

**The Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission**

**THE COMMUNION STUDY,  
2002**

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## THE I.A.T.D.C. 'COMMUNION STUDY', 2002

### Preamble

Following the decision of the Commission in September 2001, the Primates and Provincial Secretaries of the Anglican Communion were circularised, outlining the process that was envisaged. In January every diocesan bishop and, as far as could be established, all Anglican theological colleges in the Communion were sent the four agreed 'key' questions:

- When we speak of the Anglican Communion, what do we mean by the word "communion"?
- What is it that makes some disputes so crucial that failure to resolve them threatens a break in communion?
- In what ways are Christian teachings about moral behaviour integral to the maintenance of "communion"?
- How far does *The Virginia Report* meet the relevant situations that have arisen in the Anglican Communion since its publication?

Press releases were sent, through the Provincial Secretaries, to Anglican newspapers and journals, and the questions were also posted on the Anglican Communion web-site.

The following responses were received by the end of June:

<u>Diocese</u>	<u>Province</u>
Adelaide (Women's Affairs Committee)	Australia
Akure	Nigeria
Bloemfontein	Southern Africa
Bradford	England
Brisbane	Australia
Christ the King	Southern Africa
Christchurch	New Zealand
Colombo	Sri Lanka
Coventry	England
Durham	England
Edinburgh	Scotland
Florida	ECUSA
Fort Worth	ECUSA
Glasgow	Scotland
Hong Kong (for Province)	Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui
Johannesburg	Southern Africa
Llandaff	Wales
Kenya (Provincial consultation)	Kenya
Louisiana	ECUSA
Lui	Sudan
Manchester	England
Maryland	ECUSA
Matabeleland	Central Africa
Malaita	Melanesia
Melbourne	Australia
Muhabura	Uganda
Montreal	Canada

Mundri	Sudan
Mynanmar (for Province)	Mynanmar (Burma)
New Jersey	ECUSA
New Westminster	Canada
Nigeria (Doctrine and Theological Committee)	Nigeria
Niger Delta West	Nigeria
Norwich	England
Ottawa	Canada
Oxford	England
Port Elizabeth	Southern Africa
Quincy	ECUSA
Rhode Island	ECUSA
Ripon and Leeds	England
Rochester	England
Seychelles	Indian Ocean
Singapore	South East Asia
Southern Africa (Province)	CPSA
South Kerala	Church of South India
Southern Cone (House of Bishops)	Southern Cone
Southwell	England
Tennessee	ECUSA
Texas	ECUSA
Thika	Kenya
Torit	Sudan
Uruguay	Southern Cone
West Missouri	ECUSA
Utah	ECUSA
Western Australia (Social Responsibilities Commission)	Australia
Western North Carolina	ECUSA
Worcester	England
Winchester	England

<u>Theological College</u>	<u>Location</u>
Anglican Bible College	Kafanchan, Kaduna, India
Bible and Leadership Inst.	Zaki-Biam, Nigeria
Bishopdale College	Nelson, N.Z.
Carlisle and Blackburn Theological Training Institute	Carlisle, England
Episcopal Seminary of the SW	Austin, Texas
Formation Biblique et Theologique	Mauritius
Kano TEE Department	Kano, Nigeria
Kgolagano College	Botswana (Ecumenical)
Lanka Bible College	Colombo, Sri Lanka
Moore Theological College	Sydney, Australia
Provincial TEE Programme	Nairobi, Kenya
Ridley College	Melbourne, Australia
St Francis College	Brisbane, Australia
St George's College	Jerusalem
Seminario San Andres	Mexico
South East Institute for Theological Education	Canterbury, England
Trinity College	Bristol, England
Vancouver School of Theology	Vancouver, Canada
Wyclif College (?)	Toronto, Canada

<u>Individuals</u>	<u>Role/responsibility</u>
Dr Marcia Cameron	Sydney, Australia
Thomas Dageforde	St Louis, Missouri
Canon Peter Davison	Vernon, B.C., Canada
Bishop Jane Holmes Dixon	Suffragan bishop <i>pro tempore</i> , Washington, U.S.
The Rev Samuel L. Edwards	Forward in Faith/North America
Professor George Egerton	Associate Professor of History, University of British Columbia
Orville Endicott	Lawyer, Hon. Assist Priest, St James' Cathedral, Toronto
Dr Tom Frame	Anglican Bishop to the Australian Defence Force
Manuel Guedes-Viera	Lay member of Synod, Igreja Lusitana
Ivan Head	Warden, St Paul's College, University of Sydney, Australia
David Hannon	Lay member of Church of Ireland panel which responded to <i>The Virginia Report</i>
The Rev Timothy Nakayama	Retired former missionary in Japan
The Rev Prof. Stephen Noll	Vice Chancellor, Uganda Christian University
The Rev John Roberts	Rural Dean of Brackley, Peterborough, England
Donald Smith	Baptised member of All Saints, Bangalore (CSI)
The Rev Toni Stuart	Rector, St Matthews Church, Sacramento, California
Dr Derek Walter	Churchwarden, Tasmania & member of General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia
Dr Louis Weil	California, U.S.

This total of 96 responses (59 from dioceses, 19 colleges, 18 individuals) may seem to be a disappointing return from the number of bishops (846) and colleges (327) who were personally contacted. It is worth noting though that many more than 96 individuals have been involved. It is worth noting that dioceses from 21 different Provinces replied, and that altogether communications came from 28 provinces. Many diocesan responses and almost all those from colleges were composite replies. Quite a wide range of consultation was evident in some of the submissions, and in seven instances this led to a provincial-level of response. Furthermore, the process seems to have raised awareness of the theological issues involved in a number of current controversies: several provinces – including even the Church of England – have indicated that they will look again (or often, to be truthful, look for the first time) at implications of *The Virginia Report*. To some extent it may be claimed that the 'Communion Study' is beginning to create, as was hoped, a renewed field of discourse within the Anglican Communion.

It can also be said that the paucity of the response does not in itself limit the usefulness of the study as a whole. The questions were not circulated as a survey, and replies do not constitute votes in a poll. Anglican decision-making is never simply a matter of establishing majority opinion about any question. A prior claim is the accumulation of wisdom, the discernment of truth. The value of the replies received is not so much their number but what each or any one

of them might add to the developing understanding of how the church is held and sustained in communion. In launching this study the Commission foresaw that, incidentally, it could also act as a communion-building exercise. Even the limited number of responses received suggest that to some extent this study models ways in which the communion of Anglican churches can be maintained: the reluctance of so many people in positions of responsibility to join in the consultation seems equally to represent one of the most significant threats to their doing so.

There follows an inevitably brief selection of some of the insights which have been offered, but first, a commentary by the Chairman, Professor Stephen Sykes, on the significance of the questions and the implications of responses offered to them.

## **CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTARY ON RESPONSES MADE TO THE IATDC STUDY ON KEY QUESTIONS UNDERLYING ISSUES OF COMMUNION**

### **What do we mean by the word 'communion'?**

Five somewhat different responses can be detected among replies received:

- 1.1 For some the word is primarily, **theological**, expounding the Greek term *koinonia*/communion. It means that the basis of the Anglican Communion is our being adopted into the *koinonia* of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Though fundamental, this use of the term is obviously not distinctively Anglican; such communion is shared with all baptised Christians, even with those with whom we differ over important areas of faith and order. Many Anglicans recognise this reality by welcoming at Holy Communion those who have been baptised in the name of the Holy Trinity, and are in good standing in their own churches.
  
- 1.2 For some the word signifies those linkages which connect the legislatively autonomous provinces with each other, such as the office of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conferences, the ACC and the Primates Meeting. Of these so-called instruments of unity, being in communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury is by some (but by no means all) provinces identified as an element in their own constitutional identity. The Archbishop appears to have, by tradition, the right to invite (or not to invite) bishops to the Lambeth Conference – a right which has been exercised to exclude churches and bishops which have formally gone into schism or disregarded the canon law of their own provinces (for example in South Africa, England and North America). This aspect of communion is at least quasi-judicial. It is currently being suggested that there should be an explicit corpus of international Anglican canon law. This aspect of communion might therefore be called **canonical or proto-canonical**.
  
- 1.3 At the same time, in order perhaps to distinguish Anglicanism from the very strong tradition of Roman Catholic international canon law, some writers emphasise the importance of the **voluntary** element in the Anglican Communion. It is, in all circumstances, true that one enters baptism by voluntary decision, not by compulsion. No law can compel anyone to remain in any communion, including the Roman Catholic. For

Anglicans however it is always stressed that communion comes about, and is maintained, through voluntary agreement.

1.4 A fourth aspect of communion emerges in the recognition of the role of certain cultural and historical links, which have been (and in some cases still are) powerful in maintaining communion. Such features include the use of English and the involvement of the UK in colonial government. There are numerous parts of the Anglican Communion where this is not the case, but where they do exist they are frequently important in creating and sustaining (on both sides) a sense of kinship. This may be spoken of as the **historical/cultural** dimension to communion.

1.5 Finally, of considerable significance are the more or less formal modes of communication between parts of the Anglican Communion. **Communicational** instruments include (traditionally) the exchange of letters, and (in the modern world) telephone calls, faxes and e-mail. Mission societies have played a large role in the forging of contacts by the work of missionaries and other workers and travellers. Expressions of support through gifts of money or talents strengthen the sense of involvement. At the heart of such communication, of course, lies the theological conviction of openness to the other, based on sharing in a common nature, a desire to understand and be understood, a genuine care, and the mutual giving and receiving characteristic of a family.

2. In summary there are five aspects of communion:

- Theological
- Canonical or proto-canoical
- Voluntary
- Historical/cultural
- Communicational

These are not separate items, but aspects of a single reality, intertwined with each other like strands of a rope. Missionaries preach and teach the faith (communicational); but baptismal faith is God's own gift (theological); it is preached by people of a certain language and culture (historical/cultural); and meets with a response (voluntary); it arrives already embodied in certain rules and arrangements (canonical or proto-canonical). Moreover it is not a static reality. Understandings of the faith develop; canon law responds to new challenges; historical and cultural factors constantly shift; modes of communication change; the desire to remain in communion fluctuate with circumstances. If we are to interpret a given state of communion it is obviously important to acknowledge the interconnectedness of these organic shifts of perspective. It is often quite difficult to be sure at a specific time precisely what changes are under way.

3. What happens to communion when there is a dispute? Cultures which are used to litigation will obviously ask whether legal process can resolve the matter? Church law, of course, except in England is not civil law, and its decisions may not be enforceable. This is where the voluntary aspect of communion is important. The parties to a dispute have to *desire* that the dispute should be resolved by the decision of a church process or court. If there is no formal procedure, the parties may proceed to a solution either (a) by discussion, or (b) by pre-emptive action. In the first case the voluntary character of the process is still more obvious; both parties have to desire an outcome (even one disappointing to themselves) and both have to be ready to consent to the outcome. But in church disputes it is not infrequently the case that one or both parties identify one outcome as consistent with the truth of God. It is more attractive, in this case, to 'solve' the issue by pre-emptive action. In the end of the day not even canon law can prevent a schism from occurring in the church. It is clear however that the church which has developed a respect for the authority of its corporate decision-making procedures is less prone to schisms than a church which emphasises freedom of individual choice. Disputes are not, of course, of equal seriousness. This is the subject matter of the next question.

#### **Disputes which threaten a break in communion.**

4. Although on the face of it this was a question about the *content* of particular disputes, a lot of correspondents drew attention to the *context* of disputes as an important characteristic influencing their character.
  - 4.1 Some insist that local culture determines the content of disputes rather than theology. This, one may comment, seems a rather extreme view. After all, the dispute is about the Christian faith. Though the interpretation of the Christian faith may be influenced by a certain local culture, there has to be something universal about the faith or otherwise communion would be simply impossible.
  - 4.2 Some point out that different regions of the Anglican Communion lay emphasis upon different matters. The 'West' stress issues of gender and sexuality; the developing world, poverty, oppression and AIDS. This is a relative not an absolute matter. Poverty, oppression and AIDS are issue in the West; gender and sexuality are also pertinent in the two-thirds world. But it is a matter of emphasis, and on whose agenda is made to count when an international assembly meets. There is a widespread perception that the Western agenda predominates. In this sense one particular part of the earth exercises its power (of numbers, influence and rhetoric) to define what is said to be crucial.
  - 4.3 It is important, however, to note that the question of context cannot and does not simply disappear. For example, if the West says that the world church must discuss the question of homosexuality because it is an important item in its own culture, it is quite possible for the two-thirds world to respond (and parts of it have responded in this way), this subject is crucial because a decision, or non-decision of a certain kind would disqualify that part of the world church from being regarded as fully Christian. In other words the context from which a dispute arises cannot, of itself, be a reason for asserting that the dispute is of no importance.
  - 4.4 What then makes the content of a dispute 'crucial'? Here the correspondents undoubtedly face a difficulty. On the one hand, it must be the case that a church which confesses the Nicene Creed acknowledges the possibility of dispute of world-wide importance – a 'crucial' matter affecting the very heart of the faith itself. On the other hand, there seems to be no protection of the word 'crucial' from rhetorical abuse. It is suggested, for

example, that only arrogance and obsessiveness, or a kind of moral childishness, will insist on the ‘cruciality’ of this dispute or that.

- 4.5 At this point it is worth observing that ‘crucial’ is one of a group of related words frequently used to designate closeness to the heart, core, fundamentals, essence or substance of the faith. Anglicans have tried for centuries to identify fundamentals and distinguish them from secondary matters (see my essay in Sykes and Booty on the ‘fundamentals’). Lutherans also used this distinction, and developed the concept of the *status confessionis* (the state of confessional identity) to speak of an issue on which no compromise is possible. Roman Catholic theology and ecumenism have spoken of ‘the hierarchy of truths’ as a way of indicating that not every item in the dogmatic definitions of Catholic theology is equally close to the heart of the matter. All these ways of speaking correspond to a common-sense idea that certain theological are more important (‘fundamental’, ‘crucial’, ‘substantive’) than others.
- 4.6 But common-sense does not solve either of two consequential problems, the questions of (a) authority (ie. *who* has the authority to decide that a question is ‘fundamental’, ‘crucial’ etc.), and (b) content (ie. *what* is said to belong to the ‘heart’, ‘core’, ‘fundamentals’). Article 20 of the Thirty-nine Articles (‘Of the authority of the Church’) bestows a certain limited authority on ‘the Church’ to make decisions about controversies of faith. But it does so subject to the authority of Scripture in all matters relating to salvation; and it does not further specify who precisely speaks for ‘the Church’. It is also necessary to add that the authority of the Articles themselves is differently understood in different parts of the Anglican Communion.

#### **‘Teaching on moral behaviour’ and the maintenance of communion**

5. On the whole the responses indicate a positive acceptance of the fact that Christian teachings about moral behaviour is integral to the maintenance of communion, though certain caveats are entered against a too simplistic interpretation of this fact.
- 5.1 The grounds for believing this to be true are generally biblical. It is said by some, for example, that the Ten Commandments have been received by the Church, and that Jesus teaches the Two Commandments in which all the law is summed up. Some responses specifically distanced themselves from the ‘Righter Judgement’ (in response to the charge that teaching that a homosexual person in a partnership could be ordained to the priesthood or episcopate was a heresy), which asserted that for Anglicans the ‘fundamentals’ did not include moral teachings. It is also, one might add, specifically permitted by the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer for a priest not to administer communion (ie. literally to ex-communicate) to someone judged to have given offence to the congregation by being ‘an open and notorious evil liver, or [to] have done any wrong to his neighbours by deed or word’, subject to the jurisdiction of the bishop. In principle, therefore, the maintenance of communion must involve at least some teaching on moral behaviour. Twentieth-century history suggests that a Church may have to declare teaching about racial purity or ethnic segregation to be heretical.

- 5.2 However the responses also enter caveats. The first of these relate to ‘changing times’. It is necessary for a church to be alert to the fact that complexities within circumstances require careful judgements. Examples are polygamy and issues surrounding the medical prolongation of life. From Anglican history a question on which a new judgement was made is the control of conception by artificial means.
- 5.3 Other responses indicate the need to be alert to a degree of relativity in respect of context. There is sensitivity to the possibility of confusing cultural contexts, if norms from one area are imposed on another. No one area has a monopoly on truth. It may be added that though the general principle may be conceded, it is difficult to know what belongs to the ‘heart’, ‘core’, ‘fundamentals’ etc of Christian teaching, and what is a contextual variant on it. Also it is not infrequently the case that disagreement about an ethical issue may arise within one area or context, between people of broadly similar cultural background but of different theological traditions or commitments.
- 5.4 Another caveat relates to the need to ensure the possibility of repentance in relation to ethical behaviour. This again may be fully conceded. But the question which is posed relates to *teaching* about ethical behaviour, not to ethical behaviour. The precise issue is whether or not the maintenance of communion involves some measure of common teaching on ethical matters.
- 5.5 Finally it is also asked whether, even granted the importance of moral theology, it is necessary to enshrine that teaching in legislation (in the church’s case, canon law)? Should not the moral questions be left as matters of conscience? This plainly draws on the *voluntary* aspect of communion noted above. It is also consistent with the idea that the church is not obliged to make decisions about every matter. The difficulty with this view emerges once it is alleged that a refusal to make a decision about a matter is an aspect of lack of faith; in other words, there are certain matters which cannot be left as matters of individual conscience. In this case though it can be generally conceded that many things can be left as a matter of conscience, it is not possible to include every course of action in this permission. So the question of *content* has to be raised: is this specific issue (whatever it is) a matter on which a non-decision is not possible?

### **Application of these three questions to current disputes**

6. It seems generally accepted that teaching about moral behaviour could, subject to certain caveats, be relevant to maintaining communion.
  - 6.1 It would need to be determined that the moral behaviour in question was not a context-specific issue. In the case of sexuality, there is acute disagreement internal to the main context in which the issues arise. Furthermore the fact that an international gathering (the 1998 Lambeth Conference) did issue guidelines on the matter is consistent with the conclusion that the teaching in question is not confined to one part of the communion.
  - 6.2 It is important that this specific teaching about moral behaviour should not be confined to people identifiable as absolutists or people with undeveloped moral formation. The consistency of the teaching with the greater part of Christian tradition tends in the direction of this conclusion, short of complete certainty. To describe all people holding such a view as 'fundamentalists' is plainly abusive.
  - 6.3 At the same time it is not self-evident or unchallengeable that this particular issue is 'crucial' in the sense that to teach about it in a certain way (or to fail to do so) is to depart from the 'fundamentals' (etc) of Christianity. Whether a given issue is, or is not close to the heart of the faith is not determined by mere assertion. It has to be accompanied with argument: whether or not it is taught in Scripture, and in what way. What studies are relevant to understanding the situation, are all part of the consideration of the subject. Anglicans are used to enjoying communion with people who have been baptised, but who do not agree with them on all matters. What precisely is being said about *this* issue? That teaching of this kind is so seriously misleading that it is necessary for the sake of truth to separate oneself entirely from it? Again mere assertion would not be sufficient. It would need to be supported by open argument and argument would need to be tested.
7. The question also plainly relates to the *who* of authority? Given that the Church has authority in these kinds of disputes, who speaks for the Church? Is the Archbishop with the Primates? Is the Lambeth Conference? What role is accorded to the non-episcopal voice of the ACC? How do the international bodies relate to the provincial?
  - 7.1 The precise point raised by *To Mend the Net (TMTN)* concerns the rejection of advice or opinion of the 1998 Lambeth Conference by certain ECUSA diocesan bishops and synods. It is asked, are they simply free to do this under the rubric of 'reception'? Given that this has occurred, is there nothing that other parts of the church which concur with the Lambeth resolution can do? The suggestion of *TMTN* is that the Archbishop of

Canterbury and the Primates already have the requisite authority, and have the duty, to begin a quasi-canonical disciplinary process.

7.2 In connection with this, it is said by *TMTN* to be a weakness of *The Virginia Report* that it failed to recognise the need for international mechanisms by which authoritative decisions could be made on issues which threatened communion.

7.3 The response of *TMNT* to the problem of maintaining communion is, thus, to strengthen the canonical (or proto-canonical) procedures. The five-fold aspects of communion we have uncovered suggests, however, that other responses are possible. It would be important to bear in mind the strong *voluntary* character of communion in the Anglican Communion and to be meticulous about seeking consent to the strengthening of international canonical procedures. It would be wise to recognise the role played by *communication* in this matter (as IATDC explicitly does). We need to address the issue of *culture and history* by ensuring that non-English speaking parts of the Communion are included in the discussion. The *theological* character, both of communion and partial communion needs to be explored – the Eames Commission has already carried out much of this work in relation to the ordination of women to the episcopate.

### **Commentary**

8. It is unavoidable that a judgement will have to be made, explicitly or implicitly, about the claim that the issue is crucial to communion. All disputes are not of equal importance although the Vestiarian controversy (in which one party regarded the issue as indifferent and therefore fit for the legislation of the magistrate, and the other as a matter of real importance because of its implied connection with popery) indicates that people can become very heated about relatively small things. Not all disputes are equally important in all contexts. But the disagreement about sexuality is (at least arguably) of international importance, and has already been discussed in an international forum.

8.1 Is this dispute, however, ‘crucial’, in the sense that it threatens communion? Though there are those who do not think it of such importance, there are also those who believe that it is. Their argument is that to advance or condone this teaching is such a departure from the norms of Anglican theology that it is a Christian duty to separate oneself from it. The fact that this argument has been proposed, and the fact that steps have been taken to create an alternative centre of allegiance in certain place (eg. the Denver ordinations),

makes a judgement unavoidable on whether or not the issue is crucial, as the proponents argue.

- 8.2 Who makes this judgement? In the first instance, of course, it is made by the province in which the claim is advanced or that action is taken. The judgement may be explicit in the form of a resolution from a synod or meeting of bishops, or implicit in its refusal to deal with this issue (a refusal being one way of judging that the issue is not crucial).
- 8.3 Secondly, the judgement may be made at an international level by one or more of the international bodies charged with the duty of preserving communion, the Primates (with a special focus on the Archbishop of Canterbury), the ACC, and the Lambeth Conference. It is correct to say that the role of these bodies is proto-canonical. One or other of them could be developed in a more explicitly canonical direction.
9. By what criteria would such a judgement be made? It would be very convenient if it could be known in advance of a dispute what the relevant criteria for resolving it were. For example, if it were the case that there was a known and limited quantity of ‘fundamentals’, then a criterion would obviously be whether or not it belonged, or was closely related to one of the fundamentals. Unfortunately it has never been the case in Christian history that what constitutes the fundamentals has been known for certain.
- 9.1 If the criteria for what is crucial are not certain, is there then no alternative to sheer assertion? Is each Christian judge of what is ‘crucial’? There is plainly a role for the judgement of individual conscience. Synodical government, for all its flaws, seriously attempts to discern what such a judgement might be. There is plainly a role, also, for learning in the enlightenment of conscience, and thus for scholars and the processes of reasoned argument. In an episcopal church, furthermore, considerable though not exclusive responsibility is given to bishops to maintain the church in the true faith, and so to make representative judgements.
- 9.2 Thus though the criteria for what is crucial are not unchallengeably certain, and cannot be decided in advance and apart from the issues of a particular controversy, nonetheless commonsense confirms that not all disputes are a threat to communion. It has therefore to be *publicly argued* that this is (or is not) such a dispute. Then a judgement has to be made (by bishops in a synodical forum) of a kind which either confirms or does not confirm that this issue is crucial.

9.3 An open procedure of this kind is greatly to be preferred to various kinds of avoidance. Avoidance is detectable in vague exhortations to beware the dangers of schism, or warning about unbalanced mentalities, in generalities about approaches to ethical issues. Although these may be well meant and true in themselves they are only tangentially relevant to the issue, whether the Church may teach a particular doctrine about sexuality and act on the basis of that teaching. Frequently the imprecision is phrased in a kind of code, whose intention is to lend general support to one side or another of the argument without explicit consideration of the issues involved. This code, though a convenient device for a limited circle, is nonetheless unhelpful to general communication.

Stephen Sykes,

July 2002.

## The Communion Study: summaries and selections from responses received

This is not a consensus document. To synthesise all the points made even from the 100 submissions received would be almost impossible, and in any case the nature of the questions encouraged response more by way of assertion rather than through developed arguments. Furthermore the purpose of the study was to expose issues surrounding notions of 'communion' and the Anglican Communion, rather than at this stage to foreclose discussion on them. So this summary sets out simply to trawl through the responses received, to note some striking assertions and register elements of significant debate. It does not pretend to offer a scientific analysis or weigh competing viewpoints in the balance, although it may provide an indicator of some of the anxieties and aspirations shared by Anglicans today. It presents, in the phrase used by the Ottawa diocese to describe its own document, "snatches of overheard conversation" which might provide the basis of more sustained debates in future.

### **Question 1 – what is meant by 'communion' and the Anglican communion**

1.1 The question is not straight forward. The communion of Anglicans is "easier to describe than prescribe" (Montreal), and even that is difficult: "I know it when I see it" said another bishop.

1.2 Some formal definitions were offered – the 1930 Lambeth conference statement for instance, while several cited *The Virginia Report* (3.1) "The confession of a common faith, the celebration of the eucharist, a life of common prayer, the service of an ordained ministry, conciliar structures, shared service and mission sustain a life of Anglican belonging".

1.3 When it came to practical examples – as will be seen –maintaining communion was often taken to involve much more than merely institutional re-organisation. Ripon and Leeds offered a striking affirmation "The church is a sacrament of God's purposes for his creation, 'the purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth' (Eph 1:10). The churches calling requires it to be upward looking – to God – and out-ward looking – to the world – rather than inward looking" They go on to envisage the church representing and articulating "the 'eager longing' of the creation for reconciliation".

As the Chairman has noted however, respondents tended to construe their understanding of how this sort of hope might be fulfilled in a number of distinctive ways.

**1.4 Theologically**, a variety of approaches emerged.

1.5 There was a steady emphasis on the biblical use of the terms eg. Coventry offered a contrast between Hebrew (and incidentally Islamic) thinking and the use of *koinos/koinonia* in secular and New Testament usage. Mundri, in Sudan offered an extensive catena of biblical references to communion including, movingly, an emphasis on the fellowship of suffering/persecution (Phil 3.10) and anticipated reunion among the heavenly host with their saints and martyrs (also Torit). In such testimony 'communion' is almost spoken of as an apocalyptic rather than simply a political reality.

1.6 Many others stressed the divine source of Christian fellowship. It involved a "participation in something, rather than association" insisted Akure, with primacy of "the vertical" relationship with God as the basis for horizontal relationships.

1.7 For others, Anglicanism represented “*communio in sacris*” (eg. Brisbane, Melaita ); it is a “sacramental and only secondarily institutional reality” with a need to distinguish communion from federation – or religious clubability (Florida) A number of contributors (eg. Norwich) observed that common ministry has already been lost. Others remark that the whole idea of ministerial collegiality is being marginalised as the parish rather than the diocese or province became, in popular thinking at least, the unit of Anglican communion. A renewed theological identity seems necessary if Anglicans are to be “more than a voluntary association of national churches bound together by human will”, and the cultural and historical shift towards leadership from the ‘two-thirds’ world was testing the tendency of “narcissistic independent operators” in the West to individualism (Louisiana)

1.8 Recourse was frequently made to the image of the family as the natural model for Anglican unity – although Ripon and Leeds wonder whether the Pauline “household of faith” or Johannine (and African?) theme of “friendship” might offer a more realistic basis? However the Bishop of Worcester opened up the family metaphor, in which he saw a combination of genetics (irrevocable) and covenant (marriage/adoption), both of them immutable. Yet some things can still rupture family life. He went on, “However they are extreme and their extreme nature cannot be stated in advance of their happening. Indeed to state them in advance is to make the family itself a conditional entity, which is something a family cannot be. The attempt to ‘toughen up’ the authority structures of the Communion – as in *To Mend the Net* – is fraught with the danger that any family would face if the weight of authority is inappropriately asserted – it can provoke precisely the tendencies towards separatism that it wishes to prevent. The encounter between Ahab and Elijah over the question of who was the ‘troubler of Israel’ has permanent relevance here.”

1.9 This reference to current controversies amplifies the conversation going on in the background (and sometimes not very far in the background) in several of the contributions. A number of writers consciously looked for a ‘toughening up’, at least of the doctrinal definitions of communion. eg. “*TVR* fails to sufficiently identify the fundamentals of the Christian Faith that must be the basis of communion with the Holy Trinity” (Singapore) – or “biblical truth should bridge the various disputes” (Thika).

1.10 A typically weighty contribution from the Bishop of Rochester stated: “Throughout the New Testament and the early church there is an underlying assumption that some agreement in faith is necessary if communion is to be real. In his earliest letters, St Paul was emphasising the importance of holding onto and passing on the apostolic paradosis (1 Cor 15; 2 Thess 2.15). The latter parts of the New Testament, understandably, are even more concerned to uphold right believing as an aspect of belonging (1 Tim 3 & 4; 2 Tim 2; 2 Peter 2; I John 4; Jude). St Irenaeus points to the agreement in faith among all the Churches (*Against Heresies* 1.10.2) and this is a primary consideration for others also as they seek to maintain communion with fellow-Christians (see, for example, St Cyprian’s letter to Stephen of Rome)”

1.11 Numerous responses allude to the Lambeth Quadrilateral as a basis for union, and some (eg. Lui) look for credal conformity, the denial of which “breaks any unity of life or purpose”. Ridley College notes that *koinonia* has an element of toughness: without some corporate discipline, no identity is possible: “It is one of the marks of Western Anglican theology that it seems to enjoy the notion of mystery about the centre of faith at the same time as being emphatic about more peripheral matters”.

1.12 While the historic markers of Anglican identity are widely respected, many see them as providing a starting point for outworking communion rather than the final definition of its limits. Montreal quotes a helpful definition by ARCIC *Church as Communion* (para 45) but then adds an emphasis it takes from *The Virginia Report* that communion “is not a union of the identical, but reconciliation of diversity in love”. It quotes, “[The Anglican way] entails a

willingness to contain difference and live with tension, even conflict, as the Church seeks a common mind on controversial issues” (TVR p14). The theological college in Mexico values “the moral maturity of living with inconclusive issues”.

1.13 An attractive essay from the Vancouver School of Theology traces ideas of communion from the writings of Hooker (*EP* V.56.5) and the Prayer of Humble Access. Accordingly, the Anglican Communion is not just an accidental coming together of the like-minded but an historical adventure of finding the reality of Christ in diversity and circumstances. Drawing on their enlarged experience of communion in an ecumenical setting, they urge the pursuit of unity through a re-appropriation of classical Anglican spirituality, citing among others, William Countryman: “If Anglicanism is to survive as a communion – that is, in maintaining actual communion among its very diverse members across the world – it will do so only by acknowledging the centrality of its spiritual tradition .... In so far as we decline to do so, we shall probably try to substitute, at the heart of Anglicanism, the kind of doctrinal and disciplinary rigidity that we have both rejected and coveted in the Reformed and Roman traditions. If we do so, we will tear Anglicanism, both as a community and a tradition, into increasingly small pieces” (*The Poetic Imagination: An Anglican Spiritual Tradition* (1999) p190).

1.14 The nature of this conflict, between conservative and more liberal approaches to Anglican authority and sources is significantly exposed in the personal submissions from Bishop Jane Holmes Dixon and the Rev’d Samuel Edwards. Bishop Dixon notes “We are only at risk for a break of communion when one party to a dispute asserts that his or her authority in interpretation of scripture is higher than that of another, or when we abandon our respect for the place of tradition and reason in resolving disputes to an exclusive struggle over authority in the interpretation of scripture.” Anglicans still pursue the *via media* she contends, and the “intentions and actions of my office ... were for unity, not disunity”, but “we do not have the authority to hold back one church until the whole Communion is of one mind on a particular point of dissension.”

1.15 Father Edwards, whose congregation of Christ Church, Accokeek, were in contention with Bishop Dixon, argues that the Anglican Communion must decide whether “communion is grounded in God’s definitive revelation of Himself as Trinity of Persons in Unity of Substance ... (or) the product of mutual consent between members of the ecclesiastical programme sufficient to preserve the institutional structure.” For him the loss of the classical understanding of scripture and tradition admits beliefs at a foundational level which are “not merely diverse but divergent”. Unless some things are “incapable of compromise or surrender” then “the only sure qualification for membership in the Anglican Communion seems to be whether one’s bishop is invited to the Lambeth Conference.”

1.16 In different degrees, this sort of division is characteristic of many (perhaps most) contributions. It is not something that can just be dismissed as a difference between the two-thirds world and the West.

1.17 A suggested way between these two approaches is perhaps sketched in the Southwell contribution (written by Prof Tony Thiselton) when it notes that the Lambeth 1988 Resolution “acknowledges permitted degrees of communion.... *De facto* the broader basis of a shared recognition of Scripture, the major creeds and gospel doctrine is narrowed in focus by criteria that entail a mutual recognition of ministries, and often in turn, mutual admission to communion”

Theological issues recur throughout the responses of course, notably in the way the *Virginia Report* is evaluated in Question 4, but even in the way communion is identified more than just theology is involved.

**1.18 The Voluntary nature** of Anglican association is a significant modifier of theology. “The Anglican Communion is not a body that votes on membership according to certain rules, rather it is a body to which one chooses to belong or not according to each Province’s acceptance of the Lambeth Quadrilateral” (Christchurch). It is a communion of churches “who wish to be in the Anglican family and accept the corporate wisdom of sister Churches as a balance to their own individual freedom” (St George’s, Jerusalem). Apart from theological definitions, there is a question of the ‘will’ to hold the Communion together.

1.19 This tension between freedom and submission to a common mind causes Uruguay to wonder about reactions to the Lambeth resolution on sexuality: if membership of the Communion is voluntary, how is it that some can so easily ignore what it sees as the consensus?

1.20 The clearest assertion of the voluntary character of Anglicanism perhaps comes from Moore College. Communion is experienced where believers gather under the Word in a particular place. “It is important that we do not confuse this historical entity (the Anglican Communion) with either the spiritual reality achieved by Christ or the physical manifestation of that entity in the local churches.” The Anglican Communion is simply a network to encourage proclamation and obedience to the gospel. It should not be confused with the Church (gathered in heaven) or churches (gathered on earth around the word). Anglicans are fragmenting because of inadequate views of Scripture, and as common cause is lost “the bonds of association unravel”.

1.21 Others see the whole idea of common cause, achieving ‘consensus’, as becoming problematic. If the Anglican Communion lacks a viable central authority which carries meaningful sanctions, it becomes less of an identifiable “communion, and more an increasingly informal ‘association’ .... Anglican identity is less clear as the Communion diversifies and grows away from British cultural heritage” (Tennessee).

**1.22 The historic links** that generated Anglican loyalty have inevitably become tenuous over recent decades. “We valued what we inherited from the British Empire” agreed Mauritius “but we are not stuck with inherited values.” “Common history” (Johannesburg) is still important for many, but for others it needs radical reinterpretation: being Anglican “has nothing whatever to do with the See of Canterbury” (Glasgow) - the role of the Archbishop of Canterbury may be valued, but only as that of an English bishop. “Moving beyond the *English church* is an important challenge” (Rhode Island).

1.23 Familiar things still have significant value. “Communion has a human face” states Bloemfontein, valuing “... common baptism and roots in a particular set of traditions and styles” beyond any single body of beliefs or moral code. “We can’t choose our family” said a correspondent from Bradford – but despite tensions there are still family characteristics which matter. You can still “recognise the ‘sense’ of an Anglican church elsewhere despite differences” (Manchester)

1.24 For some though, the links of history are rather too prominent, and represent a problem that must be addressed. “Colonialism the *material* basis, missionary societies the *effective* basis for Anglican identity” (Hong Kong) – but neither factor is adequately recognised in *TVR*. The Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui demand and requirement to become a church which is both Chinese and Christian is offered as a paradigm for reflection by Anglicans globally. Others point to “... the heavy-handedness of the powerful Western branch of the Communion that sought to over-ride the African/Asian component at the last Lambeth Conference. We have to take into account the evil of the world and the reality that Satan will use any foothold to divide and destroy” (Port Elizabeth).

1.25 Anglicans who trace their allegiances directly back to the Church of England are especially facing the post-modern implications of the loss of common culture. No Act of Uniformity – or the thinking which evolved from it – is any longer possible (Melbourne). Rochester cites Nicholas Sagovsky on the importance of the ‘living norm’ of actual life corresponding to ‘linguistic norm’ of Scripture in the early church. But the hermeneutical gap between the two is widening rapidly.

**1.26 Communication** becomes of vital importance in situations which threaten a breakdown of relationships. Fundamental to the maintenance of communion is the need for churches to be “more intentional about communicating .... Ongoing dialogue and common heritage are a binding force that continue to exercise greater power than any of our legalities...”(Maryland) This involves more than simply the spread of information. Adelaide amplifies: “catholicity, our shared communion within Anglicanism, is able to be secured ... only as a result of ongoing and careful maintenance of relationship between provinces and individuals, and ongoing and careful negotiation of shared meaning.”

1.27 Partnership links take on added value in situations where misunderstandings may divide. “In a shrinking world ‘belonging’ to others is very important” (W.Missouri) We are “proud of our peculiar traditions” (wrote Myanmar/Burma – where the dangers of isolation are perhaps better known than in most other parts of the world) yet they are “happy to be part of the wider Anglican Communion too”.

1.28 MRI/Partners in Mission and the Cycle of Prayer are noted as tangible ‘instruments’ of communion, but communication is costly in terms of effort and resources. In a changing situation throughout the Communion, the sharing of financial resources must be re-thought. An American bishop notes the iniquity of the West using money to “influence, reward or punish fellow Anglicans in other parts of the world .... The tail is wagging the dog” (Tennessee).

## **Question 2 – ‘Communion-breaking’ issues**

2.1 The lack of an Anglican magisterium is both a “blessing and a curse” (Louisiana) – a blessing, in that it means spiritual responsibility has to be taken personally, but a curse in that it is not easy to transcend individualism. This dilemma recurs in attempts to identify and address the presenting issues which threaten communion – attitudes to homosexuality predominate, the gender of priests and bishops, and for some the prospect of lay presidency at the eucharist are all major but not the only controversies in view. In what follows such issues are viewed differently by those who emphasise the blessing or the curse, the element of freedom or the longing for authority, commitment to locality or the importance of the universal, in Anglican polity.

2.2 Many value elements of freedom. The strength of Anglicanism is to “promote plurality – dialogue and openness” (Colombo). We need to acknowledge “varying definitions of sin” (New Jersey). “Accountability” is necessary, for this is what enables the “celebration of diversity” (Kenya). Others regret the defensiveness and insecurity of some of their partners and “the inability of many people and church leaders to dialogue within good Anglican parameters” (W.Missouri), or warn against the “arrogance, obsessiveness, lack of respect for one another, lack of listening to one another and recognising the differences that exist among us as we try to be faithful to following Jesus Christ” (Western N. Carolina). It is possible to identify ‘my issue’ as exclusively identified with faithfulness to the gospel. Appeals to ‘conscience’ or ‘tradition’ need to address underlying questions of where authority lies.

2.3 A more consistent response however is from those who seek some defined limits to freedom. There is a given baptismal koinonia yet “most Anglican faithful are over-shadowed with individualism and freedom of opinion and action” (Niger Delta West). The limits of freedom can be over-stepped. “The theological concept of communion as involving unity within limits is consistent throughout the New Testament Scripture and the Rule of Faith of the patristic period. It is also at the heart of the Protestant Reformation. The Reformers themselves justified their departure from the Church of Rome on the basis that the Roman Church had departed from the apostolic faith”, wrote Prof Stephen Noll, Vice Chancellor of the Uganda Christian University. Numerous other references were made to the need for safeguarding the deposit or fundamentals of the faith, or re-stating the ‘irreducible minimum’ basis upon which communion can be maintained. And this must be carried through by responsible authority: “Our government is not democratic, but Episcopal and synodical ... A healthy church applies healthy discipline: it recognises sin, seeks repentance and exercises pardon” (Bishops of Southern Cone)

2.4 But there is also a reluctance to approach the chasm of divorce too readily. Manchester warns of danger when “the sound of trenches being dug is louder than that of bridges being built”. Adelaide draw attention to Miroslav Volf’s treatment of the ministry of reconciliation (*Exclusion and Embrace*, p30) which sees the balancing of identity and difference as the most pertinent political and theological concern of the contemporary age.

2.5 What are seen as crucial issues often conceal more deeply-seated problems. “Disputes do not only cause break in communion, they make clear that such a break has already occurred” (Florida). Dr Ivan Head drew attention to the way in which the schism between Rome and Constantinople took some 200 years to become absolute. He comments that the instantaneous nature of modern communications raise the level of volatility and heat in any and every contentious matter. Johannesburg similarly notes that “lack of communication [previously] buffered us from our differences”.

2.6 Time is available for a reconciliation of differences to be achieved, as long as a state of “convergence rather than divergence exists”, with a clear distinction being made between diversity and *divergence* (Fort Worth). In an interesting illustration, Bishop Iker acknowledges as legitimate the difference between an Anglo-Catholic interpretation of the Mass, and the rising practice of Lay Presidency in Sydney. “The intention is to celebrate redemption in Christ. While there would be great disagreement about the act of communion, there is overwhelming agreement ... on the saving work of Jesus Christ in His death, resurrection and ascension.” He is not alone in regretting that “institutional transgressions” (like the Singapore/Denver consecrations) attract such immediate attention, because “they are easy to see, perhaps even impossible to miss”. By contrast, orthodox leaders find it hard to take seriously “outrageous statements of unbelief”, and repeatedly postpone responding to them.

2.7 There are no winners when schism takes place. There is a simple response from Muhabura “disputes become crucial when we fail to resolve them”. Mundri and other Sudanese churches refer to their own experience of reconciliation after schismatic succession – and appreciate the mediating role of Archbishop of Canterbury at the time. They are among those who can see a place for increased intervention from the Primates in times of crisis. Niger Delta West cites *To Mend the Net* approvingly, speaks of “the hierarchy” as a toothless bulldog – and calls for moral and political sanctions to be imposed in the interest of resolving conflict.

2.8 Yet it is possible to reach a point of divergence which takes the issue beyond dialogue. “When a dissident jurisdiction has been set up by those who believe that the legitimate limits of dialogue have been overpassed” (Montreal) which went on to reflect on

Non-Jurors/CSI/Frank Weston's 'excommunication' of Bishop Perceval, and to compare AMiA with the Donatists (the only other schism based on a moral issue).

2.9 The loss of a 'universally' acknowledged ministry marks a significant diminution of communion: "where there isn't mutually recognisable and interchangeable ministry we cannot contain diversity" asserts Ripon and Leeds, contrasting the experience of the early church and the role of Irenaeus. Such division takes place more readily under voluntary understandings of communion -- "in ECUSA we are a confederation of dioceses" (Quincy) -- where links appear to be more easily dispensable than when sacramental or doctrinal thinking is uppermost. Some correlation may be possible between differing understandings of communion and the implications drawn from it for what constitutes a 'communion-breaking' issue.

2.10 However order is not the only issue (especially if seen from within a scale of degrees in communion) as expounded by Southwell. Their document continues: "On one side a degree of caution is needed over any 'single issue' criterion. This is because a belief-system in Anglican theology might be said to less like a gas balloon (one prick and it collapses), than a birds nest which may invite the question, how many twigs can be extracted before it falls apart? Yet some 'twigs' remain more crucial and critical than others .... On the other side Scripture speaks of 'foundations' .... Note that Paul did not seek to excommunicate those who had honest doubts about the resurrection. However, we need not assume that these doubters sought to *promote* their doubts. Honest exploration may be less a necessary cause for a break in communion than a positive promotion of false beliefs" -- and refers to *Believing in the Church* (1981) especially 'Markers and Signposts' pp286-302.

2.11 Most seem agreed that the withdrawal of fellowship, or withdrawal from fellowship, is not something that can be contemplated simply by the application of formulae. "Only apostasy can break communion with God," states one contributor, (Melbourne) therefore any existing or potential break in the life of the church "must be faced with a profound openness to the possibility of our being wrong". Issues that sustain or break communion are not straight-forward precisely because the life of the church is lived under the provisionality of the Spirit.

2.12 Context influences what constitutes a crucial issue. Glasgow draws attention to the perennial importance of "non-theological issues", and Johannesburg to how in its own experience of internal differences, the environment of provinces, dioceses, and even parishes, shapes different world-views and consequently throw up different issues which appear to be of critical importance. The same point may be found in a global fellowship. What is seen as a threat may be factor of where it is seen from! "In a discussion about Anglicanism, the sociology of the Communion (rich Western churches and poor but large Southern churches) needs to be taken into account"(Oxford).

2.13 Yet to take *context* seriously is an identifying feature of Anglicanism. "The Reformation insistence on providing the Scriptures in the vernacular (citing *TVR*) opened the possibility that the faith is expressed in the language, symbols and imagery of different cultural contexts .... For example, issues of justice and human rights including human sexuality, the family and status of women, racial equality, religious freedom and the use and distribution of resources demand attention. Our response to these issues is conditioned by our particular cultural context, our way of interpreting the Bible, our degree of awareness of being part of a wider human community, and our attentiveness to the response of other ecumenical partners and to the concerns of those of other faiths" (Port Elizabeth). The Province of Southern Africa explicitly finds itself "... rescued from remaining trapped in historical traditions which can now be seen to have been 'culture bound' ... yet clearly this is not to say 'anything goes' ... Uncomfortable as it is to acknowledge, we are not in a position to answer the question [about limits of diversity] at this juncture". The uncomfortable calling is to learn

how to trust one's fellow Anglicans – and how the Holy Spirit lead us into Truth – and part of the difficulty comes by the way that in different contexts churches feel justified in responding to similar situations in different ways.

2.14 The central problem however is in distinguishing what are matters which can be decided as essentially matters of local context, and other issues which are of universal principal. A telling example of the way this dilemma arises is provided by the Nigerian Doctrine Committee's reflection:

“On Women's Ordination, the Church of Nigeria concluded after several meetings in 1992 and 1993 that the time was not ripe for feminine ordination. Thus the Women Ordination carried out in Kwara Dioceses in December 1993 was declared irregular. Cultural differences motivated this decision .... The most sensitive issue in the 20<sup>th</sup> century ... is the issue of Homosexuality and Lesbianism. To the European nations, it is a dawn of a new era which the church must embrace, but the Anglican Church of the South in the Kuala Lumpur Statements issued in 1997 made a share disagreement with the recent church discipline and moral teaching championed in some provinces of the North on the canonisation of homosexual practices and the blessing of same-sex unions. On the perimeter of the Holy Scriptures, this move was declared unacceptable. This conference pointed out the need to carry provinces and dioceses along when issue affecting the common interest of all is on board. In order not jeopardise the spirit of true unity, all must reach an agreement before embarking on radical changes with respect to church discipline and moral teaching.

2.15 “Our diversity and openness are among the great attractions of our tradition” states Utah which has come to accept gay and lesbian people in their churches as a matter of course. This is not an issue in local congregations, “and either governance or credal conformity would impair our tradition in my experience and perspective. I know it would satisfy certain members of our communion, but I don't see that as part of our mission to make every single member alike or content with all aspects of our practice as a church”

2.16 It is not only the innovators who sense the need to respond to demanding contexts. “Having set one's own culture under judgement (fetishism, human sacrifice) it is disturbing to find fellow Anglicans defending unbiblical cultural pressures – there is a price to be paid in presenting a church without blemish, stain or wrinkle (Eph 5.27)” (Makurdi Bible Institute, Nigeria). Christians living under pressure to conform to external political or cultural forces find it “easy to feel undermined” by the seemingly easy compromises made in other parts of the Communion (Matabeleland). Yet the priority given to facing cultural challenges are quite individual. Traditionalists in Melanesia would like women wearing trousers to be placed under discipline – a pressure that church leaders resist, yet it seems that homosexual practices among young men are generally condoned as a pragmatic way of postponing marriage and the inevitable economic implications it brings (Malaita).

2.17 Still, despite the anomalies of local decision making, the demands of the universal recur eg. “While the human situation and contexts are always important, taking account of these cannot mean a change to the fundamentals of the Faith of the Gospel given by Christ” (Singapore).

2.18 Specific threats are often seen as potentially communion-breaking. Sexuality and questions of order are not the only issues to preoccupy Anglicans: as some pointed out, it seems that two-thirds of the world want justice, the other third, just more sex (eg. Christ the King). “A Christian morality which speaks predominantly about sex and little about the use of money or power, for example, is failing to demonstrate what it believes God cares about.” (Trinity College, Bristol)

A list of particular issues identified as threatening local communion includes:

- Neglect of orphans and widows (Akure)
- Transformation and cultural change – affecting liturgy and Christian understanding
- Interfaith dialogue
- Assumed superiority of a particular language and culture/colour (Lui)
- Initiation/’born again’ pressures – styles of mission – re-baptism (Malaita)
- Africanisation – God, ancestors, dreams, healers (Southern Africa)
- Gate-keepers of communication – who knows what?
- Polygamy (of renewed significance especially in S. Africa)
- Power, wealth and relationships
- Caste and gender (Colombo)
- Cremation (Kenya)
- Traditional initiation practices and genital mutilation
- Wealth and warfare (Coventry)
- Erosion of a culture of trust (Edinburgh) – grace and spirit over law
- Unilateralism/ ’provincialism’
- Uses of Scripture – which may reflect deeper differences about the vision of God.

2.19 There are serious questions about how Scripture and theology should be marshalled in the face of such questions. While “a characteristic Anglican appeal to Scripture” is seen in *TVR* as an identifying mark, differing interpretations/relative emphases given to reason and tradition can make this into a cause of, not a solution for, differences of opinion. (Ripon and Leeds).

2.20 Indeed differences will arise as to whether an issue has theological significance at all. “Homosexuality is not about morality but about theology and anthropology in Christ” (Christchurch), but others take the opposite point of view. In the light of subsequent events, a response concerning the way conflicts arose in New Westminster becomes significant. Bishop Ingham wrote:

I serve a diocese where there are deep divisions over the blessing of same-sex unions (we do not call them ‘marriages’) Those who oppose them do so on the grounds of Scripture and the ethical teaching of the Church. Those who support them believe they are a pastoral, not doctrinal innovation, a matter of justice, and not prohibited by Scripture. Neither side disputes the authority of Scripture nor the importance of doctrine. They disagree on their application to this question ...

There is a dynamic of power behind the dispute.... The issue is no longer primarily theological, but has become a struggle over decision-making and direction in the church. In this context it is natural for some people to resort to threats of division because this is a tactic of power”. He goes on to speak of the way attempts at reconciliation are only seen as coercion or compromise – *koinonia* becomes distorted by the lens of power, and adds “... If some of the solutions being proposed were taken seriously one wonders whether the English Reformation (the decision of a local province to break with the universal church) would ever have happened in the first place.”

2.21 A correspondent from Norwich (this diocese sent number of individual responses from differing perspectives) cites Rowan Williams’ tests for any contentious innovation: how

far does it manifest the self-less holiness of God, and how far build up holiness of community (in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, ed. Robin Gill, 2001). Another draws attention to his speech to the Lambeth Conference “Being in the Body means that we are touched by one another’s commitments and thus by one another’s failures”, noting the primeval instinct that touch can endanger purity. The life of the Body of Christ is not lived out of commitment to untainted ritualistic purity. It has more to do with helping each other to carry on the journey.

2.22 It is important then to try to see issues from the perspective of companions on the way, rather than exclusively from one’s own point of view. The Bishop of Winchester, interpreting the experience of partners from some of the most pressured dioceses in the Anglican Communion recognises: “a perception that ... some participants have ceased to be serious about looking to Scripture (indeed have allowed themselves to become culturally disabled from looking seriously to Scripture)... This situation becomes still more intractable when these perceptions coincide with one or more of the following: the pervasive anxiety, anger and suspicion caused by the ‘world-power’ behaviour of the USA; the particular pressures experienced by Churches living in predominantly Islamic environments; the view-point/experience of a Church that is living through an experience of ‘genocide’ and its aftermath.”

2.23 The danger of a selective reading of Scripture and Christian tradition is not new. “Warnings about ‘a Province being bound by its culture’ (TVR 4.14) reflect precisely Paul’s concern about the distinctive distortions of Gospel truth in Roman provincial first-century Corinth. Today this applies no less to post-modern, neo-pragmatic cultures in America and the West as to any province in the Far East or Africa.” (Southwell)

### **Question 3 – ‘Moral teachings’ and the maintenance of communion**

3.1 Most responses accept that the gospel includes a moral dimension. “Christianity is not just a religion but also a way of life.... Moral teaching based on the tenets set forth in the Holy Bible becomes paramount to the maintenance of unity” (Nigeria). Baptism leads towards “accepting the life we share” (Akure), and this shared life is shaped in part by moral teaching. Some distinguish *kerygma* and *didache* – the proclamation of the gospel from its moral application – although Rochester insists that the *didache* was rigorously applied to new converts before baptism.

3.2 Several contributors distinguished the moral teaching of individuals from the formal practices and policies of churches. It is to the latter that the issue of communion is addressed – and various suggestions are made about the need to reinforce universal values eg. the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s summary of the Law (eg. Western Australia), Scriptural teaching (Torit), an agreed Anglican catechism (Kenya), the content of holy living (Winchester).

3.3 It is when there is a dispute over moral teachings that difficulties arise. For many, attention to those disputes constitute part of the teaching ministry of the church. “Dialogue within koinonia: (disagreements are not sufficient reason to) step outside koinonia” (Bloemfontein). “It is not a matter of weakness that a church is unable to make instant decisions in relation to complex matters” (Brisbane).

3.4 “The sacrament of communion begins with an admission of failure not a declaration of virtue! .... A fundamental form of communion or fellowship is a *pre-requisite* for determining issues about moral teaching and behaviour” (Manchester). It is how we regard those with whom we differ – are they fellow believers or not? – which will determine how we

approach their teaching/behaviour (Melbourne). It is argued by more than a few respondents that agreement over moral teachings are a consequence, not a pre-condition, of *koinonia*.

3.5 Yet sweet reasonableness does not always mark discussion of disputed issues. Over some issues “coercion not reception is the order of the day” (Fort Worth). And while “Anglican practice in general and canon law, in particular, does not envisage a breaking of communion over disputes concerning moral teaching.” (Montreal), Bishop Iker would respond that traditional practices and canon law does not envisage situations in which bishops (in many people’s eyes at least) turn away from orthodox beliefs.

3.6 “Biblical teaching about moral behaviour is integral to the maintenance of communion because it returns everyone to the authority of the scriptures as normative for Christian living that it contains all things necessary for salvation”(Nigeria). “To live in moral obedience is such an important part of the Gospel message that we must strive to maintain a balance between belief and action or lose the communion that we cherish” (Southern Cone)

3.7 While most recognise that moral teaching is integral to the proclamation of the gospel, many also believe that they are not necessarily the same thing. “The Christian imperative – to love one another – is the one irreducible insofar as moral behaviour is concerned. Bearing this in mind, Christian ‘teaching’ about moral behaviour has varied with the ages (ie.slavery) and therefore should not be considered ‘integral’ to the maintenance of communion” (Texas). Adelaide interestingly notes the Western attachment to ‘Just War’ theory as a cultural reading of Scripture which would not be recognised by many in other cultural traditions.

3.8 The cultural conditioning of ethical systems – which is not necessarily the same thing as the cultural relativism – means that emphasis has to be on the “we need to expand the meaning of ‘moral’ and ‘behaviour’”(Rhode Island). There is a “need to recognise challenge towards compassion, forgiveness, healing, self-worth and respect for the dignity of others as well as the unquestionable value of love...” (Llandaff) or to distinguish “morality – love as he loved us – and moral codes which are derived more from culture than theological principle” (Maryland).

3.9 If that is allowed, “it may be inappropriate of Lambeth to pronounce policy on matters that instead fall within the remit of free decision by national Churches” (Oxford). “Christian teachings should not be imposed on other parts of the Communion” (Matabeleland).

3.10 While the question of homosexuality is plainly foremost in many people’s minds, it is also recognised that “explosive issues of gender and sexuality” are closely linked to ethical questions of “power, culture and control” (Rhode Island). And, asks Worcester, what makes the Lambeth resolution on sexuality more fundamental than those on international debt or ecumenical commitments?

3.11 While no respondents firmly advocated using the threat of a break in communion as a tactic to inhibit the promotion of particular moral teachings, it was generally assumed that the maintenance of communion did require some consonance in moral thinking. Certainly, since “the Righter Judgement it is not sustainable as an argument to distinguish between ‘doctrinal’ and ‘ethical’ questions and make that distinction between church-dividing issues and ones that are not” (Worcester). To do this would be the same as suggesting that the division between German churches in 1930’s was ‘merely’ to do with qualifications for ordination, and no-one could seriously accept that.

3.12 If belief and behaviour are to be dealt with together, then the radical call of the gospel needs to be applied to them both. Ripon and Leeds engaged in an extended reflection on the

Parable of the two sons (Luke 15): despite differing patterns of behaviour, both sons were kept within the Father's heart who went out to reconcile and embrace. Moral behaviour does not finally determine fundamental relationships! They also quote Wolf:

For all their differences, the two brothers – the one in a distant country and the other at home – were so much alike; the expectations of the one and the demands of the other were governed by the same logic. Who could object to that logic? And yet the objection emerges from between the lines of the very discourse that makes the need for clear-cut rules of inclusion and exclusion so plausible. The rules are necessary to preserve social ties, the older brother says. But in addition to separating him from the father and the brother, his anger over the transgression of the rules makes him break some rather significant rules. He insists that he worked like a slave for his father (v29), but fails to mention that he also worked for himself as the heir of two-thirds of the property. He claims that his brother devoured the father's property (v30), but fails to tell that what the younger brother 'devoured' belonged also to the younger brother. Most significantly, he projects onto his brother evil that his brother did not commit: the brother's 'dissolute' living, which in the original seemingly implies no immorality (Bailey 1992, 124) he makes into 'devouring the property with prostitutes' (v30). Obsession with the rules – not bad rules, but salutary rules! – encourages self-righteousness and the demonization of others. (*Exclusion and Embrace*, pp156-165)

#### **Question 4 – the impact of *The Virginia Report***

4.1 The most regular response was that *The Virginia Report* had not been read, was not available, or was not known to respondents. There was a moving responses from one diocese where they were not able to read the report on the internet because the nearest terminal was 89km away, "and the road is in the hands of rebels!" Another apologised for a delayed reply, as mail could only be posted when someone crossed the border. Anglican reports should not be written with the idea that they will be read in studies or common-rooms.

4.2 Where the report was known, some complained that it was "too academic in tone" (Sevchelles), or that it was not given a fair hearing. Where it is quoted, it is presented "reactively" (Louisiana). "The dilemma of all reports is that they speak authoritatively for those who seek to make a point which they perceive the Report makes on their behalf. Otherwise it has no authority for them" (Quincy). However some did claim that the significance of the report was being found in local decision-making at diocesan/parochial level, in collaboration across divides of theology, in the reconciliation of those previously estranged.

4.3 The Trinitarian framework was appreciated by some, although others saw it as too idealised – or too limited by an imminent rather than economic model of the Trinity (Adelaide). The framework needs Christological (historical-structural) /pneumatological (provisional) additions (Melbourne). *TVR* had not set out to provide answers to specific disputes (Montreal) but disputes now coming to a head and the vision needed to be earthed ("Hegel, the crafty rogue, lives") in history and a realistic doctrine of sin (Wycliffe College)

4.4 "The Report is sophisticated at the two 'edges': on a 'high' Trinitarian theological idealism; and on some specific empirical factors that arise from eg. meetings of Primates (4.17), learning and reception, and issues of local concern The Report may need the same level of detail on the middle ground that spans the space between the ends" (Southwell)

4.5 Some actually see the Trinitarian basis in baptism as too inclusive – seeking "unity at the expense of truth". External rites are not enough "the reality of a person's participation depends even more on whether the Christian faith he or she may understand and profess is the

Faith once and for all delivered by Jesus Christ ... the fundamentals need to be more exactly and fully defined” (Singapore)

4.6 They are not alone in seeking less subtle treatments. Southern Cone, and Uruguay urge attention to *To Mend the Net* as a more adequate foundation than *TVR* – “but advisory committee reports should not take the place of Lambeth and the Primates’ Meeting .... We suggest that Lambeth take on resolute authority, not only a pastoral role, and that the Primates meeting acquire disciplinary powers”. Winchester sympathises with criticisms that *TMTN* makes of *TVR*. The enhanced role envisaged for the Primates Meeting would be welcomed in a number of dioceses (eg. Niger Delta West).

4.7 Others however are reluctant to adopt the proposals of “centralists/imperialists” (Christchurch), accept an “Anglican Vatican”(W. North Carolina) or become dependent on “control mechanisms”(Oxford). “Resist temptation to become a joint magisterium ..... more missional, interpersonal and local” (Bloemfontein). Certainly communion depends on more than “offices, meetings and councils” (Rochester) – what is needed is renewed attention to unity in faith, but some see it as worrying if the Primates should begin to write doctrine (Ripon and Leeds). Resolutions are one thing, making law quite another.

4.8 And who will keep the Primates honest? Ottawa told the story of an Eastern Rite bishop making his first visit to a parish. He was surprised at the basic level of questions about Jesus and the way of salvation that he was asked, and challenged the priest as to why the congregation did not have such basics down pat. Sir, they do, was the reply, they are just making sure that you do too!

**4.9 *TVR* and ‘Eames’ introduced useful new vocabulary** which needs further elaboration

4.10 *TVR* changes the basic paradigm of Eames – both propose *koinonia* but Eames in terms of reception and provisionality “a process moving from periphery to centre”: *VR* emphasises universality of fellowship, and reverses direction of reception progressing from the centre (New Westminster). Western Australia – see it as unrealistic to expect agreement or accommodation: best to aim at recognition of differences.

4.11 Several noted that the “instruments of unity” were unduly tipped towards the episcopate – the A.C.C. alone reflects the synodical element of Anglican polity. Lay participation is reduced even more.

**4.12 Subsidiarity** – avoid overtones of European usage “There is no central body to do the devolving in the Anglican Communion!” (Glasgow) – important to avoid proliferation of decision-making therefore need more clarity of status of documents/resolutions. Need to “delineate those things that we must decide together and those things that are best left to the local province” eg. who ordained – local; sacramental theology – universal; selection / ordination of bishops both local and communion wide (Rhode Island)

**4.13 Impaired communion** – what impairs/what permits commonality? Reflect on ecclesiology of Provincial Episcopal Visitor – what degree of communion achieved / maintained – is this an expediency of mistrust or comprehension? / Recognise good intentions, and recognition of minorities yet “Act of Synod has had (albeit unwittingly) the disastrous side effect of encouraging ... some people to declare themselves ‘out of communion’ with their bishop” (Oxford). Denver consecrations –interpret and implement *VR* (and provision of ‘flying bishops’) rather than simply labelling them as rebels(Matabeleland).

4.14 How is it possible to ‘restore’ communion after it has been breached? What about the practice of penance and discipline (Melaita)

**4.15 Reception** - how do we know when a proposition is ‘received’ – and how much diversity can be contemplated in the meantime?

4.16 Some other snippets: the role of Archbishop of Canterbury as Chairman disadvantages C of E (Durham); Ottawa – the quest for ‘communion’ represents a pastoral/evangelistic need – those on both sides of the divide are “looking for something”: what is it? Simply quoting the Bible is not enough – problems over the interpretation of scripture reveal “irreconcilable differences”(Montreal) - instinctive rather than informed arguments prevail and are therefore more difficult to untangle. “The reputation of the Church, never something which seemed to bother Jesus, has always bothered us.” (Coventry)

4.15 And the future? Does the renewed emphasis on **Canon Law** imply that *TVR* has been tried and found lacking, or has it (like Chesterton’s view of popular notions of Christianity in his time?) just not been tried!

Philip Thomas,

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