Introduction

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Interreligious dialogue and interfaith concerns have gained considerable prominence within the life of the Christian church around the globe. Yet a century ago the idea of pursuing a dialogical conversation with people of other faiths, let alone becoming engaged in interfaith activities of one sort or another, was no more than a fringe notion indeed so far as most Christians were concerned; missionary outreach and Christocentric triumphalism were more the order of the day. But two things have since changed. On the one hand, the advent of the ecumenical movement has meant Christians have learned to transcend, and to cooperate across, denominational identity lines; and on the other, many churches have entered the new waters of interreligious engagement. However, relatively speaking, it is probably the case that ecumenical dialogue, rather than interreligious dialogue, has received more attention. Certainly it has been observed that, on the whole, interreligious dialogue has been much less pronounced within the life of the Anglican Communion in comparison with bilateral interchurch dialogues.¹ In the United Kingdom, for instance, only “since the considerable immigration from the Indian sub-continent in the 1960s have members of the Church of England met people of other

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¹ Bruce Kaye, An Introduction to World Anglicanism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 118.
faiths on any large scale.”

Local interfaith experience in England is little more than half a century old and, despite significant urban centers of interfaith activity, is by no means a widespread engagement. By contrast, it has long been the experience of some Anglicans elsewhere to be involved in various forms of interreligious relationship or interfaith activity as a natural part of the everyday life of faith, while for others it has become a prominent feature only in more recent times. Thus although interreligious dialogue may have come in second to the plethora of ecumenical dialogues that have occupied Anglicans overall, it certainly has engaged them nonetheless.

The articles brought together in this issue of the ATR were originally papers presented at The Presence of Faith: A Century of Anglican Engagement with World Religions, a conference held at Lambeth Palace, London, in December 2011. It marked the centenary of the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910, and also the approaching one hundredth birthday in March 2013 of Bishop Kenneth Cragg, the doyen of Anglican Islamicists—in fact, its title was a play on the title A Faithful Presence, the Festschrift that was presented to him on his ninetieth birthday.

The intention of the conference was threefold: to examine the history of Anglican engagement with non-Christian religions through the twentieth century; to explore Anglican theological reflection on relations with other religions; and to survey the various forms of encounter with other religions in the provinces of the Anglican Communion. The papers presented here reflect one or other of these themes, and frequently allude to both Edinburgh 1910 and Kenneth Cragg.

The twentieth century witnessed considerable changes in Anglican approaches toward non-Christian religions. The sense of unquestioning certainty that is apparent in the reports and speeches from Edinburgh 1910 was gradually tempered by the awareness that there is sincere spiritual value in non-Christian traditions, and that their followers are working toward many of the same individual and social goals as Christians. The assumption, inherited from the Middle Ages, that Christianity could be successfully defended against the claims of

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other religions was gradually replaced by more modest moves toward improving understanding and respect jointly with other believers, and by 2010 the churches of the Anglican Communion had moved far from the motto of Edinburgh 1910: “The evangelization of the world in this generation.” The self-assured stance instanced in these words and the church’s sense of its superiority are no more clearly expressed than in the comments in conference reports and speeches about Islam and the Middle East. The Report of Commission I, *Carrying the Gospel to All the Non-Christian World*, describes the Middle East as “pre-eminently the stronghold of Christianity’s most difficult opponent—the faith of Islam,” and observes that the social conditions there, as in the rest of the Islamic world, present “the most hopeless and pitiable picture.”

Similarly, the Report of Commission IV, *The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions*, judges that “Islam does not meet the soul’s deepest needs” because it lacks the promise of forgiveness and favors observances over belief. It goes on to say that the best way forward between Christians and Muslims is discerned by identifying their common features, and then “by showing how these common features are found in a truer form in Christianity.” Any idea here that Islam bears features of authentic religion, or can be a preparation for Christianity, is ruled out because, as the report goes on to say, common features result from Islam’s dependence on Christianity. The clear inference is that Christian truth has no relationship with the teachings of Islam (or any other religion, apart perhaps from Judaism), and the only form of engagement must be confrontation.

This attitude is shown in detail in a conference evening address by the Anglican missionary in Egypt, W. H. T. Gairdner. He sees

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widespread intellectual decay throughout the Islamic world, though he acknowledges the powerful hold of the Mosque and University of Al-Azhar in Cairo, and the influence of what he calls the Neo-Islam of the revanchist thinker Mohammed Abdu. His prescription is to set up a college in Cairo where missionaries can be equipped with sufficient learning in Islam to engage with traditional and reformed thinking, a plan that recalls the appeal of the Franciscan Ramon Lull in the fourteenth century for European universities to establish chairs to teach Arabic to missionaries, and the earlier initiative of Peter the Venerable in the twelfth century to produce translations of key Islamic texts in order to provide European scholars with the intellectual means to combat and overcome Islam.

Of course, the confidence and unflinching assertiveness that the records of Edinburgh 1910 exhibit was not entirely typical of Anglican thinking about Islam and other religions. Missionaries who worked in the Arab and Indian worlds often felt attracted to the faiths they came to know. Few followed the singular ideas of the Victorian clergyman Charles Forster, who argued that the Bible itself taught that “Isaac” needed “Ishmael,” that Christianity was incomplete without Islam, though a substantial minority warmed toward the spiritual teachings they encountered.

Although there were definite moves toward sympathetic recognition of the status of other faiths at various points throughout the twentieth century, as the first article in this issue shows, official Anglican statements on interfaith relations were slow in coming. The Anglican Communion’s Report of the Lambeth Conference 1978 provided perhaps the first Anglican theological statement concerning interreligious dialogue, but the Church of England itself issued no official statements on other faiths until 1984 when, in the wake of Lambeth 1978 as well as pronouncements from the Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church in 1965 and from the World Council of Churches in 1979, the General Synod approved Towards a Theology for Inter-Faith Dialogue. This report was based on an earlier

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7 Gairdner, “In Mohammedan Lands,” 256–257.
document from the British Council of Churches. It outlined the different positions of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism as set out by the Anglican theologian Alan Race, and summarized the biblical foundations on which relations could be based. It was commended by a small majority at the Synod, but also attacked for what critics saw as its overly intellectual approach and lack of emphasis on the doctrine of redemption. It was an attempt to strike a balance between recognizing value in other religions and maintaining the truth of Christianity, a problem discernible in later Anglican publications though not addressed with the same directness.

In 1988, the Lambeth Conference issued *Jews, Christians and Muslims: The Way of Dialogue,* a substantial reflection on relations between the three faiths that marks a dramatic contrast to Edinburgh 1910. In its first paragraph this document emphasizes the responsibility of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, by virtue of their common descent from Abraham, to bring about “a fresh, constructive relationship which can contribute to the well-being of the human family, and the peace of the world, particularly in the Middle East.” It recommends this through dialogue, which “involves understanding, affirmation and sharing,” with no trace of the Manichaean opposition between Christianity and other faiths of eighty years earlier. The document goes on to commend to Christians efforts to understand the two other faiths, to affirm them and to share in dialogue with them. It sets out clear guidelines for studying these faiths, recognizing in them all that they hold in common with Christians and giving honest expression to issues that are either admirable or causes for concern. While some features from the publications of Edinburgh 1910 can be seen in this document—it makes no pretense about qualitative differences between Christianity and the other faiths, and it recommends detailed study of Judaism and Islam—its whole approach is different, for it insists that engagement must be pursued with respect and the sincere effort to understand. There is none of the insensitive overconfidence that risked turning non-Christians into caricatures who could at best be patronized and more often berated for their shortcomings. A sign

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of the new seriousness which the church attached to interfaith relations was the recommendation to establish a committee to coordinate interreligious work within the wider Anglican Communion.

The 1998 Lambeth Conference continued the thinking about Christianity and other religions along the lines set ten years earlier. Christian approaches to people of other faiths must be characterized by commitment toward open and loving relationships, cooperation, honest exploration of common ground and differences, prayerful attention to the causes of conflict, listening to the other, speaking about Christian beliefs, and “leaving the final outcome of our life and witness in the hands of God.”11 And it sets clearer guidelines for its interfaith committee, now named the Network for Interfaith Concerns (NIFCON).

Doctrinally, the most important step taken by the church came in 2008 with Generous Love: The Truth of the Gospel and the Call to Dialogue, a theology of interreligious relations drawn up by members of NIFCON and “welcomed and commended for study in the Anglican Communion” by the 2008 Lambeth Conference.12 This document makes a strong affirmation of both the Christian vision of God as Trinity and the mission which issues from this truth. Christians are called “to abide among our neighbours of different faiths as signs of God’s presence with them, and we are sent to engage with our neighbours as agents of God’s mission to them.”13 This emphasis is repeated throughout, as Generous Love calls for careful discipleship and the embodiment of values derived from trinitarian insights. Significant among these is that Christians should see themselves as being sent among people of other faiths and as abiding among them as witnesses to the Christian vision of God. But the giving is not all in one direction, for “we come to know our neighbours of different faiths in a new way, both as fellow human beings, and also as those who seek, as we

do, to orient their lives towards the One who is the source of all life.”

This is recognition that truth is not the sole possession of Christians, because they cannot fail to see it among people of other beliefs.

These declarations of the Anglican Church from the late twentieth and early twenty-first century speak clearly about the centrality of Christian beliefs, and they give no sign that these are to be changed or diluted by the encounter with other religions—Christians should be present among them as witnesses to truth. At the same time, however, there are hints that followers of other religions are engaged in a sincere relationship with God and service of him in their communities—authentic faith is already present. The tension implicit here is left unresolved (as it is in the Vatican Council document *Nostra Aetate*), to be pondered and explored by individuals and local churches.

The interreligious pronouncements commended by Anglican bodies are, of course, only one aspect of reflection within the church on interreligious relations. A host of individuals, theoretical and practical theologians, missionaries, and church people have expressed views on one side or the other about the form that relations with followers of other faiths should take. Among them, a small group of distinguished thinkers stand out for their dedication and depth of contribution, and few of these rival Kenneth Cragg, a devoted Anglican churchman and theologian who in one respect embodied the Edinburgh 1910 ideal of a Christian who made such a deep study of Islam that he could converse with Muslims with ease and mastery. Cragg immersed himself in the study of Arabic and the Qur’an so deeply that he could hold groups of Muslims fascinated by his exegeses of their scripture. Many of his works have become classics, and *The Call of the Minaret*, published in 1956, remains one of the standards of the Christian approach to Islam. In his thought Cragg embodied, and in his characteristically involved Latinate sentences he articulated, the tension that can be discerned in the documents that have come out of the church in recent times. On the one hand, he was a staunch Christian, true in his beliefs and witness—he was a faithful presence; on the other, he held Muslim spirituality and morality, and the scripture on which they are based, in great reverence—he saw in them a faithful presence. A number of participants in *The Presence of Faith* conference had come under Cragg’s influence, and most held his witness and scholarship in

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14 *Generous Love*, 15.
the highest respect. He himself was unable to attend through incapacity, and a year after the conference his great age overtook him. He died on November 13, 2013, just a few months before his hundredth birthday. Many would say that an era ended with him.

As noted above, the genesis of this collection of papers was *The Presence of Faith* conference held at Lambeth Palace in 2011. The first paper, by Douglas Pratt, traces an historical overview demonstrating—as this introduction has foreshadowed—the nature and extent of theological change and development. Anglican interest in interfaith matters had clearly matured by the late twentieth century and this allowed for significant Anglican initiatives to emerge in the first decade of the twenty-first. In the second, Michael Ipgrave addresses what is arguably the primary interfaith relation to engage Christianity, as he explores the distinctive Christian relationship with Judaism and its import for an Anglican theology of relations with other religions. In the third, Lucinda Mosher pursues the theme of an Anglican theology of interfaith engagement from the perspective of the Episcopal Church of the United States of America. Here we see a specific Anglican contribution to wider Anglican Communion resources and discussion and, again, one that demonstrates the dual motif of maturity and initiative which mark where Anglicanism has reached in the last twenty years or so. Richard Sudworth then addresses the distinctive influence and contribution of Kenneth Cragg, pointing out the impact of his experience and theology upon the development of Anglican thinking as represented in the outcomes of the last three Lambeth Conferences. The fifth essay, by Kenneth Cracknell, looks closely at another distinctive Anglican voice, that of Allan Coates Bouquet. Cracknell sketches some of the wider ecumenical contexts in which Anglican interfaith engagement and reflection have been set, and then turns attention to the life and writings of Bouquet, an English Anglican scholar-priest who wrote and taught extensively in the field of comparative religion.

Our final two papers, by Yvonne Haddad and Guli Francis-Dehqani, explore aspects of contemporary Anglican engagement with Islam. Haddad focusses upon the subject of Anglicans in Palestine/Israel in the context of Christian–Muslim relations, while Francis-Dehqani addresses the Iranian Shi’a context and the problematic of pursuing dialogical relationship under persecution. Thus, the positive and encouraging developments sketched and explored by the
earlier papers are counter-balanced by the challenging demands of contemporary contexts and troublesome realities. Interreligious engagement is no comforting picnic, and dialogue is a perennial double-edged challenge: its active engagement is often fraught with political and social minefields, and it certainly raises acute theological questions of self-understanding and so too Christian understanding of the ways of God and the place of the religious other in the scheme of God. As these papers—and the originating conference—show, Anglicans and Anglican theological thinking have played, and continue to play, a vital role in the evolution of Christian interfaith engagement.