

## Catholicity and a Vocation for the Anglican Communion

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*For several decades now, Anglican churches around the world have been struggling with serious conflicts about gender relationships. Internal troubles have been most apparent in the United States, Canada, England, Scotland, and more recently in Aotearoa New Zealand. These conflicts between churches have occupied the attention of the institutions of the Anglican Communion, usually in terms of establishing some framework of unity between the churches. In this context, I wish to suggest a different way of approaching these issues. I want to draw on a renewed sense of catholicity in the church and of the eschatological framework in which all Christians are called to live. In the process, I hope to offer a picture of what might be a vocation for the Anglican Communion, specifically its institutions, that will better honor the narrative tradition of Anglicanism and provide a more effective way into engaging with the problems of our times.*

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### *The Background*

The conflict between the churches of the Anglican Communion over the morality of same-sex relationships quickly showed some distinctive issues at stake. First, it was an institutional issue in the sense that it focused on the actions of provinces, which in Anglicanism were

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the relevant forms of jurisdiction in the church. Second, dealing with these institutional relationships was very complicated, not least because there existed no clear jurisdictional relationship between the provinces. Norman Doe puts it quite frankly: “There is no formal Anglican canon law globally applicable to and binding upon member churches of the Communion. No central institution exists with competence to create such a body of law.”<sup>1</sup>

The stress of the moment brought to light underlying sentiments from the experience of colonialism and of empire. Exhortations and appeals did not seem to be effective, and demands were even less so.

The Windsor process and the various iterations of the Anglican Covenant implied a significant change in the institutionality of the Anglican Communion. Windsor proposed a more detailed structure and a role for the institutions of the Anglican Communion that went beyond consultative fellowship and generous influence, to something more like control in the internal arrangements within provinces. In the political and cultural context at the time, this was in a certain sense an understandable move, though it did not and does not seem to me to be sufficiently consistent with the longer theological traditions in Anglicanism. It also seemed to me that it would only institutionalize the conflict when what was really needed was some kind of resolution of relationships within the framework of a shared commitment into the future.<sup>2</sup>

### *Dispersing a Local Tradition*

The problem of how a locally established and formed tradition of Christian faith and practices, in this case England and the Church of England, adjusts to the transportation of that faith to different sociopolitical contexts from that in which the tradition was formed is not unique to Anglicans. The long history of the Coptic Church in Egypt, for instance, has shaped its traditions of beliefs and practices. In the twentieth century there was a significant emigration of Coptic Christians out of Egypt, which raised the question of how this Coptic diaspora might relate to the home church. It is a continuing question in that tradition. The Church of England, with a distinct tradition going

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<sup>1</sup> Norman Doe, *Canon Law in the Anglican Communion: A Worldwide Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 339.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce N. Kaye, *Conflict and the Practice of Christian faith: The Anglican Experiment* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 171–72.

back beyond the seventh century, was part of the united power structure of the English Christendom. This Christendom was not simply an arena in which there were churches and Christian belief. Rather, it was a political entity in which clerical and lay parts together constituted the governance of the kingdom.<sup>3</sup> This English Christendom, with its evolving organization, spread across the globe as the British Empire. With the coming of organized dissent and religious toleration and the triumph of parliament in English polity, this Christendom model developed into a form of establishment that remains to this day only in England.

That this faith moved across the globe in connection with the empire is very significant for any understanding of the dynamics of the relationships between the provinces of the Anglican churches that were formed in that way. Because empire was the context of the spread of the faith and practices of the Church of England, the colonial churches had to face the challenge of indigenizing their politically embodied imported faith. This was a quite fundamental challenge, and one that is still being confronted. How these derived indigenizing churches might relate to each other, and how that relating might best be understood, remains the challenge for envisaging a vocation for the Anglican Communion.

That challenge of engagement between churches distantly located was a question already in the first generation of Christians. Paul's letters refer to this fellowship on numerous occasions, and his arguments about the nature of the faith in each of the churches to which he writes point to the importance of such connections. In this nascent situation he speaks of gifts of support from one church to another and of personal contacts between the churches of Paul and his colleagues. His argument in 1 Corinthians 4:7 is a powerful statement that what the Corinthians have as Christians they have received as a gift: "What do you have that you did not receive?" (NRSV). It does not originate with them and is not uniquely their own possession. The agreement between Paul, Peter, and the leading apostles in Jerusalem that Paul should go to the Gentiles and Peter to the circumcised is an early striking example of an agreement about areas of responsibility (Gal. 2:6–10). The context was Paul's assertive independence of calling, the recognition of Peter's ministry, well illustrated in the early chapters of

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<sup>3</sup> Bruce Kaye, *The Rise and Fall of the English Christendom: Theocracy, Christology, Order and Power* (London: Routledge, 2018), 7–30.

Acts, and the fundamental issue of the relations of Jews and Gentiles in the life of the churches. The personal conflict later between Paul and Peter highlights the significant issue at stake; the agreement in Jerusalem was of direct significance for the Gentile churches in Galatia (Gal. 2:11–21). Later in the third century, institutional developments in Christianity had brought more order and structure in the church, and some enduring patterns emerged.

The constitutions of Anglican churches often contain a reference to the area of responsibility of a bishop, and in so doing, refer to the canons of the councils held at Nicaea and Constantinople in 325 and 380. The Council of Nicaea was called by the Emperor Constantine, and he played a significant role in the council. The presenting issue for the bishops was the human and divine in Christ, but the underlying issue for Constantine was the political need to obtain some unity among the bishops. He had failed with the Donatists at the Council of Arles nine years earlier. At that council, he tried to stand back and let the bishops settle the matter, which did not prove to be a winning strategy for either church or empire. When the Arian conflict appeared, Constantine directly called the council and participated in it. He was clearly looking for a decisive settlement for political reasons in the empire.<sup>4</sup>

The council marked not only Constantine's support of Christians and the churches but also their enrollment into the empire. That enrollment had a significant effect on how Christians saw their place in the political structures in which they lived. In his opening address to the council, the emperor thanked God that they were "not only all assembled together, but all united in a common harmony of sentiment. I pray therefore that no malignant adversary may henceforth interfere to mar our happy state."<sup>5</sup> The council passed twenty canons dealing with various aspects of church life. Entirely in line with the wishes of the emperor, canon 15 prohibited bishops, elders, or deacons from

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<sup>4</sup> H. A. Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) and Peter J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 147–63.

<sup>5</sup> Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, 3.12, in *Eusebius Pamphilus: Church History, Life of Constantine, Oration in Praise of Constantine*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, series 2, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1890), [http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1819-1893/\\_Schaff\\_Philip\\_3\\_Vol\\_01\\_Eusebius\\_Pamphilus\\_EN.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1819-1893/_Schaff_Philip_3_Vol_01_Eusebius_Pamphilus_EN.pdf).

passing from city to city because of the “great disturbance and disorders that occur.”<sup>6</sup> Severe penalties applied to any breach of this rule.

The rule was repeated and elaborated in terms of regions at the Council of Constantinople in 381:

Let the Bishop of Alexandria, according to the canons, alone administer the affairs of Egypt; and let the bishops of the East manage the East alone, the privileges of the Church in Antioch, which are mentioned in the canons of Nice, being preserved; and let the bishops of the Asian Diocese administer the Asian affairs only; and the Pontic bishops only Pontic matters; and the Thracian bishops only Thracian affairs. . . . It is evident that the synod of every province will administer the affairs of that particular province as was decreed at Nice. But the Churches of God in heathen nations must be governed according to the custom that has prevailed from the times of the Fathers.<sup>7</sup>

This canon sets out a remarkable regional arrangement that provides for regional responsibility. It also makes clear that these arrangements apply only within the empire. The pattern is echoed in a canon of a synod in the east with bishops from Persia, which declared that “Easterners cannot complain against their patriarch to western patriarchs,” signifying that there is a hierarchy of order for complaints against bishops.<sup>8</sup>

This empire-wide pattern is clearly designed to preserve local responsibility in the provinces, as well as an imperial interest through the churches in the empire. One only has to read the contemporary Eusebius in his history of the church and his biography of Constantine to see this political aspect fully displayed.<sup>9</sup>

The patterns of this early period live on in the constitutions of many of the Anglican Provinces. The Lambeth Conference of 1878 encouraged isolated dioceses to associate themselves with a province

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<sup>6</sup> The Canons of the Council of Nicea, 325, canon 15. [http://www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/nicaea\\_canons.htm](http://www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/nicaea_canons.htm).

<sup>7</sup> The Canons of the Council of Constantinople, 381, canon 2. [http://www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/constantinople\\_canons.htm](http://www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/constantinople_canons.htm).

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 162.

<sup>9</sup> Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*.

“in accordance with the ancient laws and usages of the Catholic Church.”<sup>10</sup> Lambeth 1930 affirmed that the “true constitution of the Catholic Church involves the principle of the autonomy of particular Churches based on common faith and order.”<sup>11</sup>

The fact that the early development of institutions in Christian churches was influenced or tacitly shaped by the particular historical context in which the institutions were formed does not invalidate them. Rather, it makes clear that from a transgenerational or historical perspective, they will inevitably be contingent as that context changes through time or place. Not all those changes will necessarily be for the best. In addressing the Service of the Church, the 1662 Book of Common Prayer describes the fallibility of institutions in terms of corruption and frames the contingency of such institutions in terms of the passing of time: “There was never any thing by the wit of man so well devised, or so sure established, which in continuance of time hath not been corrupted.” It appeals to the ancient fathers for the ground and purpose of these institutions of divine service, namely the “great advancement of godliness.”<sup>12</sup> The goal and purpose of the institution must shape changes in the design and character of such institutions.

However, in the context of Nicaea’s and Constantine’s remolding of the churches, a further sense of contingency appears, namely that these institutions are arrangements that operate in the here and now of the earthly or mundane arena of Christian life. It is clear in the documents of the New Testament that the early churches were well aware that Christians live in this world as citizens of heaven, or in the terms of Jesus’s response to Pilate, that “my kingdom is not from this world” (John 18:36). Polycarp and Diognetus are just the more well known of this pervasive eschatological element in the Christian faith in its early years. In one form or another, that eschatological dimension has always been fundamental and central to Christian faith, even though in many generations it has been more of a challenge to the churches than an existing reality. This eschatological framework helps to keep our assessment of our institutions in place, though it is noteworthy that recent reports of the International Theological and

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<sup>10</sup> Lambeth Conference 1878, recommendation 2, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127719/1878.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Lambeth Conference 1930, resolution 48, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/127734/1930.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> “Concerning the Service of the Church,” published in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, <http://www.eskimo.com/~lhowell/bcp1662/intro/service.html>.

Doctrinal Commission of the Anglican Communion have not given much prominence to this theme.<sup>13</sup>

There is one aspect of the English tradition that has strongly influenced its experience of the provincial pattern. It comes from the long struggle of the English Christendom over many centuries with the centralizing claims of papal authority and jurisdiction. In 1080, William I rather curtly rejected a request from Pope Gregory VII for fealty: "I have not consented to pay fealty, nor will I now, because I have never promised it, nor do I find that my predecessors ever paid it to your predecessors."<sup>14</sup> The conflicts went back and forth for more than five hundred years in relation to investiture, annates, and other matters. This story had many notable crises, such as those between Innocent III and King John as to who had the right to appoint the Archbishop of Canterbury, or between Henry II and Becket on the jurisdiction of the royal courts over criminous clerks.<sup>15</sup> These disputes came to a climactic conclusion with the legislation of Henry VIII that declared that the English Church "hath been reputed and also found of that sort that both for knowledge, integrity and sufficiency of number, it hath been always thought and is also at this hour sufficient and meet of itself, without the intermeddling of any exterior person or persons, to declare and determine all such doubts and to administer all such offices and duties as to their rooms spiritual doth appertain."<sup>16</sup> Throughout the history of English Christendom, the lay Royal Supremacy lasted longer than in any other example of a Christian monarchy. The move to synodical government in colonial churches was in part an attempt to provide for the lay element in the English Royal Supremacy. Apart from the Episcopal Church in the United States, where the Royal Supremacy was dispensed with by a war of independence, it was negotiated elsewhere. One of the earliest examples occurred in Australia with the 1850 conference of the bishops of the six colonies.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Bruce Kaye, "The Role of Eschatology in Recent Anglican Ecclesiology: A Study of Three Recent International Doctrine Commission Reports," *Sewanee Theological Review* 56, no. 3 (2013): 262–72.

<sup>14</sup> David C. Douglas, *English Historical Documents*, vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952–69), document 101.

<sup>15</sup> Kaye, *English Christendom*, 105–64.

<sup>16</sup> Ecclesiastical Appeals Act 1532 (24 Hen 8 c 12), <https://www.reformationhenryviii.com/1532—3-preamble-ecclesiastical-appeals-act-1532.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Bruce Kaye, "The Laity in Church Governance according to Bishop Broughton," *Journal of Religious History* 20, no. 1 (1996): 78–92.

Of course, Henry VIII's assertion of complete independence and competence was made in order to justify a domestic path to a divorce for the king by rejecting any authority of the pope and asserting the complete competence of the Church of England to make the decision the king wanted. Significant elements in the theology of some English reformers were also laden with anti-Roman sentiment. The fact that this hostility was cast in jurisdictional and legislative terms enabled it to live on and to lay the basis for a subsequent strong anti-Roman strain in the Church of England, and in England generally.

The persistence of a provincial or metropolitan principle is intimately related to the focus on the local. That is where the direct ministry is exercised and where churches flourish. That is where the ministry of word and sacrament is set. That ultimate jurisdiction for the provision of an ordered ministry of word and sacrament in the local came to be located in the regional has a great deal to do with the necessity of proximity in the exercising of any jurisdiction in this kind of community. Richard Hooker provides a classic statement of this point: "Yea the very deitie it self both keepeth and requireth forever this to be kept as a law, that wheresoever there is a coagmentation of many, the lowest be knitt to the highest by that which being inter-jacent may cause each to cleave unto other and so all continue one."<sup>18</sup>

This focus on the local and the extension of the gospel over time and place has meant a high degree of contextualization in this tradition. We can see it in the early advice to Augustine from Pope Gregory I on how to grow the English church by using local customs to form the arrangements in the church. Pope Gregory the Great did not think Augustine needed to follow the Roman practices, but should use those that best served the English church.<sup>19</sup> In 1897 the Lambeth conference, in resolution 19, asserted that the church "should be adapted to local circumstances' and not to 'feel foreign burdens are laid upon them."<sup>20</sup> This conference passed a number of resolutions about the independence of local churches save that they should hold to catholic and apostolic unity. However, in a different ecclesial and

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Laws*, book 8, chapter 2, in *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker*, ed. W. Speed Hill, vol. 3 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), 331.

<sup>19</sup> Bede, *A History of the English Church and People*, trans. and intro. Leo Shirley-Price (London: Penguin Books, 1968), 1.27, p. 73.

<sup>20</sup> Lambeth Conference 1897, resolution 19, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1897/resolution-19?author=Lambeth+Conference&year=1897>.

political context, the 1920 “Resolution 9—Reunion of Christendom” looked to a full visible union of all churches.<sup>21</sup>

### *Imagining the Future*

This historical and adaptive principle has meant that, from an ecclesiological perspective, Anglicans have had a relatively open-textured community and a tradition that has been shaped for the local. This tendency was reinforced by the experience of centuries of the English Christendom part of the Anglican narrative. In recent centuries this ecclesial tradition has been cast into a multitude of different cultural and political contexts, and the process of indigenization in these Anglican churches, both in their practices and ways of thinking, is a continuing challenge. It is as great a challenge for the originating Church of England, with its inheritance of extensive and embedded institutions and practices, to adapt to changing circumstances, not least in relations with other Anglican churches.<sup>22</sup> The complexity of this challenge is well illustrated by Bishop Simon Chiwanga in his appeal to his fellow African bishops to give up the idea of a monarch/chief bishop.<sup>23</sup> This is part of the complex nest of issues that lies behind the way in which conflicts might be approached and how we might imagine the character of the relationships between these churches. This in turn affects how we might imagine the future of the Anglican Communion and its institutions.

Because of the diversity among Anglican churches around the world and the desire to sustain fellowship with each other in their shared tradition of Christian faith, it is not easy to characterize this set of churches and their relationships. In trying to encompass this complexity, nine questions occur to me in any attempt to imagine a vocation for the institutions of the Anglican Communion. My purpose in this article is not to address these questions specifically, but rather to suggest a way to approach the character of the relations between Anglican churches around the world and the role of the Anglican Communion.

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<sup>21</sup> Lambeth Conference 1920, resolution 9, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1920/resolution-9-reunion-of-christendom?author=Lambeth+Conference&year=1920>.

<sup>22</sup> See I. T. Douglas and Kwok Pui-lan, eds., *Beyond Colonial Anglicanism: The Anglican Communion in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Church Publishing, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Simon Chiwanga, “Beyond the Monarch/Chief: Reconsidering Episcopacy in Africa,” in Douglas and Kwok, *Colonial Anglicanism*, 297–317.

Only on the basis of such a general conception can we adequately deal with these specific questions and discover others that may occur to us. The nine questions are the following:

1. How can the tradition of the provincial pattern of organization engage with the globally scattered Anglican churches?
2. What is novel about this global context, and how, in such a context, might serious engagement between churches be imagined and practiced?<sup>24</sup>
3. How can we imagine approaching the underlying forces deriving from the inheritance of empire in relations between these churches, and especially with the two former imperial roles of England and the United States of America?
4. How can we imagine a way of thinking critically about the globally scattered Anglican churches in the context of the powerful assumptions in our contemporary global culture of “hegemony” and “superpower” as ways of construing international relations?
5. Is the idea of Anglicans being part of an emerging “global church” helpful?
6. What is the actual useable meaning of eschatology in regard to church and institutions?
7. How do we approach the tension of hope and life in the different locations of Anglican churches, and what do we think might be the shape and character of any “imagined community of communities” for these churches?
8. How do we construe the kinds of relationships that support the life and witness of Anglican churches in the light of the ambiguities in the tradition from which these churches have come?
9. How do we design institutions for such a “fellowship of churches” that facilitate a generous engagement and the virtues of patience, humility, and love, rather than encouraging borders that become a focus of conflict?

The very complexity of the elements of the Anglican ecclesial narrative noted above, which tend toward the local and to indigenization,

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<sup>24</sup> See the discussion in Kam Ming Wong, “Catholicity and Globality,” *Theology Today* 66 (2010): 459–75.

suggests that engaging with these matters is not something that will be solved in any final sense. The earliest Christians clearly experimented with the way in which interchurch relations were fostered. The pre-Nicene provincial pattern described in the canons of Nicaea and Constantinople draw attention to the priority of the local as the essential place where Christian faith and practice are fostered, while recognizing the essential importance of relations with other churches. These patterns existed within the framework of an eschatological hope that made life and institutions quite radically contingent. That contingency was reshaped as the church was colonized into the empire and Christendom became an acceptable form for the churches. The long experience of English Christendom has left a very subtle and deep legacy in the history of the Church of England, and thus in Anglican churches.

By and large, Anglican churches around the world have come into existence through the dispersal of the faith of a particular local church tradition into multitudinously different cultural and political contexts. This has led to different responses to the indigenization challenge and thus different presentations of the challenge to the life, practice, and witness as Anglican churches.

In trying to imagine a vocation for the institutions of the Anglican Communion, these issues of the heritage and the present conditions of individual Anglican churches provide a necessary groundwork. The character of the received tradition focuses on the local as the essential locus of faith, the eschatological meaning of what we imagine, the fragile nature of any institution, and the necessity for them to be not only created, but also sustained, by the fundamental values and purposes that serve the faith and witness of the local churches.

In 1963, a very significant attempt was made to reconfigure the way in which the local and the universal might relate to each other. The Toronto Congress brought together a very large number of lay and clerical Anglicans from around the world. The Congress issued a final declaration to Anglican Churches called *Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ (MRI)*. At a time marked by decolonization in the British Empire and the emergence of newly independent churches, *MRI* called for what was at the time a radical change in thinking. Every church, they declared, was an equal partner, and each was called to a new and thoroughgoing commitment to the good of the other churches. There was an action plan for every kind of resource being devoted to this end and a commitment to “extend

the whole process of inter-Anglican consultation.”<sup>25</sup> Following the appointment of an Executive Officer for the Communion in 1959, *MRI* proposed the appointment of regional officers to facilitate the process of interdependence, though no reliable financial provision was made and the proposal disappeared into the sands of time. The document envisaged training for mission and a priority for ecumenical work, and mission was the driving motif in the document, and was the goal of active mutual responsibility and interdependence.

Despite the language of the document, in the longer light of history it reads like a program that dealt with resources of all kinds to grow unity between the churches of the Communion. The initial enthusiasm faded, although two things did follow on from *MRI*. First, more institutions of consultation across the Communion were developed, and from one executive officer, there is now a significant set of institutions to sustain consultation through the Lambeth Conference, the Anglican Consultative Council, and the Primates Meeting, which together with the Archbishop of Canterbury constitute what are now called the “Instruments of Unity in the Communion.” It is hard not to notice the clerical character of these bodies, or the preponderance of representatives who are senior office holders in the churches from which they come. Casting back to 1963, it seems like institution growing at the global level has simply rolled along like any other process of globalization.

The second thing that followed from *MRI* is the Partners in Mission (PIM) program, also known as the Companion Dioceses scheme. In 1973, the Anglican Consultative Council called for Anglican Communion guidelines for this program. These guidelines take up a theme from *MRI* and make it clear that the local is the focus and that PIM sets out to encourage local dioceses in mission. The overriding motif of these guidelines, as had been the case with *MRI*, was mission. PIM undoubtedly has served, and is serving, many dioceses wishing to learn and share with others. There are around 780 Anglican dioceses around the world, and well over half of them are involved in such PIM relationships.

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<sup>25</sup> Stephen Fielding Bayne, ed., *Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ, with Related Background Documents* (London: S.P.C.K., 1963) *MRI*, section 2. Quoted from the online version at [http://anglicanhistory.org/canada/toronto\\_mutual1963.html](http://anglicanhistory.org/canada/toronto_mutual1963.html)

Despite the fact that the *MRI* document was received with enthusiasm and was seen as a reinvention for Anglican churches, it is now hardly ever referred to.<sup>26</sup> Issues of sexuality have become the dominating concerns and fill the airwaves of worldwide Anglicanism. In the public conflicts between Anglican churches, unity has become the driving motif, and organizational change has been pursued as a way of dealing with these conflicts. With the formation of the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) and the Global Fellowship of Confessing Anglicans, and the embedding of organizational arrangements to sustain this dissent, the whole story appears a little like a global rerun of the English experience of the Wesleyan revival. Furthermore, the appropriation of descriptors such as *confessing Anglicans* and *orthodox Anglicans* points to an ambition to fight these conflicts on a higher level and on broader theological principles, though they are rarely explicated or defended. The most recent description of churches that decide to commit to a view different from the speaker as “apostate” simply heightens the language without advancing the argument very much. The approach here is a world away from 1963 Toronto and *MRI*.

Approaching this scene calls for a motif within our still-common Christian faith, and even our still-common Anglican narrative, that encompasses both the enduring issue of the local and the universal and also has some capacity to approach the theological issues that are said to be at the root of present conflicts, not least to see if the various claims have some defensibility.

To address these issues, I propose a revival of a particular form of catholicity as a way of thinking about our problems. In Christian theology, catholicity has a very broad and spacious semantic field, while yet pointing to two key issues important to our present circumstances: a fundamental commitment to the confession of Christ by Christians ubiquitous through time and place, and the personal and particular embrace of that confession that is made place in a particular place and time. In order to shape this argument, I wish to point to some general matters in relation to the malleability of the term *catholicity*, and to illustrate this by reference to a striking Roman Catholic document, *Lumen Gentium* from Vatican II, and to set alongside it

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<sup>26</sup> Jesse Zink, “Changing World, Changing Church: Stephen Bayne and ‘Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence,’” *Anglican Theological Review* 93 (2011): 252.

some reference to the reports of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commissions.

### *Catholicity Past and Present*

In a remarkable survey, Avery Dulles traced the various meanings of catholicity from the earliest times to the modern ecumenical movement. He points out that the words in the Creed immediately present interpretive questions. It is not clear on the surface whether the Creed is asserting a fact about the church as it actually exists, an ideal of what it ought to be, or a promise about what it eventually will be. If a present fact, is catholicity verifiably present in the visible, institutional church, or is it perceptible only by faith in an invisible church? If visible, is the catholic church one particular body (e.g., Roman Catholic or Orthodox), or several bodies of a certain type (“catholic churches”), or the entire collectivity of baptized believers, regardless of their ecclesiastical affiliation? As for catholicity, does it mean universal extension, fullness of grace, purity of doctrine, apostolic ministry, or what? On all these points controversies have raged.<sup>27</sup>

Dulles then goes on to outline the very diverse ways in which *catholic* has been used throughout the history of Christianity. The word captures both universal and local connotations. One can see this, on the one hand, with the assertion of Ignatius that “wherever Jesus Christ is there is the catholic church.”<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, later in the fourth century, Cyril of Jerusalem in his *Catechetical Lectures* described the church as catholic because it extended all over the world and taught the whole Christian truth to all humanity. This universal descriptive sense is most commonly used in the constitutions of Anglican churches around the world. It is a claim to be part of that universal body of faith: Christians who trace their identity back to Christ and the apostles.

Lambeth conferences have tended to use the term in a descriptive mode. The 1930 Lambeth Conference was very focused on church unity and in that context set out its understanding of the Anglican Communion as a “fellowship within the one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, of churches” in communion with Canterbury

<sup>27</sup> Avery Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 18.

<sup>28</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Smyrnaeans* 8.1–1, in *The Apostolic Fathers with an English Translation*, ed. Kirsopp Lake, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 261.

and having known characteristics of the Anglican heritage. Further, it looked forward to the “ultimate reunion of all Christendom in one visibly united fellowship.”<sup>29</sup> This ecumenical theme is also reflected in Lambeth 1968 in connection with the role of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC).<sup>30</sup> In line with a common contemporary usage, this resolution uses the term *christendom* as almost synonymous with this universal church. However, in terms of medieval and early modern historiography, the term is more often used to describe a political entity in which ecclesial and political powers are united.<sup>31</sup>

Clearly the term *catholicity* has been used in Christian history in a variety of ways in relation to different situations. In many instances, however, a sense of the Christian churches scattered around the known world in the time of the apostles and their immediate successors was conveyed without the term *catholicity*.<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, *catholicity* is a valuable term because it speaks to a universal generality in ecclesial existence and at the same time it addresses particular churches. It speaks about the universality of the Christian gospel and to its particular expression in the lives of individuals and local churches.

It is not too hard to see how this term might have relevance not only in relation to the whole of Christianity but to that area of Christianity occupied by one or other of the Christian traditions that exist over a wide spread of location and time. Anglicanism is such a tradition of Christianity. It is an environment in which it makes eminent good sense to speak of the universal or general as the comprehensive extent of the tradition. It does not claim to be the only correct tradition nor even the only complete tradition, whatever those things might actually mean. Its claims are more modest. It is not the whole, but it is a viable tradition in terms of its origins in a narrative of long-standing and manifestly Christian character. It is not a tradition holding a preeminent magisterium or a defining particular doctrinal formulation. It is

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<sup>29</sup> Lambeth Conference 1930, resolution 49, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1930/resolution-49-the-anglican-communion?author=Lambeth+Conference&year=1930>.

<sup>30</sup> Lambeth Conference 1968, resolution 69, especially clauses 3 and 4, <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/resources/document-library/lambeth-conference/1968/resolution-69-the-role-of-the-anglican-communion-anglican-consultative.aspx>.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200–1000*, 10th anniversary rev. ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 489.

<sup>32</sup> Michael A. Fahey, “The Catholicity of the Church in the New Testament and in the Early Patristic Period,” *The Jurist* 52 (1992): 44–70.

a tradition formed for a millennium by a narrative of Christian life in a particular place that was then dispersed across the globe. In its current scattered form, the issue of relationships inevitably has a more open-textured character and requires more complex attention with its dispersed points of reference. In order to open up this discussion of catholicity in relation to the vocation of the Anglican Communion, I want to turn to a text from Vatican II and the Inter-Anglican Doctrinal and Theological Commission report of 2005.

### *Vatican II and Lumen Gentium*

Vatican II was a major event in Christian history as well as in the life of the Roman Catholic Church. It produced many documents that have proved to be enduringly significant, not the least of which was *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution of the Church. This remarkable document offers a descriptive account of the catholicity of the church, but proceeds to portray catholicity as a dynamic movement by relating it to the eschatological end of the purposes of God.

It follows that though there are many nations there is but one people of God, which takes its citizens from every race, making them citizens of a kingdom which is of a heavenly rather than of an earthly nature. All the faithful, scattered though they be throughout the world, are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit, and so, he who dwells in Rome knows that the people of India are his members. Since the kingdom of Christ is not of this world the Church or people of God, in establishing that kingdom takes nothing away from the temporal welfare of any people. On the contrary it fosters and takes to itself, insofar as they are good, the ability, riches and customs in which the genius of each people expresses itself. Taking them to itself it purifies, strengthens, elevates and ennobles them.<sup>33</sup>

It is this principle of universal reach, of catholic comprehension, that provides the basis for the contribution of the local to other parts of the whole. “In virtue of this catholicity each individual part contributes

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<sup>33</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, promulgated by Pope Paul VI, November 21, 1964, chapter 2, 13. [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html).

through its special gifts to the good of the other parts and of the whole Church.” Of course, lying not far distant from this passage, *Lumen Gentium* affirms that those who have the Spirit and accept the entire structure of the church and its government through the supreme pontiff and the bishops are included in the church. However, the point I draw attention to is not the definition of the church in terms of its social or ecclesiastical structure, but the eschatological context in which the vocation of the church is set.

This is done by emphasizing the gifted character of the differences between churches by virtue of churches existing in different localities, and the eschatological dimension within which catholicity is portrayed. In the second century, Irenaeus argued with Pope Victor that variations in the date of Easter were not a problem. “The dispute is not only about the day, but also about the character of the fast.” Clearly there were differences of long standing about the date. But, says Irenaeus, “in spite of that, they all lived in peace with one another, and so do we: the divergency in the fast emphasises the unanimity of our faith.”<sup>34</sup>

From an Anglican perspective, this is a very significant point and the terms in which it is expressed are uncannily like the terms used by Pope Gregory I to Augustine of Canterbury about church practices.

If you have found customs, whether in the church of Rome or of Gaul or of any other that may be more acceptable to God, I wish you to make a careful selection of them, and teach the Church of the English, which is still young in the faith, whatever you have been able to learn with profit from the various Churches. For things should not be loved for the sake of places, but places for the sake of good things. Therefore select from each of the Churches whatever things are devout, religious, and right; and when you have bound them, as it were, into a Sheath, let the minds of the English grow accustomed to it.<sup>35</sup>

The broader contexts are, of course, different, but the affirmation of the presence of God in the locally formed practices of Christian

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<sup>34</sup> Eusebius, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, ed. G. A. Williamson (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965), book 5.24.8, p. 232.

<sup>35</sup> Bede, *History of the English Church and People*, 1.27, p. 73.

faith is clear in both examples. The significance of the Vatican II reference is that it places this point within the framework of an understanding of catholicity. Catholicity is not just a description but also a dynamic that holds together the diversity of the particular and the generality of the whole. Furthermore, this catholicity captures the enrichment of the particulars by the encounter with those other particulars that together comprehend the whole. That whole is here set in an eschatological end and is thus reflexively the deliverance of the many particulars in their diversity into a fulfillment that exists beyond the present and beyond our imagination, but where Christ is all in all.

From the point of view of Anglican ecclesiology, diversity is much more profoundly entrenched than in the case of the Roman Catholic Church. There is a long tradition of dispersed authority in the adjudication of church life as there is also a limit on the extent of the jurisdiction that governs church practices. This is the point at which the provincial ecclesiology in Anglicanism is so significant for Anglican churches generally, as well as for any vision of how we view the relationship between the multitudinous Anglican churches around the world. This is a quite fundamental point for any formulation of a vocation for the institutions of the Anglican Communion.

#### *Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission (IATDC)*

The first IATDC document was established in 1976 at the third meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) in Trinidad just eight years after *Lumen Gentium* was promulgated. Its report was published in 1986 under the title *For the Sake of the Kingdom*.<sup>36</sup> The brief was simple and clear: “Church and Kingdom in Creation and Redemption, being a study of the relationship between the Church of God as experienced and the Kingdom of God as anticipated, with special reference to the diverse and changing cultural contexts in which the Gospel is proclaimed, received, and lived.”

The commission set out to consider these themes mainly under the general heading of belonging to the kingdom of God while at the same time living in their own particular circumstances. That duality belongs not only to individual Christians, but also to Christian

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<sup>36</sup> Anglican Consultative Council and Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, *For the Sake of the Kingdom: God's Church and the New Creation* (Cincinnati: Published for the Anglican Consultative Council by Forward Movement Publications, 1986).

communities or churches. The recurring question was how to live a kingdom-appropriate life. Approaching it this way meant giving priority to the local and particular circumstances where the faith was to be lived. They assert this in striking form.

The meaning of God's promise of his Kingdom is empty apart from some grasp of why it is good news *here* and *now*, and of those events and processes which are seen as embodying and pointing to the Kingdom in this or that bit of actual human history. (5)

As a consequence theological variety—even theological tension—can enrich our understanding of God's truth. (6)

The result is that this report grapples with the actual realities and diversity in which churches exist, and the failures within and between churches. The strong focus on the local and particular prevails throughout the report, and the role of any broader set of connections is only lightly touched on. That may explain the absence of any reference to catholicity in the report. The report of the Commission declares its conclusion in quite striking terms: "It is natural and appropriate, therefore, that the Anglican Communion today should take the form of a fellowship that encourages local and regional initiative and nourishes styles of church life that fit—and address—particular societies and cultures" (95).

Throughout this report there is a clear focus on eschatology, framed usually in terms of transcendence, of belonging and not belonging, in which the institutions of the Anglican Communion serve the local church.

The second IATDC report, the Virginia Report (1997), focused much more on the general and an attempt to legitimate the existing Anglican Communion institutions. The report acknowledges the local and the need for each church to have an embedded ecclesiology, but the focus is on the wider horizon represented in the Anglican Communion and its institutions, and it lacks any strong eschatological drive.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> See for example paragraphs 4.26, 27 in Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, *The Virginia Report: The Report of the Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission* (London: Anglican Consultative Council, 1997), and more fully Kaye, "Eschatology in Recent Anglican Ecclesiology," 269–72.

The third IATDC report, *Communion, Conflict and Hope* (2008), marked a return to the themes and interests of the first report and distanced itself from the Virginia Report. This report began with the reality of conflict and focuses on the Anglican commitment to dispersed authority, difference, and plurality and on eschatology and catholicity.<sup>38</sup> The principle of dispersed authority is stoutly affirmed, in some open contrast to the approach in the Virginia Report. The report gives significant space to the importance of communication in the formation of communion. It argues for a notion of catholicity as a more productive and specifically Anglican way of approaching relations within the church.

The specific argument is laid out in paragraphs 45 through 49. It is presented in essentially ecclesiological terms, beginning with the local church. “From the first the local church had a catholic dimension’ without which it could not ‘function healthily as a local church” (45). Catholicity in experience yields “delight in the gift of the other both within the local church and beyond it” (46). “A lively sense of catholic mutual interdependence is a source of strength, encouragement and stability at every level” (47). “The Anglican experience of catholicity has, however, been an experience of incompleteness. Anglicanism has never sought to be a world-wide church sufficient in itself” (48). “Traditional Anglican structures have developed little beyond provincial level. That has reflected an underlying provincial ecclesiology” (49). Consequently “our history has not prepared us to handle such conflicts with confidence.” “Hence our focus on catholicity. We have sought to explain the need for the gifts of the Spirit—and for virtues such as patience, humility, trust and hope—in sustaining a conversation with one another despite the current serious conflict within the Anglican Communion. This is why we have spoken of dynamic catholicity” (119).

Having established an argument for a more dynamic kind of catholicity, the report directly addresses the remaining challenge of conflict between the churches of the Anglican Communion. It asserts the priority of the local in any attempt to deal with such a challenge:

Unless we are clear what sort of communion is anticipated for congregational, local regional or global fellowship, the

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<sup>38</sup> Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission, *Communion, Conflict and Hope* (London: The Anglican Communion Office, 2008), par. 18.

terminology can be used merely to justify higher level organizational arrangements without analyzing how they contribute to communion itself. . . . The Anglican theological tradition cannot be content with any claim to communion which separates the Gospel of Christ from the aspiration of faithful Christian discipleship within a Communion which is both diverse and united, broken and being restored. (122–23)

The report concludes on a hortatory note encouraging Anglicans to forge ahead in hope, a hope that arises from the experience of the gospel. “Hope is kept alive and burning within us as we participate together in the sharing of the Gospel” (125).

These documents show a number of things important to any consideration of a vocation for the Anglican Communion. IATDC III fully affirms a notion of catholicity that embraces both the local and the broader general. It focuses on the promotion of Christian life in that local context. It highlights the need of the other. That need is so that the giving and receiving is an essential part of the life of the church. Such interchange between different locals is possible because of the particular gifts of God in those locals. It thus conceives of catholicity as a form of dynamic interaction of locals to enhance the Christian life of these local. This interchurch engagement reinforces the gifts in the church and fosters humility in the receiving from others. Its eschatology embraces not just transcendence, but also a sense of direction and movement in the growth of these local churches in Christian discipleship. In this respect, IATDC III recapitulates the central elements of IATDC I and adds a dynamic and purposive element.

Using catholicity as a way of expressing this dynamic within a particular tradition of Christianity, in this case Anglicanism, also facilitates an awareness of other traditions of Christian faith. The reference above to *Lumen Gentium* from Vatican II shows the mutual interaction between local churches in the Roman Catholic tradition that resonates with the Anglican situation, even though that same document sets that interaction within a quite different Roman ecclesiology.

This notion of dynamic catholicity needs to address realistically the heritage of Anglican churches around the world. This tradition, as noted above, focuses on the local as the essential locus of faith, and the contingent and fragile nature of our institutions, which are inevitably subject to corruption and misuse. As a result, they need to be sustained so that they continue with the purposes for which they exist

and the values according to which they were designed—in short, so that they continue to support the faith and life of the churches.

### *A Vocation for the Anglican Communion*

The picture of dynamic catholicity outlined in IATDC as described above offers a very useful starting point for thinking about the vocation of the Anglican Communion, or more particularly, the institutions of the Anglican Communion. The Anglican Communion is itself a reasonably abstract entity somewhat akin to the “imagined community” of Benedict Anderson.<sup>39</sup> It is the relationships between the provinces. Constituent parts of that fellowship have over the years created some institutions. Some, like regional officers, have not survived. The Lambeth Conference is older and differently founded. In such a widespread membership, some kind of arrangements were needed, and so we have what was, at the time, thought to be right and fit for the situation. The current institutions are recent reconfigurations and have been shaped by the crises in relations between member churches. That is how things of this kind normally happen. That does not mean the present institutions are immutable. It just means that they are what we have as a result of our predecessors responding to past challenges and movements. This article sets out a vision for the Anglican Communion, and, naturally enough, that vision has implications for the way the existing institutions work and implies the possibility of changes for these institutions and perhaps for some new arrangements.

The vision of the Anglican Communion presented here is a fellowship of Anglican churches around the world committed as a priority in their church life to generous engagement with other churches within that communion with a view to learning from and contributing to the life of each church. It envisages a time when the churches in the Communion have become living exchanging practitioners of dynamic catholicity. It also envisages a way in which the institutions of the Anglican Communion should think of themselves in setting priorities for their actions so that they contribute to progress toward this end.

This is a vision of local contextualized church life that witnesses to the living Christ and has the dynamics of hope, persistence, humility,

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<sup>39</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991).

and generosity in the sharing of the gifts of the art of discipleship learned in each other's lives.

This is a vision that stays focused on discipleship in the local. It moves Anglican churches from a commitment to agreement to one of companionship and living with difference, from power to humble learning. It is most certainly not a vision of a global church for Anglicans. It is a vision of the practice of dynamic catholicity by Anglican churches and of the facilitating of that dynamic catholicity in this "Fellowship of Churches." This should be the first priority of the institutions that exist to serve that fellowship of churches, and those arrangements that serve this purpose should be the first priority in the activities of the Anglican Communion.

Such a prioritizing would involve a serious recalibration in what we expect from the Anglican Communion Office and Lambeth. Of the current activities noted on the Communion website, the three activities nearest to anything like the exercising of dynamic catholicity are the Partners in Mission program, the Networks, and the Intentional Discipleship Initiative. Over half the Anglican dioceses round the world participate in PIM. They provide a wonderful starting point for infusing a stream of dynamic catholicity in Anglican churches around the world. The PIM priorities could focus on engaged listening and learning about the issues that challenge each diocese in their own discipleship—not just friendly contact for each to reflect on, but sustained deep involvement that touches the sore spots in our life as a church. I have no doubt that many of these PIM relationships already do this. My plea is that the whole program be set up on this basis and facilitated to help such interconnections be productive to this end. Being connected is not the point. The point is being connected in order to learn and to serve for the growth in Christian faith and discipleship of each other. A reinvigorated PIM for dynamic catholicity should, on this basis, have first priority on the budget of the ACC, which is actually the budget of the churches of the Anglican Communion. The same applies to the Networks, though because of their more specific focus, the process will work differently. The Intentional Discipleship initiative speaks for itself, and in relation to the life of local churches has real capacity to be part of a spreading tide of dynamic catholicity. In support of this priority on the growth of mutual encouragement and learning in christian discipleship, the other existing institutions would be able to take a lower priority in claims on funds.

The change envisaged here might be helpfully expressed in terms of a move from global organizational focus to a networked connection. Niall Ferguson has recently set out an analysis and history of networks in contrast to hierarchies.<sup>40</sup> His interest is in politics and power. Networks do not necessarily need to be shaped by these precise interests. What they represent is a pattern of connecting by association and cooperation. Thinking of the relations between Anglican Churches around the world in terms of networks might be a helpful way of liberating our imagination about the Anglican Communion. The design of such networks would call for creativity and discipline in keeping to the purpose of the relationships encouraged by these connections. Networks like organizations are susceptible to corruption, but they offer a potentially more creative approach to how we think about the Anglican Communion.

The fundamental priority of all the institutions of the Anglican Communion might, on this vision, be turned to focus on the cultivation of an effective culture of dynamic catholicity among local and regional churches in the communion.

Changing existing priorities or creating new ones is not a new idea in Anglican churches. The recent history of the Anglican Communion is a good example of such a capacity to change. Those changes, and indeed the general history of the Anglican Communion in this area, have tended to be directed at some kind of unity between the scattered Anglican churches and often the creation of a global focus and even a global church. The institutional response at the Communion level to the conflict over gender relations reflects that tendency.

The suggestion in this article is that while that has been an understandable move, the longer-term good of Anglican churches around the world lies in a different direction. It lies in the culture of those churches being less insular and more open to the kind of learning and openness of life that is conveyed in a lived form of dynamic catholicity. The future of the whole in this loose association—not of supposedly autonomous provinces but of responsible provinces—will never prosper unless the provinces actually want to change and engage with each other.

While I think that the fellowship within Anglican churches around the world will not be developed from the global to the local, but will

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<sup>40</sup> Niall Ferguson, *The Square and the Tower: Networks, Hierarchies and the Struggle for Global Power* (London: Penguin, 2017).

grow from the local, it also seems to me that in so doing it will go a long way toward helping us think more imaginatively and Christianly about the global.

However, the argument of this article is that the priority of local regeneration and the experience of dynamic catholicity is not based on what might work in some pragmatic sense, but rather that dynamic catholicity is a more genuinely Anglican expression of ecclesial thought, and as a consequence, offers a more appropriate vision for Anglican churches around the world and for the institutions of the Anglican Communion.