

A PROPOSAL FOR THE ANGLICAN CHURCH OF AOTEAROA, NEW ZEALAND & POLYNESIA

Greetings

First, may I say how greatly I appreciate the welcome I have received from Archbishop Philip and Archbishop Don (noting the apologies of Archbishop Winston), and the people of Hemi Tapu, and as a visitor I am grateful for the assistance of Archbishop David, my translator during the call of the kaikaranga and welcoming speeches in te reo Maori. My only hope is that I have not committed any cultural *faux pas* as I have responded to the generous welcome of all here. If so, I trust you will be patient with this Aussie visitor.

I come bringing greetings from the Primate of Australia, the Most Rev. Dr Philip Freier, and the other Australian Metropolitans who have committed my visit to their prayers. I also bring the greetings of my own Diocese in Sydney, whom I represent in this meeting, *kanohi ki te kanohi*, with my fellow Anglicans in the land of the long white cloud.

Introduction

Since the three Primates of the Anglican Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia (ACANZP), Archbishop Philip, Archbishop Winston and Archbishop Don, kindly invited me to New Zealand to meet with you all, I have thought and prayed long and hard about the presenting issue of your General Synod's recent decision regarding the blessing of same gender relationships. I appreciate that this decision was not made lightly, but after years of consultation and reflection by members of your Church and your General Synod, the majority of whose representatives consider that a Christian understanding of human sexuality in the 21st century allows one to affirm God's blessing on those in same-sex relationships. I respect the process of your General Synod's actions, notwithstanding that a significant minority of your Church members consider this has been the wrong decision.

I recognise that we are past the point where I could expect you to change your mind or that I could ask you to step back from decision to which you have come. For this reason, I come to you with a proposal for a new way forward for Anglicans in New Zealand which, if accepted, could well become a model for other Anglican Provinces, avoiding the querulous controversies that have beset our Anglican brothers and sisters in North America and, more recently, in Scotland.

The Tension of Unity and Diversity

Throughout the history of the Church, the tension between unity and diversity has manifested itself. We see examples of this on the pages of the New Testament, in the Councils of the Ancient Church and the sixteenth century Reformation debates to name a few. In the church of Corinth, for example, we read of the expulsion of a member from the church (1 Corinthians 5:1-5) and his subsequent return upon repentance (2 Corinthians 2:5-11). At the time of the Reformation, we see the Protestant Churches separate from the

jurisdiction of the Roman Church on doctrinal grounds and the nature of the gospel, while still claiming fidelity to apostolic teaching and its continuity with the Church catholic.

Essentially, up until the schism of 1054, organisational unity and spiritual unity were seen as one. Yet since then, the church has been organisationally divided between the East and the West. At the time of the Reformation, further organisational disintegration manifested itself in multiple ways in various countries. Thus whereas 'ecumenical' unity could be affirmed, at least among the Protestant Churches, with one Bible and the shared creeds of the Ancient Church, 'organisational' unity was broken. While the separation from the Roman Church was seen as a doctrinal necessity, among the Protestant Churches division was often caused over what we might call matters of order, rather than matters of gospel. Thus, the Presbyterians decided to separate mainly due to questions of polity, while the Baptists separated on the question of the proper candidates for baptism as well as polity. These separations caused their respective leaders to forge a new definition of unity, which enabled them to claim the reality that they were equally Christian brothers and sisters, yet within separate organisations.

On the other hand, apart from the Great Ejection of 1662, Anglicans have been largely able to maintain their organisational unity despite diversity of opinions. Even during the tensions of the nineteenth century over Tractarianism, Anglicans were able to maintain unity, notwithstanding strongly held opinions on both sides. With the rise of women's ordination, once again Anglicans have sought to maintain unity across the Communion, despite varying practices within Provinces. In fact, it may well be that the strength of the Anglican Communion is that it is not a 'Church' with one structure, as such. Rather it is a federation of autonomous Provinces each of whose organisational structure is governed by a constitution. Thus, even today the Anglican Communion's notion of unity is somewhat different from that which obtained prior to 1054. We have evolved in our understanding of unity, in light of the reality of diversity in a fallen world.

The difficulty of the present hour is that those who oppose the legitimising of same-sex relationships see the question not as a matter of order, but as a matter of gospel. The adoption of such a departure from Christ's teaching (as they see it) makes it impossible for them to continue in communion with those who advocate the new teaching. At the same time, those who advocate for the legitimising of same-sex relationships as a matter of justice and non-discrimination see the exclusion of same-sex couples as lacking the love which should characterise disciples of Christ. Indeed, some claim that for them also, this is a gospel issue and they cannot understand why anyone would suggest otherwise. The heightened and emotionally charged debate has caused havoc in our Communion, which in my view has brought dishonour to Christ. However, peaceful co-existence seems illusory.

The Solution of Adversarial Conflict

The experience of North America is a sad and sorry blemish upon relationships that should characterise Christians, let alone Anglicans. I need not rehearse the litany of ungodly behaviour that has accompanied the adoption of the new teaching on sexuality. However, that anyone could justify the defrocking of Dr J. I. Packer from holy orders beggars belief.

That millions of dollars have been expended, or should I say wasted, in the courts over property disputes is a scandal. That The Episcopal Church (TEC) would refuse to sell one of its church properties to a dissenting congregation (who supported the old orthodoxy) for \$150,000, and yet willingly sell it for \$50,000 to Muslims for a mosque, reveals the level of antagonism and adversarial conflict to which the North American Church has succumbed. Greed and power seem to characterise this antagonism, neither of which reflects the fruit of the Spirit.

It would be very sad if the ACANZP repeated the errors of its neighbours across the Pacific over matters of such significance. The current crisis affords Anglicans in Aotearoa and Polynesia the opportunity to forge a new path, a godly way of resolving the tension of unity and diversity.

The Solution of Co-existence

While members of your General Synod may have thought that dissenting voices would acquiesce to the amended canons, this has proved not to be the case. Moreover, plenty of warning was given prior to the vote being taken. It is unrealistic to think that the stakes are not high on the matter of human sexuality, which of itself is not the root problem, but the interpretation of Scripture, the nature of the gospel and the appearance of accommodation to the surrounding culture. Of course, I recognise that both sides see the situation differently – and that is the problem. After twenty years of debate since Lambeth 1998, where Resolution I.10 was overwhelmingly affirmed by the majority of bishops, expressing the time-honoured view of the Church since apostolic times (and of Israel under the Old Testament), I do not think that either side is going to convince the other side of their view. The proposition that same-sex relationships are a legitimate expression of Christian discipleship is something that will never be accepted by a large number of Anglicans throughout the world. Moreover, the evidence from North America regrettably forces me to conclude that for those who advocate the new morality, there is no turning back. At the same time, those who wish to maintain the received tradition of sexual morality cannot compromise within an organisational structure that allows a divergence from what they believe to be the teaching of Scripture.

How shall we then live as Anglicans?

The Solution of Distinctive Co-existence

My proposal is that we need to rethink the nature of our unity in the light of this diversity. The old structures cannot hold this together. What should unite us is our common Anglican heritage: our commitment to the Bible, the *Book of Common Prayer* and the Thirty-nine Articles ('The Fundamental Provisions' of ACANZP). This is what distinguishes us from other denominations and historically links us to the See of Canterbury. It expresses our Anglican heritage and our communion with those who share these fundamental principles of Anglican identity. Even those Anglicans who have sat loosely to some of these fundamental provisions, such as TEC, which does not require any subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles from its clergy, still own and claim the 'Anglican heritage'.

The question is: why can't two organisational structures co-exist, each holding to this Anglican heritage?

It is interesting to observe that within Europe there are two overlapping Anglican Churches: the Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe under the jurisdiction of the Presiding Bishop of TEC.¹ Each has differing constitutions and canons, yet they share the same Anglican heritage. No one seems to have complained all these years that they co-exist distinctively and exercise separate jurisdiction over the same territory. This is different from the current arrangement in the ACANZP, which has overlapping jurisdictions within the one Province.

Could not the model of continental Europe provide a new way forward for Aotearoa and Polynesia? The dissenting churches from Christchurch and elsewhere cannot in good conscience remain in ACANZP, despite the gracious offer of alternative oversight from Polynesian bishops. The problem is that these brothers and sisters cannot continue to be a part of a Church which in their understanding has changed its Canons to allow the blessing of same-sex couples living in sinful relationships. Yet these brothers and sisters are still Anglican, and recognised as such by most Anglicans around the world.

I note the generous overture from the Motion 29 Final Report, which describes those who dissent from the report as 'faithful Anglicans'.

We note however, that should faithful Anglicans in this Church wish to consider other ecclesial arrangements, it would be appropriate for this Church to consider how best to embrace this challenge with the same grace and spirit as is reflected in Motion 29; seeking to find 'breathing room' for one another; to live out our commitment to each other in the light and life of the gospel. [Section H]

I am not sure if the authors of this report thought that such 'breathing room' would be temporary or not, but my reading of the situation, both here and overseas, is that such 'ecclesial arrangements' would need to be permanent.

In other words, there would be two Anglican Churches in New Zealand, just as there are in Europe, both recognised by Canterbury as being Anglicans, by their historical connection to the formularies of the 16th and 17th century, and thereby both sharing a common Anglican heritage.

¹ To be precise, there are four overlapping Anglican jurisdictions in continental Europe - the Church of England's Diocese of Gibraltar in Europe, the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe, the Lusitanian Church of Portugal and the Reformed Episcopal Church of Spain. All four jurisdictions are recognised as members of the worldwide Anglican Communion (the former two being part of recognised Provinces and latter two being extra-provincial to the Archbishop of Canterbury) – see <http://www.anglicancommunion.org/structures/member-churches.aspx>.

Section H of the Motion 29 Report made reference to Resolution 72 of the 1988 Lambeth Conference with regard to Episcopal Responsibilities and Diocesan Boundaries, which reads as follows.

This Conference:

1. reaffirms its unity in the historical position of respect for diocesan boundaries and the authority of bishops within these boundaries; and in light of the above
2. affirms that it is deemed inappropriate behaviour for any bishop or priest of this Communion to exercise episcopal or pastoral ministry within another diocese without first obtaining the permission and invitation of the ecclesial authority thereof.
3. urges all political and community leaders to seize every opportunity to work together to bring about a just and peaceful solution.

With the number of issues that could threaten our unity it seems fair that we should speak of our mutual respect for one another, and the positions we hold, that serves as a sign of our unity.

However, surprisingly, the Report did not cite Resolution I.10 of the 1998 Lambeth Conference. Whereas no Scriptural support was advocated for the basis of Resolution 72 (in fact, Paul and Peter's disagreement in Antioch could well argue the opposite), Resolution I.10 of 1998 was based upon Scripture. Furthermore, it is interesting that the disputes experienced in North America have been classic examples of Resolution 72 versus Resolution I.10. The irregularity of Archbishop Moses Tay's consecration in 2000 of the Rev. Charles H. Murphy III and the Rev. John H. Rogers Jr as bishops for the Episcopal Church of the USA (as it was then known) without any provincial permission is an example of a breach of the former; whereas the consecration of the Rev. Gene Robinson as bishop in 2003 is an example of a breach of the latter.

On the one side are those who uphold the integrity of diocesan boundaries (Resolution 72), believing all cross-boundary interference is un-Anglican. On the other side are those who uphold the doctrine that heterosexual marriage is the only place for sexual relations (Resolution I.10) and believe that the blessing of same-sex couples, on the basis that homosexual practice is incompatible with Scripture, is both un-Anglican and un-Christian.

After thirty years of debate about these issues, including the calling of meetings, writing of reports, convening of panels and the essential element of listening to one another (as per Resolution I.10), humanly speaking, we have exhausted the possibility of convincing each other of our position. If Paul and Barnabas could separate due to differing views on mission strategy, then we should be able to separate on differing views of doctrine.

Practical Application for New Zealand

For this proposal to work, the ACANZP would need to allow parishes to decide whether they would leave the ACANZP to join a parallel and overlapping Anglican Diocese/Province. This would include the retention of their property, which would continue to be held in trust for the benefit of the parish. This should be the outcome of the 'respectful conversations' that the Motion 29 Report called for in Section H2. Each Anglican expression would recognise the other as having Anglican heritage, despite their significant differences on the issue at hand.

North America saw the defrocking of priests and the confiscation of property, even diocesan property where a diocesan synod had agreed to disaffiliate with TEC. This merely demonstrates power and greed, not gospel partnership. The Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) is now one of the fastest growing denominations in the USA, whereas TEC is declining in numbers. If TEC had had the wisdom and grace to allow dissenting churches and dioceses to exit TEC with their property, then the kingdom of Christ would have expanded. Finances would have been used for such extension, rather than expending precious resources in endless court cases.

The Archbishop of Canterbury described the 2016 meeting of the Primates as ‘walking together at a distance’ rather than ‘walking apart’. This aspiration can only be achieved if we recognise the depth of disagreement that exists among Anglicans. In this critical hour, the ACANZP has the opportunity of modelling a way of ‘walking together at a distance’ for the Anglican Communion as a whole.

Practical Application for the Anglican Communion

We all know that the Archbishop of Canterbury has named the dates for Lambeth 2020. His desire, as it is of many, is that all bishops would attend. However, the failure of his predecessor to resolve the problems leading up to 2008 are currently likely to create another partial attendance of bishops. The ‘Letter to the Churches’ issued by the 2018 Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) in Jerusalem last June made it very clear what those who represent some 70% of Anglicans worldwide wished to see. They wish to see the heart of Resolution I.10 maintained and reaffirmed as the doctrine of the global Anglican Church, such that those who have departed from this doctrine are excluded from Lambeth 2020. Moreover, should such bishops be included, then those who are members of GAFCON would decline the invitation. The Province of Uganda has already declared its intention not to attend. This is a serious dilemma for the Archbishop of Canterbury. We know he is a gospel-hearted man who longs to see the breach mended, the opposing parties reconciled and peace restored to the Communion. What should he do?

If ACANZP were to adopt the proposal as outlined above, then Aotearoa and Polynesia could lead the way in expressing generosity of Spirit to those who find themselves unable to accommodate the new consensus. This would be a model not only for other provinces, but for the Anglican Communion as a whole.

Lambeth 1998 was the last Conference of Bishops to pass resolutions. Lambeth 2008 was resolution-free and it is expected that Lambeth 2020 will be the same.

Arguably, 1998 was the last of the long line of Lambeth Conferences, which began in 1867. The bishops came together for fellowship and the resolution of difficulties. Yet their fundamental agreement on doctrine always ungirded their deliberations. As the 1920 Encyclical Letter to ‘The Faithful in Christ Jesus’ declared.

For half a century the Lambeth Conference has more and more served to focus the experience and counsels of our Communion. But it does not claim to exercise any powers of control or command. It stands for the far more spiritual and more Christian principle of

loyalty to the fellowship. The Churches represented in it are indeed independent, but independent *with the Christian freedom which recognizes the restraints of truth and of love. They are not free to deny the truth.* They are not free to ignore the fellowship. And the objects of our Conferences are to attain an ever deeper apprehension of the truth, and to guard the fellowship with ever increasing appreciation of its value. If the Conference is to attain such objects, it must be because it is itself a fellowship of the Spirit.²

Sadly, the unanimity of doctrine in 1920 is no longer present a century later. It therefore means that a new Lambeth Conference must rise from the ashes of disagreement that has plagued the Communion for more than twenty years. If the Lambeth Conference is to mean anything it is to be the fellowship of bishops who share our Anglican heritage, not merely those whom the ACC recommend to the Primates to be in 'fellowship with Canterbury'. If our relationships are not grounded in our belief in the Bible, our practice of the principles of the *Book of Common Prayer* and our adherence to the Thirty-nine Articles, then it is difficult to say that those who depart from these fundamental provisions are Anglican at all. If, on the other hand, TEC could recognise ACNA as a legitimate expression of Anglicanism; if the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (formerly the Church of the Province of South Africa) could recognise the Reformed Evangelical Anglican Church (formerly the Church of England in South Africa); if the Anglican Episcopal Church of Brazil could recognise the Anglican Church in Brazil; if the ACANZP could recognise an alternative expression of Anglicanism in New Zealand, then we could all gather as bishops of Anglican heritage with the Archbishop of Canterbury. This would necessarily redefine the nature of the Lambeth Conference from its historical role as a resolution-making body. The gathering could celebrate our heritage, our common desire to see Christ glorified, without pretending there are no differences among us. Would that not be a celebration worth having?



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23 August 2018

² *Conference of Bishops of the Anglican Communion 1920 – Encyclical Letter with Reports and Resolutions*, London: SPCK, 1920 p.14 [emphasis added].