

Learning from Lambeth 1998 and Primates' Meetings 2000-2003

This submission is **based** on participation in: the **Lambeth Conference 1998** (as part of the group that produced the opening and closing Plenary Sessions of the Conference and in between them tracked the Conference by observing its main Sections and being present at the lunchtime meetings of the group steering the Conference); the **Primates' Meetings in Porto (2000), in Kanuga (2001), and in Canterbury (2002)** (as leader of the daily Bible Studies and member of the drafting group for the communiqués/pastoral letters issued by the Meetings); and the **Primates' Meeting in Gramado (2003)** (as one of the theological respondents to the Meeting and member of the drafting group for the pastoral letter issued by it).

The **rationale** is that Lambeth 1998 and the Primates' Meetings that followed it have been the main centres of representative deliberation for the Anglican Communion on the issues that are the concern of the Eames Commission, and are among the main reference points mentioned in the Commission's Mandate.

The **aim** is to recall briefly a few critical moments, statements and realities that the Commission may find helpful to bear in mind as it consults the records of those gatherings in accordance with its Mandate.

1. Lambeth 1998: A Problematic Polity?

Lambeth 1998 went very well indeed at every level except that of the plenary gatherings that discussed and voted on resolutions. Those plenaries proved vulnerable to forms of politics that as far as I know were unprecedented at Lambeth Conferences, but have since spread. Whatever one's attitude to what emerged from the plenaries, I think it is generally agreed that the process was problematic. **The underlying issue, however, was the polity of the Anglican Communion.** The Commission's Mandate and Key Questions commit it to making *ad hoc* polity recommendations to meet a serious situation. *Is it possible to do that without having in mind an overall polity for the Anglican Communion? If that is too ambitious in the time available, then might one recommendation of the Commission be that serious work on polity be done before the next Lambeth Conference?*

2. The Shape of the Primates' Meetings: Enabling Collegiality

One observation about the four Primates' Meetings that I attended is the importance of the collegiality they encouraged by a combination of several factors: a good deal of worship and Bible study; long enough (a week) for community life to happen; a balanced agenda covering mission and global issues (debt, HIV/AIDS, etc.) as well as internal Church matters; contributions from guests invited to address the Meetings; and frank sharing by Primates of what was going on in their Provinces. I noticed that each Meeting had its tensions in advance; each time it took some days for the Primates really to engage with each other; each time the discussion of mission and world issues had beneficial effects on the discussion of controversial Church matters; and yet by the time the next Meeting came around a great deal of the understanding

and fellowship seemed to have evaporated during another year of ecclesial politics and separation from each other, so that communion had to be renewed by the same process over again. The best meetings were those most secluded and retreat-like in conception. *My conclusion as regards the Commission's work is that the Primates' Meeting and Anglican Consultative Council meeting which receive and deliberate about the Commission's report should ideally have the characteristics of the best of the Primates' Meetings.*

3. Porto 2000: A Key Peacemaking Insight

In the communiqué of the Porto Primates' Meeting there is the following statement:

As in any family, the assurance of love allows boldness of speech. We are conscious that we all stand together at the foot of the Cross of Jesus Christ, so we know that to turn away from each other would be to turn away from the Cross.

That grew out of what I judge to be the most significant moment in all five gatherings from 1998-2003.

The key moment happened in the course of a Bible study on the Letter to the Ephesians. A discussion of 'the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name' (Eph. 3:14) led into a discussion of authority in families between two African archbishops. This connected with the discussion of Ephesians Chapter 2 on being brought together by the blood of Christ, 'For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us' (Eph. 2:14). Through the discussion that followed in the Bible study and later in the group drafting the communiqué a number of basic realities emerged:

- **in our Anglican Christian family it can be 'life-giving' to have the sort of challenge, disagreement and admonition in love and truth that were going on in the Meeting;**
- **if it is virtually unthinkable for us to turn away and break off from our natural families, how much more unthinkable and scandalous should it be to turn away from those with whom the blood of Christ unites us;**
- **the measure of the suffering we are called to be willing to put up with for the sake of our unity is nothing less than that seen in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ;**
- **the suffering might well last many years; in the face of impatient calls for solutions on all sides, we may need to be prepared if necessary for decades of living patiently with deep problems, yet without ever turning away from each other. That patient living and loving 'at the foot of the Cross of Jesus Christ' might prove to be the witness that our conflict-torn world needs most of all.**

This cross-centred understanding of the extraordinary preciousness of unity and the sacrifices which it is worth enduring for the sake of our Communion's unity was only the most powerful example of what the Primates' Meetings demonstrated again and again: *that the best way to cope with differences is to go deeper into the heart of the Gospel.* I hope that that is where the Commission will lead the Anglican Communion.

4. Kanuga 2001: A Transforming Perspective

The second most memorable event of the five gatherings occurred in Kanuga. The Rev. Gideon Byamugisha of Uganda gave what the Pastoral Letter rightly called a profoundly moving presentation on HIV/AIDS. When the Letter later said: ‘We thank God for those outpourings of the Holy Spirit we have heard of and experienced this week’ (how many gatherings of Anglican archbishops and presiding bishops have claimed to have experienced outpourings of the Holy Spirit?) what it had in mind was Gideon’s presentation and the remarkable overflow from it in discussing implications and in sharing experiences of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The indirect effect on the sensitive discussions about divisions in the Anglican Communion was considerable. *The pandemic helped to put our internal difficulties into a different perspective, shaped by God’s compassion for those who are suffering.* How might this perspective shape the Commission’s report?

5. Canterbury 2002: The Role of Law

One of the surprises of Kanuga and then Canterbury for me was the way in which the relevance of canon law to the long term health of the Anglican Communion was convincingly demonstrated, and it is good to see it featuring prominently in the Commission’s Key Questions. However, especially after Canterbury, I was convinced that canon law is no substitute for *creative thinking about polity*, of which there has been too little in Anglicanism in recent years. This reinforces the questions under Section 1 above.

6. Gramado 2003: Scripture and ‘A New Dawn’

In Gramado the Bible studies were led by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. They invited the Meeting day by day deeper into the heart of St John’s Gospel through chapters from the Farewell Discourses. Those who were there will recall the remarkable effect of this immersion in scripture. I asked the Archbishop of Nigeria, Peter Akinola, what he thought at the end of the final study, and he said: ‘A new dawn’. I am convinced that scripture, which is so much part of our problems, also offers the main way through them. **There are wiser ways of understanding and applying scripture than many of those which often dominate the controversies in our Communion.** I hope the Commission’s report will exemplify the Gramado wisdom interpretation of scripture.