

Deeper Communion; Gracious Restraint

A Letter from Alexandria to the Churches of the Anglican Communion

1. At the invitation of the Archbishop of Canterbury, as the Primates and Moderators of the Churches of the Anglican Communion¹, we gathered for prayer and consultation in the ancient city of Alexandria, with the Most Revd Mouneer Anis, President Bishop of the Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East, as our host. We prayed, worshipped God, and studied the Scriptures together, seeking to be faithful to the call of God in Christ, and to discern the leading of the Holy Spirit. There was a common desire to speak honestly about our situation.

2. Since we were meeting in Alexandria, we were conscious of the historical, cultural, ecumenical and inter-faith contexts of our meeting. This was reinforced during our visit to the Bibliotheca Alexandrina. We met with the State Governor of Alexandria, General Adel Labib; we were received warmly by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, Patriarch of Alexandria, and Head of the Coptic Orthodox Church. He spoke to us powerfully of the vocation and calling of a bishop to witness to the Gospel of Christ. We were also conscious that we were meeting in a country which is majority Muslim, but in which there is a strong Christian heritage and presence. We were able to celebrate the heritage of faith received from SS Mark, Clement, Anthony, Athanasius, and the desert fathers and mothers. Meeting in Egypt, a country which is the home of Al Azhar Al Sharif, one of the historic intellectual centres of the Muslim world, we were also very conscious of the importance of constructive engagement between Christians and Muslims in many Provinces of the Anglican Communion. We draw attention to the significant recent initiatives² undertaken by the Archbishop of Canterbury and by the Diocese of Egypt with North Africa and the Horn of Africa.

3. In the course of our visit, we valued participating in the life of the local diocese, the dedication of St Mark's Pro-Cathedral in Alexandria, the Installation of the new dean, the Very Revd Samy Fawzy Shehata, and the ongoing life of the Alexandria School of Theology. We commend the witness and work of the Diocese of Egypt. At the Service of Dedication on Sunday, 1st February, the Archbishop of Canterbury

¹ Four of our number were not present to be with us: The Moderators of the Churches of North India, South India and Pakistan, and the Presiding Bishop of the Philippines were not able to be present at this meeting.

- ² A meeting with Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, Sheikh Al Azhar, on January 31 2009, at which the Archbishop and the Sheikh reaffirmed the agreement for dialogue between the Anglican Communion and Al Azhar that was initially signed in January 2002.
- The Archbishop's letter of 15 July 2008 entitled '*A Common Word for the Common Good*', sent in response to *A Common Word* (the letter sent by 138 Muslim scholars in October 2007). The Archbishop has also sponsored two international gatherings, in June and October 2008, to help take forward a constructive response to *A Common Word*. Bishop David Hamid (Suffragan Bishop in Europe) has been appointed by the Archbishop to take forward engagement on his behalf with this and other Muslim-led initiatives such as that being developed by the King of Saudi Arabia.
- The 'Building Bridges' programme, in which, since the original meeting in January 2002, a group of Christian and Muslim scholars have met together on an annual basis to discuss significant theological issues of interest to both faiths.
- A meeting in Libya in late January 2009 in which the Archbishop met with Dr Mohammad Sharif, the Secretary General of the World Islamic Call Society (WICS), and they agreed, in principle, to establish a mechanism for ongoing dialogue and collaboration. While in Libya, on 29 January at the WICS University Campus in Tripoli, Libya the Archbishop gave a lecture '*How does God reveal himself? A Christian perspective.*' (www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/2150) This was the third in a series of lectures given by the Archbishop about Christianity in Muslim seats of learning. Previous lectures were given at Al Azhar, and Islamabad, Pakistan.

preached and reminded us to see Christ in one another, recognising that Christ alone is the foundation of our building and our work, the one who prays in and through us.

4. We were moved while we listened to some of our members speaking first hand of the situation in Zimbabwe, of the oppressive partisanship of the former Bishop of Harare, Nolbert Kunonga, and of the violence and persecution exercised against the Anglicans of Zimbabwe. We adopted a statement on Zimbabwe which has been released separately. We also heard from the Primate of the Sudan about the violence experienced by the people of Sudan and urgent needs of that nation. We append a statement on Sudan which we have adopted and to which we urgently draw attention. The Primate of Jerusalem and the Middle East also drew our attention to the ongoing crisis in Gaza. We append a statement on this tragic situation.

5. As we met, we shared a common concern for the Anglican Communion and a strong desire to see our Christian World Communion flourish and remain united. At the beginning of the meeting, the Archbishop of Canterbury invited five of us to speak about how the current situation in the Communion affected mission in our own contexts. We were able to talk honestly and openly about our experiences and perceptions. We were reminded powerfully of the sense of alienation and pain felt in many parts of the Communion, as many are tested by difficult theological tensions. Nevertheless, there was a discernable mood of graciousness among us in our engagements: a mood which assisted and sustained our conversation.

6. Successive Lambeth Conferences have urged the primates to assume an enhanced responsibility for the life of the Communion³, but we are aware that the role of the Primates' Meeting has occasioned some debate. The role of primate arises from the position he or she holds as the senior bishop in each Province. As such we believe that when the Archbishop of Canterbury calls us together "for leisurely thought, prayer and deep consultation"⁴, it is intended that we act as "the channels through which the voice of the member churches [are] heard, and real interchange of heart [can] take place"⁵.

7. We have the responsibility each to speak to the other primates on behalf of the views and understandings held in our own Provinces. We are called to mutual accountability and to bear faithful witness to what is held dear in the life of our Provinces and to the inheritance of faith as our Church has received it. Together we share responsibility with the other Instruments of Communion for discerning what is best for the well-being of our Communion. We are conscious that the attitudes and deliberations of the primates have sometimes inadvertently given rise to disappointment and even disillusion. We acknowledge that we still struggle to get the balance right in our deliberations and ask for the prayers of our people in seeking the assistance of the Holy Spirit to support and direct us in discharging our responsibilities before God.

8. One of the chief matters addressed was the continuing deep differences and disrupted relationships in the Anglican Communion. We acknowledge the difficult

³ Lambeth 1998, Resolution III.6: "encouragement be given to a developing collegial role for the Primates' Meeting under the presidency of the Archbishop of Canterbury, so that the Primates' Meeting is able to exercise an enhanced responsibility in offering guidance on doctrinal, moral and pastoral matters" See also Lambeth 1978, Resolutions 11 and 12 and Lambeth 1988, Resolution 18.

⁴ cf The Address of Archbishop Donald Coggan to the Lambeth Conference, 1978

⁵ *ibid*

nature of these tensions, which evoke deep feelings and responses, but we were grateful that, by God's grace, we were able to discuss and debate these issues in a spirit of open and respectful dialogue. There has been honest exchange and mutual challenge at a new and deeper level.

9. The Archbishop of Canterbury shared with us the Report of the Windsor Continuation Group. We wish to express our thanks to the members of the group and those who supported its work for the careful and patient analysis that they have offered to us. The matters discussed are not solely issues of church politics; we are considering the spiritual health and well-being of our communion. It is therefore a conversation about our own lives and ministry. This issue touches us all, because we are each burdened and diminished by each other's failings and pain.

10. Our honest engagement revealed the complexity of the situation. Matters are not as clear-cut as some portray. The soul of our Communion has been stretched and threatened by the continuation of our damaged and fractured relationships, even though we believe that God continues to call us into a Communion founded not on our will, but on the action of God in Christ Jesus. We have experienced God drawing us more deeply into that honest engagement and listening which both require and engender trust, and which must continue and intensify if we are to move forward under God. We must find a deeper understanding of the basis of the bonds, both divine and human, which sustain ecclesial fellowship.

11. The Windsor Continuation Group Report asks whether the Anglican Communion suffers from an "ecclesial deficit."⁶ In other words, do we have the necessary theological, structural and cultural foundations to sustain the life of the Communion? We need "to move to communion with autonomy and accountability"⁷; to develop the capacity to address divisive issues in a timely and effective way, and to learn "the responsibilities and obligations of interdependence"⁸. We affirm the recommendation of the Windsor Continuation Group that work will need to be done to develop the Instruments of Communion and the Anglican Covenant. With the Windsor Continuation Group, we encourage the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Anglican Consultative Council and the Anglican Communion Office to proceed with this work. We affirm the decision to establish the Inter-Anglican Standing Commission for Unity, Faith and Order. We recognise the need for the Primates' Meeting to be engaged at every stage with all these developments.

12. There are continuing deep differences especially over the issues of the election of bishops in same-gender unions, Rites of Blessing for same-sex unions, and on cross-border interventions. The moratoria, requested by the Windsor Report and reaffirmed by the majority of bishops at the Lambeth Conference, were much discussed. If a way forward is to be found and mutual trust to be re-established, it is imperative that further aggravation and acts which cause offence, misunderstanding or hostility cease. While we are aware of the depth of conscientious conviction involved, the position of the Communion defined by the Lambeth 1998 Resolution 1.10 in its entirety remains, and gracious restraint on all three fronts is urgently needed to open the way for transforming conversation.

⁶ WCGR (Windsor Continuation Group Report), Section D(i)

⁷ WCGR, paragraphs 2, 54

⁸ Ref WCGR, paragraph 57, cf. The Lambeth Commentary by the Covenant Design Group, Question 13, page 12.

13. This conversation will include continuing the Listening Process⁹, and the “Bible in the Church” Project. It is urgent that we as primates, with the rest of the Communion, directly study the scriptures and explore the subject of human sexuality together in order to help us find a common understanding.

14. The Windsor Continuation Group Report examines in Section H the question of parallel jurisdictions, particularly as raised by the Common Cause Partnership, a coalition of seven different organisations¹⁰ which have significantly differing relationships with the Anglican Communion. The Report identifies some of the difficulties in recognising the coalition among the Provinces of the Anglican Communion. Significant concerns were raised in the conversation about the possibility of parallel jurisdictions. There is no consensus among us about how this new entity should be regarded, but we are unanimous in supporting the recommendation in paragraph 101 of the Windsor Continuation Group Report¹¹. Therefore, we request the Archbishop of Canterbury to initiate a professionally mediated conversation which engages all parties at the earliest opportunity. We commit ourselves to support these processes and to participate as appropriate. We earnestly desire reconciliation with these dear sisters and brothers for whom we understand membership of the Anglican Communion is profoundly important. We recognise that these processes cannot be rushed, but neither should they be postponed.

15. The Archbishop of Canterbury reported to us on the development of a scheme for a Pastoral Council, consistent with the proposal of the Windsor Continuation Group, and the Pastoral Visitors, whom he is appointing as a starting point for this idea, in line with the opinions expressed at the Lambeth Conference. The intention is that the Pastoral Visitors will be commissioned by him to conduct personal and face to face conversations in order to assist in the clearest discernment of the ways forward in any given situation of tension. We affirm the Archbishop of Canterbury in this initiative.

16. We received a report on progress in the development of the Covenant. We believe the securing of the covenant to be a vital element in strengthening the life of

⁹ The Listening Process itself has many levels - to enable a more profound listening to God and to one another, as well as listening to the experience of gay and lesbian persons, which is among the commitments of Lambeth 1998 Resolution 1.10. It will also require a listening to those with different experiences of and positions in the current tensions.

¹⁰ The American Anglican Council (1996), The Anglican Coalition in Canada (2004), The Anglican Communion Network (2004), The Anglican Mission in America (2000), The Convocation of Anglicans in North America (2005), Forward in Faith North America (1999), and the Reformed Episcopal Church (1873).

¹¹ WCG Report, paragraph 101: The WCG therefore recommends that the Archbishop of Canterbury, in consultation with the Primates, establish at the earliest opportunity a professionally mediated conversation at which all the significant parties could be gathered. The aim would be to find a provisional holding arrangement which will enable dialogue to take place and which will be revisited on the conclusion of the Covenant Process, or the achievement of long term reconciliation in the Communion. Such a conversation would have to proceed on the basis of a number of principles:

- There must be an ordered approach to the new proposal within, or part of a natural development of, current rules.
- It is not for individual groups to claim the terms on which they will relate to the Communion.
- The leadership of the Communion needs to stand together, and find an approach to which they are all committed.
- Any scheme developed would rely on an undertaking from the present partners to ACNA that they would not seek to recruit and expand their membership by means of proselytisation. WCG believes that the advent of schemes such as the Communion Partners Fellowship and the Episcopal Visitors scheme instituted by the Presiding Bishop in the United States should be sufficient to provide for the care of those alienated within the Episcopal Church from recent developments.

the Communion. We welcome the Covenant Design Group's intention to produce a covenant text which has a relational basis and tone. It is about invitation and reconciliation in order to lead to the deepening of our koinonia in Christ, and which entails both freedom and robust accountability. We look forward to the development of a covenant text to be presented at ACC-14 which will commend itself to our Provinces because it speaks of the mutuality that should characterise the life of Christians and of Churches; of a relationship which exercises the self-limitation and gracious restraint born of true affection, and which should be marked by a spirit of humility and integrity.

17. We received a report on the ongoing work of the "Theological Education in the Anglican Communion" Working Group of the Primates (TEAC). We acknowledge the critical importance of this work, and commend to ACC-14 the establishment of TEAC2, focussing on supporting theological educators.

18. We received a presentation on global warming and climate change followed by a discussion. There is a significant and growing body of statistics which demonstrates that this is a real problem, and one in which humanity has a crucial responsibility. The scriptures call humanity to a careful stewardship of creation; we undertake to ensure that issues of climate change and the responsible management of our natural resources are items which are given urgent priority for reflection, study and action in our own Provinces.

19. We received a presentation and analysis of the current global financial situation and explored Christian responses to it. The primates affirmed that the Church's concerns must be broader and deeper than economics and politics. This is a moment "to proclaim the big vision [of love for my neighbour], living it out in practice, and witnessing, where necessary, against injustices which desecrate that vision." This vision of universal neighbourliness "must not end at our geographical borders. The Church of Christ is universal and recognises that love for my neighbour is not limited to the person next door.¹²" In particular, we call on our Churches to do all that they can to ensure commitments by governments to the Millennium Development Goals are not abandoned in the face of the current crisis.

20. We received an extensive briefing on the proposed establishment of an Anglican Relief and Development Alliance. We warmly commend the potential of this initiative to strengthen the co-ordination and effectiveness of this work throughout the world. We further commend the resolve to develop a comprehensive theological vision to undergird this work. We recognise the value and potential of a global network of local agencies.

21. The Archbishop of Canterbury began our time together reflecting on the spiritual health of the Churches of Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (Revelation Chapter 3). The tone and substance of our conversations, though sometimes hard, have been honest, deep and transforming. Our engagement together in Christ during these days convinces us that God is calling us and our Churches to deeper communion and gracious restraint.

¹² The quotations are taken from the Archbishop of York's address.