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The Limits of Anglican Diversity

Roger T Beckwith

This phrase, from resolution III 6(b) of the 1998 Lambeth Conference, points up an issue which has been with Anglicans since the first Lambeth Conference of 1867. That conference was called by Archbishop Longley primarily to address the controversy surrounding Bishop Colenso of Natal, whose writings on biblical criticism had led to an attempt by the Bishop of Cape Town to depose and excommunicate him: this attempt had been rejected by the law courts as *ultra vires*, so it was hoped by Colenso's critics that an international conference of Anglican bishops could deal with the matter more effectively through purely ecclesiastical censures. The conference appointed a committee 'to consider the constitution of a voluntary spiritual tribunal, to which questions of doctrine may be carried by appeal from the tribunals for the exercise of discipline in each Province of the Colonial Church' (resolution 9). The word 'voluntary' is significant, and the tribunal was in fact never set up. If it had been, whether it would actually have censured Colenso for adventures in biblical criticism which many bishops have since duplicated is an open question. And as its nature would have been 'voluntary', nothing could have compelled him to accept its decision. Was it, then, something not worth doing? Apparently the church of the period drew that conclusion, as no action followed.

Because it began in this way, it has always been recognized that the Lambeth Conference has no legislative power, and that its own decisions, like those of any committee it appoints, have purely moral authority. This is not to say that most provinces do not act upon these decisions, which they do, but not before taking their own local decision to act accordingly. A hundred years later, in 1968, the Conference was urged not to be content any longer with these informal structures, but in the event it just set up the Anglican Consultative Council, with tasks of informing, advising and encouraging (resolution 69). 'True to the Anglican Communion's style of working', as the *Church of England Year Book* notes, 'the Council has no legislative powers'. The ACC has brought rather questionable benefits to the church, and in 1978 the Lambeth Conference proposed the creation of a further consultative body, at

the highest level, the Primates' Meeting, which has since met every few years, and when it met at Oporto in the year 2000 decided in future to meet annually. At the 1998 Lambeth Conference it was resolved to bring the ACC into closer connection with the Primates' Meeting (resolution III 6d), but the ACC has been resisting this change, despite the fact that it owes its existence to the Lambeth Conference.

In the years leading up to the 1998 Lambeth Conference, a report was being prepared by the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, which appeared in 1997 as the *Virginia Report*, and was the subject of resolution III 8 at the Lambeth Conference. The report notes the characteristics which the different Anglican churches have in common, drawing special attention to the Lambeth Quadrilateral, with its four components of the Scriptures, the Creeds, the Sacraments and the Historic Episcopate. It also notes, as instruments of Anglican unity, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the ACC and the Primates' Meeting, but it envisages further developments 'not only for legislation, but also for oversight', including a universal ministry somewhat comparable to the role of the Pope. Resolution III 8 asks the Primates to 'initiate and monitor a decade of study' of the report, and in the light of it to make specific recommendations in time for the next Lambeth Conference.¹

It cannot be unconnected with this that already at the 1998 Conference certain new functions were proposed for the Primates' Meeting and the Archbishop of Canterbury. In resolution III 6, the Conference—

(b) asks that the Primates' Meeting, under the presidency of the Archbishop of Canterbury, include among its responsibilities...intervention in cases of exceptional emergency which are incapable of internal resolution within provinces, and giving of guidelines on the limits of Anglican diversity in submission to the sovereign authority of holy scripture and in loyalty to our Anglican tradition and formularies;

and

(c) recommends...that, while not interfering with the juridical authority of the provinces, the exercise of these responsibilities by the Primates' Meeting should carry moral authority calling for ready acceptance throughout the Communion...

The latter provision shows that no legislative authority is claimed for the new functions proposed.

Also, the 1998 Lambeth Conference envisaged the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury being developed in a rather similar way. In resolution IV 13(b) it said that the Conference—

In view of the very great difficulties encountered in the internal affairs of some of provinces of the Communion, invites the Archbishop of Canterbury to appoint a Commission to make recommendations to the Primates and the Anglican Consultative Council, as to the exceptional circumstances and conditions under which, and the means by which, it would be appropriate for him to exercise an extra-ordinary ministry of *episcopate* (pastoral oversight), support and reconciliation with regard to the internal affairs of a province other than his own for the sake of maintaining communion within the said province and between the said province and the rest of the Anglican Communion.

If and when the Commission has been appointed (it now has been, October 2003) and has reported to the Primates' Meeting and the Anglican Consultative Council, and they have made their reflections on its report known, it will be possible to see whether the Archbishop of Canterbury is in fact (as seems likely) being encouraged to act as the envoy of the Primates' Meeting when 'intervention' in one of the provinces is considered necessary. If so, the Primates' Meeting will presumably lay down 'the limits of Anglican diversity', in accordance with resolution III 6, and the Archbishop of Canterbury will then make it clear to the province concerned, in accordance with resolution IV 13, that the transgression of these limits, though they have only 'moral authority', will result in a breach of communion, either 'within the said province', or 'between the said province and the rest of the Anglican Communion', or both.

At first sight, as the *Virginia Report* hints, this new role for the Archbishop of Canterbury looks like the universal immediate jurisdiction which the First Vatican Council assigned to the Pope, whereby he is entitled to intervene uninvited in the internal affairs of any Roman Catholic diocese in the world. In reality, however, something quite different is presumably envisaged. The resolution speaks of provinces rather than dioceses, and there is no suggestion

that the Archbishop of Canterbury will be ‘interfering with the juridical authority of the provinces’, any more than the Primate’s Meeting claims to do in resolution III 6. So he will not be exercising juridical authority. Rather, he will be acting as a personal mediator, in attempting to reconcile contending parties, and to deter them from actions which will lead to breaches of communion’ though his attempt will not necessarily be successful. If it is not, breaches of communion will be liable to occur, either within the province, or between the province and other provinces, or both, despite all his efforts to prevent them.

Although the Archbishop of Canterbury has not yet had this role conferred upon him, the new role assigned to the Primates’ Meeting by resolution III 6 was evidently intended to take immediate effect. So when the Primates next met, in March 2000 at Oporto, they proceeded to address the rejection by some American dioceses of the resolution of the Lambeth Conference on sexuality (resolution I 10), and said—

Such a clear and public repudiation of those sections of the Resolution related to the public blessing of same-sex unions and the ordination of declared non-celibate homosexuals, and the declared intention of some dioceses to proceed with such actions, have come to threaten the unity of the Communion in a profound way. We strongly urge such dioceses to weigh the effects of their actions, and to listen to the expressions of pain, anger and perplexity from other parts of the Communion.

The following month the American House of Bishops met, and after its meeting the Presiding Bishop, Frank Griswold, issued a statement in which he said—

I cannot imagine any diocese altering its perspective as a result of either the bishops’ [the Lambeth Conference’s] or the Primates’ Meeting.

This was not an encouraging start for the Primates’ Meeting, in the exercise of new responsibilities which the Lambeth Conference said ‘should carry moral authority calling for ready acceptance throughout the Communion’. The American General Convention, however, had its triennial meeting in July 2000, and did not display quite the same defiant attitude. Invited to authorise the

preparation of liturgical rites for solemnizing homosexual and other unions distinct from marriage, in fairly close votes it failed to do so. When the General Convention met again, in August 2003, it avoided the issue, and left dioceses to continue making their own arrangements (if any) in the matter. Instead, it concentrated its attention on the question whether it would endorse the election of a practising homosexual bishop, with a former wife and two children, by the diocese of New Hampshire. With the encouragement of the Presiding Bishop, it decided, by a sufficient majority, that it would.

Faced with the prospect of further disruption in the Episcopal Church, which has been plagued with splits ever since it started introducing radical innovations in the 1970s, and with the excommunication of the Episcopal Church by many other Anglican provinces, the new Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, then summoned an extraordinary gathering of the Primates' Meeting in October, shortly before the consecration of the bishop-elect of New Hampshire was due to take place. The Primates' Meeting had already convened once in 2003, and had attempted to head off divisive actions promoting homosexuality, with little success. Not only the election in New Hampshire, but the sanctioning of same-sex blessings in the diocese of New Westminster, across the Canadian border, had followed. The efforts of Rowan Williams on that occasion, and his summoning of a further meeting, despite the setbacks, are much to his credit, since he is known to have some sympathy with the cause he is publicly resisting. By the time this essay is in the reader's hands, we will probably know what the extraordinary gathering decided, and whether it was treated with any respect by the Episcopal Church.

The previous General Convention, that of July 2000, after stepping back from the brink on homosexuality, gave the Primates' Meeting something else to think about. The 1998 Lambeth Conference issued tacit warnings to the Episcopal Church not only on homosexual practices but also on refusing to tolerate difference of opinion on the ordination of women. The Episcopal Church is a church which has rescinded its conscience clause and passed legislation making the ordination of women obligatory in all dioceses and denying any office in the church to its opponents. It has done this despite the reports of the Eames Commission, urging an 'ongoing, open process of reception' regarding the ordination of women, and the treating of all decisions on the matter as provisional until agreement is reached. The Lambeth

Conference, in resolution III 4, accepted and endorsed the work of the Eames Commission, and, significantly, urged ‘continuing monitoring within the Communion with regular reporting to the Primates’ Meeting’. More pointedly, in resolution III 2, on ‘The Unity of the Anglican Communion’, the Conference—

- (b) for the purpose of maintaining this unity, calls upon the provinces of the Communion to uphold the principle of ‘Open Reception’ as it relates to the ordination of women to the priesthood as indicated by the Eames Commission, noting that “reception is a long and spiritual process” (Grindrod Report);
- (c) in particular calls upon the provinces of the Communion to affirm that those who dissent from, as well as those who assent to, the ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate are both loyal Anglicans;
- (d) therefore calls upon the provinces of the Communion to make such provision, including appropriate Episcopal ministry, as will enable them to live in the highest degree of communion possible, recognising that there is and should be no compulsion on any bishop in matters concerning ordination and licensing...

Faced with these resolutions, which were formally drawn to its attention, the General Convention resolved not just to maintain its intolerant legislation, without any provision for alternative episcopal oversight, but to establish a task force to compel the three dioceses which still do not ordain or license women priests (Quincy, Fort Worth and San Joaquin) to do so. The task force was to visit the three dioceses for this purpose, which it did, and was to complete its work in time for the General Convention of 2003; but when it reported, it made the surprising recommendation that the General Convention abandon its policy of compulsion. Whether the General Convention will agree to this, is not yet clear; but, like other matters, it was completely overshadowed by the New Hampshire election. Intolerance may rear its ugly head again, and even be extended to new issues; but, happily, not yet.

Of course, one realises that it is difficult for the supporters of the ordination of women to be patient with their old-fashioned opponents, but they ought to

realise that, though the New Testament does not perhaps settle the issue of the ordination of women in an unmistakable way, it does undoubtedly settle the issue of forcing people to act against their conscience. St. Paul's approach to the scruples of Jewish Christians about the ceremonial law, in Romans and 1 Corinthians, is that, though their consciences are 'weak', they should obey them until they can see matters in a different light. The Jewish Christians should not try to force their scruples upon Gentile Christians, but they themselves must do what their conscience dictates (Rom. 14:1-15:13; 1Cor. 8:1-11:1). And so, no doubt, must those whose consciences, rightly or wrongly, do not allow them to recognise the ministry of women priests and bishops.

The Reasons for the Current Crisis

Bishop Colenso, with whom we began, was one of the pioneers among Anglicans of the Liberalism which has reached a high point today in the Episcopal Church. Although the rationalistic ideas of the Enlightenment had been at work on the Continent for many years, it was not until the publication of *Essays and Reviews* in 1860 that the destructive biblical criticism to which it had given birth found open supporters in the Church of England. It was quickly adopted by Colenso, and from that time onwards it has made rapid headway, particularly in the Broad Church or Liberal school of thought, but not there alone. The result has been a widespread loss of confidence in the authority of the Bible, which has hampered the church in its educative and evangelistic work, and has led to the now calamitous decline in churchgoing, and in Christian influence among the young. The matter has been brought to a head from time to time when individual bishops, as being among the chief accredited teachers of the faith, have attacked the content, in particular the miraculous content, of the Gospels, and have thus undermined much of what the Creeds declare about our Lord Jesus Christ. For the theories of Hume and Kant about the impossibility of miracles are no longer viewed by many as assaults on Christianity but as necessary results of modern thought, and the Virgin Birth and Resurrection of Jesus, and the wonderful acts by which he revealed his compassion and attested his mission, are consequently often discarded as pious myths. A non-doctrinal form of Christianity tends to be substituted, strongly influenced by contemporary secular ideas.

There has always existed, alongside destructive biblical criticism, a believing biblical criticism, which seeks to foster the historical approach to the Bible

without accepting the philosophical assumptions which lead to unbelief. Its fortunes have varied, and the two traditions of biblical criticism have often been confused, especially at the popular level, but the believing form continues to be vigorously promoted, finding most acceptance in the Evangelical and Anglo-Catholic schools of thought. It is strong in Britain, while in the Third World it is all-pervading. In America, it is strong in many denominations but not in the Episcopal Church, which is largely dominated by Liberalism.

During the first part of the twentieth century, disbelief in the miraculous, though it certainly existed among Broad Church theologians, was not thought tolerable in Anglican bishops. In 1918, Hensley Henson's consecration as Bishop of Hereford only went ahead after he denied the rumours that he did not believe in the Virgin Birth or the Resurrection. William Temple, when publishing the report *Doctrine in the Church of England* (1938), thought it necessary, as Archbishop of York, to prefix an absolute disclaimer on his own part of any share in the disbelief in the miraculous which the report records as existing among theologians in the church. When, after the war, Bishop E.W. Barnes of Birmingham published a book expressing his own disbelief in the miraculous, both archbishops publicly called on him to resign. It was not until David Jenkins was appointed Bishop of Durham in 1984 that disbelief in the miraculous began to be tolerated among bishops by either of the English primates, though even then it was checked by the General Synod. The House of Laity in 1987 passed a resolution calling for the doctrinal beliefs of candidates for the episcopate to be examined in the future, and this has generally been done, though the utterances of the present Bishop of Worcester, in particular, show that it has not been done without fail.

In America, the recent decline has been much steeper. From Bishop James Pike to Bishop Jack Spong was a decline from reckless rationalism to irrational iconoclasm. In the Episcopal Church, the main criterion of truth today is not reason, as in the Enlightenment (much less Scripture, as at the Reformation), but *experience*.² Whatever *ad hominem* arguments are offered from Scripture and elsewhere, experience is the real guide. For Edmond Browning, the Presiding Bishop, who consecrated the first Anglican woman bishop, the chief argument for the ordination of women was 'experience' of their ministry—an *ex post facto* criterion which is in the highest degree subjective.³ Reliance on experience easily accounts for the rapid secularization of the Episcopal

Church, where (as in contemporary secular thinking) the avoidance of 'discrimination', in whatever sphere, is exalted above all other legitimate considerations. Reliance on experience also accounts for the fact that the Episcopal Church has thrown ethics into the melting pot as readily as doctrine. The old-fashioned Modernists of the 1920s and 1930s were purely naturalistic in their doctrine but were very strict in their morality. The radical Liberals of today are as lawless in the one matter as in the other.

Of course, radical Liberals will not usually agree that they are lawless. They may claim that they are following a higher ethic, or a different interpretation of Scripture. Even on a matter where Scripture speaks emphatically and repeatedly, such as homosexual intercourse, there are those who claim that the Bible does not forbid it, but that another interpretation is possible. What those who make this sort of claim need to ask themselves, is whether they would submit to the teaching of the Bible, even if the Bible did forbid the practice. For if the honest answer is No, the suggestion of a different interpretation is a mere evasion, and is probably wishful thinking. Those who have examined most carefully the new interpretations that have now been proposed, such as R.A.J. Gagnon in his book *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), have ended up quite dissatisfied with them. There is, after all, such a thing as 'twisting the Scriptures, to one's own destruction' (2 Pet. 3:16f.).

The Ecclesiology of the Anglican Communion

The *Virginia Report* rightly draws attention to the work of the 1930 Lambeth Conference. It was there that the ecclesiological relationships which had developed between the Anglican churches in different part of the world were first given serious theological consideration and were interpreted in a way which could provide definite guidelines for the future. The committee on 'The Anglican Communion' at that Conference, chaired by St. Clair Donaldson, of Brisbane and Salisbury, produced a clear and penetrating report which was generally endorsed by the whole Conference (resolution 48) and which has not been surpassed since. It contains useful discussions of dioceses, provinces and national churches, and of their mutual relationships, but much greater importance attaches to the statement of basic principles with which it begins—

2. ...in order to expound this ideal [that of incorporation into the wider

fellowship of the Catholic Church] it is necessary to glance at the principle which, as we believe, underlies the constitution of the Church.

3. That principle is clear to us. There are two prevailing types of ecclesiastical organization: that of centralized government, and that of regional autonomy within one fellowship. Of the former, the Church of Rome is the great historical example. The latter type, which we share with the Orthodox Churches of the East and others, was that upon which the Church of the first centuries was developing until the claims of the Roman Church and other tendencies confused the issue. The Provinces and Patriarchates of the first four centuries were bound together by no administrative bond: the real nexus was a common life resting upon a common faith, common Sacraments, and a common allegiance to an Unseen Head. This common life found from time to time an organ of expression in the General Councils.
4. The Anglican Communion is constituted upon this principle. It is a fellowship of Churches historically associated with the British Isles. While these Churches preserve apostolic doctrine and order they are independent in their self-government and are growing up freely on their own soil and in their own environment as integral parts of the Church Universal. It is after this fashion that the characteristic endowment of each family of the human race may be consecrated, and so make its special contribution to the Kingdom of God.
5. The bond which holds us together is spiritual. We desire emphatically to point out that the term 'Anglican' is no longer used in the sense it originally bore. The phrase 'Ecclesia Anglicana' in Magna Carta had a purely local connotation. Now its sense is ecclesiastical and doctrinal, and the Anglican Communion includes not merely those who are racially connected with England, but many others whose faith has been grounded in the doctrines and ideals for which the Church of England has always stood.
6. What are these doctrines? We hold the Catholic faith in its entirety: that is to say, the truth of Christ, contained in Holy Scripture; stated in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds; expressed in the Sacraments of the Gospel

and the rites of the Primitive Church as set forth in the Book of Common Prayer with its various local adaptations; and safeguarded by the historic threefold Order of the Ministry.

And what are these ideals? They are the ideals of the Church of Christ. Prominent among them are an open Bible, a pastoral Priesthood, a common worship, a standard of conduct consistent with that worship, and a fearless love of truth...

We read here that the organization of the Anglican Communion is not a centralized government like that of the Church of Rome, but a fellowship between autonomous churches, such as existed in the patristic period of church history, and such as exists in Eastern Orthodoxy today. The bond which holds it together is not so much the historical and racial link with the British Isles, but the spiritual bond of faith, based upon the doctrines and ideals outlined in the Lambeth Quadrilateral and embodied in the Book of Common Prayer. At the end of this section, the committee boldly claims that a fellowship of autonomous churches is also the right ideal for a reunited Church—

11. And we dare to look further still. We humbly believe that when in God's good providence the Church Universal now divided is finally brought together in the unity which is His will, the foundation of this unity will be the freedom based upon common fundamental beliefs which has ever been our heritage: and that if ever in the days to come a council of the whole Church were to be called together, it would be assembled on a plan of autonomy and fellowship similar to that which is the basis of our Conference to-day.⁴

But before going on to that, it says this—

7. While, however, we hold the Catholic Faith, we hold it in freedom. Every Church in our Communion is free to build up its life and development upon the provisions of its own constitution...

And so it is led on to address the very matter that is the subject of the present essay, the limits of Anglican diversity, which it deals with as follows—

8. This freedom naturally and necessarily carries with it the risk of divergence to the point even of disruption. In case any such risk should actually arise, it is clear that the Lambeth Conference as such could not take any disciplinary action. Formal action would belong to the several Churches of the Anglican Communion individually; but the advice of the Lambeth Conference, sought before action is taken by the constituent Churches, would carry very great moral weight. And we believe in the Holy Spirit. We trust in His power working in every part of His Church as the effective bond to hold us together.

These are words which deserve much pondering.

Applying the words to our present situation, we too believe in the Holy Spirit, and his power to hold us together: that indeed is our only hope. We do not stay together, however, by ignoring the problems that divide us, but by facing them. And the way we should face them, so the committee tells us, is by seeking the advice of the Lambeth Conference, which cannot take disciplinary action itself but can give advice, and then by the individual constituent churches of the Anglican Communion taking formal disciplinary action, of such a kind as is open to independent churches in communion with one another. On the Episcopal Church's policy with regard to homosexual practices and to differences of opinion about the ordination of women, the advice of the Lambeth Conference has already been taken, in 1998, and on the former subject it has been backed up by the Primates' Meeting several times. If, after the October Primates' Meeting, the American Presiding Bishop decides not to proceed with the consecration of the bishop-elect of New Hampshire, or if the bishop-elect himself withdraws, communion between the Episcopal Church and the other Anglican provinces will remain intact (insofar as it is not already impaired by the existence of American women-priests and women-bishops); but if the Episcopal Church again proves defiant, those provinces which consider its departure from biblical morality too serious to be ignored, will be acting rightly, and in accordance with Anglican principles, if the excommunicate it. It is true that the Episcopal Church will still be committed to many Christian truths—many more than it will so far have discarded—and that it will not have repudiated the Lambeth Quadrilateral (which Rowan Williams has himself urged in the past as a dissuasive from such action);⁵ but heresy is always judged by its seriousness, not by its extent; and if its tendency

is to overturn the whole Christian faith, by ignoring or perverting the teaching of Scripture on doctrinal or ethical issues, it must be disciplined as soon as possible.

Lambeth 1930 considered the Anglican Communion in terms of principle, and this was the more valuable, in that it is usually considered far more pragmatically. The Lambeth Conference began, in 1867, with Archbishop Longley inviting bishops in the Anglican episcopal succession to Lambeth, and this has given rise to the rather bizarre idea that the Anglican Communion is defined by the Archbishop of Canterbury's mailing list, whereas it should be defined (as Archbishop Donald Robinson once pointed out) by adherence to Anglican principles. A good example of the common pragmatic approach is provided by the Overseas and Other Clergy Measure of 1967, which says that, if any question arises which churches belong to the Anglican Communion, it shall be decided in accordance with the opinion of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York currently in office. The proposals of the volume *To Mend the Net* (Carrollton: Ecclesia Society, 2001) and of its successor-volume, both submitted to the Primates' Meeting, were rather on these lines, since they proposed that the Archbishop of Canterbury should in future invite bishops from the Episcopal Church only as observers. He could do this, presumably, either on his own initiative or on the authority of the Primates' Meeting. But, in the latter case, the Primates' Meeting would be acting in a Roman and not in an Anglican manner, and in the former case the Archbishop would need to be sure that, if he took this course, his action would be unchallenged, which one fears it would not be. The Primates' Meeting, and the Archbishop of Canterbury himself, can only give advice: disciplinary action rests with the provinces.

Anglicanism and Orthodoxy

The parallel which the 1930 Lambeth committee drew between the Anglican Communion and the Eastern Orthodox Church is important and deserves to be further explored, for the parallel is a true one, and the Eastern Orthodox Church has a history of dealing with disciplinary problems between its constituent churches which the Anglican Communion, being still young, does not have.

As the Lambeth committee pointed out, when a church is organized on a

national or regional basis, either each of those national or regional churches is ultimately subject to a central international authority, or else they each make their own decisions. In the former case you have a church like the Church of Rome, in the latter case a church like the Eastern Orthodox Church or the Anglican Communion. You cannot have it both ways. In the former case all decisions taken locally are merely provisional, in the latter case they are (humanly speaking) final. The individual Orthodox or Anglican local churches can consult together at Councils or Conferences, but any joint decisions they make are not imposed—they have to be locally accepted; also, these churches can have a presiding bishop with a primacy of honour as first among equals (the Oecumenical Patriarch or the Archbishop of Canterbury), but he does not have jurisdiction over the other bishops like the Pope of Rome. What binds the individual Orthodox or Anglican local churches together is that they have the same Scriptures and a shared tradition and are in communion with each other. Their shared tradition includes a common confession of faith, a common liturgy and a common ministry.⁶

The way the individual Orthodox churches have handled international disagreements between them is unfamiliar to Anglicans but well known to the Orthodox.⁷ The disagreements have often been concerned with rival jurisdictions, which might seem trivial compared with the doctrinal and ethical problems facing Anglicans. Nevertheless, the serious way the Orthodox have handled them is illuminating. Since the various Orthodox churches are independent of each other, irreconcilable disagreements between them have tended to result in excommunication, though this is not necessarily mutual. In 1870 Constantinople excommunicated the Church of Bulgaria for insisting on intruding a Bulgarian bishop into the territory of Constantinople, to minister to its own nationals. The two churches remained out of communion until 1945. Since the Oecumenical Patriarch is only a first among equals, however, his action did not exclude the Church of Bulgaria from the Orthodox Church, and the Church of Russia remained in communion with both contestants.⁸ In 1996-7 the Oecumenical Patriarch was himself excommunicated for a short time by Moscow for restoring the autocephalous Church of Estonia without Moscow's consent. Obviously, excommunication is a very serious step to take, expressing not just difference of opinion but the gravest disapproval—a step which needs to be withdrawn as soon as it properly can be; but the experience of the Orthodox is that it does not destroy the church, and may sometimes

bring about the necessary change of heart without a long delay.

If, therefore, after the latest Primates' Meeting, following whatever time for reflection the Meeting has decided to allow, there has been no sign of repentance on the part of the Episcopal Church, and it seems that nothing short of excommunication can bring home to that Church the error of its ways, the individual Anglican churches should not hesitate to take this unprecedented step and the more of them that do so the better, as their action will not be irreversible. If there is disagreement within a province whether to take this step, some of its dioceses may want to take action individually, and there does not seem to be any reason why they should not do so: in that case, the archbishop will be in the same position as any other diocesan bishop. Provision will obviously need to be made for those who are the victims rather than the culprits in the American tragedy, and determined efforts made to reunite all the scattered fragments of faithful American Anglicanism which exist outside as well as inside the Episcopal Church. It is a task which seems likely to require much patience and understanding, but in the changed situation might be achievable.

ROGER T. BECKWITH is formerly the Warden of Latimer House, Oxford

ENDNOTES

1. The *Virginia Report* has since been bound up with the report of the 1998 Lambeth Conference, where it may be found at the beginning.
2. The threefold criterion of Christian truth was for Hooker Scripture, tradition and reason, with Scripture having the priority because of its supernatural origin and complete reliability (*Ecclesiastical Polity* 1:11-15). The Enlightenment, on the contrary, put reason above Scripture and tradition; but to add experience to the three, and to give that the priority, is an even more fundamental change. The threefold criterion of Rome, by which Anglo-Catholics are often influenced, is different: it is Scripture, tradition and the contemporary teaching church (see Vatican II, *Decree on Divine Revelation* 10).
3. See his open letter reproduced in *The Anglican Tradition* (ed. G. R. Evans and J. R. Wright, London etc: SPCK etc., 1991), p. 596. In the course of this short statement, he refers to experience three times.
4. The committee does not discuss what authority the decisions of such a general council would have. Subject to the teaching of Scripture (cf. Article 21), the

decisions of the ecumenical councils do, of course, have great authority.

5. In *New Directions*, May 2000, p. 8.
6. In the Orthodox case, this consists of the Nicene Creed and the decrees of the Seven Councils, the Byzantine Liturgy and the Orthodox ministry. In the Anglican case, it originally consisted of the three Creeds and the 39 Articles, the Book of Common Prayer and the Anglican ministry. The Creeds are still the common possession of Anglicans, but the 39 Articles have been sidelined in some Anglican churches and the Book of Common Prayer in many, and the Anglican ministry, as a whole, is no longer universally recognised among Anglicans (thus impairing communion between them), owing to the ordination of women. These are serious problems for the Anglican Communion and need to be redressed.
7. The writer is grateful to Bishop Kallistos Ware for information on this matter.
8. One may compare the way the Church of England in South Africa has long been in communion with the province of New South Wales, while not in communion with Canterbury.