

APPENDIX C

THE ACC MEETS IN HONG KONG – SEPTEMBER 2002

Kate Turner and I were honoured to represent the Church of Ireland at the recent meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council, which took place in Hong Kong from September 15 to 25. It was a gathering characterised by an extraordinary display of hospitality and generosity on the part of our hosts, the still very young Hong Kong province. Much of the time not taken up with formal business (of which there was a very great deal) was spent viewing the local church's distinctive approach to outreach and social service in a context which has seen so much political and administrative change in recent years.

Inevitably the Council was somewhat dominated by the impending departure of Archbishop George Carey, to whom many well-deserved tributes were paid - again and again his commitment to keeping development issues on the 'western' agenda and his passion to improve inter-faith relations were lauded. Many, this writer included, felt the archbishop was somewhat unwise to use his last presidential address to launch some rather personal attacks on those whose actions he perceived threatened the coherence of the Anglican family. It was a tactic which had clearly failed at the previous council in Scotland when Dr Carey roundly criticised published work by his host, Bishop Richard Holloway. Yet in Hong Kong the archbishop was at it again - this time his main target was the urbane and kindly bishop of New Westminster (Canada), Michael Ingham, who was present as a council member. New Westminster, of course, is famous or infamous for its policy in relation to the blessing of same-sex relationships. The archbishop, who has a strange hatred of the word 'autonomy' in relation to Anglican provinces, personally proposed a resolution reminding dioceses not to take unilateral action without appropriate reference to 'superior synods' and with a careful eye on the implications of their decisions for the unity of the Anglican family. It was however a carelessly worded resolution, which failed - for example - to acknowledge that legally 'national churches' and 'provinces' are not invariably the same thing. It also did not seem to go down entirely well in Hong Kong, where a famous act of conscientious unilateralism over an issue of much greater moment than that addressed in New Westminster had begun the process to have the priestly ministry of women accepted in the Anglican Communion.

Dr Carey's resolution was ultimately passed without opposition, but **only** after consideration of it was postponed for over a week. This gave the Canadian church time to fly in Bishop Ingham's metropolitan and to lay on a very impressive presentation, attended by nearly all the council members, at which it was made abundantly clear that New Westminster had *already* engaged in precisely the kind of careful consultation which the Carey motion aspired to prescribe. The presentation, which raised fascinating and deep issues about the nature of the basic authority of a diocesan bishop, was chaired by no less than Archbishop Eames - taking a break from his normal ACC role as chair of the inter-Anglican finance committee.

The preoccupation of the media with sexuality of inevitably gave the impression that the Carey/Ingham altercation was the only show in town. But, of course, many other issues were being raised and frequently directed to the in-tray of Dr Rowan Williams. One

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thing he will have to decide is whether to hold an Anglican congress around the time of the next Lambeth Conference, or whether to make the conference itself into a more representative gathering, reflecting today's experience of synodical government throughout the Anglican Communion. It is quite possible, for example, that the 2008 'Lambeth' could take place in South Africa where there is suitable access and accommodation available at a most favourable exchange rate. It may be that at such a conference suffragan bishops would be dropped (no worries here for the C of I!), along with episcopal spouses, and that diocesan bishops would instead be accompanied by representatives of their priests and laity. It is also possible that the non-episcopal representation will have to include a prescribed percentage of the 'young'. (As the C of I delegation was visibly the youngest national delegation in Hong Kong, we feel that other provinces will have to work very hard to be like us). In other words, there is all to play for in relation to Lambeth and Dr Williams will have to think fast - hardly a problem for him! Meanwhile we could be beginning to think here about how we might approach our participation in a new-look Lambeth.

There was also considerable discussion of whether it would be prudent to make all Primates members of the ACC, thus removing virtually all other episcopal membership. This desire, apparently articulated by the last Lambeth Conference, would create a clearer relationship between the Primates Meeting (now happening annually) and the ACC. However it would also have the effect of making the Primates a very dominant force indeed amongst the instruments of unity. It is probably best to state here simply that the Celtic fringe played some modest part in pointing out the hidden but very real long-term dangers of this proposal which, despite the Lambeth recommendation, is probably dead in the water now. Dr Carey himself came to the conclusion that perhaps each province, regardless of size, should ultimately have three ACC representatives - a bishop (NOT necessarily the Primate), a priest and a lay person.

The Council, of course, was not oblivious to the realities of the world outside - this was demonstrated by its agonisings over the situation in such places as Iraq, Israel, the Congo and Sudan. The exhilarating and varied daily worship of the council never allowed one to be distracted from an awareness of the day's headlines. Undoubtedly the most moving presentation we heard concerned the extent and impact of HIV/AIDS particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where life expectancy is drastically reduced and indeed a whole generation often virtually wiped out by this twenty first century plague. 'The Body of Christ has AIDS' was a slogan that was never allowed to cease ringing in our ears. More people die of AIDS related illness in Africa every day than perished in that infamous 11 September attack in New York. Even in the West the church's welcome to and pastoral care of AIDS victims continues to leave a great deal to be desired.

The Anglican Communion has many 'networks' - bodies of people all over the world who share experiences and offer resources in connection with a wide variety of issues - inter-faith concerns, Peace and Justice, the Family and so on. Representatives of the Networks introduced each morning's Bible study at the Hong Kong meeting. One emerging network which has a capacity to become very significant is that of Provincial Legal Advisers. Some time ago it became clear at a Primates' meeting that canon law

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was possibly an unrecognised fifth instrument of unity within Anglicanism - the others being of course the archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the ACC and the Primates' meeting. It is now suggested that there are certain principles of canon law which are common to the various independent Provinces and that these need to be identified and codified and perhaps somehow 'owned' by all as a new 'bond' between provinces which might involve a little more than mere mutual affection. The lawyers were interested in, for example, how our Preamble and Declaration commits us to continuing communion with the 'sister' Church of England - yet we never felt we violated this commitment one whit when we made possible the episcopal ordination of women - something the English Church has yet to do. There was also much discussion of the principle of 'canonical obedience' to a diocesan bishop which all the provinces claim to hold dear - yet what does this actually mean when the chips are down? One noted with a measure of concern that the Church of Ireland had not been represented at the conference when the Legal Advisers Network was inaugurated. This is something at which we really do need to make our presence felt even if the subject appears a little arid to many and even if participation stretches a little further our commitment to financing inter-Anglican endeavour.

Our Irish ACC representatives, along with those of England, Scotland, Wales and Spain will also be looking for modest financing from their province to fund a single meeting of the 'Europe' region of the Council in advance of the 2005 ACC, itself likely to meet in Mexico. (We will be happy to meet for just a day in London!) It was clear to us that the Europe region in the Council was not nearly as focussed as other regions in terms of bringing its particular concerns to the attention of the wider family or in terms of working out our considered response to the motions submitted by others. It is worth pointing out that the Europe region is the SMALLEST one within ACC - we have 9 members, whereas - for example - Africa utterly justifiably has 38. We feel the next time we need to get our act together better in order to contribute more effectively. The only 'Europe' member of the ACC Standing Committee is Dr John Moses, Dean of St Paul's Cathedral in London.

One practical way in which a region like the European one could work together to benefit churches in the Developing world was mentioned by Archbishop Carey in his presidential address. Many clergy in the poorer churches cannot be sure of whether they will be paid regularly and they certainly cannot retire because of the lack of proper pension provision. It may be utterly naive to think that churches in a country like ours could simply transfer resources from their pension funds to an African Province. However, we in the Europe region have to hand enormous non-financial resources of expertise and experience which might in a co-ordinated way be offered as a gift to provinces which truly need a helping hand to get even a semblance of proper pension mechanisms established. This whole issue proved to be one about which many expressed passionate feelings, and it has huge pastoral implications.

Another issue which led to a certain amount of passionate debate was a request from the inter-Anglican Liturgical Consultation that the ACC should initiate a study of the use of elements other than bread and wine in the Eucharist in certain cultural and economic

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contexts within the Communion - in places where, for example, bread and wine are in no wise evocative of the everyday person's daily food. This is quite a major issue, we were assured, in a place like Sri Lanka. The ACC took the view, however, that the use of bread and wine is no mere tradition - it is a Dominical command. It did not see itself as being an appropriate body to initiate such a survey. So the IALC's request was returned to it, with an implied suggestion that it should do the work itself and inform the ACC of its findings. The ACC's avoidance of direct intervention in this matter was something, the delightful Roman Catholic observer assured us, on which the Vatican would smile.

One could write so much more about this truly memorable experience, enriched by encounters with so many remarkable people - such as the charming and charismatic Simon Chiwanga from Tanzania, presiding at his final ACC. Perhaps this meeting of the council lacked the solid theological ingredients of its predecessor in Dundee - there was no major ARCIC presentation, for example and even the Virginia Report was not much to the fore. There was the usual really unnecessary plethora of resolutions about virtually every matter under heaven. Inevitably too the meeting was affected by certain undercurrents and even spin-doctoring which one would have been very naive not to be aware of. But I have no hesitation in saying that the Celtic fringe made people well aware of its existence and at the final banquet I ended up having the peculiar honour of offering the tribute of the European region to the retiring archbishop of Canterbury. I must also pay a warm personal tribute to Kate Turner whose sharp mind and splendid wit made quite an impression at her first Council meeting.

So, after all that, what is it that makes Anglicanism both distinctive and coherent? What is our real instrument of unity? Often I feel I just don't know the answer to this question but apparently some distinguished divine once summed up the atmosphere of Anglicanism in the simple phrase '**We meet**'. Well we certainly **met** in Hong Kong and realised afresh that, despite differences of attitude and culture, we belong together and are all essentially capable of living with the paradoxical painfulness that sometimes accompanies a determination to remain in communion. This scant report should give the Church of Ireland some practical issues to get its teeth into. For myself, I can hardly wait the three years until **we meet** again.

Michael Burrows
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