

## Unity, Faith and Order – Dialogue and Action

An edited version of the Address to the Lambeth Conference Seminar

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Brothers and sisters in Christ, thank you for the invitation to speak with you. For those who don't know me: I'm a priest of the Church in Wales, though I've also spent 11 years with the Anglican Church of Southern Africa, as Research Advisor to Archbishop Thabo in Cape Town, and his predecessor. I'm now the Dean of St Davids – the Cathedral in west Wales, where St David himself led his Christian community.

That was in the 6th century: indeed, as I rather relish mentioning whenever I am in Canterbury, before Pope Gregory sent Augustine to convert the Anglo-Saxons! After Augustine's arrival, it must be said, he treated with disrespect the bishops from Wales, and other west and northern parts of Britain, those still-Christian lands resisting Anglo-Saxon conquest. Further, the British bishops followed Eastern practices, including on asceticism, the date of Easter and the style of tonsure, while Augustine aimed to spread the ways of Rome. There were thus differences around personalities and politics, as well as theology and ecclesiology.

How often has this been the case! 1400 years later we still we struggle with divisions between Christians. Yet if unity was ever likely to be easy, I doubt St John would have recorded Jesus' repeated prayer at the Last Supper, that his followers would be one, not merely for our own good, but so the world may believe. *Unity is for the sake of the gospel, so that the world might know the Father has sent the Son, and loves the world as he loves his Son* (Jn 17:20-23).

Being Anglican, Being Ecumenical

Brothers and sisters in Christ ... those five words with which I began, define our most profound identity. As Christians, we are 'in Christ', as Cardinal Tagle reminded us this morning. And if we belong to Christ, we therefore belong to one another, as members together of the body of Christ. Anglicans have long understood the implications for ecumenism – as far back as the affirmation of the Chicago-Lambeth quadrilateral at the 1888 Lambeth Conference. This of course was originally enunciated as a framework for pursuing Christian unity, though now has become something of a touchstone also for Anglican

Identity. The 1920 Appeal to all Christian People was another significant milestone, mentioned by more than one speaker in the Plenary on Christian Unity.

I've been involved in the Communion's ecumenical work since 2000, as a member of the Inter Anglican Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations, IASCER. When set up by Lambeth 1998, one task was to ensure consistency and coherence across our ecumenical activities – for, as we know, Anglicans are very diverse, and whoever are our ecumenical partners there are some of us who will find it easy to be on their wavelength. But we ourselves need to keep on the same wavelength with one another within the Communion, which can be more of a challenge! Since 2009 I've steered ecumenical work in IASCER's successor body, the Inter Anglican Standing Commission for Unity, Faith and Order, IASCUFO. It is right all these should be addressed within a single body, for we found IASCER inevitably focused on Faith and Order issues, particularly around the theology and ecclesiology of Anglican identity. Other Christians asking of us 'Who are you? What do you believe and practice on this or that issue? Why?' inevitably keep us refining our self-understanding and how we enunciate it. Thus unity, faith and order inevitably belong together.

And all three matter profoundly. All churches need good theology and ecclesiology. Like the invisible steel structures of a building like the one we are now in, they provide when rooted in the firm foundation of Christ a reliable framework, strong and stable, around which we can grow the church with integrity, as we respond to whatever circumstances demanded of us, not least in what is often termed 'Life and Work'. Or you might like to think of them as sea-anchors that keep us from being tossed helplessly by life's storms. Another way of looking at it lies in Cardinal Tagle's call to develop cultural intelligence. As has famously been said 'culture eats strategy for breakfast', so we need good theology and ecclesiology to bring our own Christian culture to bear. It will not be enough merely to understand other cultures and try to develop strategies for responding. We want to lead with our culture. Further, good faith and order work, especially shared ecumenically, is what will enable us to walk the tightrope of appropriately contextualised, enculturated, faith, without falling off into unjustifiable syncretism.

It is in this light that IASCUFO works to support the Anglican Communion, and to support our pursuit of Christian unity as Christ prayed. We now offer an on-line Compendium which summarises our work since 2009, on both Anglican identity and how it is expressed in dialogue with others. The Compendium provides an overview, highlighting key points, and supplementing these with a comprehensive directory of links to resources, past and present,

which underpin our understanding of who we are, and how we live with others within the body of Christ.

#### Unity, Faith and Order Work – Serving Anglican Identity and Praxis

Let me begin, as does the Compendium, with our work on Anglican Identity, and particularly historic and theological considerations of the Instruments of Communion. A seminar on the Life of the Communion earlier this week addressed some of this, particularly how the Instruments might be viewed as contributing to a ‘Symphony’. I also commend our work on Mission-shaped Communion: theology and ecclesiology in dialogue with, and in service and support of, the mission of the churches. This, and our paper on Theological Anthropology, aim to help us think ‘Christianly’ about how we live in the complexities and changes of today’s world. They help us do better at bringing ‘Faith and Order’ and ‘Life and Work’ into creative, faithfully Christian, synergy.

We have a fundamental need to ensure this. Not only are we not operating through strategy, neither are we social workers with a thin veneer of religiosity. We have to wrestle theologically with, for example, what economic and environmental justice mean from the perspective of our ultimate identity: the nature of humanity as created by God in the divine image and likeness, and called by Christ to share eternal life. Gospel-shaped engagement is the gift the world most needs from us in facing questions of justice and peace. And we should help those who are at the forefront in this demanding work to keep resourcing and refreshing themselves personally by drawing on the deep theological wells of Christ’s living water. The importance of this was underlined in the Christian Unity plenary by the Bishop of the Amazon, the Rt Revd Marinez Bassotto, speaking about ecumenical work with indigenous peoples, and Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira and Great Britain, addressing human trafficking,

IASCUF0 also reflected on God’s Sovereignty and Our Salvation. What does it mean to be saved? Through history, divisions within the Church have too often led some to question whether those with whom they disagree really are Christians at all! Yet we also attest that salvation is a gift of God, and lies in his hands. You can follow the link, and see what we concluded.

#### The Anglican Ecumenical Vocation – Recent Developments

This returns me to our calling to heal the wounds of Christian division, for the sake of the gospel. The second part of the Compendium provides an update on bilateral dialogues and

other ecumenical activities, as well as on relations of full communion. It builds on the IASCER report, *The Vision Before Us*, available online, which was written as a comprehensive handbook to Anglican ecumenical endeavours, and is still a useful reference guide. After I've spoken, this seminar will focus on bilateral dialogues, variously represented by some of you here. But I wish first to highlight some particular developments, and how they help us grow into Christ and into each other.

Historically dialogues tended to be conducted between Bishops, senior clergy and academics, and generally focussed on faith and order matters which had divided us. As was noted during Thursday's plenary by Revd Anne Burghardt, much has been achieved in clarifying these issues – in some cases, such as with the Lutheran World Federation, pretty comprehensively.

But more is required. I strongly endorse the words of Fr Tony Curren, speaking for himself and for Cardinal Koch of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity, in Thursday's plenary that reconciled diversity is not an acceptable goal, though it may be a helpful way-marker on the journey. Jesus prayed for more. What shape that unity takes, and how we get there, may remain unclear. But it is evident there remains considerable scope for going forwards together, and for increasingly integrating our common life in whatever areas each dialogue may offer. Revd Anne Burghardt mentioned a range of these: from praying together, to the pursuit of social justice. So rather than seeing these speakers contributions as offering alternative scenarios, I think we need to draw on both as we respond to Jesus' prayer for us to be one.

Let me highlight three areas where we have seen marked changes in recent years, all of which have opened up fresh avenues for ecumenical growth.

The first is the shift away from focussing primarily on what impedes unity (which, as Fr Tony noted, quoting Karl Raiser, can sometimes crystallise and entrench division). Instead we now have growing attention on what partners can do practically together. We increasingly steer such work through Commissions for Unity and Mission, as with Roman Catholics (IARCCUM grew from the 2000 Mississauga meeting of pairs of bishops), Lutherans and Methodists. As the name suggests, these look both at building up our common life (whether or not we are in full communion), and at how as partners we share God's love with God's world, in tangible ways on the ground. These Commissions, when theologically anchored, can also help bridge perceived, but unhelpful and unnecessary, divisions between 'faith and order', and 'life and work'.

The second is the move, within continuing theologically-framed dialogue, that directs our attention to contemporary ethical challenges: how do we, and our partners, address these? What principles and processes do we bring to bear in our discerning? How might these approaches apply to particular questions? Thus, Anglicans and Eastern Orthodox began with Theological Anthropology: I cannot commend highly enough *In the Image and Likeness of God: a Hope-Filled Anthropology* (I say this having joined the dialogue after the text was finalised!) as a fresh mode of clear, simple, yet deeply profound theological expression. This became the lens for considering our ecological vocation, and we are now wrestling with end of life issues. In contrast, Anglicans and Roman Catholics, in *Walking Together in the Way*, took Ecclesiology as the framework for ethical engagement, and will be applying their insights to two practical areas. (Note: in subsequent discussion, Fr Tony Curren confirmed that ARCIC will next review understandings and exercise of authority.)

Thirdly, these new approaches have been assisted and reinforced by the growth in what might be called 'affective' and/or 'spiritual' ecumenism, alongside the more cerebral, cognitive, stance of traditional ecumenism. God calls us to live in love with our hearts and souls, as well as our minds and strength (this 'physicality' perhaps useful seen as paralleling our tangible service to the world). I see the integration of all these aspects into our ecumenical relationships as a necessary and welcome enriching of our engagement with one another: we've been developing a more fully rounded, comprehensively human and truly incarnational approach.

Its effectiveness has been seen, for example, in how the Global Christian Forum has helped draw Evangelicals, Pentecostals and others into ecumenical engagement. Revd Dr David Wells, Vice-Chair of the Pentecostal World Fellowship, touched on this in the plenary session. Sharing testimony, as participants are invited to speak, each in their own terms, about their journey of faith and that of their church or tradition, has been experienced as powerfully communicating a common living faith. People recognise one another in Christ, and Christ in one another, across different styles of language and worship which previously had been perceived as a dividing gulf. We've used this to help build relationships built on Christ in new Anglican, and ecumenical, bodies and meetings.

This affective approach also breathes life into Receptive Ecumenism, a more humble ecumenical stance than often taken in the past, that is increasingly widely known. This moves us from asking 'What can others learn from us?' and instead calls us to pose the questions 'What are we lacking?' and 'What do we need to receive from others?' These powerfully

complement the GCF's parallel challenge to ask 'Who are we lacking?' and 'Who do we need to receive, and be received by?'

#### Radical Realignment and Bold Possibilities

All three of these changes have been factors in what I see as the most significant ecumenical development of recent years, which we need to grasp and grow into. This arises from the 1999 Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification between Lutherans and Roman Catholics.

Though their historic division and subsequent reconciliation and healing of memories was not our history, Anglicans along with the Methodist World Council and the World Communion of Reformed Churches have all since variously affirmed that we share the conclusions they reached around salvation, justification by faith, and the relationship of God and humanity. These are the central fundamentals of Christian belief. Our five World Communions essentially stand together on what matters most.

I was part of the Anglican delegation to a meeting in Notre Dame, US, in March 2019 held at the level of global presidents and /or general secretaries, including Cardinal Koch, to digest the implications of this, and consider where we go from here. It was clear that this development should bring about profound change for our five church families, as we assimilate the implications of what we have said we believe. I also hope some of the lessons for us will spill over for all Christian traditions, as we grow in rediscovering one another within the one Church of God in this new way.

How can we now do otherwise than recognise, not only in theory but in practice, that if we agree on all that lies at the heart of faith, then what we disagree on cannot divide who we are 'in Christ' and should be viewed as second order? It will take a while for this to seep into our common lives, after centuries of defining ourselves over and against each other – that division having provided the very justification for the particular existence of some of us. It will doubtless be subversive and disorienting to set this aside, and yet this is the new reality, found in Christ!

The Notre Dame meeting issued a range of proposals about how we can begin living into this new life.<sup>1</sup> These were derailed by Covid, and momentum was lost. But these are now being progressed, and the challenge is there for us, as Anglicans, with our partners, to pick up this ball and run with it. Much is about practical coordination and 'doing more' together, 'as

5', though we should keep deepening and enriching our various bilateral relationships in parallel.

Let me highlight two particular overarching insights that have potential to transform powerfully the dynamic of our relationships, if we take the opportunities arising from JDDJ seriously.

- The first takes the Lund principle of 1952's WCC Faith and Order conference, (churches should act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately) and replaces it with a greater '**Lund Imperative**'. This is the first of five 'ecumenical imperatives' adopted at the 2016 Lutheran-Roman Catholic meeting: *dealings together 'should always begin from the perspective of unity and not from the point of view of division in order to strengthen what is held in common even though the differences are more easily seen and experienced.'* The other three world Communion are now challenged also to operate in this way.
- Second, we should proceed on the basis of '**differentiated (or differentiating) consensus**'. In other words, our starting assumption should be that differences generally should not be seen as church-dividing, or threatening our consensus in the essentials of faith. More than this, we acknowledge that we do not need to use the same language or adopt the same emphases as we express faith. It is fine that, to caricature somewhat, Anglicans tend to prioritise incarnation, Lutherans justification and so forth. Thus we can hold together differing perspectives and feel enriched, not threatened. There is no need to require them to be reduced to a single perspective.

Indeed, it might be said that Anglicans have been living with something like differentiated consensus since the Elizabethan settlement, holding Catholic and Reformed strands together!

#### Looking Ahead

As I look back, it seems to me that in each decade or so, between Lambeth Conferences, there has been significant movement forwards in Anglican ecumenical engagement – not only in specific agreements, but in the areas of our agreements too. This has been accompanied by more profound movement, in where we have placed our focus, and in the attitudes and expectations that we have brought. I would hope to see continuing movement in the next decade, and specifically see the deep-seated shifts coming through our JDDJ engagement as offering significant, and more wide-reaching, potential for taking ecumenism forwards.

You, the Bishops gathered at Lambeth 2022, have already made commitments in endorsing the 'Call to Unity' which has been put before you. But let me leave you with some additional thoughts, and challenges – which I particularly offer to you who are in this seminar, as it seems to me that you are the ones who most need to take up the responsibility of breathing life into these commitments and ensuring there is vision and energy to take them forward.

First, there are some easy wins that come from the JDDJ process. Acknowledging differentiated consensus opens important possibilities for a fresh harvest from former ecumenical engagement with all our partners, bilateral and multilateral. We should revisit previous agreed statements and other common texts, asking whether what they have presented as divergent can now be seen as acceptable, complementary, perspectives.

Further, looking through the lens of my time in Southern Africa, I hope this approach may also help us find ways to reverse the way that the colonial era exported and imposed the differences between European Christians upon those with whom we later shared the gospel.

We must also be assiduous in ensuring we no longer live out of past paradigms, even of our own lifetime. We must deliberately call out and set aside prejudices, caricatures, and negative views of one another where they persist. This may be hard work – not least, because the optimistic ecumenical momentum of a generation ago has been so weakened.

And so to my last challenge, which is a considerable one: to work for better teaching of ecumenism; and specifically, that it should be woven throughout the curriculum of ministry training, rather than being seen as a particular specialism on the side. There is serious need to ensure ecumenical dimensions are fully taught not merely as an optional extra, but in how they impinge on every area of theology and ecclesiology.

Jesus' prayer is not optional. It is my hope that Bishops will appreciate the opportunities for new relationships among Christian traditions, and will spread the word with their clergy and people. It is my prayer that we shall live into the Call that Lambeth has issued, and, most of all, live into Jesus prayer that all brothers and sisters in Christ may grow in unity, so that the world may believe.

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Anglican Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations through its life, from 2000 to 2008, and edited and compiled its report, *The Vision Before Us*. Since 2009 she has been a member of the Inter Anglican Standing Commission on Unity, Faith and Order, steering its ecumenical work. She has been a member of the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue since 2015, and represented the Communion on the Steering Committee of the Global Christian Forum from 2002 to 2015. Her PhD, *Doing God in Public: An Anglican Interpretation of MacIntyre's Tradition-Based Reasoning as a Christian Praxis for a Pluralist World*, considers a 'whole-life' hermeneutic for living with faithful integrity. She writes and broadcasts widely on ecumenism, public theology, spirituality and pilgrimage, and is also a published poet.

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<sup>i</sup> See [Statement from Notre Dame Consultation: Visible Unity and Common Witness | The Lutheran World Federation](#) and [190303-jddj\\_nd\\_statement\\_final-en.pdf \(lutheranworld.org\)](#)