

Let us pray:

Holy God,
whose presence is known
in the structures we build,
and in their collapse;
establish in us a community of hope,
not to contain your mystery,
but to be led beyond security
into your sacred space,
through Jesus Christ. Amen

There are those who would claim that there is no such thing as Anglican identity – John Howe in his 1985 book, *Highways and Hedges: Anglicanism and the universal church*, declares firmly: ‘There is no separate Anglican identity. To search for one ... is an unprofitable exercise.’¹

It is also tempting to suggest that our identity is that we have no mission – that we are gloriously diverse, reflecting the richness of God’s creation, and are completely incapable of agreeing on any course of action.

Certainly Anglicanism gets a bad rap in some quarters – ‘the bland leading the bland’ or, as one Federal parliamentarian said to a social researcher: ‘I don’t belong to any organized religion, I’m an Anglican’.

We don’t even do well in the media: Anglican clergy pop up quite often in British TV shows but usually they are utterly ineffectual – think of the vicar in ‘Keeping up Appearances’ or, going even further back, Derek Nimmo in any number of British comedies. More recently there has been a spate of homicidal vicars in shows like ‘Midsomer Murders’, ‘Morse’ and ‘Wexford’. Such are the stereotypes.

But they are not true. As we laugh at ourselves and perhaps ruefully feel that the cap might just fit, we are missing a vital point: Anglicanism has been, and remains, an extremely effective missionary church. It has also been, and remains, an extremely effective missional church.

The Anglican Communion worldwide now comprises over 80 million members in 44 regional and national member churches around the globe in over 160 countries. In some places it is very much part of the mainstream, in others it is a small, struggling, minority church. Everywhere, it is involved in the life of the community of which it is a part, proclaiming the gospel in word and action.

In my time today I will structure my talk around 3 questions:

¹ Howe 1985, p. 28

- 1) Who do we think we are?
- 2) What are we on about? and
- 3) Are we there yet?

1) Who do we think we are?

This is, of course, the identity question. And it's one which is particularly difficult for Anglicans to answer. You could argue that from the moment of the Elizabethan Settlement in the 16th century, the driving force behind Anglicanism has been unity of praxis rather than conformity of doctrine. Elizabeth I's wish that her country might be 'godly and quietly governed' after centuries of turmoil led to a church designed to hold in one embrace all but the most ardent of Papists, all but the most ardent of Protestants. Anglicanism was designed for diversity, almost from the moment in the 1500s that it became independent from the Church of Rome.

Waves of reform and revival have swept through Anglicanism over the centuries: the Evangelical movement of the 18th century, the Tractarian movement of the 1830s, are just two examples of very different approaches to theology, hermeneutics and ritual that have affected the Church of England and, by extension, her daughter churches.

For, as the Church of England was exported with British colonialism, it took root and grew locally. The variety of churchmanship and theological approach already evident in the Church of England went with it and then, grafted onto that diversity, came diversity of governance and further diversity of praxis. In fact, everywhere it has gone Anglicanism has adapted itself to local circumstances, preserving some things from the mother church and modifying or abandoning others.

Australia is a case in point. And since it is our home turf, I will spend a bit of time looking at what has happened here.

For the first 70 years of its existence the Church of England in Australia was in a state of constant change. The attitudes of various governors, the push for independence in the young colonies, the discovery of gold in Victoria and NSW, the particular demographics of the various colonies, the personalities and viewpoints of the first bishops, religious pluralism, the churchmanship of the pioneer clergy, the changing religious and political climate in Britain: all had their effect on the early development of the Church of England in Australia.

The society of which the church was part grew from one small convict settlement eking out an existence on the shores of Port Jackson in 1788 to a series of democratically-inclined colonies spread across the continent, sustained by enterprises as varied as farming, whaling and gold-mining. The growth and changing character of the society necessitated planting models of ministry that would serve a large and geographically dispersed population. Within 80 years the Church of England in the Australian colonies grew from a

government-funded military chaplaincy with a staff of one, to a parish-based system of five diverse, geographically isolated self-governing dioceses that were rapidly becoming entirely self-supporting.

The transition to self-governing dioceses happened in the mid nineteenth century. By then there were a number of dioceses in Australia: Sydney, Tasmania, Melbourne, Adelaide and Newcastle. As these dioceses were formed and grew, they were greatly influenced by their bishops. The bishops appointed the clergy and tended to fish in the pools that were familiar to them (as indeed they still do!).

And what were those pools? Broughton, appointed as Archdeacon of Australia in 1829 and as Bishop in 1835, was a High Churchman who had left England before the Tractarian movement started to shake up the Church. Francis-Russell Nixon, appointed to Tasmania in 1842, was definitely Tractarian and immediately found himself in conflict with the largely evangelical clergy who had gone to Tasmania as military chaplains. His difficult personality only exacerbated the problems. A stubborn and fractious man, he successfully antagonized both clergy and laity.

And then in 1847 3 more bishops were appointed: Charles Augustus Short for Adelaide, Charles Perry for Melbourne and William Tyrrell for Newcastle. Perry, an Evangelical, was deliberately chosen to balance the known High Church or Tractarian sympathies of Broughton, Nixon and Short. Tyrrell was also supposed to provide some Evangelical balance but was in fact a Tractarian. Someone somewhere made a small clerical error (sorry!) and thought that he came from the evangelical missionary organization CMS, whereas he was, in fact, a Tractarian SPG man. This odd attempt at even-handedness in the appointment of bishops was, I suspect, more to deal with political and ecclesiastical tensions at home in England than to offer the people of the Australian colonies genuine choice in their expression of Anglicanism.

From the penal colony of Tasmania to the free settlement of South Australia, the bishops, Tractarians, High Churchmen and Evangelicals alike, wrestled with the ambiguities and tensions of their position in a rapidly evolving society. Whatever their environment, whatever their churchmanship, they were experiencing difficulties concerning the relationship between church and state, their authority as bishops (particularly when it came to keeping their clergy in line) and in the status of the clergy. It was desperately unclear what power they had and attempts to clarify the matter had been inconclusive.

In 1850 the bishops got together to discuss these problems and the unsatisfactory responses they had had from the English authorities.

Their solution? Synods!

They disagreed on exactly what sort of synods and how urgent the need was, but they were clear that they wished to transplant the English church to Australasia. They also wanted to provide it with a measure of self-

government. Moreover, they could agree on enough for the Minutes of the meeting to say that

‘the Clergy and the Laity may severally consult and decide upon all questions affecting the temporalities of the Church, and that no act of either order relating thereto should be valid without the consent of the other.’²

And then they all went home and started to put it into effect. With very different outcomes. Just two examples:

Victoria, coping with a 3-fold increase in population in the 3 years from 1851 to 1854, and suddenly extremely wealthy, was moving to statehood. At the same time as they drafted the Constitution for the State of Victoria, the same men drafted the Constitution for the church, a Constitution which was passed by the Legislative Council in 1854.

In South Australia, as you know, a different track was taken. Local circumstances here led the church to be constituted as a ‘consensual compact’ by voluntary agreement of the 26 congregations in the colony. Bishop Short believed that consensual compact was ‘the more suitable and wiser course’ for South Australia, in view of the general feeling of the colonists against state ‘interference’ in religious matters.³ The first session of the Synod met in April 1856 and consisted of clergy and laity.

The diverse situations throughout the colonies led to diverse solutions and one historian has gone so far as to say that:

“Circumstance, not principle, has been the leading factor in the Australian Church’s Constitutional development.”

Bishop Broughton, the first Bishop in Australia, and indeed, the only Bishop of Australia, had dreamt of a single, uniform constitution covering all the colonial churches in Australasia, South Africa and Canada, and of a church organized on a provincial basis, as much as on a diocesan one. We ended up with something that was much more flexible, much more adaptive to local situations. However, the capacity for cooperative action between the dioceses was much less than it would have been had Broughton’s dream been realized. The fact that the Australian dioceses ‘went it alone’ at this point has had long-lasting consequences.

Which showed up almost immediately. For almost immediately the Australian dioceses thought it would be lovely to do things together. The old unity impulse again! By 1872 they were meeting together regularly and, caught up again in the spirit of the times and the push towards a national federation, started trying to reach agreement on a constitution for a national church.

² Giles, 1929, p. 239

³ Hilliard 1986, p. 21

90 years later, the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia came into effect: 1 January 1962. Clearly agreement had not been easy. Why work so hard to find a constitution all could agree to? A Melbourne lawyer, E.C. Rigby, who worked on the text said to the Melbourne Synod 'One of the objects of this constitution is to keep them all within the fold.'⁴

And all had been kept within the fold but this had only been achieved by agreeing not to impose any decisions on each other. The General Synod can vote for something but if a diocese doesn't like the way the vote has gone, it doesn't have to be bound by it. That sounds like an overstatement and a caricature, but it is barely so. At the risk of oversimplifying a very complex set of rules, any decision of any significance has to be adopted separately in each Diocese. And that Diocese may choose not to, as a number of Dioceses have chosen not to adopt the 1992 legislation relating to the ordination of women as priests, or, more recently, the Episcopal Standards legislation passed by the General Synod.

As Justice Keith Mason has said:

'The Constitution of the National Church ...has so many checks and balances that it makes the United States Constitution look like a unitary dictatorship.'⁵

This legislative situation has further increased the diversity within the Anglican Church of Australia.

And this is just Australia... one of the 160 countries of the Anglican communion. As Anglicanism has in each place answered the question, 'How do we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?' an extraordinary diversity has blossomed.

I am one of the Australian members of the Anglican Consultative Council. We met in Jamaica in 2009 and in Auckland last year. As we gathered each time, the diversity of the Anglican Communion was there among us: diversity of culture, of history, of life story, of language, of ethnicity, of sex, of education. For each one of us there, as indeed for each one of us here today, our sense of Anglican identity has been formed in a very particular set of local circumstances. Multiple lines of similarity and of difference cut across the group in many directions.

It is this diversity which makes identity statements about Anglicanism extremely problematic, particularly at the global level of the Anglican communion. But more of this later...

⁴ E.C. Rigby, quoted in Davis 1993 p. 57 (see also p.121)

⁵ Keith Mason, 1992

2. What are we on about?

This is, of course, the mission question. And actually, there is agreement throughout the Communion about this. It is very clear.

The five marks of mission, first agreed to in 1984 as a statement of our mission in the world, and amended last year, are:

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society, and to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation, and
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth⁶

Precisely what this means in each place and how we might go about it is, of course, the challenge for each congregation, each Diocese, each national church to discern.

At last year's meeting of the Anglican Consultative Council, the fourth mark of mission was amended, adding the clause about peace, conflict, transformation and reconciliation. Originally proposed by the 2009 Mutual Responsibility and Mission Consultation in Costa Rica and by the Anglican Church of Canada, this amendment makes explicit our mission as peacemakers in the world.⁷

Our relative unity on mission was on display at last year's ACC meeting and at the 2009 meeting in Jamaica. I came away from those meetings with a vivid sense of the depth and multiplicity of the connections between the provinces of the Anglican Communion. All around the world Anglicans are getting together to help each other, learn from each other and transfer resources and information. The bonds happen between individuals, between parishes, between dioceses and between provinces and they cross boundaries of theological understanding, churchmanship and culture.

As we talked together at the ACC and discussed many resolutions concerning the mission of the church, there was a high level of agreement among members and strong support for the work of the Anglican networks such as the Peace and Justice Network, the Environment Network, the Youth Network, the Women's Network.

⁶ Bonds of Affection-1984 ACC-6 p 49, Mission in a Broken World-1990 ACC-8 p 101

⁷ Resolution 14.05 ACC 14

However, despite our warm agreement in these kinds of areas, there was an elephant in the room. It was our disagreement on the particular issues troubling our unity at the moment. Which brings me to my third question:

3. Are we there yet?

This question, beloved of small children on long journeys, is actually the question for the Anglican Communion and indeed, even for the Anglican Church of Australia. Have we got to the end of our journey together? Are we coming to the point of fracture? Or even to a less dramatic point where unity becomes meaningless and diversity becomes dysfunction?

Let's look at Australia first.

Since 1962 the member dioceses of the Anglican Church of Australia have worked together on a mutually agreed basis to further our common ecclesial life, finding a way to work together in unity despite our diversity. Our unity has survived a number of issues that highlighted deep differences: for example, the remarriage of divorced people, and the ordination of women as priests. Both of these issues were threshold issues for people – issues that saw them re-evaluate their membership of the church. These are the kinds of issues where people say things like: 'It's not the Anglican Church I know and love if we don't do this' and 'It's not the Anglican Church I know and love if we do do it'. As a national church we have found ways to move forward on these questions – there's a little more diversity than there used to be, and but we are still meeting together and working together.

But have we survived? And if we have, can we continue to survive? As more threshold issues come forward – questions relating to the place of homosexual people in the ordained ministry, to the consecration of the bread and wine of communion by lay people or by deacons, to the nature of diocesan boundaries and episcopal oversight – will there be an earthquake along one or more of the fault lines that divide us, causing the fragile bridges that unite us simply to topple?

A calmer and more sanguine view of the future has been suggested. Bruce Kaye, former General Secretary of the General Synod, is one of those who argue that division is a normal, if turbulent, part of the institutional life of Anglicanism in general and the Anglican Church of Australia in particular. The divisive issues of our time will gradually fade into history and be replaced with new points of tension. Meanwhile, the everyday life of the Anglican Church will continue with growing cooperation in areas of mutual interest. So, while we can't agree on some things, we can agree on others, that Jesus wanted his followers to combat poverty, for example.

Globally the issues are the same. Despite the strength of many of the connections between Anglicans across the globe, and despite the courtesy and restraint of the last two ACC meetings held in 2009 and 2012, it was clear

that there are those who find the differences between us too great and who wish to draw new lines of association.

How do we define what it is to be Anglican? There have been multiple attempts! The 1888 Lambeth Quadrilateral is about as broad as it gets and, while it highlights 4 essential points, does not offer any distinctive definition. In 1930 the Lambeth Conference had a go at defining the Anglican Communion. More recently the Virginia Report has explored the meaning and nature of Communion and the Windsor Report has tried to provide some goalposts for the Communion.

The impulse to find a way to hold the Communion together is very strong. Many people have a sense that something very precious, something that speaks of God, is currently at risk.

In a reflection posted on the web on 28 July 2009 the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, identified membership of the Anglican Communion as an important part of Anglican identity. He drew a distinction between two ways of seeing the Anglican Communion. One way is to see the Communion in a federalist and pluralist way, as a loose federation of local bodies with a cultural history in common. The other is to see it as a theologically coherent 'community of Christian communities'. He argues that this is how we have traditionally seen ourselves and urges us not to abandon it lightly.

The most recent discussions in the life of the Communion have led to a proposal for a Covenant, for a document which outlines some basic tenets of belief and an agreed process for considering proposed changes within the life of the Communion. A draft text has been in circulation for some years and has been widely considered throughout the Communion. It is on the Anglican Communion Office website. and I have some copies here for anyone who is interested.

ACC 14 in 2009 approved Sections 1-3 of the draft. The final section, Section 4, was later finalized and the proposed Covenant has been circulated to provinces for adoption – or not! There is no provision for amendment. Take it or leave it!

It is unclear how many provinces will adopt the Covenant. So far it has been adopted in some provinces, rejected by some and partially adopted by others. As you will remember, partial adoption is not one of the options on offer. Anglicans being Anglicans, however, that has not stopped anyone! Quite where that leaves us is unclear and little thought seems to have been given to managing such an outcome. Despite this and despite the scepticism in some parts of the Communion about the desirability of a covenant at all, there is, in the words of the Archbishop of Canterbury at the ACC, 'no Plan B'.

Conclusion

There is strength and beauty in the diversity of Anglicanism. St Paul's image of the body of Christ calls us always to celebrate the value of difference within our ecclesial communities. Where one is weak, another is strong. Collectively we are the body of Christ in a way we do not achieve as individuals. However, this very diversity also threatens us – at the very least it is deeply uncomfortable.

We are in a place we have never been in before. Modern communications, post-colonial tensions, the 'Africanisation' of Anglicanism and secularism are among the factors affecting the global discussions. It seems impossible to predict what the Anglican Church will look like in 20 years time. Into this uncertainty I offer a hymn commissioned by the Diocese of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands for ACC 14, expressing their prayers and hopes for the life of the Communion.

"Lord of our diversity unite us all we pray; welcome us to fellowship in your inclusive way;
Teach us that opinions which at first may seem quite strange may reflect the Glory of Your great creative range."

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