far and wide as it can until it runs up against the barriers erected by broken communion, rival claims to jurisdiction or serious differences in doctrine or order.

Like the conciliar movement, the Anglican Communion acknowledges national identities and aspirations in its notion of provincial autonomy and recognises the importance of cultural identity in its acceptance of the principle of inculturation. While the authority of Anglican provinces *vis à vis* the cohesion of the Anglican Communion as a whole is a matter that calls for continued hard thinking and heart-searching, there is certainly a degree of continuity to be perceived here with the national ambitions and resentments that helped to fuel the conciliar movement.

Conciliarism was not concerned only with General Councils, but picked up the early medieval precedent of regional and national councils that had fallen into disuse. Though synods are by no means unique to Anglicanism, the Anglican Communion has structures of synodical government at all appropriate levels – typically, deanery, diocesan, provincial and national – as well as participative Church government in the parish. Anglicanism gives a voice in these councils to clergy and laity as well as to bishops. Clergy (mostly theologians and canon lawyers) were involved in the pre-Reformation reforming councils, but the laity were represented mainly by rulers. Among influences on conciliar thought, Marsilius of Padua and William of Ockham were notable for advocating a place for laity.

Conciliarity is grounded theologically on the foundational sacrament of Christian initiation, baptism. Through their baptism all Christians are incorporated into Jesus Christ's threefold messianic identity as prophet, priest and king. By virtue of this royal

priesthood, all the baptised are mandated to play their part in the governance of Christ's kingdom. The 1988 Lambeth Conference affirmed that baptism into the royal priesthood is the foundation of all ministry, lay and ordained. It is the royal priesthood of the baptised that makes it right in principle for lay people to participate in councils and synods.

Anglicanism has universal structures of consultation – though not of jurisdiction or binding decision-making – in place in the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council and the Primates' meeting. It is within this conciliar and collegial context that the office of Archbishop of Canterbury functions. The Archbishop of Canterbury has primacy as the incumbent of the most ancient metropolitan see of the Church of England, which for historical reasons serves as a focus of communion and unity for those churches that have links of doctrine, liturgy and polity with the Church of England. The Archbishop has no ordinary jurisdiction outside his own diocese, though he has a certain canonical authority in appeals and visitations. Following the 1988 Lambeth Conference, the Primates and the Anglican Consultative Council, meeting jointly, reaffirmed the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury 'as the principal focus of unity in the Communion' and the initiator of new developments. This is the distinctive style of Anglican primacy.

Anglican conciliarity in practice

What makes Anglicanism a communion? The member Churches identify themselves as national or regional churches that are both catholic and reformed. They share a heritage of theology and liturgy, polity and spirituality that goes back to the classical Anglicanism of the seventeenth-century Church of England. They are in communion with one another by virtue of each being in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury or with the Church of England. One expression of this communion is the Lambeth Conferences, convened by the Archbishop of Canterbury every ten years, for the sharing of insights and problems and the exchange of views, leading, it is hoped, to a common mind on issues of mutual concern, but not to binding decisions.

The Lambeth Conferences have adopted, as it were, a self-denying ordinance, consistently resisting suggestions that they should adopt juridical powers. The first Lambeth Conference in 1867 stated: 'It has never been contemplated that we should assume the functions of a general synod of all the Churches in full communion with the Church of England, and take upon ourselves to enact canons that should be binding upon those represented. We merely propose to discuss matters of practical interest and pronounce what we deem expedient in resolutions which may serve as safe guides.' The Conference of 1948 observed: 'Former Lambeth Conferences have wisely rejected proposals for a formal primacy of Canterbury, for an Appellate Tribunal, and for giving the Conference the status of a legislative synod. The Lambeth Conference remains advisory, and its continuation committee consultative.' Clearly, what unites Anglicans belongs not in the realm of binding authority or juridical structures, but in the more elusive area of relationships grounded in the intention to belong together.

Anglicanism is not a world Church, like the Roman Catholic Church, but a fellowship of self-governing national or regional Churches. The 1930 Lambeth Conference in its Encyclical Letter said: 'This Communion is a commonwealth of Churches without a central Constitution: it is a federation without a federal government.' The same Lambeth Conference affirmed, in contrast to the Roman Catholic position, that 'the true constitution of the Catholic Church involves the principle of the autonomy of particular Churches based upon a common faith and order.'

The Conference of 1878 had already considered the question of 'the best mode of maintaining unity among the various Churches of the Anglican Communion.' It had declared that 'the duly certified action of every national or particular Church, and of each ecclesiastical Province (or Diocese not included in a Province), in the exercise of its own discipline, should be respected by all the other Churches, and by their individual members.' One hundred years later, however, the 1978 Lambeth Conference put the other side of the equation, resolving that on major issues none of the provinces should take action without first consulting the Lambeth Conference or Primates' meeting.

Behind this resolution of Lambeth 1978 lay the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood and to the episcopate which would not only affect relations with other communions, but would also bring about a state of 'impaired communion' between some provinces of Anglicanism. On this issue provinces went their own way and were not prepared to wait for a consensus to emerge at the infrequent meetings of the Anglican bishops. The result of these developments has been a sharpening of dissatisfaction with the Anglican machinery for taking decisions as a communion.

This concern raises the question whether the stress on the autonomy of Anglican provinces is compatible with the nature of Anglicanism as a communion. The argument, much simplified, runs like this: Communion (*koinonia*) is grounded in the mutual relations of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. Autonomy is certainly not an appropriate term to apply to the relation of the Son to the Father, for example. Relatedness needs structures. In authority a juridical aspect is inescapable. There is canonical authority in a diocese or a province: why not in a worldwide communion? To be catholic, the local must maintain communion with the universal. It is not a question of creating the authority: it exists, particularly through baptism and ordination. It needs suitable channels in order to be exercised and the will to do so.

Cardinal Ratzinger once asked slightly sceptically of the Lambeth Conference, 'What sort of teaching authority and jurisdiction belongs or does not belong to this assembly of bishops?' How does Anglicanism measure up to this challenge? It has structures of conciliarity, collegiality and primacy. The authority of the primacy operates pastorally and fraternally. Without the power to take binding decisions at the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Communion possesses a distinctive kind of collegiality. Collegiality belongs primarily to bishops with jurisdiction. The bishops of the Anglican Communion can offer, but not enforce leadership, outside their own diocese or province.

The strength of the Anglican Communion lies in its experience of informal conciliarity. Its structures are designed for mutual counsel and the sharing of experience and insight, the discipline of seeking together for the mind of Christ. It seems that this does not preclude the Lambeth Conference from making a corporate and decisive judgement on a controversial question by majority vote. That judgement would have considerable moral, but no juridical authority until provinces had debated and approved it by due canonical process. Thus in answer to Cardinal Ratzinger's question, Anglicans may reply that Lambeth Conferences have teaching authority, but that there is no compulsion for the member churches to accept that teaching. They will make up their own minds about it through their own structures of conciliarity in the process of reception. Jurisdiction has it none. Even if it were possible to reverse the whole tenor of the Lambeth Conferences for the past century and a half, so that they were awarded (presumably by the member churches) juridical authority – canonical powers to take decisions that would be binding on the member Churches – this would be shattered at the first concerted challenge and the Anglican Communion would suffer much more serious disruption than anything it has experienced so far. Anglicans would be wise not to try to go down that road.

The Conference of 1920 was right to envisage the more excellent way of moral authority and charitable persuasion. Long before *koinonia* became ecumenically fashionable, Lambeth invoked its meaning. 'The Lambeth Conference does not claim to exercise any powers of control. It stands for the far more spiritual and more Christian principle of loyalty to the fellowship. The Churches represented in it are indeed independent, but independent with the Christian freedom which recognises the constraints of truth and love. They are not free to ignore the fellowship... the Conference is a fellowship in the Spirit.' Although the member Churches of the Anglican Communion are legally autonomous – they have the integrity and fullness of authority to decide their own destinies – the invoking of autonomy and the claiming of independence are hardly the language of Zion. More appropriate in the speech of Christians and Churches is the rhetoric of communion, bearing one another's burdens and 'speaking the truth in love'. Interdependence should take priority over autonomy. To practise the grace of walking together without coercive constraints is the special vocation of Anglicanism in our pluralistic world.

Towards some conclusions

The conciliar tradition of authority is a development of the Pauline understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ. The body metaphor is both mystical (linked with the metaphor of the bride of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit) and political (as a visible, ordered community, the Church has various structures of governance and of oversight that can be interpreted by means of secular political theory). Within the range of political options available within the Church's tradition, Anglicanism is an expression of conciliar Catholicism. Its divines have consistently invoked conciliar principles. The conciliar character of Anglicanism applies to the Communion as a whole, as well as to the member provinces, since communion (*koinonia*) is an ecclesial concept. However, in

a plural and divided Christian Church conciliar authority is fragmented and dissipated. It is located within, rather than between churches. This situation pertains to the Anglican Communion as well as to the whole Christian *oikumene*.

Mandatory, binding authority is not the only form of conciliar authority. Conciliarity also involves mutual consultation, bearing one another's burdens and the offering of principled leadership. Conciliarity remains valid, even when its decisions cannot be imposed. Any attempt to move the Anglican Communion to acceptance of a central, 'monarchical' authority with the power to make decisions that would be binding on the member churches is doomed to failure. The vocation of Anglicanism lies in its distinctive approach to questions of authority where primacy, collegiality and conciliarity all have their integrity and are interrelated and mutually constrained.

However, this does not mean that the Communion can never have more than moral authority for its members. Conciliarity that lacks mandatory authority nevertheless has the potential to develop forms of mutual obligation (protocols of consultation, leading to common action or perhaps restraint, together with the sanctions that would apply in circumstances where they are not observed) that are intended to promote the common good. The common good of the Anglican Communion should be seen in ecclesiological and missiological terms, i.e. as the conditions that are required for the Communion as a whole and its member churches to grow in the four dimensions of the Church (unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity) and to carry out the mission of the gospel in the world. However, the common good of the Communion would need to be set within the context of the common good of the whole Church of Christ – which means that ecumenical considerations would also be taken seriously.

Such protocols may be freely accepted by the constituent bodies, following their own canonical processes. When so accepted they would become binding unless and until repudiated by a similar canonical process. A majority (threshold to be agreed) of the provinces may insist that membership of the Communion requires acceptance and observance of these protocols. Presumably, the consent of the Archbishop of Canterbury would be required before this condition could be implemented.

Conciliarity presupposes communion. Communion (*koinonia*) is a multi-faceted, dynamic and graduated reality that expresses and sustains the nature of the Church as the Body of Christ. The communion of the Anglican Communion goes well beyond the baptismal communion that pertains (e.g.) between Anglicans and Roman Catholics. Communion between Anglican provinces involves the interchangeability of ministries and therefore of Eucharists (any impairment of this can only be regarded as a temporary anomaly).

Even serious differences between constituent parts of the Church (dioceses or provinces) are not a sufficient reason for breaking communion, unless a diocese or province chooses to elevate that difference to the level of a church-dividing issue of faith or practice, so making acceptance of its position a touchstone of communion. The Bonn Agreement between Anglicans and Old Catholics soundly states that 'Full Communion does not require from either Communion the acceptance of all doctrinal opinion, sacramental

devotion or liturgical practice characteristic of the other, but implies that each believes the other to hold all the essentials of the Christian faith.' We may profoundly, passionately and bitterly disagree with one another without breaking canonical communion.

It is vital that, as far as possible, communion be maintained in order that conciliarity may function, because conciliarity is needed to solve the problem. Sometimes differences held in conscience can be marked in ways that do not involve breach of communion. Breaking communion in a drastic way implies that the Orders and Eucharists of the body that is being disowned are not valid. Questions of validity need to be seen, not only in strictly canonical terms but also in the light of the catholic doctrine that 'the unworthiness of the minister... hinders not the effect of the sacrament' (Article XXVI of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England). The objectivity and 'givenness' of the sacraments and of the sacred ministry as their channel, sustains the Church in communion in spite of many human imperfections.

QUESTIONS

1. To what extent does Anglicanism embody conciliar principles and structures?
2. Could the conciliar axiom, 'What affects all should be agreed by all', be implemented in the Anglican Communion?
3. How might the common good of the Anglican Communion be described?